

SYRIA

GCPEA identified over 100 attacks on schools, students and teachers, as well as the military use of dozens of schools, mostly in northwest Syria. GCPEA also collected reports of the recruitment of students at, or on the way to or from, school.

CONTEXT

Armed conflict continued in Syria during the 2022-2023 reporting period. The Syrian government controlled much of central, western, and southern Syria, including major cities, and some areas of the north. The US-backed Kurdish-led armed group Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) controlled much of northeastern Syria, while Türkiye occupied territories of northern Syria alongside its border, and Turkish-aligned groups controlled most of Idlib governorate in the northwest.¹ Fighting between Syrian government forces and opposition armed groups continued in northern Syria, killing and injuring civilians, according to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.² According to the UN, in November 2022, shelling, airstrikes, and armed clashes near Idlib city killed at least four children, and injured approximately 75 people.³ Parties to the conflict committed human rights abuses during the reporting period, such as detaining and forcibly disappearing people, including children.⁴

In the northeast, the SDF continued to fight against the Islamic State (IS) armed group.⁵ In January 2022, IS attacked an SDF-controlled prison in northeastern Syria that held suspected IS members.⁶ The SDF regained control of the prison after a ten-day battle that reportedly killed 500 people, including children, according to Human Rights Watch.⁷ IS also conducted regular attacks in Homs, Deir-ez-Zor, Hama, and Raqqa governorates during the reporting period.⁸ In 2022 and 2023, the Turkish military conducted airstrikes in northeastern Syria that destroyed infrastructure, disrupted electricity and water supply, and displaced families in the region.⁹ The UN reported that violence in Syria continued to disproportionately affect women and girls.¹⁰

In December 2022, 15.3 million people in Syria were in need of humanitarian assistance, of which seven million were children.¹¹ The Syrian government continued to limit international aid delivery throughout the country, during the reporting period.¹² However, following earthquakes in northern Syria in February 2023, when around 6,000 people died and 12,000 were injured,¹³ the government temporarily allowed aid delivery to the northwest from Türkiye by opening two additional border crossings.¹⁴ In addition, in August 2023, the government authorized the UN to continue using the Bab al Hawa crossing from Türkiye through the end of 2023, after the UN Security Council was unable to renew a cross border mechanism for aid delivery.¹⁵ In 2022, 6.9 million people were internally displaced in Syria;¹⁶ the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre reported that most people who were displaced from camps in the northwest by the earthquakes had already been displaced by conflict.¹⁷

Conflict, natural disasters, and the ongoing economic crisis continued to impact education throughout the re-

porting period. At the end of 2022, the UN reported that 2.4 million children were out of school in Syria and 1.6 million school students were at risk of dropping out.¹⁸ In 2023, the earthquakes damaged approximately 2,220 schools, according to the Ministry of Education, further impacting education.¹⁹

ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS

GCPEA identified at least 95 attacks on schools during the 2022-2023 reporting period. Attacks appeared to decrease in 2022 before rising again in 2023. In comparison, GCPEA collected at least 28 incidents of attacks on schools in 2021 and at least 60 such attacks in 2020.²⁰ The majority of attacks identified by GCPEA during the reporting period involved the use of explosive weapons.

In 2022, GCPEA collected around 12 reports of attacks on schools from media, UN, and non-governmental organization reports.²¹ Separately, the UN verified 13 attacks on schools and protected persons in relation to schools, attributed to government and pro-government forces, as well as Turkish armed forces, non-state armed groups, and unidentified perpetrators,²² although GCPEA was unable to determine whether any of these overlapped with GCPEA's count. Incidents GCPEA collected included:

- The UN reported that on February 3, 2022, artillery shelling damaged a school in Afrin city, Aleppo governorate.²³
- On April 4, 2022, artillery shelling hit and damaged a primary school in Ma'arat al-Naasan village, Idlib governorate, as reported by the UN, ACLED, and media reports.²⁴
- On August 18, 2022, a drone reportedly struck a girls' school in Al Hasakah governorate, injuring several people and killing four female students, as reported by International Crisis Group and international media.²⁵
- On August 19, 2022, a rocket attack on Al Bab city, Aleppo governorate, damaged a school, as reported by the UN; seven children were killed and ten were injured, although GCPEA could not establish whether or not they were at, or near to, the school.²⁶
- On November 4, 2022, artillery shells reportedly damaged a primary school in Ma'ar Ballit village, Idlib governorate, as reported by a human rights monitor.²⁷

In 2023, GCPEA identified at least 83 attacks on schools, primarily in the northwest.²⁸ Separately, the UN reported 19 attacks on schools; however, since some of these could overlap with the incidents identified by GCPEA, they were not included in the total, to avoid double counting.²⁹ Schools were damaged during airstrikes, shelling, and armed clashes in northwestern Syria in September 2023, according to the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.³⁰ During increased hostilities in October, 27 schools in northern Syria were damaged or destroyed, according to OCHA,³¹ and schools were closed.³² Other attacks GCPEA identified included:

- On January 8, 2023, an unidentified armed group reportedly detonated an improvised explosive device near Al Buhturi School in Al Bab city, Aleppo governorate, as reported by ACLED and local media;³³ the building was allegedly damaged but no injuries were reported.
- On February 27, 2023, shelling reportedly damaged part of the fence of a non-operational school in Nayr-

ab, Idlib governorate, according to ACLED and local media.³⁴

- On September 5, 2023, Abu Thar al-Ghafari School in Sfuhun village, Idlib governorate, was directly hit by a rocket, which destroyed the school building, as reported by a human rights monitor.³⁵
- On December 24, 2023, a shell allegedly landed in a classroom during class at Jamil Qentar Elementary School in Ein Larouz village, Idlib governorate; the shell injured one child and damaged the school building and interior furnishing, as reported by a human rights monitor.³⁶

ATTACKS ON SCHOOL STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND OTHER EDUCATION PERSONNEL

In the 2022-2023 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least ten attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel. This represents a decrease as compared to the previous reporting period, when GCPEA identified at least 14 incidents in 2021 and three in 2020.³⁷

GCPEA collected eight reports of attacks in 2022.³⁸ Examples included:

- On March 27, 2022, suspected members of an armed group reportedly shot at a school, wounding ten children, in Mirkan village, Aleppo governorate, as reported by ACLED and local media.³⁹
- On April 4, 2022, shelling killed four male students who were on their way to school in Ma'arat al-Na'san city, Idlib governorate, as reported by the UN, ACLED, and an international media outlet.⁴⁰
- On August 7, 2022, police reportedly assaulted a student during student protests over high exam failure rates, in Azaz city, Aleppo governorate, as reported by local media.⁴¹

GCPEA identified two reports of attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel in 2023:

- On April 13, 2023, in Al Bab city, Aleppo governorate, members of an armed group allegedly stormed a school, aimed their weapons at students, and detained one student, as reported by ACLED and a human rights monitor.⁴²
- On June 4, 2023, in Al Joura neighborhood, Deir-ez-Zor city and governorate, at least one secondary school student was detained during a raid on the student accommodation center.⁴³

MILITARY USE OF SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES

GCPEA identified at least 80 cases of the military use of schools and universities during the reporting period, an increase as compared to past years. *Education under Attack 2022* included 17 incidents of military use in 2021 and 31 incidents in 2020.⁴⁴

The UN verified 48 cases of military use in 2022.⁴⁵ Separately, GCPEA identified 23 cases of military use in 2022.⁴⁶ Since it was unclear how many of these attacks overlapped with the UN count, they were not added to the total number, to avoid double counting. Examples of incidents collected by GCPEA included:

- On June 25, 2022, armed forces allegedly seized Abdul al Salam al Ajili Primary School in Al Khatouniya

village, Raqqa governorate, and used it as a military base, as reported by a human rights monitor.⁴⁷

- As reported on February 9, 2022, and August 4, 2022, an alleged armed party reportedly occupied multiple schools in Afrin city, Aleppo governorate, for use as bases and for interrogation, according to local media reports.⁴⁸ GCPEA was unable to establish whether the occupation of these schools was continuous between February and August, or whether the schools were used sporadically.

The UN reported 33 incidents of the military use of schools in 2023.⁴⁹ Separately, GCPEA identified at least 21 cases in 2023.⁵⁰ Since it was not clear whether some of these overlapped with the UN count, they were not included in the total, to avoid double counting. Examples of incidents identified by GCPEA included:

- On June 25, 2023, in Jisr al-Shoghour city, Idlib governorate, airstrikes allegedly destroyed a school building that was being used as a base by an armed group, as reported by ACLED and a human rights monitor.⁵¹
- Human Rights Watch reported in August 2023 that two schools in Amuda city, Al Hasakah governorate, and Ein Issa town, Raqqa governorate, were occupied by the Russian military.⁵²
- On October 8, 2023, in Abu Hamam village, Abu Kamal district, Deir-ez-Zor governorate, members of an armed group reportedly fired live ammunition when residents, including students, protested against the group using the school as their headquarters, as reported by ACLED and a human rights monitor.⁵³

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

GCPEA identified at least five reports of child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school, during the 2022-2023 reporting period. No such reports were identified in the previous reporting period.⁵⁴ According to the UN, child recruitment increased during the reporting period, with almost 1,700 children verified as recruited in 2022 alone, despite a reduction in the armed conflict.⁵⁵ However, GCPEA was unable to establish how many of these incidents occurred at, or on the way to or from, school.

GCPEA collected three reports of child recruitment in 2022.⁵⁶ For example:

- A 13-year-old girl was reportedly abducted for military recruitment as she was leaving a school in Aleppo city and governorate in late March 2022, according to local media.⁵⁷
- On June 22, 2022, members of an alleged non-state armed group reportedly abducted a 14-year-old boy for the purposes of recruitment as he was leaving a school in Aleppo city and governorate, according to local media reports.⁵⁸

GCPEA identified two reports of child recruitment in 2023:

- In January 2023, a girl was allegedly abducted while on the way to school, for the purpose of military conscription, in Tal Ref'at, Aleppo city and governorate, as reported by a human rights monitor.⁵⁹
- In March 2023, a female secondary school student was recruited for military purposes while on the way to school, as reported by the UN.⁶⁰

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