

MALI

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,⁹⁹¹ and hostilities intensified again in the first half of 2021.⁹⁹² In August 2020, a coup ousted President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta;⁹⁹³ nine months later, a second coup deposed an interim civilian-military government.⁹⁹⁴ 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).⁹⁹⁵

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-2020.⁹⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch reported that at least 400 people were killed during violence between Dogon and Fulani groups in 2020.⁹⁹⁷ 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.⁹⁹⁸ Flare-ups of such fighting continued in 2021 and spread to areas of southern Mali, according to the UN and ACLED.⁹⁹⁹

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.¹⁰⁰⁰ In addition, the UN identified over 7.1 million Malians, including 3.9 million children, in need of humanitarian assistance in 2021.¹⁰⁰¹

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,¹⁰⁰² where almost 300 schools were affected by attacks and insecurity.¹⁰⁰³ At the end of August 2021, the UN reported over 1,664 schools closed in Mali due to insecurity, affecting 499,200 children,¹⁰⁰⁴ an increase from November 2020.¹⁰⁰⁵ 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.¹⁰⁰⁶ 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.¹⁰⁰⁷ 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.¹⁰⁰⁸

Between March and June 2020, the government closed all educational institutions in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, affecting 3.8 million children¹⁰⁰⁹ and prolonged reopening until January 2021.¹⁰¹⁰ 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.¹⁰¹¹

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,¹⁰¹² and 2018 when the UN verified 81 attacks on schools.¹⁰¹³ 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.¹⁰¹⁴ 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.¹⁰¹⁵ 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.¹⁰¹⁶ 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.¹⁰¹⁷
- *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.¹⁰¹⁸
- 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.¹⁰¹⁹

In 2021, GCPEA identified over 110 attacks on schools in Mali from NGO and UN sources.¹⁰²⁰ 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.¹⁰²¹ 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.¹⁰²² Furthermore, the UN verified 20 attacks on schools between April and June in Mopti and Timbuktu regions,¹⁰²³ and another 26 attacks on schools nationwide between October and December 2021.¹⁰²⁴ 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 counts¹⁰²⁵ 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.¹⁰²⁶
- 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.¹⁰²⁷
- 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.¹⁰²⁸
- 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.¹⁰²⁹

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 2018.¹⁰³⁰ Also in 2018, the UN verified that at least 40 schools closed after armed groups directly threatened teachers.¹⁰³¹

In 2020, GCPEA identified at least eight reported incidents of armed groups attacking school teachers or other education personnel.¹⁰³² 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.¹⁰³⁷ 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 Tongorong 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 2019¹⁰⁴¹ and one in 2018.¹⁰⁴² 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.¹⁰⁴⁴ This indicates that child recruitment by armed forces or groups may occur in, or near, school settings in conflict-affected areas.

⁹⁹¹ Héni Nsaibia, "Mali: Any end to the storm?," Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, December 17, 2020.

⁹⁹² ACLED, "Mid-Year Update: 10 Conflicts to Worry About in 2021," August 5, 2021.

⁹⁹³ Ruth Maclean, "Mali's President Exits After Being Arrested in Military Coup," *The New York Times*, August 18, 2020.

⁹⁹⁴ Elian Peltier and Ruth Maclean, "Military Ousts Civilian Leaders in Mali," *The New York Times*, May 25, 2021.

⁹⁹⁵ Reuters, "Mali Conference Recommends Election Delay of Up to 5 Years," *VOA News*, December 30, 2021. UN, "Economic Sanctions on Mali Tightened as West African Leaders Reject Proposed Timetable for Presidential Election, Special Representative Tells Security Council," UN Meeting Coverage SC/14762, January 11, 2022.

⁹⁹⁶ International Crisis Group, *Reversing Central Mali's Descent into Communal Violence*, (Brussels: ICG), November 2020), Africa Report N°293, pp. i, ii, 3, 4.

⁹⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2021: Events of 2020*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2021), Mali chapter.

- ⁹⁹⁸ “Note on violations and Human rights abuses in Mali April 1 – June 30, 2020 (Note sur les tendances des violations et abus de droits de l’homme au Mali 1er avril – 30 juin 2020),” MINUSMA, August 2020, para. 5; “Note on violations and human rights abuses in Mali July 1 – September 30, 2020 (Note sur les tendances des violations et abus de droits de l’homme au Mali 1er juillet – 30 septembre 2020),” MINUSMA, August 2020, para. 25.
- ⁹⁹⁹ UNICEF, “UNICEF Mali Humanitarian Situation Report No. 9, September 2021,” November 1, 2021, p. 2; Héni Nsaiba and Jules Duhamel, “Sahel 2021: Communal Wars, Broken Ceasefires, and Shifting Frontlines,” ACLED, June 17, 2021.
- ¹⁰⁰⁰ UNHCR, Operational Portal, Refugee Situation, Mali.
- ¹⁰⁰¹ UNICEF, “Mali Humanitarian Situation Report No 12 - January-December 2021,” February 2, 2022, p.1.
- ¹⁰⁰² OCHA, “MALI Situation Report (MALI Rapport de situation), January 28, 2020, p.8. Education Cluster Meeting – Mali August 2021 (Reunion Cluster Education – Mali Août 2021), September 15, 2021, Slide 2. Education Cluster Meeting (Reunion Cluster Education), March 17, 2021.
- ¹⁰⁰³ Information from a UN respondent received via email on December 29, 2021.
- ¹⁰⁰⁴ Education Cluster Mali, “School Situation, Mali August 2021 (Situation des Ecoles, Mali Août 2021), September 24, 2021, Slide 2.
- ¹⁰⁰⁵ UNICEF, “Mali Humanitarian Situation Report No. 11,” November 2020, pp. 1, 3.
- ¹⁰⁰⁶ Education Cluster Meeting – Mali August 2021 (Reunion Cluster Education – Mali Août 2021), September 15, 2021, Slide 2.
- ¹⁰⁰⁷ Education Cluster Meeting – Mali August 2021 (Reunion Cluster Education – Mali Août 2021), September 15, 2021, Slide 11.
- ¹⁰⁰⁸ United Nations Security Council, “Situation in Mali - Report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/519),” June 1, 2021, para. 23.
- ¹⁰⁰⁹ UNICEF, “Humanitarian Action for Children 2021 - Mali,” December 14, 2020, pp.1-2.
- ¹⁰¹⁰ Julie Crenn, “The joy of going back to school in the time of Covid-19,” UNICEF Article, February 10, 2021. Ministry of Education, as cited in “The 2020-2021 school year is pushed back until January 2021 (La rentrée scolaire 2020-2021 est reportée jusqu’au 25 janvier 2021),” *MaliJet*, January 4, 2021.
- ¹⁰¹¹ AFP, “Mali Teachers Strike Over Virus Concerns As Schools Reopen,” *Barrons*, June 2, 2020. “Mali COVID-19 Situation Report No. 6: 1-31 August 2020,” UNICEF, September 28, 2020, p. 1.
- ¹⁰¹² UN General Assembly and Security Council, “Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General,” A/74/845-S/2020/525, June 9, 2020, para. 113.
- ¹⁰¹³ UN General Assembly and Security Council, “Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General,” A/73/907-S/2019/509, June 2019, para. 118.
- ¹⁰¹⁴ UN General Assembly and Security Council, “Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General,” A/75/873-S/2021/437, May 6, 2021, para. 111.
- ¹⁰¹⁵ Information received via email from a humanitarian organization, August 7, 2020.
- ¹⁰¹⁶ A full list of references can be found on GCPEA’s website, https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2022_references.pdf
- ¹⁰¹⁷ Studio Tamani, as cited in ACLED, Event ID MLI3491. “Ansongo: unidentified armed men burned school and city hall’s administrative documents in Tinhama (Ansongo : des hommes armés non identifiés ont brûlé quelques documents administratifs de l’école et ceux de la mairie de Tinhama),” Studio Tamani, February 13, 2020.
- ¹⁰¹⁸ Studio Tamani, as cited in ACLED, Event ID MLI4110 (data downloaded January 20, 2021); Studio Tamani, “KORO: school blown up by armed men (KORO : explosion d’une école par des hommes armés),” Studio Tamani, July 29, 2020.
- ¹⁰¹⁹ Undisclosed source, as cited in ACLED, Event ID MLI4552 (data downloaded January 20, 2021). Protection Monthly Monitoring Report No. 11 November 2020 (Rapport Mensuel de Monitoring de Protection Mali No. 11 Novembre 2020), Protection Cluster, November 2020, p. 4.
- ¹⁰²⁰ Information received from a confidential respondent on October 6, 2021. United Nations Security Council, “Situation in Mali - Report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/1117),” January 4, 2022, para. 51. Education Cluster Meeting (Reunion Cluster Education), April 18, 2021. UNICEF, “Mali Humanitarian Situation Report No. 6, January - June 2021,” August 2, 2021, p. 7
- ¹⁰²¹ “Monthly Protection Monitoring Report Mali, No 5 - May 2021 (Rapport Mensuel de Monitoring de Protection No 5 - Mai 2021),” Mali Protection Cluster, pp. 3, 7. Education Cluster Meeting (Reunion Cluster Education), April 18, 2021, Slides 12, 15. Education Cluster Mali, “School Situation, Mali August 2021 (Situation des Ecoles, Mali Août 2021), September 24, 2021, Slides 2, 11.
- ¹⁰²² “Education Cluster Meeting (Reunion Cluster Education),” January 21, 2021. Education Cluster Meeting (Reunion Cluster Education), April 18, 2021, Slide 15.
- ¹⁰²³ Information received from a confidential source on October 6, 2021.
- ¹⁰²⁴ United Nations Security Council, “Situation in Mali - Report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/1117),” January 4, 2022, para. 51.
- ¹⁰²⁵ A full list of references can be found on GCPEA’s website, https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2022_references.pdf
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- ¹⁰²⁷ Education Cluster Meeting (Reunion Cluster Education), March 17, 2021, Slide 17.
- ¹⁰²⁸ “Monthly Protection Monitoring Report Mali, No 5 - May 2021 (Rapport Mensuel de Monitoring de Protection No 5 - Mai 2021),” Mali Protection Cluster, June 2020, pp. 3, 6. Twitter, as cited in ACLED, Event ID MLI5070.
- ¹⁰²⁹ Studio Tamani, “KORO: attack on Zon primary school (KORO : attaque contre l’école fondamentale de Zon),” *Studio Tamani*, June 10, 2021.

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

¹⁰³⁰ GCPEA, *Education under Attack 2020*, Mali chapter.

¹⁰³¹ UN General Assembly and Security Council, “Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General,” S/2019/509, June 20, 2019, para. 118.

¹⁰³² A full list of references can be found on GCPEA’s website, https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2022_references.pdf

¹⁰³³ *Essor; Mali Jet; AMAP*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID MLI3476. L’Indépendant, “Insécurité dans le cercle d’Ansongo: Au moins deux morts et un enlèvement,” *Mali Jet*, February 7, 2020.

¹⁰³⁴ *Studio Tamani*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID MLI4139 (data downloaded January 20, 2021). Studio Tamani, “Diré: teacher attacked (Diré: un enseignant attaqué),” *Studio Tamani*, August 3, 2020.

¹⁰³⁵ “Protection Monthly Monitoring Report No. 11 November 2020 (rapport mensuel de monitoring de protection Mali No. 11 Novembre 2020),” Protection Cluster, November 2020, p. 4.

¹⁰³⁶ *Maliweb; Mali Jet; Mali Actu*, as cited in ACLED, Event ID MLI3574 (data downloaded July 23, 2020). Lerepublicainmali, “Teachers’ march yesterday in Bamako: Police violently charge demonstrators (Marche des enseignants hier à Bamako : La police charge violemment les manifestants),” *Mali Jet*, March 12, 2020.

¹⁰³⁷ A full list of references can be found on GCPEA’s website, https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/eua_2022_references.pdf

¹⁰³⁸ “Monthly Protection Monitoring Report Mali, No 4 - April 2021 (Rapport Mensuel de Monitoring de Protection No 4 - Avril 2021),” Mali Protection Cluster, p. 3. Malijet, “Insecurity in the Central region: a school attacked in Sokoura commune (Insécurité au centre : Une école attaquée dans la commune de Sokoura),” *Malijet*, April 25, 2021.

¹⁰³⁹ “Monthly Protection Monitoring Report Mali, No 4 - April 2021, p. 3.

¹⁰⁴⁰ *Jeune Afrique*; Facebook, as cited in ACLED, Event ID MLI5536. Bokar Sangaré, “Mali: at the heart of the standoff between teachers and the government of Choguel Maïga (Mali : au cœur du bras de fer entre les enseignants et le gouvernement de Choguel Maïga),” *Jeune Afrique*, August 11, 2021.

¹⁰⁴¹ UN General Assembly and Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict,” A/74/845-S/2020/525, June 9, 2020, para. 114.

¹⁰⁴² United Nations Security Council, “Situation in Mali: Report of the Secretary-General,” S/2018/1174, December 28, 2018, para. 41.

¹⁰⁴³ UN Security Council, “Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General,” A/75/873-S/2021/437, May 6, 2021, para. 112.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Solidarités Internationales, “Multisectoral rapid needs assessment of IDPs (Evaluation multisectorielle rapide des besoins des IDPs),” February 2020, p. 9.