

CAMEROON

Attacks on schools and school students, teachers, and other education personnel continued during the 2020-2021 reporting period. GCPEA identified over 55 reported incidents of attacks on school students and staff and over 65 incidents of attacks on schools, primarily in the North-West and South-West regions. Armed separatists and armed forces allegedly used schools for military purposes in the Far North, North-West, and South-West regions.

Context

The 2020-2021 reporting period saw an escalation in violence in Cameroon's Far North region and North-West and South-West regions.⁴¹³ In the Far North region, Boko Haram and other non-state armed groups increased their operations during the reporting period; the African Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) reported a 90 percent increase in violence by Boko Haram in 2020 as compared to 2019.⁴¹⁴ After the death of Boko Haram's leader in May 2021, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), a splinter faction from Boko Haram, became the dominant armed group in the Far North region.⁴¹⁵ International Crisis Group (ICG) reported in 2021 that over 3,000 Cameroonians had been killed in the conflict with Boko Haram.⁴¹⁶

In the North-West and South-West regions, non-state armed groups attacked civilians and clashed with Cameroonian security forces, which also subjected civilians to human rights abuses, including unlawful killings and deprivation of liberty, during the reporting period, according to Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.⁴¹⁷ At the end of 2021, armed violence had killed around 4,000 people in the North-West and South-West regions since fighting began in 2016.⁴¹⁸ The UN reported that armed groups used improvised explosive devices (IEDs) against civilian populations, further evidence of intensifying conflict.⁴¹⁹ Attacks by non-state armed groups escalated in early 2020 after the government set a date for contested parliamentary elections.⁴²⁰

Conflict, the Covid-19 pandemic, and climate shocks augmented humanitarian needs during the reporting period.⁴²¹ The UN reported in 2021 that 4.4 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance in Cameroon, over half of whom were children.⁴²² In December 2021, the UN reported that almost one million people were internally displaced in Cameroon and over 65,000 Cameroonians had fled to Nigeria.⁴²³

Non-state armed groups continued to enforce a boycott on education in North-West and South-West regions which, along with ongoing violence, forced more than two-thirds of schools in the regions to close and affected over 700,000 school-aged children during the reporting period.⁴²⁴ In October 2020, schools reopened after Covid-19 closures,⁴²⁵ however, the UN reported that school attendance was less than 30 percent in North-West and South-West regions.⁴²⁶ A study by Plan International found that both male and female adolescents in North-West and South-West regions feared attending school due to military presence near facilities, which heightened risks of arbitrary arrest and detention, sexual violence, and crossfire.⁴²⁷ When schools reopened, there was a spike of attacks on students, teachers, and educational facilities in North-West and South-West regions, according to the UN.⁴²⁸ Also, in the Far North region, authorities closed over 60 schools in October 2020 due to insecurity caused by Boko Haram.⁴²⁹

Attacks on schools

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified over 65 reported incidents of attacks on schools in Cameroon. Most reports occurred in the North-West and South-West regions, with sporadic incidents taking place in the Far North region. Attacks on schools typically consisted of gunfire, raids, or arson. Reported incidents of attacks on schools appeared to increase slightly as compared to earlier years. In 2019, for instance, GCPEA identified three reports of attacks on schools and 12 reports in 2018.⁴³⁰ However, a multisectoral needs assessment by the Cameroon Education Cluster reported 157 attacks on schools in the North-West and South-West regions and over 2,300 school interruptions between January – August 2019; a comparable assessment did not take place in 2020 or 2021.⁴³¹

In 2020, GCPEA identified around 40 reported attacks on schools. The UN verified 20 attacks on schools in 2020 in the North-West, South-West, and Far North regions.⁴³² In the same year, between January and October 2020, the UN reported 17 incidents of attacks on schools,⁴³³ and at least 35 attacks on schools in North-West and South-West regions between

October 1 and December 10, 2020.⁴³⁴ However, GCPEA could not add these two aggregates due to the overlapping period. GCPEA also identified at least six reports of attacks on schools in North-West and South-West regions between June and December 2020 from media, NGO, and UN sources, some of which may have been included in the UN count.⁴³⁵ Attacks appeared to escalate after school reopenings in October, according to the UN.⁴³⁶ Examples in North-West and South-West regions in 2020 included:

- On October 24, 2020, a group of men armed with guns and machetes stormed Mother Francisca International Bilingual Academy, a private school in Kumba town, South-West region. According to Human Rights Watch and the UN, attackers forcibly entered a classroom and shot at students, killing at least six students, and injuring at least 13 others.⁴³⁷ Both the government and armed separatists accused each other of perpetrating the attack.⁴³⁸ OCHA called the incident the deadliest attack on education since the start of the conflict in 2017.⁴³⁹ In 2021, a trial in a military court resulted in the sentencing of four people to death for the attack.⁴⁴⁰
- Local and regional media sources reported that four unidentified attackers fired at a high school in Bamenda town, Mezam division, North-West region on November 3, 2020.⁴⁴¹
- On November 4, 2020, armed assailants attacked Kulu Memorial College in Limbe, Fako division, South-West region. After perpetrating sexual violence on students and teachers (below), the attackers burned several classrooms and materials, according to local media and the UN.⁴⁴²

In addition, GCPEA identified one reported incident in Far North region in 2020:

- On February 15, 2020, alleged Boko Haram members reportedly burned down a school, along with other buildings, in Mandoussa village, Mayo-Sava division, Far North region, according to Insecurity Insight.⁴⁴³

In 2021, the UN verified 18 attacks on schools in Cameroon.⁴⁴⁴ Also in 2021, GCPEA identified at least nine reported incidents of attacks on schools in North-West and South-West regions.⁴⁴⁵ GCPEA could not determine whether of any of these incidents were included in the UN's count.

- On January 22 and 23, 2021, in two incidents, unknown attackers reportedly burned down both the boys' and girls' dormitories at the Presbyterian Secondary School in Mankon area of Bamenda, Mezam division, North-West region, according to the UN and local media sources.⁴⁴⁶ Media reported that the attack affected approximately 60 girls and 73 boys, who were removed from the dormitories at the time of the attack; three students were reportedly injured.⁴⁴⁷
- A local NGO and ACLED reported that on February 9, 2021, unknown attackers set a section of a school on fire in Nkambe town and division, North-West region. The fire allegedly destroyed several classrooms.⁴⁴⁸
- On June 29, 2021, members of a non-state armed group fired guns near three schools where General Certificate of Education exams were taking place in Mamfe, Manyu Division, South-West region. The attackers then destroyed materials used for the exams, which prevented students from finishing the academic testing.⁴⁴⁹
- On the morning of November 24, 2021, members of an unidentified armed group raided the Government Bilingual High School in Ekondo-Titi, Ndian Division, South-West region, according to Human Rights Watch, international media, and the UN.⁴⁵⁰ A government official reported that an IED was detonated in the attack. The gunmen killed one female teacher and four students under the age of 18; in addition, at least five other students were injured. The school served around 1,000 students.⁴⁵¹

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

In 2020 and 2021, GCPEA identified at least 58 reported incidents of attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel, which harmed over 150 individuals. Non-state armed groups in North-West and South-West regions continued to abduct, kill, harass, threaten, or otherwise harm school students and staff at, or on the way to or from, school. GCPEA identified more reported incidents during this reporting period but that harmed fewer people, as compared to earlier years; for example, GCPEA identified 20 incidents of attacks on school students and teachers in 2019 and 15 in 2018, which affected at least 535 people.⁴⁵² In addition, after the publication of *Education under Attack 2020*, the Cameroon Education Cluster reported that, between January and August 2019, 3,918 violent incidents against stu-

dents and 1,124 violent incidents against teachers were reported; however, GCPEA could not determine whether all of the incidents constituted attacks as per GCPEA definitions.⁴⁵³

In 2020, GCPEA identified at least 31 reported incidents of attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel, most of which occurred between August and December.⁴⁵⁴ Of these, 27 incidents involved targeted attacks on students and school staff, including 14 abductions, and affected 83 students and educators in the Far-North (1), North-West (21), and South-West (5) regions; the remaining four incidents involved security forces arresting or using excessive force against teachers in Centre and Littoral regions. The actual number of attacks on school students, teachers, and other personnel may be under-reported. For example, in October 2020, as authorities sought to reopen school in conflict-affected areas, *Voice of America* reported that at least 3,000 teachers had refused transportation to school by Cameroonian Armed Forces, claiming renewed threats against them and students.⁴⁵⁵

Examples of attacks school students, teachers, and other education personnel in 2020 included:

- On January 30, 2020, Human Rights Watch reported that armed separatists kidnapped and maimed two 19-year-old secondary school students, one male and one female, in Buea, Fako division, South-West region, having targeted them for attending school. The female student reported that the separatists cut off her finger with a machete before releasing her on February 3, 2020, upon payment of ransom. Both students reportedly received medical treatment but had not returned to school as of March 2020.⁴⁵⁶
- On August 5, 2020, in Bafia, South-West region, members of a separatist armed group abducted a teacher after he refused to fly an “Ambazonia” flag outside the school where he worked, according to Human Rights Watch. The armed group released the teacher in early September 2020, after receiving a ransom payment. The teacher, who reported receiving beatings while held by the armed group, reported that he left the teaching profession after his abduction.⁴⁵⁷
- UN and local media reported that on October 23, 2020, suspected armed separatists abducted 15 students from Progressive Comprehensive College in Bamenda, Mezam, North-West region. On October 24, the kidnapers released six students who were subsequently hospitalized.⁴⁵⁸
- On November 3, 2020, suspected armed separatists abducted at least 11 teachers and school personnel from a Presbyterian school in Kumbo, Bui division, North-West region, according to the UN and *Al Jazeera*.⁴⁵⁹
- The UN reported that an armed group kidnapped nine children who were on their way to school on November 4, 2020, in Fundong, Boyo division, North-West region.⁴⁶⁰
- On December 8, 2020, OCHA and ACLED reported that members of a non-state armed group shot a student while he was on his way to school in Oku subdivision, Boyo division, North-West region. ACLED reported that the attack injured the student.⁴⁶¹

In 2021, attacks on school students, teachers and education personnel continued at a similar rate, with GPCEA identifying at least 26 reported incidents, including 14 actual or threatened abductions affecting over 50 people.⁴⁶² All of the reported incidents occurred in North-West and South-West regions. Incidents appeared to escalate after the 2021-2022 academic year began in September 2021. Examples included:

- OCHA and local media sources reported that on January 9, 2021, alleged armed separatists shot and killed the principal of a school in Ossing, Manyu division, South-West region. The reports indicated that the victim had returned home after work at the time of the attack.⁴⁶³
- OCHA and local media reported that on January 28, 2021, armed separatists abducted seven students from Elak Government High School in Oku, Bui division, North-West region. The students were later released.⁴⁶⁴
- Around September 14, 2021, armed separatists abducted five teachers and five education administrators from Ndop, Ngo-Ketunjia division, North-West region; the educators had reportedly attended a meeting about the reopening of government schools. One school administrator was killed six days later, according to the UN and media reports, while others were freed on September 16, 2021.⁴⁶⁵
- The UN and local sources reported that armed separatists abducted eight students in Bamenda, North-West

region on or around September 14, 2021. The students' families paid for their subsequent release.⁴⁶⁶

- The UN reported that on November 9, 2021, members of a non-state armed group abducted a principal and two teachers from the premises of the Government High School in Oku, North-West region.⁴⁶⁷

Also in 2021, GCPEA identified two incidents in which state security forces killed schoolgirls on the way to or from school.⁴⁶⁸ For example, on November 12, 2021, police at a checkpoint shot a bullet that hit and killed an eight-year-old girl who was on the way home from school.⁴⁶⁹

Military use of schools and universities

The military use of schools continued in Cameroon during the 2020-2021 reporting period in both the Far North,-West and South-West regions. In 2018 and 2019, GCPEA identified dozens of cases of military use of schools, primarily in the Far North region.⁴⁷⁰

In 2020, the UN verified 19 incidents of military use of schools in the Far North region.⁴⁷¹ In North-West and South-West regions, in 2020, GCPEA received various unverified or anecdotal reports of the military use of schools. For example, *Voice of America* reported in late September 2020 that Cameroonian armed forces had vacated over 100 schools that had been occupied by armed separatists over a weekend of fighting, in efforts to secure schools ahead of the 2020-2021 school year.⁴⁷² The UN also reported two incidents of non-operational school buildings used by the military, both of which were damaged, in North-West region, between January and September 2020.⁴⁷³

In 2021, the UN verified 21 cases of military use in Cameroon.⁴⁷⁴ GCPEA also identified UN reports from 2021 that armed groups had used schools as bases, sometimes holding people hostage in or around them, and sometimes torturing people, in North-West and South-West regions.⁴⁷⁵

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

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least one report of sexual violence by a non-state armed group that occurred at a school. On November 4, 2020, during an attack on Kulu Memorial College (reported above) located in Limbe, Fako division, South-West region, an armed group forced around 20 male and female students and four teachers to strip naked while filming them, poured petrol on them, and reportedly used force against some of them, according to Human Rights Watch.⁴⁷⁶ They then chased the naked students and teachers away from school, before burning parts of the school, according to *BBC*, Human Rights Watch, and local media.⁴⁷⁷

Attacks on higher education

GCPEA identified at least nine incidents of attacks on higher education during the 2020-2021 reporting period, affecting at least 45 students and personnel. As in previous years, alleged non-state armed groups killed or abducted student or faculty on or near campuses in North-West and South-West regions or attacked facilities. In addition, state security forces detained students from universities. Attacks occurred at a similar rate to the period covered in *Education under Attack 2020*, when GCPEA identified six reports of attacks on higher education in 2019 and five in 2018.⁴⁷⁸

In 2020, GCPEA identified at least four reported incidents of attacks on higher education students and staff.⁴⁷⁹ Examples included:

- On May 17, 2020, two armed separatists killed a university professor in Bamenda, Mezam division, North-West region. Human Rights Watch reported that members of an armed separatist group had threatened the teacher multiple times to stop teaching and to adhere to the boycott, as well as demanding money. Witnesses reported to Human Rights Watch that the professor was killed outside of his home.⁴⁸⁰
- Insecurity Insight and *Le Gideon Magazine* reported that unidentified attackers kidnapped a female student near her dormitory at the University of Bamenda in Bamenda, Mezam division, North-West region on July 5, 2020.⁴⁸¹
- On July 27, 2020, state security forces allegedly raided student residences in Ndongo town, Fako division, South-West region. Students alleged that the security forces had demanded money from them and detained those who did not pay the security forces.⁴⁸²

In 2021, GCPEA identified at least three reported incidents of attacks on higher education students. The University of Bamenda was particularly affected by such attacks, causing its staff to declare a strike in October 2021, calling for authorities to finish roadwork on a section of the road that connected a satellite campus to the city. University staff alleged that armed men used the trenches in the construction area to hide in and abduct university teachers.⁴⁸³ Incidents of attacks included:

- Garda reported that on January 7, 2021, suspected armed separatists abducted at least six university students in Bamenda, Mezam division, North-West region. The students were in a car on the way to university.⁴⁸⁴
- Local media reported that on May 17, 2021, armed separatists allegedly abducted 11 staff members, including teachers, from the Baptist Training School for Health Personnel in Kumbo town, Bui division, North-West region.⁴⁸⁵
- Local media reported that around July 22, 2021, military forces shot a student in front of his student hostel in Bambili, near Bamenda, Mezam division, North-West region. Reports did not specify whether the killing was targeted.⁴⁸⁶
- On September 24, 2021, armed separatists allegedly abducted two University of Bamenda staff members in Tubah sub-division, Mezam division, North-West region. The report noted that three other staff had been abducted in the month before.⁴⁸⁷

In addition, GCPEA identified one report of an attack on a higher education facility in 2021. Human Rights Watch, the UN, and international media sources reported that on November 10, 2021, an armed group allegedly placed an IED on the roof of a building, which detonated and injured at least 11 students at the University of Buea, in South-West region.⁴⁸⁸

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