

South Sudan

Reports of attacks on education continued to decrease in the 2024-2025 reporting period, although attacks on schools, on students and teachers, and on higher education, continued. There were notable attacks on girls' and women's education. Although a number of schools were vacated during the reporting period, some cases of the military use of schools continued.

Context

During the 2024-2025 reporting period, armed conflict continued and expanded across South Sudan with much of the country under the control of either the South Sudan People's Defense Army (SPLM-IG) or Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO).¹ Lack of progress towards security arrangements included in the 2018 Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan peace agreement further increased tensions between opposing political parties.² In addition to arbitrary arrests and detention of critics, dissidents, and opposition political parties by South Sudan's National Security Service as reported by Human Rights Watch, a two-year postponement in government elections by the transitional government in September 2024 further impacted progress towards peace.³ Almost half of all communal militia violence occurred in the Greater Upper Nile Region, where fighting between the South Sudan People's Defense Forces (SSPDF) and armed youth began on February 14, 2025, which led to large numbers of displaced and injured civilians.⁴ Violence intensified in some states and also became more geographically dispersed across South Sudan due to armed group fractures.⁵

Civilians, including children, remained at serious risk of conflict-related physical and sexual violence, abductions, extrajudicial killings, exploitation, and psychological distress.⁶ Forced abductions and recruitment of children continued in Eastern Equatoria, Western Equatoria, and Central Equatoria states, Jonglei state, and the Greater Pibor Administrative area.⁷

Across South Sudan, flooding and disease outbreaks exacerbated the existing humanitarian needs created by economic crises and various conflict-related displacements.⁸ More than nine million people required assistance, of which half were children, and included more than 500,000 refugees and returnees fleeing Sudan.⁹ Flooding, heatwaves, and droughts across South Sudan severely contributed to ongoing food insecurity which affected more than 60 percent of the population.¹⁰ Flood damage to thousands of acres of farmland, hundreds of schools, and healthcare facilities compounded these humanitarian needs and impacted almost 900,000 people, many of whom already experienced limited access.¹¹ Aid workers remained vulnerable to road ambushes and hostage taking for ransom.¹²

According to Human Rights Watch, three out of every five children did not have access to education in South Sudan.¹³ Heatwaves forced weeks-long nation-wide school shutdowns in early 2025.¹⁴ In addition to the multiple risks associated with traveling to and from school, the military use of schools remained a concern during the reporting period, and the UN cleared at least 11 schools of mines.¹⁵

Attacks on schools

During the 2024-2025 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least three attacks on schools. This represents a significant decrease compared to a previous spike in 2022: in *Education under Attack 2024* GCPEA identified zero attacks on schools in 2023 and 51 in 2022.¹⁶ It is unclear whether this decrease in identified attacks was associated with decreased violence or monitoring and reporting although it seems to fit the broader trend; GCPEA identified eight and three such attacks in 2021 and 2020, respectively.¹⁷

In 2024, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) verified two attacks on schools.¹⁸ Separately, GCPEA identified at least two attacks on schools in 2024, but these were not added to the UNMISS number, to avoid double counting.

In 2024, the UN verified one school attack by the National Salvation Front.¹⁹

As reported by ACLED and local media, on January 19, 2024, armed actors, allegedly from the Abyei region, reportedly burned down a primary school in Twic county, Warrap state.²⁰

Between January and April 2025, the UN reported that 23 schools, one secondary and 22 primary, were looted, although GCPEA was unable to establish whether these attacks occurred in the context of armed conflict, and thus whether they met GCPEA criteria, and so they were not included.²¹

GCPEA identified at least one attack on a school in 2025. In May 2025, in Marial Lou, Warrap state, at least 100 girls students were trapped inside a girls' boarding school when it was surrounded by armed individuals, as reported by Human Rights Watch.²² Teachers locked the gates and UN peacekeepers subsequently secured the school.²³

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

During the 2024-2025 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least two attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel. This represents a decrease as compared to the previous reporting period, when GCPEA identified three and five such attacks in 2023 and 2022, respectively.²⁴ As above, it is unclear whether this decrease in identified attacks was associated with decreased violence, or monitoring and reporting.

GCPEA identified at least one attack on school students, teachers, and other education personnel in 2024:

- As reported by ACLED and local media, on January 12, 2024 in Aweil West county, Northern Bahr el Ghazal state, police allegedly arrested and assaulted between 27 and 300 teachers demonstrating against salary deductions. During the protest, teachers allegedly threw stones at the military police and vandalized the Ministry of General Education office. At least 30 injuries resulted during this incident.²⁵

GCPEA identified at least one attack on school students, teachers, and other education personnel in 2025:

- On June 25, 2025, in Pochalla North, Jonglei state, armed men reportedly abducted four female students while they were on the way to secondary school exams, as reported by Human Rights Watch.²⁶ According to local media reports, accompanying male students were unharmed and not abducted, suggesting that the girls were targeted for their gender.²⁷

Military use of schools and universities

During the 2024-2025 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 14 cases of the military use of schools and universities. This represents a decrease compared to the previous 2022-2023 reporting period, when GCPEA identified at least 32 incidents of military use.²⁸ It is unclear whether this decrease in identified attacks was associated with decreased military use or decreased monitoring and reporting, but it appears to be a continuing trend, since seven and 24 such attacks were reported in 2023 and 2022, respectively.

The UN reported that five schools were occupied in 2024, and separately that seven schools were vacated by the Necessary Unified Forces, the South Sudan People's Defence Forces, and the South Sudan National Police Service.²⁹ GCPEA identified six reports of military use, but these were not added to the UN number, to avoid double counting. Examples included:

- As reported on April 15, 2024, the South Sudan People's Defence Forces occupied three schools in the Agok area, Abyei region, according to the UN.³⁰
- Between February and July 2024, the Necessary Unified Forces allegedly occupied three schools in Western Equatoria, as reported by the UN.³¹
- Between February and July 2024, the South Sudan National Police Service vacated one school in Lakes state, as reported by the UN.³²
- Between February and July 2024, the Necessary Unified Forces vacated one school in Western Equatoria state, as reported by the UN.³³

GCPEA identified at least two reports of military use in 2025. Between April 16 and October 1, 2025, the South Sudan People's Defence Forces continued to occupy school facilities in southern Abyei, as reported by the UN. In May 2025, UNISFA contacted the Government of South Sudan advocating for the withdrawal of these forces in line with the demilitarized and weapons-free status of Abyei, under the terms of the 2011 Agreement on Temporary Arrangements for the Administration and Security of the Abyei Area. As of October 2025, the schools were reportedly still occupied.³⁴

Attacks on higher education

During the 2024-2025 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least two attacks on higher education. This is similar to the sporadic number of incidents identified in the previous 2022-2023 reporting period, when GCPEA identified at least one attack on higher education in both 2022 and 2023.³⁵

GCPEA identified at least one attack on higher education in 2024: as reported by Scholars at Risk and local media, on June 12, 2024, at the University of Juba in Juba county, Central Equatoria state, South Sudan National Police Service raided an all-female hostel at the University's request in response to protests over fee increases and living conditions. According to reports, female students were arrested and 16 were injured.³⁶

GCPEA identified at least one attack on higher education in 2025. On May 9, 2025, in Rumbek city, Lakes state, four university lecturers from Rumbek University of Science and Technology were allegedly detained, as reported by local media.³⁷