DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

GCPEA collected over 600 reported incidents of attacks on schools in 2020 and 2021, with Ituri and Tanganyika provinces particularly affected. In addition, armed groups reportedly recruited or used students at or near schools. GCPEA also collected reports of sexual violence by armed groups at schools. Reports of targeted killings and threats against teachers increased in North Kivu. Attacks on higher education students and staff continued at a similar rate to earlier years.

Context

Armed conflict continued in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) during the 2020-2021 reporting period. In 2020, fighting involving non-state armed groups, which numbered over 130, and the Congolese national armed forces (Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo – FARDC), along with intercommunal violence, remained high in parts of the eastern provinces of Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, and Tanganyika. In May 2021, authorities declared a state of siege in Ituri and North Kivu provinces, allowing military and police to take over civilian administration in the two provinces.

Civilians continued to bear the brunt of hostilities throughout the reporting period. In 2021 and 2020, the UN reported that fighting in Ituri, North Kivu, and South Kivu provinces killed over 2,000 civilians each year. The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) armed group, which operated in North Kivu and Ituri provinces, was responsible for one-third of all civilian deaths in DRC in 2020. Attacks on civilians continued at high rates in 2021, despite martial law in North Kivu and Ituri provinces, according to Human Rights Watch.

In November 2021, the UN reported that 5.6 million people were displaced in DRC, nearly half of whom had been displaced since January 2021. Ituri province was particularly affected, with over 1.7 million people displaced between January and November 2020, according to the UN. At the end of 2021, the UN estimated that over 27 million people needed humanitarian assistance. However, armed groups frequently prevented humanitarian actors from delivering assistance to people in need during the reporting period.

In addition, the public health crises of both Ebola and Covid-19 severely strained an already fragile healthcare system and compounded humanitarian needs. Along with conflict, Covid-19 contributed to a 40 percent increase in the number of people experiencing food insecurity in 2020, according to analyses by the non-governmental organization CARE.

Access to education was severely constrained in DRC due to conflict and Covid-19 during the 2020-2021 reporting period. Over 26 million students did not attend school from April 19 to October 12, 2020 due to Covid-19-related school closures, and again between December 2020 and late February 2021. However, insecurity kept some schools closed; for example, in North Kivu, even when health measures permitted reopening in both October 2020 and February 2021, dozens of schools remained closed due to conflict, affecting thousands of students. Furthermore, in areas where schools reopened in October 2020, attendance rates declined, with many families reporting that they were unable to pay school fees. In addition, damage to schools from both conflict and flooding prevented thousands of students from returning to school in Eastern provinces of DRC in 2020 and 2021. The eruption of Mount Nyiragongo volcano on May 22, 2021, also damaged seven schools and temporarily halted classes at all schools in Goma and 40 universities.

Attacks on schools

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified over 600 reported attacks on schools from both verified and unverified data sources. Attacks on schools occurred at similarly high rates as in the previous reporting period. In 2018 and 2019, GCPEA identified hundreds of reported incidents annually. Between 2018 and early 2020, the UN reported that most attacks on schools occurred in Ituri province and were perpetrated by non-state armed groups including the Cooperative for the Development of Congo (CODECO). In 2020, the UN verified 101 incidents of attacks on schools that affected 24,900 students, representing a five-fold increase from 2019, when the UN verified 20 attacks on schools. Of these, the UN verified that Twigwaneho armed...
groups lead by a former FARDC colonel destroyed 15 schools in the Kamombo area of South Kivu province between mid-June and mid-September 2020. GCPEA also identified unverified reports of attacks on schools throughout the year, some of which were higher than verified counts. For instance, in the whole of Tanganyika province in 2020, the UN reported that 342 schools had been destroyed due to hostilities. Tanganyika province’s Nyunzu territory was particularly affected, with armed violence causing the destruction of 69 schools between January and October 2020, according to the UN. Also in Tanganyika province, schools were reportedly damaged during fighting between Zambian armed forces and the FARDC in 2020, according to the DRC Protection Cluster. In Ituri province, the UN reported that 163 schools were attacked in 2020.

GCPEA identified ten reported incidents of attacks on schools from media, conflict monitors, and the UN. GCPEA could not determine whether these incidents were counted in the above totals reported by the UN. For example:

- The Kivu Security Tracker reported that on January 26, 2020, at least two schools were burned as a result of clashes between two armed groups in Uvira territory, South Kivu province.
- In March 2020, Bantu militia members burned two schools in Nyunzu town and territory, Tanganyika province, according to the UN.
- Between August 5 and 8, 2020, during fighting between Zambian armed forces and the FARDC, the primary school in Kalumbama, Moba territory, Tanganyika province, was destroyed, according to the DRC Protection Cluster. During the same month, the DRC Protection Cluster documented two attacks on schools in Muliro, Moba territory, Tanganyika province.
- On August 18, 2020, unknown attackers allegedly burned part of a school in Lengwe, Nyunzu territory, Tanganyika province, according to Radio Okapi. A report from ACLED indicated that other school buildings may have also been set alight in the area.
- On August 27, 2020, in Katanga village, Masisi Territory, North Kivu province, an armed group and FARDC battled each other near an exam center while students were taking the national exams for the completion of primary school. Two students were killed in the attack, according to the UN. Radio Okapi reported that the attack prevented over 300 school students from finishing their exams.
- The DRC Protection Cluster reported that during an attack on Irumu town, Ituri province, on October 21, 2020, an armed group burned down the Primary and Professional Education administrative building.

In 2021, the DRC Education Cluster received reports that at least 250 schools were looted, destroyed, or burned in eastern DRC between January and September. In 2021, the UN verified 69 attacks on schools. GCPEA also identified reports during the same period which may have been included in either the DRC Education Cluster or UN reports. For example, in March 2021, the DRC Protection Cluster reported that 36 schools had allegedly been attacked in Bijombo-Moranvia during fighting between armed groups. In Walikale, Masisi, Rutshuru, and Beni territories of North Kivu province, 43 schools were reportedly destroyed between January and March 2021, according to the Education Cluster. These attacks often caused interruptions to learning. In April 2021, the UN reported that attacks on schools had affected approximately 400,000 school-aged children in Ituri province.

In addition, GCPEA identified at least six reported incidents of attacks on schools from media sources, UN, and NGOs, in North Kivu, Ituri, and Kasai Central provinces, including:

- In January 2021, armed conflict damaged one school and destroyed two others in Batua Kadimba, Kasai Central province, according to an Inter-Cluster evaluation report.
- In June 2021, the UN and media reported that two schools in Mutanga village, Dimbelenge territory, Kasai Central province, were burned down during conflict in the area.
- On November 22, 2021, an explosive device was allegedly found in the yard of Bonaventure school in Mungwalu, Djugu territory, Ituri province, following clashes between FARDC and the CODECO armed group in the area. As a result, the school director reported to Radio Okapi that the school closed for three days, affecting 495 students.
Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

In 2020 and 2021, GCPEA identified at least 20 reported incidents of attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel. Incidents involved the abduction, robbery, threatening, or killing of teachers and students by both military, non-state armed groups, or unknown perpetrators. In addition, state security forces used excessive force against student or teacher protestors. The number of attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel increased as compared to prior years; GCPEA identified five incidents in 2019 and three in 2018.673

In 2020, GCPEA identified at least 13 incidents of attacks on school students and teachers,674 eight of which involved the killing or robbing of teachers or students by armed groups, and four of which involved the use of force by police against, or arrest of, students or teachers protesting education related issues. Armed groups threatened displaced teachers in North Kivu in October 2020, forcing them to return to work in their places of origin instead of in the community where they were displaced.675 Other examples of attacks on school students and educators included:

- On August 10, 2020, a group of teachers in Bukavu, South Kivu province, gathered in a protest about salaries and pay rises, according to Voice of America and local media. Police allegedly used teargas and batons to disperse the demonstrators, injuring 20 teachers; teachers accused police of stealing cell phones. The report stated that the protest took place on the first day of classes since schools closed due to Covid-19.676
- On October 22, 2020, a girl who was on her way home from school was shot in the leg by a soldier at an FARDC checkpoint who had been aiming at passing vehicle, according to the DRC Protection Cluster.677
- On November 27, 2020, primary and secondary school students in Lusambo, Sankuru province, protested against the provincial governor's raising of school fees, according to local media. The police dispersed the students using tear gas, after which some student reportedly threw stones. One student was allegedly injured.678
- The DRC Protection Cluster reported that on December 10, 2020, an administrator of Institut Rwankeri voiced his opposition to the recent occupation of a nearby school courtyard. An armed group abducted the teacher for one day until a ransom was paid.679

In 2021, GCPEA identified at least 11 reported incidents of attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel.680 GCPEA observed an increase in reporting on incidents of teachers being threatened or abducted, for payment of “security fees” in 2021. Examples of attacks included:

- Local media reported that on January 14, 2021, armed militiamen allegedly robbed four teachers in Lombana, Djugu territory, Ituri province. The teachers were returning home from the town where they lived after schools had closed again due to Covid-19 prevention measures, according to one report.681
- SOS Medias reported that on February 11, 2021, approximately 50 primary and secondary school teachers in a refugee camp in Lusenda, Fizi, South Kivu province, held a demonstration about salary payments. Police forces, along with the camp’s security, allegedly used force to disperse the protest, and injured several teachers.682
- On March 3, 2021, an armed group blocked the entrances of multiple schools in Mweso district, Masisi territory, North Kivu province, and demanded that teachers pay a “security fee” before entering. The armed group abducted two teachers on March 4, 2021, releasing them the next day after receiving a ransom payment. Some schools shut down due to the presence of the armed groups, according to the DRC Protection Cluster.683
- On July 30, 2021, media sources reported that an FARDC soldier shot and killed a 16-year-old female student who was crossing a checkpoint on her way home from school in Laoshi, Masisi territory, North Kivu province. Radio Okapi reported that the FARDC had erected a checkpoint at 20 meters distance from the school. Six soldiers were allegedly arrested in relation to the incident.684

Military use of schools and universities

GCPEA identified reports of at least 25 schools used for military purposes during the 2020-2021 reporting period. Reported incidents of military use increased in comparison to earlier years. GCPEA identified around three reported incidents of military use in 2018 and five UN-verified incidents of military use in 2019.685

In October 2020, the UN reported that armed actors had occupied 12 schools in the north of Nyunzu territory, Tanganyika
province. Over the course of the year, the UN also verified that armed forces had used four schools in North Kivu and one school in Tanganyika for as long as four months before vacating them. In addition, local media reported that on October 6, 2020, members of an armed group had set up a camp inside a school building in Ndijapanda village, Lubero territory, North Kivu province. The Protection Cluster also identified one case of military use of a primary school in Masisi territory, North Kivu Province, in December 2020 which led to the recruitment of children from a neighboring school, detailed below.

In 2021, GCPEA identified at least 13 reports of military use in the provinces of North Kivu (5), Ituri (5), South Kivu (1), and Tanganyika (2). The UN verified four such cases in 2021. These included:

- The DRC Protection Cluster reported that on March 21, 2021, an armed group had occupied four primary schools and one secondary school in Masisi Territory, North Kivu Province. The armed group denied teachers and students entry to the schools. As a result, those schools, as well as nearby schools, suspended their activities.
- The UN reported that between January and June 2021, armed groups occupied five schools in Ituri province.
- As of August 9, 2021, unidentified armed groups were using at least two schools in Mukimbo and Ngombo-Mwana, Nyunzu territory, Tanganyika province, according to the UN. The report did not specify the duration of the use of the school.
- In October 2021, the Protection Cluster verified that FARDC soldiers used a primary school for three days in Kirungu, Uvira territory, South Kivu province. The soldiers used desks for firewood and turned the classrooms into a dormitory. The Protection Cluster also verified that sexual violence against children by FARDC occurred in the same village, although GCPEA could not determine whether the cases occurred at or near the school.

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

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified occasional reports of sexual violence by parties to conflict at, or on the way to or from, school. Such incidents appeared to have decreased since their peak during the Greater Kasai crisis in 2016-2017.

In 2020, GCPEA identified one incident of sexual violence by armed groups at a school. On August 30, 2020, AFP, Reuters, and local media reported that unidentified armed men attacked the dormitory of Institut Rungu, in Rungu, Isirio territory, Haut Uélé province. Around 30 students were lodged at the school to undertake their final primary school exam. In the night, armed attackers entered the building and allegedly raped at least one female student, according to a local government official.

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

GCPEA received reports of child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school, affecting over 40 students during the 2020-2021 reporting period. In *Education under Attack 2020*, GCPEA had not received any reports of this violation, though such occurrences may have not been reported.

In October 2020, the DRC Protection Cluster reported that six children were forcibly recruited from a primary school in Bweru, North Kivu province, and used to transport military items. The children were released the next day.

On December 10, 2020, members of an armed group set up camp in the yard of a primary school in Lwama, Masisi territory, North Kivu province. While using the school, they abducted around 33 students from a neighboring secondary school and used them to transport their belongings. Their headmaster was later abducted for condemning the military use of the primary school, as detailed above.

The actual total number of children recruited at, or on the way to or from school, may be higher. For example, the UN reported that between 2018 and early 2020, 35 percent of the 980 children recruited to armed groups or forces were abducted from their home, schools, or from roads or fields. Also in 2020, the United States State Department reported that some parents kept their children home from school due to fears of armed groups forcibly recruiting them.
Attacks on higher education

For the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 12 incidents of attacks on higher education people. While attacks declined in 2020, likely due to university closures, in 2021 they rose again to rates similar to earlier years. For example, during the period covered by Education under Attack 2020, GCPEA collected between six and 11 events annually; many of those events involved arrest or use of force against university students and staff during protests.706

In 2020, GCPEA identified three reported incidents of attacks on higher education students in North Kivu province:

- On March 17, 2020, local media reported that a university student was hit and killed by a stray bullet during confrontations between security forces and an armed group in Butembo city, North Kivu province.707
- The Kivu Security Tracker and local media reported that police used tear gas and gun fire to disperse student protesters in Butembo city and territory, North Kivu province, on March 17, 2020. The police reportedly shot and killed one student. The students were allegedly carrying the body of the student killed on March 17, 2020 (see above).708
- The Kivu Security Tracker reported that on July 2, 2020, students from Semuliki University marched in Beni city, North Kivu province, marched to demand reopening of classes and an end to Covid-19 related closures. The police dispersed the protest and allegedly arrested 12 students.709

In 2021, GCPEA identified nine reported incidents of attacks on university students and personnel.710 In September 2021, the Minister of Higher Education barred over 70 universities from teaching medicine, due to failure to meet established standards, which provoked student protests across the country, some of which were met with excessive force by police.711 Examples of attacks on higher education students and personnel included:

- Local media reported that a group of students from a number of higher education institutions demonstrated in Bukavu town, South Kivu province, on January 12, 2021. Police allegedly used teargas and live ammunition to disperse the students, who were demanding an end to Covid-19 related closures of universities.712
- On July 24, 2021, police shot dead a theatre student who was filming a school project with a teaching assistant and classmates in Kinshasa, according to local media. While some reports claimed that the police arrested the teaching assistant for not having a permit for filming, others claimed that the dispute was over a Covid-19 mask mandate.713
- In response to the incident of the killing of a student on July 24, 2021, students at the University of Kinshasa protested on July 26; police allegedly used excessive force against the students, injuring several, and arrested eight. The students reportedly damaged the campus and clashed with police.714
- On September 24, 2021, students at the Official University of Rwenzori in Butembo, North Kivu province, protested against the Higher Education Ministry’s suspension of the institutions’ medical school. Police allegedly used teargas to disperse the demonstrators.715


A full list of references can be found on GCPEA’s website, https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2022_references.pdf


“Masisi: a student killed by a soldier for not having paid 0.25 USD at the barrier (Masisi : un élève tué par un militaire pour n’avoir pas payé 0.25 USD à la barrière),” Radio Okapi, July 31, 2021. Actu30; Actualite; Radio Okapi; 7 Sur 7, La Libre Afrique; Mediacongo.net; La Prunelle, as cited in ACLED, Event ID DRC22087. « Eastern DRC: schoolgirl killed at army roadblock, six soldiers arrested (Est de la RDC: une écolière tuée à un barrage de l’armée, six militaires arrêtés),” Actualite.CD, August 1, 2021.


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