Reported attacks on schools and school personnel increased during the 2020-2021 period in north and central Mali, and also spread to southern regions. GCPEA identified over 620 threatened or actual attacks on schools or educators during the reporting period, which peaked in June 2020, when armed groups reportedly threatened or attacked over 500 teachers and schools.

Context
Fighting between armed groups, self-defense groups, state security forces, and international forces increased during the 2020-2021 reporting period. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) reported that in 2020, Mali experienced the highest number of civilian fatalities as a result of fighting since casualty recording of the conflict began, and hostilities intensified again in the first half of 2021. In August 2020, a coup ousted President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta; nine months later, a second coup deposed an interim civilian-military government. In late 2021, the transitional government announced further delays to elections that had been scheduled for February 2022, resulting in sanctions from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

In central Mali, International Crisis Group (ICG) reported that fighting between Fulani armed groups and Dogon self-defense groups, such as Dana Ambassagou, escalated through mid-2020. Human Rights Watch reported that at least 400 people were killed during violence between Dogon and Fulani groups in 2020. Also in 2020, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSMA) reported that armed groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar Eddine, Katiba Macina, Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), and similar groups, attacked Malian security forces and civilians, and sometimes battled each other, in the north, center, and south of the country, including at the borders with Burkina Faso and Niger. Flare-ups of such fighting continued in 2021 and spread to areas of southern Mali, according to the UN and ACLED.

Civilians suffered the worst effects of conflict, further compounded by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. In late 2021, the UN reported that over 400,000 Malians were internally displaced and another 46,000 were refugees. In addition, the UN identified over 7.1 million Malians, including 3.9 million children, in need of humanitarian assistance in 2021.

Direct attacks on education and general insecurity severely impacted education during the reporting period. School closures due to insecurity rose in 2020 and 2021, and also began in areas of central and southern Mali, where almost 300 schools were affected by attacks and insecurity. At the end of August 2021, the UN reported over 1,664 schools closed in Mali due to insecurity, affecting 499,200 children, an increase from November 2020. During the reporting period, the regions most affected by school closures were Mopti region, where 44 percent of schools were non-operational as at August 2021, Ménaka, Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu. In most regions affected by fighting, the majority of school closures were caused by attacks or direct threats from armed groups, according to the Education Cluster. The UN reported that some schools in Timbuktu region reopened in the first half of 2021, following an agreement with a JNIM-affiliated armed group.

Between March and June 2020, the government closed all educational institutions in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, affecting 3.8 million children and prolonged reopening until January 2021. Several teachers’ unions went on strike in June and August 2020, to demand better pay and heightened measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in schools.

Attacks on schools
In 2020 and 2021, GCPEA identified over 620 reported incidents of actual or threatened attacks on schools in Mali. This signified an increase in attacks on schools compared to 2019 when the UN verified in 55 attacks on schools and education personnel in Mali, and 2018 when the UN verified 81 attacks on schools. This increase may also reflect improved reporting on attacks on education, particularly on threats made against schools.

In 2020, the UN verified 36 attacks on schools. In addition, in June 2020, the Mali Education Cluster received 516 reports of attacks on schools by armed groups, including 489 threats against schools, 11 schools burned, 2 school administrative offices burned, two incidents of looting, and 12 other attacks. Of these 489 threats, 415 took place in
Mopti region. The attacks took place after the government reopened schools for exams following Covid-19 closures. GCPEA was unable to confirm how many of the threats targeted teachers, or whether any of these incidents were verified.

Also in 2020, GCPEA collected eight reported incidents of attacks on schools from media sources and international organizations, which included seven alleged arson attacks. These reports may have been included in the above reporting from the Mali Education Cluster and UN. For example:

- Local media Studio Tamani reported that on February 12, 2020, unidentified armed men raided Tinhama village, in Ansongo district, at 11:40am. Local sources informed Studio Tamani that the armed group burned administrative documents from the school, as well as other public structures.

- Studio Tamani reported that on or around July 29, 2020, unknown militants set off explosive devices in Tonou village, Koro district, Mopti region, destroying a school.

- On November 17, 2020, 22 members of an armed group raided Sokoura village, Bankass district, Mopti region, and set fire to the administrative offices of the secondary school, according to the Mali Protection Cluster and ACLED.

In 2021, GCPEA identified over 110 attacks on schools in Mali from NGO and UN sources. Mopti, Sikasso, Timbuktu, Ménaka, and Kidal regions were particularly affected by threats to schools by armed groups in 2021, according to both Protection and Education Cluster reports. According to the Education Cluster, many of these threats led to school closures affecting thousands of students. The Mali Education Cluster reported 55 threats to schools in April 2021, the majority of which occurred in Sikasso. Furthermore, the UN verified 20 attacks on schools between April and June in Mopti and Timbuktu regions, and another 26 attacks on schools nationwide between October and December 2021. In addition, GCPEA collated 33 incident reports from ACLED, media, NGO, and other sources in 2021, although it is unknown whether some of these are included in the UN or Cluster counts. Examples of attacks on schools included:

- On or around January 20, 2021, the Mali Protection Cluster, the Mali Education Cluster, and ACLED reported that unidentified armed individuals looted school canteens and destroyed school materials in three schools in Sodon, Dindan, and Siratintin villages, Bankass district, Mopti region.

- In March 2021, the Mali Education Cluster reported that unidentified armed individuals threatened three schools (Kony, Djassa, and Bouna) in Nongon-Souala commune, Sikasso region. The schools subsequently closed.

- The Mali Education Cluster and ACLED reported that on or around May 3, 2021, armed groups burned a school in Gossi village, Goruma-Rharous, Timbuktu region, allegedly ordering local officials to close all schools in the surrounding area.

- Local media Studio Tamani reported that on June 9, 2021, unidentified armed individuals attacked a school and burned materials in Zon village, Koro, Mopti region.

**Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel**

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 18 incidents of attacks on teachers and school personnel in Mali from media and international organizations. In addition, some of the reported and verified attacks on schools from the UN and Mali Education Cluster may have included attacks against teachers or other education personnel. The rates of incident reports on this violation increased slightly as compared earlier years: GCPEA identified at least three of such attacks in 2019 and four in 2018. Also in 2018, the UN verified that at least 40 schools closed after armed groups directly threatened teachers.

In 2020, GCPEA identified at least eight reported incidents of armed groups attacking school teachers or other education personnel. Attacks took the form of threats, kidnappings, and assassinations. In some cases, attacks against teachers took place alongside attacks on school buildings. These attacks typically aimed to prevent teachers from continuing their work or targeted prominent community members. For example:

- MaliJet reported that on February 6, 2020, armed assailants entered Ouatagouna village, Ansongo district, Gao region, and killed the Treasurer of the School Management Committee, who also held the position of adviser...
to the village chief, along with the Secondary School's director.1033

- **Studio Tamani** reported that members of an unidentified armed group attacked a teacher in Alwalidji village, Diré district, Timbuktu region, on August 2, 2020. The gunmen allegedly shot the teacher in the leg and stole his motorbike. The report did not specify the teacher's location at the time of the attack.1034

- On November 16, 2020, unidentified armed men threatened teachers and burned two schools in Ménaka city and region, according to the Protection Cluster.1035

In addition, GCPEA identified one reported incident in which state security forces used excessive force against teachers. According to local media sources, on March 11, 2020, teachers reportedly demonstrated in Bamako after negotiations between unions and authorities stalled. The teachers then marched toward the prime ministry calling for the resignation of prime minister. Police reportedly fired teargas at the protestors, who threw stones at the police, resulting in injuries in both groups.1036

In 2021, GCPEA identified at least nine reports of attacks on school teachers from the Protection Cluster, media sources, the UN, and ACLED. In several incidents, armed groups attacked teachers or stole their personal items after attacking or threatening a school. There were also incidents of striking teachers being arrested. For example:

- The UN verified that on April 23, 2021, armed fighters entered Tongorongo village, Socoura commune, Mopti region, where they threatened teachers, ordered them to close the school and stole their motorcycles and telephones.1038

- On April 27, 2021, members of an unknown armed group entered a school in Konna, Mopti region, and threatened teachers to close the school, after which they stole the teachers' telephones and other valuable personal affects, according to the Protection Cluster.1039

- On August 9, 2021, amid widespread teacher strikes, teachers demonstrating in Sikasso clashed with police who fired teargas and arrested twelve teachers.1040

**Military use of schools and universities**

GCPEA collected four UN-verified cases of military use in Mali during the 2020-2021 reporting period. By comparison, the UN verified eight schools used for military purposes in 2019 and one in 2018. In 2018 and 2019, both state armed forces and non-state armed groups were responsible for the use of schools.

In 2020, the UN verified the use of four schools by unidentified armed groups and Dozo hunters in Mopti region.1043

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

GCPEA collected anecdotal evidence that actual or threatened child recruitment at, or en route to or from schools, occurred in Mali. For example, a multisectoral needs assessment of IDPs in Timbuktu revealed that some displaced parents did not send their children to school due to fears of child recruitment. These fears were reportedly based on prior experiences in their place of origin. This indicates that child recruitment by armed forces or groups may occur in, or near, school settings in conflict-affected areas.

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Essor; Twitter; Le Pays Dogon; Studio Tamani, as cited in ACLED, Event ID MLI5207 (data downloaded July 26, 2021).

1034 A full list of references can be found on GCPEA’s website, https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2022_references.pdf


