

# Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Attacks on schools continued at an elevated rate in 2024 and 2025, with at least 350 attacks reported, mostly in North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri provinces. There was a spike in reports of the military use of schools, with at least 300 cases. Attacks on school students, teachers, and staff were also reported, as well as attacks on higher education. Child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school continued.

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## Context

Armed conflict intensified in 2024 and 2025 between the Congolese national armed forces (Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo – FARDC), supported by allied militias and the Burundi National Defence Force (FNDB), on the one side, and Rwandan-backed March 23 Movement (M23) armed group, supported by Rwandan Defence Forces (RDF), on the other side, especially in South Kivu and North Kivu provinces.<sup>1</sup> As conflict escalated in January 2025, M23-RDF took Minova, South Kivu.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, they also captured the cities of Goma in North Kivu, and Bukavu in South Kivu.<sup>3</sup> In June 2025, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) signed a peace agreement brokered by the USA, which was reaffirmed with the signing of the Washington Accords for Peace and Prosperity on December 4, 2025, and in November 2025, a framework for peace was signed by the DRC and M23, mediated by Qatar.<sup>4</sup> Despite these, ceasefire violations were reported following both, including in December 2025, when M23-RDF took control of Uvira in South Kivu.<sup>5</sup> Human Rights Watch reported that, in 2024, both sides to the conflict – Congolese national armed forces and allied militias, and Rwandan troops and M23 – killed civilians and committed abuses against residents in displacement camps, and that the latter indiscriminately shelled populated areas.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, approximately 100 armed groups were operating, predominantly in Ituri, North Kivu, and South Kivu provinces, according to Human Rights Watch.<sup>7</sup> In 2025, in the border area between North-Kivu and Ituri provinces, non-state armed group Allied Democratic Forces carried out massacres, killing over 1,000 civilians, as reported by the UN.<sup>8</sup> Intercommunal conflicts and violence continued in Kwamouth, Tanganyika, Kasai and Kasai Central provinces.<sup>9</sup>

The UN verified over 4,000 grave violations against children in the DRC in 2024, including the recruitment and use of 2,365 children by at least 50 armed groups.<sup>10</sup> In February 2025, 52 people, including 28 children, were killed in an attack in Djugu territory, North Kivu province.<sup>11</sup>

More than 25 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance in 2024, including over 14.5 million children.<sup>12</sup> In late 2025, the UN reported that 5.3 million people were internally displaced in DRC, including 3.1 million children.<sup>13</sup>

The impact of conflict and insecurity increased and exacerbated the number of children without access to education during the reporting period. The UN reported in March 2025 that more than 5,900 schools were closed due to insecurity in South Kivu and North Kivu provinces, including over 5,200 in South Kivu alone, disrupting education for approximately two million children.<sup>14</sup> In September 2024, the UN also reported that at least 26 schools had been closed for over eight months in Ituri province, impacting more than 10,000 children.<sup>15</sup>

## Attacks on schools

GCPEA identified at least 350 attacks on schools during the 2024-2025 reporting period. This was a slight decrease compared to the previous reporting period, when 270 attacks were counted in 2023, and 180 in 2022.<sup>16</sup>

GCPEA identified 116 attacks on schools in 2024.<sup>17</sup> Most of these attacks were in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri provinces in eastern DRC. Examples of attacks included:

- Between January 6 and 7, 2024, overnight, suspected members of an armed group allegedly attacked and destroyed at least two schools in Mbuntie village in Kwamouth territory, Mai-Ndombe province in western DRC, as reported by ACLED and local media.<sup>18</sup>
- On January 29, 2024, in Sake town, North Kivu province, M23-RDF reportedly fired explosive projectiles near a school, injuring at least eight civilians, including six children, according to the UN.<sup>19</sup> A 12-year-old girl later died from her injuries.
- Between March 1 and 18, 2024, over 30 schools were reportedly destroyed or closed, with most located in the Drodoro health zone, Djugu territory, Ituri province, depriving at least 10,600 school-age children of their right to education, as reported by the Education Cluster.<sup>20</sup>
- In May 2024, the Education Cluster reported that an unexploded explosive device had landed 100 meters from a school in Minova, South Kivu province, endangering the school and students.<sup>21</sup>
- On June 27, 2024, armed fighters reportedly attacked Remeka village, Masisi territory, South Kivu province, during national examinations, killing two people and wounding seven others at a school, as reported by the UN.<sup>22</sup> The attack also interrupted end-of-year examinations for at least 600 students.
- On December 15, 2024, in Buleusa, Walikale territory, North Kivu province, amid clashes between the Congolese army and the M23, a bomb reportedly exploded, damaging a primary school and depriving nearly 700 students of access to education, as reported by the UN.<sup>23</sup>

Attacks increased in 2025, when GCPEA identified at least 235 attacks on schools. The Education Cluster reported over 109 attacks in North Kivu province and 100 in South Kivu province in the first four months of the year.<sup>24</sup> The UN reported that 290 schools were damaged or destroyed in Ituri province in the context of increased conflict in 2025, increasing the number of out-of-school children in the province by 130,000, although GCPEA was unable to establish whether all of these schools were attacked, or whether they were damaged in another way, so this number was not included in our count.<sup>25</sup> Attacks involving the use of explosive weapons also seemed to increase, although exact numbers were not available. In March 2025, the UN reported that many schools in North Kivu and South Kivu had sustained damage from explosive weapons, and that explosive devices remained in many schools, although it was not clear whether these had exploded or not.<sup>26</sup>

Separately, GCPEA identified 27 reports of attacks on schools.<sup>27</sup> Examples included:

- Around April 19, 2025, in Kibua, Walikale territory, North Kivu province, FARDC discovered and defused an unexploded device found near a secondary school, as reported by ACLED and local media.<sup>28</sup>
- Between April 19 and 23, 2025, in Fizi territory, South Kivu province, several school facilities were reportedly burned during armed clashes, as reported to the UN by local authorities.<sup>29</sup>
- On June 14, 2025, in Kabare territory, South Kivu province, the Kabare Centre Primary School was reportedly damaged during armed clashes that occurred near the school in the morning while it was in session, and a student was killed, as detailed below, as reported by Insecurity Insight and local media.<sup>30</sup>
- As reported on July 25, 2025, in Ikobo, Walikale territory, North Kivu province, Buhimba, Kieri and Mumbai primary schools were burned during armed clashes, as reported by Insecurity Insight and local media.<sup>31</sup>
- The UN reported that, on December 3, 2025, in Kaziba, Walungu territory, South Kivu province, a bomb struck a primary school, killing four children.<sup>32</sup>
- The UN reported that, on December 4, in Murhesa, Kabare territory, South Kivu province, a school was struck, although details about damage, injuries or casualties were not available.<sup>33</sup>
- On December 4, 2025, in Mudaka, Kabare territory, South Kivu province members of an armed group allegedly attacked civilians and injured four pupils at a school, as reported by ACLED and local media.<sup>34</sup>

## Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

GCPEA identified at least 15 attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel in the 2024-2025 reporting period. This was an increase as compared to three in 2023 and one in 2022.<sup>35</sup> Attacks involved both violence perpetrated by members of armed groups, and excessive force allegedly used by police during protest repression.

GCPEA identified two attacks on teachers in 2024:

- On April 17, 2024, members of an armed group reportedly demanded illegal taxes from teachers, and threatened them with violence, in Rusamambu, North Kivu province, which led to the closure of four primary and secondary schools. Later, around April 27, members of the armed group allegedly detained and whipped teachers who refused to pay the taxes, as reported by ACLED and local media.<sup>36</sup>
- On October 7, 2024, in Matadi, Kongo-Central province, police allegedly fired live ammunition at students who were protesting a teachers' strike and demanding resumption of classes, as reported by local media and ACLED.<sup>37</sup>

At least 13 attacks on students and teachers were identified in 2025, in which at least eight were killed and eight more injured.<sup>38</sup> Amid ongoing violence in South Kivu in December 2025, the UN reported that four students were killed and six were injured.<sup>39</sup>

Examples of attacks included:

- On June 14, 2025, in Kabare territory, South Kivu province, a student was killed at Kabare Centre Primary School during armed clashes that occurred near the school in the morning while it was in session, which also damaged the school, as detailed above, as reported by Insecurity Insight and local media.<sup>40</sup>
- Around July 23, 2025, in Opienge town, Bafwasende territory, Tshopo province, FARDC soldiers allegedly detained three education staff from Onali Primary School after they reported that FARDC soldiers had stolen the salaries of teachers from primary schools in the province; the soldiers allegedly shaved the staff members' hair with machetes and took their money, as reported by Insecurity Insight and local media.<sup>41</sup>
- On September 9, 2025, at different locations in Kabare territory, South Kivu province, members of an armed group reportedly entered schools that were in session, forced students to leave, and abducted teachers, to force them to fight with the group, as well as allegedly threatening to kill students or teachers who attempted to attend school, as reported by ACLED and local media.<sup>42</sup>
- On October 28, 2025, in Nyunzu, Tanganyika province, during a violent student demonstration against a teachers' strike, police allegedly used tear gas and live ammunition to disperse the protest, as reported by ACLED and local media.<sup>43</sup>

- On December 12, 2025, in Idiofa, Kwilu territory, province, police allegedly arrested two teachers during a teacher protest to denounce the non-payment of October salaries, as reported by ACLED and local media.<sup>44</sup>

## Military use of schools and universities

GCPEA identified at least 313 cases of military use in the 2024-2025 reporting period. This was a stark increase as compared to the previous reporting period, when 41 cases were reported.<sup>45</sup>

GCPEA identified approximately 100 cases of military use in 2024.<sup>46</sup> Military use appeared to be predominantly in South Kivu, North Kivu, and Ituri provinces, although at least one incident was reported in Maniema province. For example, in September 2024, the UN reported that 35 schools were occupied by parties to conflict in South Kivu province.<sup>47</sup> Examples of the military use of schools that GCPEA identified in 2024 included:

- In April 2024, in Nsengu village, Walikale territory, North Kivu province, members of an armed group allegedly established a base in a school, impacting learning for over 200 children, as reported by the UN and ACLED.<sup>48</sup>
- On November 3, 2024, members of an armed group allegedly damaged and occupied a primary school in Kamandi-Lac territory, North Kivu province, for use as an office, as reported by the UN.<sup>49</sup>
- On November 5, 2024, members of an armed group allegedly occupied Boa primary school, in Djugu territory, Ituri province, using six classrooms for accommodation, as reported by local media.<sup>50</sup> Classes were suspended.

At least 213 cases of military use were identified in 2025.<sup>51</sup> The Education Cluster reported that at least 213 schools were closed because they were occupied as of the end of September 2025.<sup>52</sup>

In January 2025, the UN reported that 19 schools in Minova, South Kivu province, were occupied by armed groups.<sup>53</sup> In February 2025, the UN reported that 52 schools were occupied by armed groups in South Kivu province.<sup>54</sup> In April 2025, 19 schools in South Kivu province reportedly remained occupied.<sup>55</sup> For example, in March 2025, the UN reported that, according to reports from local authorities, four schools in Fizi territory, South Kivu province, had been occupied by armed groups, disrupting education for over 2,000 students.<sup>56</sup>

## Child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school

GCPEA identified at least one case of child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school, during the current reporting period. This was similar to the previous reporting period, when GCPEA identified one incident in 2023 and one in 2022.<sup>57</sup> More broadly, child recruitment overall appeared to increase: the UN reported that 2,365 children were recruited in 2024, over 500 more than in 2023, and including 797 who were used in combat roles, although GCPEA was unable to determine whether any of these incidents took place at, or on the way to or from, school.<sup>58</sup> In November 2025, the Protection Cluster reported that over 3,900 children were associated with armed groups.<sup>59</sup> Reports showed that parents kept children home due to fears of them being recruited if they went to school.<sup>60</sup> The Education Cluster also reported that, according to teachers, some children who were associated with armed groups continued to inconsistently attend school.<sup>61</sup>

On November 21, 2024, as reported by the UN, in Shabunda, South Kivu province, four displaced students who were on their way to school were abducted for the purposes of forced labor, at a mining site that was under the control of an armed group.<sup>62</sup>

At the time of writing, no cases of child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school, were identified in 2025.

## Attacks on higher education

GCPEA identified at least six attacks on higher education during the current reporting period, fewer incidents as compared to the 2022-2023 period, when 11 were recorded.<sup>63</sup> Most attacks involved excessive force used by police or other security forces during protest repression.

GCPEA identified two attacks on higher education in 2024:

- On April 26, 2024, state forces allegedly fired live ammunition to disperse students and killed one student at the University of Kongo, Kisantu campus, Kongo-Central province, as the students were gathered for the wake of a fellow student, as reported by ACLED and local media.<sup>64</sup>
- On May 13, 2024, in Mutshatsha, Lualaba province, police allegedly used tear gas to disperse students from the University of Kolwezi who were demonstrating against the mismanagement of the university, as well as arresting some of them.<sup>65</sup>

GCPEA identified four attacks on higher education in 2025:

- On February 24, 2025, in front of the Higher Institute of Applied Technical Studies in Kinshasa, during a violent student demonstration over changes to tuition fees, police allegedly beat students and fired live ammunition, as reported by Scholars at Risk.<sup>66</sup> According to reports, three students were shot.
- On March 13, 2025, in Kisangani, Tshopo province, during a violent demonstration by students from the Institut du Bâtiment et des Travaux Publics (IBPT) higher education centre following the arrest of Secretary General of the school, police allegedly used tear gas and warning shots, injuring least five students, as reported by ACLED and local media.<sup>67</sup>
- On June 18, 2025, in Walikale, North Kivu province, police and military police allegedly used tear gas to disperse a peaceful protest staged by higher education students against staff strikes and suspended classes, as reported by ACLED and local media.<sup>68</sup>
- On November 10, 2025, in Musimba, Lubero territory, North Kivu province, a stray bullet from an armed clash between armed groups killed a female student from the Higher Institute of Medical Techniques of Butembo while she was returning from a class, as reported by *University World News* and local media *Actualité*.<sup>69</sup>

## Endnotes

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- 9 Protection Cluster, UNHCR, "Democratic Republic of Congo: Protection Analysis - Escalation of violence, cyclical forced displacement in a context of legitimacy challenges for solutions (November 2025) (République démocratique du Congo : Analyse de Protection - Escalade de la violence, déplacements forcés cycliques dans un contexte de défis de légitimité pour les solutions (novembre 2025))," November 20, 2025, <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/republique-democratique-du-congo-analyse-de-protection-escalade-de-la-violence-deplacements-forces-cycliques-dans-un-contexte-de-defis-de-legitimite-pour-les-solutions-novembre-2025> (accessed November 21, 2025), p. 4.
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