

KENYA

Attacks on school students and teachers persisted at a similar rate in 2020 and 2021 as compared to the previous two years; in early 2020, the targeted killings of teachers in the northeast led to the closure of hundreds of schools. Police continued to use excessive force during higher education protests.

Context

The decade-long conflict between government military forces and the non-state armed group al-Shabaab continued in northeastern Kenya during the reporting period.⁸⁹⁸ Based in Somalia, al-Shabaab carried out cross-border attacks. In January 2020, al-Shabaab attacked a U.S.-Kenyan military base in Lamu county;⁸⁹⁹ in November 2021, the armed group reportedly targeted a military vehicle in that same county by detonating an improvised explosive device (IED), which killed one civilian and injured two, including a student.⁹⁰⁰ Alleged al-Shabaab members also killed non-local teachers in Garissa county in early 2020, targeting them as outsiders and Christians, according to media reports. As a result, hundreds of schools reportedly closed, thousands of teachers fled, and the government transferred all non-local teachers away from the region.⁹⁰¹ Attacks on teachers and the government's response severely hindered education in the northeast in 2020, according to International Crisis Group and media reports.⁹⁰² Between 2014 and mid-2020, more than 40 teachers died in the conflict with al-Shabaab in northeastern Kenya, *The New Humanitarian* reported.⁹⁰³

In Baringo and Laikipia counties, insecurity led to the closure of at least ten schools from May to July 2021, preventing approximately 3,000 students from attending classes.⁹⁰⁴ In September 2021, a criminal organization, referred to as bandits, burned down a school in Laikipia county.⁹⁰⁵

Kenyan police officers continued to use excessive and extrajudicial force during the reporting period, including shooting and injuring people without identifiable cause when enforcing Covid-19 curfews, according to Human Rights Watch.⁹⁰⁶ *The New Humanitarian* reported that police violence had risen in recent years, including violence and sexual abuse against women.⁹⁰⁷

Kenya hosted over half a million refugees in 2020 and 2021 from Somalia, South Sudan, and Ethiopia, among other countries, according to the UN.⁹⁰⁸ The Ministry of Education recorded 150,000 refugee students in 2020.⁹⁰⁹ The UN reported 7.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in Kenya in 2021, including 4.8 million children, due to drought, food insecurity, disease outbreak, and the socioeconomic effects of Covid-19.⁹¹⁰

Beginning in March 2020, the Kenyan government suspended the academic year for pre-primary through secondary public schools, to prevent the spread of Covid-19.⁹¹¹ According to the Ministry of Education, the country had more than 18 million students at home from over 90,000 closed schools that year.⁹¹² However, some private schools, which made up about a quarter of all schools,⁹¹³ still held online classes, as did many universities.⁹¹⁴ Girl students were particularly impacted by the school closures, according to Plan International and media reports; rates of female genital mutilation, forced early marriage, forced pregnancy, and sexual abuse appeared to rise.⁹¹⁵ Schools resumed classes in January 2021, although the media reported that thousands of students were absent in some counties, with girls particularly affected.⁹¹⁶

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA collected five reports of attacks on school students, teachers, and staff. In *Education under Attack 2020*, GCPEA similarly identified sporadic reports of attacks on school students and staff, namely one and three reported incidents in 2019 and 2018, respectively.⁹¹⁷ As in past years, media outlets alleged that al-Shabaab members carried out the attacks on students and teachers in the 2020-2021 reporting period.⁹¹⁸

In 2020, GCPEA identified two reported attacks on school students, teachers, and staff:

- On January 7, 2020, alleged members of al-Shabaab killed four students and one teacher, at Saretho Primary School, in Dadaab town, Garissa county, according to international media outlet *Al Jazeera*.⁹¹⁹ 250 students attended the boarding school where ten teachers taught, nine of whom were non-local. The remaining teachers reportedly fled the region after the attack and the school was closed, as were several others in the area.⁹²⁰
- Alleged al-Shabaab members killed three teachers and injured another at Kamuthe primary school, in Kamuthe, Garissa county, on January 13, 2020, according to international media outlet *The Guardian* and local outlet *The Star*.⁹²¹ The suspected non-state armed group entered teachers' quarters at the school where they reportedly shot the teachers at close range.⁹²² Due to targeted violence against teachers, hundreds of schools reportedly closed in the northeast in early 2020 and thousands of teachers reportedly left the area.⁹²³

In 2021, GCPEA collected three reports of attacks on students, teachers, and staff:

- On March 2, 2021, alleged al-Shabaab members abducted a secondary school student in Shallete village, Wajir county, as reported by local media.⁹²⁴
- On August 3, 2021, parents from local primary and secondary schools reportedly protested outside the county commissioner's office in Kinamba town, Laikipia county, over insecurity in the area caused by banditry. Police used teargas to disperse the protesters, according to local media outlet *The Star*.⁹²⁵
- Local media reported that on September 10, 2021, primary school teachers, who were refugees from South Sudan, protested about their delayed salaries at the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Turkana county. To disperse the demonstration, police officers fired teargas into the crowd and arrested at least two demonstrators, although it was unclear whether educators or students were among those arrested.⁹²⁶

Military use of schools and universities

In 2020 and 2021, GCPEA identified one report of the military use of a school. *Education under Attack 2020*, which covered 2017-2019, included no reported incidents of military use of educational facilities.⁹²⁷

In January 2020, international media outlet *AllAfrica* reported that the Kenyan Navy had erected a fence on the land of neighboring Mweza Primary and Secondary School in Mombasa city, Mombasa county.⁹²⁸ The school community reportedly protested the construction of the fence designed to encircle Navy base housing, describing it as a land grab and claiming it would affect the playground and several classrooms.⁹²⁹ Although GCPEA had not identified the incident at the time, the land invasion appeared to first receive news coverage in 2017.⁹³⁰

Attacks on higher education

GCPEA identified approximately ten reported incidents of attacks on higher education during the 2020-2021 reporting period. The rate of attacks on higher education remained similar to previous years, when GCPEA recorded 13 total incidents in 2018 and 2019.⁹³¹ As was most often the case in previous years, reported incidents in 2020 and 2021 involved police arresting students or repressing higher education protests.⁹³²

In 2020, GCPEA collected five reported attacks on higher education:

- On January 12, 2020, students reportedly protested at Egerton University, in Njoro town, Nakuru county, over the administration preventing some students from entering campus without paying fines for university property damage in 2019. Scholars at Risk and local media reported that students threw stones at police officers; police officers reportedly used teargas and fired shots into the air.⁹³³
- The next day, protests continued at Egerton University with police reportedly continuing to use teargas to disperse students. On January 12 and 13, 2020, local media outlet *The Standard* reported that the police arrested around ten students.⁹³⁴
- On March 6, 2020, students protested overcrowding, neglect, and the administration's refusal to allow students who had not yet paid fees to take exams at Sang'alo Technical Institute in Bungoma town, Bungoma county, according to local media. Police reportedly fired teargas into dormitories, injured students using batons, and

arrested 40 students.⁹³⁵

- On December 2, 2020, police reportedly used teargas on protesting students at Karatina University, in Karatina town, Nyeri county. According to local media outlet *Nation*, students demonstrated against having to pay fees despite studying at home, and their exam schedule, among other grievances. Students reportedly broke windows at the university and vandalized a police car.⁹³⁶
- On December 3, 2020, police used teargas to disperse students protesting near the University of Nairobi, in Nairobi, over a government plan to increase tuition fees three-fold in 2021, according to Scholars at Risk.⁹³⁷

In 2021, GCPEA identified approximately five reports of attacks on higher education students and staff. For example:

- Local media reported that on May 25, 2021, police fired teargas and arrested five protesting students at the main entrance to Maasai Mara University, in Narok town, Narok county. The students demonstrated against local drivers after a student was reportedly killed in a recent traffic accident.⁹³⁸
- On June 21, 2021, police fired teargas at protesting students from the Kenya Water Institute and arrested at least three, in Tharaka town, Nithi county, according to local media outlet *Nation*. The students reportedly demonstrated against admissions fees.⁹³⁹
- Local media reported that on July 14, 2021, students from the University of Nairobi demonstrated against an increase in tuition fees. After students blocked local roads, police officers reportedly fired teargas at the demonstrators and arrested three students.⁹⁴⁰
- According to local media source *The Star*, students attending Kisii University demonstrated against high fees and vandalized campus property on October 12, 2021, in Kisii town, Kisii county. To disperse the crowd, police reportedly fired teargas at the students.⁹⁴¹

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