

SOMALIA

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 80 attacks on schools and against school students and personnel, as well as the military use of schools. At least 121 civilians were killed in one attack alone targeting education in 2022.

CONTEXT

Conflict between the non-state armed group Al-Shabaab, on the one hand, and Somali and international forces, on the other, continued during the reporting period.¹ Amnesty International reported that all actors in the conflict committed human rights abuses.² Somalia's presidential and parliamentary elections, originally set for 2020 and rescheduled for 2021, were delayed until May 2022 due to ongoing instability.³ Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was elected as president; he previously held the position from 2012 to 2017.⁴ The security context remained volatile following the presidential elections amid an increase in military offensives against Al-Shabaab, and retaliation attacks.⁵

Al-Shabaab conducted attacks against armed forces, government representatives, and civilians in 2022 and 2023, particularly in Banadir, Lower Shabelle, and Lower Juba regions.⁶ In May 2023, Al-Shabaab attacked an African Union base in Lower Shabelle region, killing more than 50 Ugandan soldiers.⁷ The UN also reported that the number of civilian casualties increased sharply in 2022, with over 600 killed and over 900 injured; Al-Shabaab was responsible for the majority.⁸ From August 2022, the government carried out a military offensive and regained territory from Al-Shabaab, and both sought the support of clan militias.⁹

Conflict was compounded by other acute crises, including seasonal floods, drought, and cholera, during the 2022-2023 reporting period.¹⁰ In addition, Al-Shabaab conducted indirect attacks on civilians by damaging and poisoning wells, further exacerbating the impact of the drought, according to the UN.¹¹ In 2023, 8.2 million people in Somalia needed humanitarian assistance, of which 5.1 million were children.¹² As a result of floods, drought, and conflict, the number of internally displaced people increased, with approximately 3.8 million people internally displaced at the end of 2023, including 2.9 million people who were newly displaced that year.¹³

Children were particularly affected by the ongoing humanitarian crisis.¹⁴ All Somali parties to the conflict recruited child soldiers, including for combat and support roles, and Somali forces detained children allegedly affiliated with armed groups, according to Human Rights Watch and the UN.¹⁵ In 2022, the UN verified cases of conflict-related sexual violence.¹⁶

Approximately 4.8 million children were out of school in 2022 and 2023 in Somalia, due to violence, floods, drought, and other causes.¹⁷ The UN reported in December 2023 that floods had impacted education for around 905,000 children, with at least 224 schools damaged.¹⁸ School closures, along with violence, early

marriage, and financial barriers, inhibited access to education, disproportionately affecting girls, according to the UN.¹⁹

ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS

GCPEA identified around 40 reports of attacks on schools during the 2022-2023 reporting period. This marks a decrease in comparison to the previous reporting period, when GCPEA collected at least 30 incidents of attacks on schools in 2021 and at least 53 such attacks in 2020.²⁰ Some of these attacks were carried out by Al-Shabaab, which targeted education facilities during the reporting period because it is opposed to the government curriculum, according to international media outlet VOA.²¹

In 2022, the UN verified at least 14 attacks on schools.²² Separately, GCPEA identified an attack on the Ministry of Education, which was one of the deadliest attacks carried out by Al-Shabaab since 2017:

- On October 29, 2022, Al-Shabaab detonated two car bombs outside the Ministry of Education, in Mogadishu, as reported by human rights organizations and the UN. The attack occurred while secondary students and their families collected diplomas; it killed at least 121 civilians and wounded over 300 more.²³ The prime minister reportedly ordered schools and universities to temporarily close after the attack.²⁴

In 2023, GCPEA identified around 26 attacks on schools, many of which included the use of explosive weapons.²⁵ For example:

- On January 24, 2023, two mortars reportedly struck inside a primary school in Hamarweyne district, Mogadishu. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack, as reported by ACLED and local and international media.²⁶
- On February 27, 2023, three improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were reportedly planted near the main gate of Mujama School in Beledweyne city, Hiiraan region; two exploded while the other was being defused by police, injuring two teachers. Teaching examinations were due to take place at the school.²⁷
- On March 2, 2023, mortar rounds struck and damaged the roof of a madrassa in Karan district, Banadir region. No children were at the school at the time of the attack.²⁸
- On April 9, 2023, in a neighborhood in Mogadishu where 15 May School is located, one of several mortar shells hit a building near a school, as reported by ACLED and local media.²⁹

ATTACKS ON SCHOOL STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND OTHER EDUCATION PERSONNEL

In the 2022-2023 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 42 attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel.³⁰ This marks an increase as compared to the previous reporting period, when such attacks were identified sporadically.³¹

In 2022, the UN verified at least 25 attacks on students or personnel, primarily involving killing, injury, or ab-

duction³² Separately, GCPEA collected four incidents,³³ some of which may have been included in the UN count. Examples of incidents GCPEA collected included:

- On June 27, 2022, alleged parties to the conflict reportedly shot at students at the Hoyga Xamar school, amid a land dispute, as reported by ACLED.³⁴
- On November 3, 2022, in Dayniile district, Mogadishu, a roadside IED detonated, killing two students who were in a vehicle returning home from school, as reported by the *Associated Press*.³⁵

The UN verified 17 attacks between January and September 2023, although at least one involved child recruitment which GCPEA classified in a category below.³⁶ Separately, GCPEA identified two incidents, although the first may overlap with the UN count:

- On March 15, Al-Shabaab militants abducted a teacher from a madrassa in Burhakaba district, Bay region. The group had earlier summoned the teacher for unknown reasons and when he declined, they abducted him.³⁷
- On October 14, 2023, in Garowe town, Nugaal region, secondary school students demonstrating against student association elections clashed with the police who fired live bullets, injuring at least three people, including students and a principal.³⁸

MILITARY USE OF SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES

GCPEA collected at least eight cases of military use in the 2022-2023 reporting period, a slight increase as compared to past years. *Education under Attack 2022* included three incidents of military use in 2021 and one reported incident in 2020.³⁹

The UN verified one case of military use by Al-Shabaab in 2022.⁴⁰

In 2023, seven schools were used by SSC Khatumo forces in Sool region; the schools were subsequently attacked.⁴¹ On March 7, in Laascaanood, Sool region, a secondary school was partially damaged by mortars attributed to Somaliland forces. At the time of the incident, the school was being used for military purposes by the SSC Khatumo militia, and no children were present.⁴²

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

GCPEA received one report of child recruitment at a school in 2023; no such incidents were identified in the previous reporting period.⁴³ On February 13, Al-Shabaab militants abducted seven boys aged between 14 and 17 from a madrassa in Baidoa district, Bay region, and transferred them to a nearby training center.⁴⁴

ENDNOTES

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