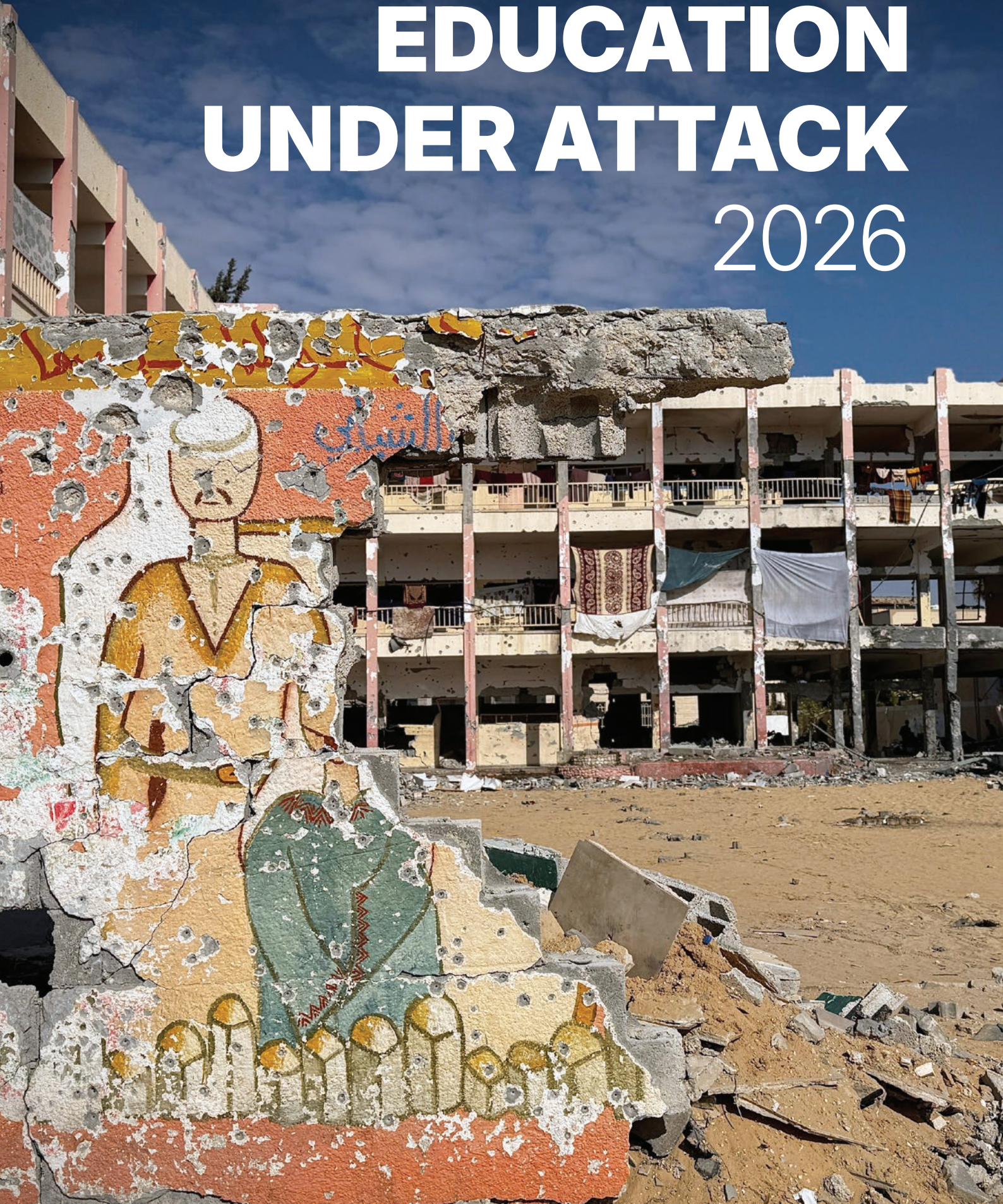




Global Coalition to **Protect**
Education from Attack

EDUCATION UNDER ATTACK

2026





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Education Under Attack 2026

A Report by 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 2026 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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Front cover photo: Gaza's education system lies in ruins. Some 88% of schools, or 496 out of 564, have been damaged or destroyed. © Plan International / Ahmed Salama



Girls attend an informal outdoor lesson in a remote area of Afghanistan as communities continue to seek access to education amid ongoing barriers and insecurity. ©Diego Ibarra Sánchez, 2025.

Methodology

Education under Attack 2026 covers attacks on schools, universities, students, and educators in 2024 and 2025. The report includes a Global Overview as well as profiles for 28 conflict-affected countries with a systematic pattern of attacks on education and military use of educational facilities. The seventh edition, *Education under Attack 2026*, follows the 2007 and 2010 editions from the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the 2014, 2018, 2020, 2022, 2024 reports published by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA). This Methodology section explains the definitions used in *Education under Attack 2026* and the criteria for profiling a country. The sources, analyses, and limitations for the report are also laid out.

Definition of attacks on education and military use of schools and universities

Education under Attack 2026 covers attacks on students, teachers, and education facilities, as well as military use of schools and universities, during armed conflicts. This report examines violent attacks on education, defined as any threatened or actual use of force against students, teachers, academics, education support and transport staff (e.g., janitors, bus drivers), education officials, buildings, resources, or facilities (including school buses). It tracks intentional and indiscriminate attacks perpetrated by armed forces, law enforcement, state security entities, and non-state armed groups.

In more detail, **educational facilities** are defined as any site where students learn from a designated instructor, or where the learning process is supported, at any level of learning. In addition to primary and secondary schools, this includes preschools, kindergartens, universities, technical and vocational education training institutes, and non-formal education sites, as well as student or teacher dormitories, school buses, and warehouses or vehicles dedicated to storing or transporting educational materials. These facilities may be run by the state or other entities, including religious organizations. **Educational materials** include textbooks, school records, or teaching and learning supplies. **Education personnel** refers to anyone working professionally, or volunteering, in the education





The remains of a school in Partyzanske village, Mykolaiv region, destroyed by shelling. © UNICEF / UN1739375 /Filippov

system, at any level of learning. Personnel may include teachers, academics, education officials, or education support and transport staff such as: education administrators, janitors, bus drivers, and librarians.

In terms of perpetrators, *Education under Attack 2026* includes violations committed by armed forces, law enforcement, and other state security entities, including state intelligence, as well as associated entities such as paramilitary groups or paramilitary police. Multinational forces include regional forces and United Nations (UN) peacekeeping forces. "Non-state armed groups" refers to any armed group in a given country. Non-state armed groups generally control territory, possess a chain of command or degree of internal organization, and seek political, social, or economic goals. The term "armed opposition group" applies only to non-state armed groups fighting against the government in power. The term "armed separatist group" or "separatists" is only used to refer to non-state armed groups seeking to establish autonomous territory.

Categories of attacks on education

GCPEA classifies attacks on education into five categories plus military use: attacks on schools; attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel; child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school; sexual violence at, or on the way to or from, school or university; attacks on higher education; and military use of schools and universities.

Attacks on schools

Attacks on schools include targeted and indiscriminate violent attacks on primary and secondary schools, as well as kindergartens, preschools, and nonformal education sites. This category also includes attacks on related infrastructure, such as playgrounds, school libraries, storage facilities, and examination halls. Excluded from this category are attacks on higher education facilities, which are included in the higher education category. Common forms of attacks on schools include aerial bombardment, ground strikes, crossfire, arson, vandalism, and explosives such as suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices.

An incident is considered an attack on a school if it takes place in a school setting and if an armed force, other state security force, or non-state armed group damages the school facility or attempts or threatens to do so. This category also includes airstrikes, ground strikes, or explosions, whether indiscriminate or targeted, that occur in reasonable proximity to a school because of the risk that school infrastructure will be damaged, and students and teachers killed. Any unexploded ordnance or explosive remnants of war found on school grounds are considered attacks on schools, even if security personnel were able to defuse the explosives before they detonated. School closures due to targeted threats against one or more educational facilities are included as attacks on schools; however, school closures due to conflict in general are not.

Although students, teachers, and other education personnel may be harmed in attacks on schools, attacks on schools are distinct in that they involve an intent to damage infrastructure or a failure to take precautions to protect it. Accordingly, an incident of an armed conflict actor detonating an explosive device on school grounds is still counted as an attack on a school, even if students are harmed or killed, since the explosive was presumably intended to damage the school more generally, rather than harm specific students. In such cases, student or teacher casualties are recorded in relation to an attack on a school; such casualties are not recorded in the category of attack on school students, teachers, and other education personnel.

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel include killings, injuries, torture, abduction, forced disappearance, or threats of violence, such as coercion or extortion, that occur in, or on their way to or from, school. Targeted attacks on students, teachers, staff, and education officials are included, even if the incident occurs off campus, if the person is attacked for their status as a student or educator. Attacks on school students and educators typically target, or directly affect, people, while attacks on schools generally target, or directly affect, infrastructure.

Attacks on school buses and vehicles carrying ministry officials, teachers, or students are included in this category when people are targeted in the attack, as opposed to the infrastructure. Cases of armed forces or armed group members entering a school and opening fire are included only when the incident does not involve a complex attack, such as one with explosives meant to damage the facility, in which case the incident would be classified as an attack on a school.

Specifically included are cases in which armed forces, law enforcement, or other state security entities arrest or use excessive force, such as live ammunition, teargas, or water cannons, against students or education staff during protests that either (a) occur on school grounds, regardless of their aim, or (b) are related to education, even if they occur off school grounds. This category does not include incidents in which students or staff were injured while participating in off-campus protests unrelated to education, even if the leaders of the protest were students. This category also does not include sexual violence, which is a distinct category.

Since it is often difficult to determine why a student, teacher, or staff member is targeted, this study excludes such attacks if they occur outside of the educational context unless the attack was attributed to a specific actor or there is an established pattern of attacks on education in that context.

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

Child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school occurs when armed forces or armed groups recruit children under the age of 18 from their schools or along school routes. International human rights law prohibits the recruitment or use of all children, setting the age of lawful conscription or use of a person by armed forces or groups at 18 years of age or older.¹ Recruitment for any purpose is included, such as serving as fighters, spies, or intelligence sources; for domestic work; or to transport weapons or other materials.² This category of attack on education does not include cases of recruitment for sexual violence, such as rape or forced marriage, which are included in the sexual violence category.

Sexual violence at, or on the way to or from, school or university

Sexual violence at, or on the way to or from, school or university occurs when armed forces, law enforcement, other state security entities, or non-state armed groups sexually threaten, harass, or abuse students or educators of all genders. Sexual violence includes rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced sterilization, forced abortion, forced circumcision, castration, genital harm, and any other nonconsensual sexual act, as well as acts that may not require physical violence or contact but include humiliation or shaming of a sexual nature, such as forced nudity.³ It also includes abduction for these purposes, which are counted as sexual violence, not child recruitment or attacks on students or personnel.

This category includes such violations if they occur while students or educators are traveling to and from, or are in, places of learning, or if a clear nexus with education otherwise exists, such as if individuals are explicitly targeted while away from places of learning, but because of their status as students or educators. This category also includes sexual violence that takes place in an educational institution by armed forces, other state security forces, or non-state armed groups, even if those abused are not students or educators. Sexual violence perpetrated by other educators and students is not included as an attack on education, unless the perpetrators belong to an armed force, law enforcement, other state security entity, or non-state armed group.

Attacks on higher education

Attacks on higher education include targeted or indiscriminate attacks on universities, technical and vocational education training institutes, and other higher education facilities, as well as attacks that target students, professors, and other higher education staff. Many of the violations included in this category are similar to those described at the pre-primary, primary, and secondary school levels, including bombings, airstrikes, or other methods of targeting university campuses, as well as killings, abductions, or threats directed at university students, faculty, or staff. Sexual violence committed against university students in an educational setting by armed forces, other state security entities, or non-state armed groups is categorized as sexual violence, not attacks on higher education. Although no such incidents have been identified, cases of children under the age of 18 conscripted in a higher education setting would be categorized as child recruitment, rather than an attack on higher education.

As with attacks on primary and secondary education, also included are cases in which armed forces, law enforcement, or other state security entities arrest or use excessive force, such as live ammunition, teargas, or water cannons, against students or education staff during protests that either (a) occurred on campus, regardless of their aim, or (b) are related to education, even if they occurred off campus. This category does not include students or staff who were injured during their participation in protests that occurred off campus and were unrelated to education, even if the leaders of the protest were students.

Attacks on higher education also include deliberate acts of coercion, intimidation, or threats of physical force that create a climate of fear and repression that undermines academic freedom and educational functions. Examples include a university professor arrested or threatened with physical violence for an academic publication. However, this report excludes violations of academic freedom that do not consist of either physical violence or the threat of physical violence; not included, for instance, are academic suspensions, censorship, travel bans, and revocation of citizenship.

Military use of schools and universities

Military use occurs when armed forces or non-state armed groups partially or fully occupy schools or universities and use them for purposes that support a military effort. Common examples include using educational facilities as bases, barracks, and temporary shelters; fighting positions, weapons storage facilities, and detention and interrogation centers; and for military training or drilling soldiers.⁴

The duration of military use of schools and universities varies significantly. Armed forces or armed groups may use a school or university for several hours, one night, months, or years. Different groups may use the same school at different times. The presence of an armed force or group in a school may trigger attacks by an opposing side or increase the likelihood of forced recruitment and sexual violence.

If an attack occurs on a school or university that is being used for military purposes, the incident is not counted as an attack on a school or university since, under international humanitarian law, the presence of armed actors can convert the premises into a legitimate military target; instead, military use of the facility is recorded. However, cases of forced child recruitment or sexual violence that occurred in the context of military use of schools or universities are counted as distinct attacks, namely military use and recruitment, or military use and sexual violence. The Education under Attack reports also record any damage that occurs to educational facilities during military use, when that information is available.

Other considerations in defining attacks on education and military use of schools and universities

Not all violence in and around schools constitutes an attack on education. Specifically, violence against students, educators, or education facilities perpetrated by criminal organizations, lone gunmen, or individuals without an affiliation to an armed force or group are not recorded as attacks on education or military use in Education under Attack 2026. Instead, the attacks or military use must have been carried out by armed forces, law enforcement, state security entities, or non-state armed groups. When determining whether an incident qualifies as an attack on education, GCPEA considers all available evidence including the perpetrator of the incident and their motivation, when that information is available. When the perpetrator and motivation are unknown, GCPEA relies on established patterns of attack in that context and other details from the incident to determine whether the event meets the criteria for inclusion as an attack on education or military use. Finally, although several sets of international legal norms apply to attacks on education, the Education under Attack reports include incidents that meet the above definitions of attacks on education and military use, regardless of whether the incidents violate international law.

For additional details about the considerations for determining attacks on education and military use, see the online methodological appendix.

Country profile criteria

Education under Attack 2026 includes in-depth profiles describing and analyzing attacks on education and military use in 2024 and 2025 for 28 countries. Countries were selected in early 2024 for a profile in the report based on two criteria. GCPEA firstly analyzed data collected to identify countries that experienced a systematic pattern of attacks on education in 2023 and 2024, defined as ten attacks.⁵ Secondly, the report only profiles countries that experienced armed conflict during the reporting period. GCPEA referred to the Rule of Law in Armed Conflict (RULAC) project (which was integrated into the War Watch platform in late 2025, after GCPEA's selection process), and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) classifications; in cases of disagreement between RULAC and UCDP classifications, the World Bank Group's (WBG) List of Fragile and Conflict-Affected

Situations was consulted; 28 countries met these two criteria.⁶ This approach excluded countries that experienced attacks on education but were not considered to be in armed conflict, as well as countries that experienced only a few incidents of attacks on education or military use of educational facilities. These criteria were the same as those used in past reports.

Data sources and data types

GCPEA collected data for *Education under Attack 2026* through three methods: (a) a review of relevant reports, (b) media searches, and (c) outreach to staff members of international and national organizations working in relevant countries. GCPEA cycled through the data collection methods several times as new information became available. The first method was a desk review of relevant reports, datasets and documents from UN agencies, development and humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), human rights organizations, government bodies, and think tanks. GCPEA consulted with experts to compile a list of the most useful global and country-specific sources, then compiled reports and other documents from these sources through online searches or directly contacting the authoring organizations, reviewing each for relevant information in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic. Relevant sources included the UN Secretary-General's annual and country-specific reports on children and armed conflict, although these reports are limited to country situations where there is an established UN supported Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM);⁷ reports from other UN agencies and bodies, such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC); reports by human rights organizations and humanitarian NGOs, including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Save the Children; reports from scholar rescue organizations, such as the Scholars at Risk Network's Academic Freedom Monitor; Education Cluster reports and meeting minutes; and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (OCHA) country-specific situation reports. Country-specific sources included UN missions and Offices, such as the UN Assistance Missions in **Afghanistan** (UNAMA), UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the **Central African Republic** (MINUSCA), UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** (MONUSCO), The United Nations Integrated Office in **Haiti** (BINUH), UN Assistance Missions in **Iraq** (UNAMI), and UN Mission in the Republic of **South Sudan** (UNMISS). Other resources included reports from the Coalition Against the Involvement of Children and Youth in Armed Conflict in **Colombia** (COALICO), Kobo Toolbox, and the Syrian Network for Human Rights' news updates on attacks on vital facilities. In addition, GCPEA conducted country-specific searches on OCHA's ReliefWeb to identify additional reports that might be useful. In general, the sources were similar to those cited in the previous editions of the report.

The second method employed was media searches. To identify media reports of attacks on education or military use of schools and universities for Education under Attack 2026, GCPEA relied heavily on the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED).

The project compiles media and other reports of worldwide political violence and protest events into databases which GCPEA searches for relevant incidents.⁸ ACLED has its own standards for achieving data reliability.⁹ Recent editions of the report relied on ACLED database searches as well. In addition, GCPEA conducted online searches of local and international media outlets for relevant global and country-specific news articles in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic, among others.

The third approach was gathering relevant information from organizations operating in profiled countries and soliciting feedback on drafts of the country profiles. These activities aimed to (a) identify additional instances of attacks on education and military use not yet included in the report, and (b) verify and gather additional information on attacks and military use GCPEA had already identified from other sources. Through this outreach, GCPEA was able to access several additional datasets and reports compiled by local NGOs and international agencies working in the profiled countries, in line with past Education under Attack reports.

Each method yielded three types of data on attacks on education and military use: individual incident reports, tallies of attacks or military use, and qualitative information. GCPEA entered these data into country-specific Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. Reports of individual incidents were categorized by type of attack on education or military use, as well as the date and location of the incident and, if known, the perpetrator, whether the violence was targeted, and details on the individuals and institutions affected, disaggregated by gender, level of education, professional role, days of schooling lost, and damage or type of harm. GCPEA carefully reviewed records of individual incidents to prevent duplication and double counting.

Next, GCPEA recorded relevant tallies of attacks on education and military use of education facilities then incorporated them into attack totals for countries where possible. Generated by UN agencies, governments, and NGOs, the tallies report a number of attacks or military use occurring in a particular location and time period, for instance the number of recorded attacks on schools in a country or sub-national region over six months or a year.

Finally, GCPEA collected qualitative information on attacks on education and military use from all data sources. This information helped to contextualize the individual incidents and tallies presented in the report, and to indicate the severity and impact of the attack on education or military use. Qualitative data were particularly important for determining whether child recruitment and sexual violence at, or on the way to or from, educational facilities occurred in a particular country during the reporting period, given the lack of incident-level data on these violations.

Data reliability

The reliability of the data in *Education under Attack 2026* varies. Some information comes from organizations such as UN agencies or Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International reports, which maintain rigorous standards for verifying incidents before reporting them. Other incidents are compiled from media outlets that maintain reporting standards but ones that are typically lower than for the organizations mentioned. GCPEA corroborates reports whenever possible and relies on local partners to assess the reliability of sources. For transparency, *Education under Attack 2026* makes the information source clear for all incidents of attacks and military use.

For more details on data reliability, see the online methodological appendix.

Data analysis

The Global Overview of *Education under Attack 2026* analyzes global trends in reports of attacks on education, the categories of attacks on education, and military use of schools and universities. The Global Overview covers countries around the world focusing on trends in 2024 and 2025 and brief comparisons with the previous report.

Analyses in the Global Overview include totals that GCPEA calculated from incidents collected, tallies from other organizations, or a combination of the two, taking precautions to prevent double counting. When more than one count of attacks on education was available for a country, GCPEA used whichever was most comprehensive and reliable for that context.

In the Global Overview, GCPEA categorized country situations according to three levels of severity, based on either the number of discrete incidents of attacks on education or the number of students and education personnel harmed by such attacks in 2024 and 2025. These criteria allowed the report to account for contexts in which many attacks on education were reported but relatively few people were harmed in these attacks, and for contexts in which fewer incidents were reported but the incidents that occurred harmed many people. This either-or method of accounting for severity also addressed some of the limitations posed by gaps in information. For example, in some cases, significant information was available on the number of schools attacked but little information existed on whether these attacks harmed students and education personnel and, if so, how many. *Education under Attack 2026* uses equivalent thresholds to the previous three reports to determine levels of severity.

The three levels of severity, determined over a two-year period, are:

- Very heavily affected: 400 or more incidents of attacks on education or military use, or 400 or more students and education personnel harmed by attacks on education or military use
- Heavily affected: 200 to 399 incidents of attacks on education, or 200 to 399 students and education personnel harmed by attacks on education

- Affected: 10 to 199 incidents of attacks on education or military use, or 199 or fewer students and education personnel harmed by attacks on education

In addition to the levels of severity in the Global Overview, this report also includes counts of the categories of attacks on education and military use of schools and universities in the country profiles. To produce the attack counts in the profiles, GCPEA summed the number of reported individual incidents collected within each category of attack on education, as well as military use. Where possible, GCPEA included tallies from other organizations in these summations, ensuring that events were not double counted, for instance by checking for overlaps in dates and geographic areas.

When individual incidents were summed to produce totals for the Global Overview or profiles, GCPEA maintained the following definitions of attacks and military use, and people harmed:

- Incidents of attacks and military use: the total number of discrete incidents of attacks on education and military use of schools and universities reported. For military use, the highest simultaneous number recorded during the two-year period was used, meaning that this number is likely an undercount.
- Students and education personnel harmed: the total number of students and education personnel killed, injured, detained, or threatened in any form of attack, whether it targeted the people or an institution.

For more details on data analysis, refer to the online methodological appendix.

Data limitations

GCPEA faced several challenges to reporting and analyzing attacks on education and military use due to data limitations. First, the media, NGOs, and other relevant organizations almost certainly do not capture all incidents of attacks on education and military use that occur in a country; depending on the context, they may be constrained by limited resources, restrictions on free press, security and pandemic lockdowns, and other factors. Since some attacks and incidents of military use likely go unreported, GCPEA is not able to collect them and so *Education under Attack 2026* almost certainly transmits an undercount of attacks and military use. Second, the UN and other sources sometimes only make available aggregate numbers of attacks or military use, meaning that some of the trend analyses in the report may be imperfect since dates or attack types may have been misclassified given that they could not be assessed in detail. Finally, since organizations release some data annually, GCPEA may not have the most up-to-date information when conducting analyses. These limitations affect both the Global Overview and the profiles.

Data for two categories of attack in particular are limited, namely sexual violence and child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, educational facilities. In addition to survivors' hesitation to come forward and general underreporting of these violations, when child recruitment and sexual violence are reported, the location of the violation is often not re-

vealed, meaning a connection to education cannot be established, even if one exists. As a result, *Education under Attack 2026* almost certainly underrepresents school-related sexual violence and child recruitment.

When data on child recruitment and sexual violence at or en route to education facilities are available, they are often qualitative reports from news outlets or NGOs. As such, GCPEA is able to determine which countries experienced these attacks on education but is often unable to provide counts of these violations in Education under Attack reports.

Additional notes on data reporting

GCPEA takes several precautions when reporting potentially sensitive information concerning attacks on education. First, GCPEA generally follows Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility guidelines for how information on sexual violence incidents is reported in the Education under Attack series. The information provided by sources is carefully reviewed and edited so that no specific details are made public that could breach the dignity, confidentiality, safety, and security of the survivor, education facility, and community.

Additionally, GCPEA generally does not include the names of students, academics, staff, or education officials in the Education under Attack reports, even when media or NGOs report their names.

Finally, when discussing arrests and detentions of students, teachers, and academics, *Education under Attack 2026* typically uses the same language as reported by the media outlet. GCPEA recognizes that “detention” and “arrest” are different notions in some contexts, and that in a number of situations they may be conflated in the media reports.

Endnotes

- 1 Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (A/RES/54/263), Article 4.
- 2 UNICEF, The Paris Principles. Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated With Armed Forces or Armed Groups, February 2007, paras. 1.0, 2.0 and 6.30.1.
- 3 This definition of sexual violence draws from the following sources: UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Sexual and gender-based violence in the context of transitional justice," October 2014. UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence," S/2017/249, April 15, 2017, para. 2. International Criminal Court Office of the Prosecutor, "Policy Paper on Sexual and Gender-Based Crimes," June 2014, p. 3.
- 4 Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), Commentary on the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict (New York: GCPEA, 2015), pp. 6-7.
- 5 To be profiled in Education under Attack 2026, countries had to be considered to be in conflict and have experienced ten or more attacks on education or incidents of military use in 2023 and 2024. The lagged year (2023) keeps this report in line with past reports, which also included lagged years, and allowed GCPEA to determine which countries would be profiled before the end of the reporting cycle so that drafting and review could begin.
- 6 Countries on both RULAC's and UCPD's lists at any time during the designated period were considered to be in armed conflict. In instances where RULAC and UCPD did not align, for example if RULAC considered a country to be in armed conflict and UCPD did not, GCPEA referred to the WBG's 219 List of Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations, specifically to countries listed as in conflict (in some years, the WBG break this category into medium- and high-intensity conflict). If the WBG's list included the country in question, the country was considered to be in armed conflict; if not on the WBG's list, then the country was not considered to be in armed conflict.
- 7 UN Security Council Resolution 1612 established the MRM in 2005. The resolution called for monitoring of the six grave violations against children, and for these abuses to be publicly documented in an annual report. "Attacks on schools and hospitals" is one of these violations. Reporting these violations can trigger the listing of armed forces and armed groups responsible for the violation(s) in an annex to the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, UNSCR Resolution 1612, July 26, 2005.
- 8 Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), <https://www.acleddata.com>.
- 9 For more on ACLED's data reliability see: ACLED, "FAQs: ACLED Sourcing Methodology."