Nigeria continued to experience armed conflict in northeastern states due to the presence of Boko Haram-affiliated or splinter groups as well as armed violence in northwestern and northcentral states due to pastoralist-farmer tensions. Over 1,400 school students were abducted, and GCPEA identified at least ten attacks on schools, as well as several cases of military use.

Context

Armed conflict continued in Nigeria’s northeast between government military forces and two main Boko Haram-affiliated or splinter groups, the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Jama’atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan (Group of Partisans for Muslims in Black Africa) (JAS). Boko Haram has explicitly targeted Western education for over a decade. During the 2020-2021 reporting period, violence between pastoralists and farmer communities persisted in Nigeria’s northwestern and northcentral regions, while also spreading to new regions.

Boko Haram-affiliated or splinter groups continued to carry out attacks against Nigerian security forces and civilians in the northeast. In March 2020, a Boko Haram-affiliated or splinter group ambushed an army convoy, killing at least 47 troops in Yobe state, as reported in the media. Suspected fighters from one of these groups also killed more than 100 civilians, many of whom were farmers working in a rice field, in a November 2020 attack in Koshobe village, Borno state. Meanwhile, the Nigerian military restricted the access of humanitarian aid agencies in the northeast in early 2020, according to Human Rights Watch, and continued to detain children for suspected membership in Boko Haram. Gender-based violence also intensified in the northeast owing to the ongoing insurgency and conflict, according to the UN.

In the northwestern and northcentral regions, violence between mostly Fulani pastoralists and mostly Hausa farmer communities continued, driven by population growth and water and grazing land scarcity linked to climate change. International Crisis Group reported that, between 2011 and 2020, more than 200,000 people fled violence in the north-west and more than 8,000 people were killed. According to media reports and Amnesty International, militias in Kaduna state increased attacks and violence in 2020 and 2021, resulting in fatalities and displacement. In response to violence, the government launched several military operations, as well as programs to promote dialogue between pastoralists and farmer communities.

Armed conflict and violence impacted access to education. The UN estimated that 1.4 million girls and over 1.2 million boys were out of school in early 2020 due to the crisis in the northeast. Higher education institutions there also experienced declines in enrollment due to conflict, or students’ fear of attacks. Before the Covid-19 pandemic and after in-person learning resumed, insecurity, including abductions, prevented schools from remaining open. Families displaced by conflict also struggled to send their children to school due to associated fees and transportation costs or school closures in displaced persons camps.

Approximately 37 million students from preprimary through tertiary were affected by the closure of education institutions for at least five months in 2020 due to Covid-19. The UN reported that many women and girls had additional caretaking duties during the pandemic, compared to men and boys, making it more challenging to continue distance learning.

Attacks on Schools

In 2020 and 2021, GCPEA collected at least ten reported incidents of attacks on schools. In comparison, in Education under Attack 2020, GCPEA reported four attacks on schools in 2019 and more than five in 2018. As in the prior reporting period, GCPEA identified reports of attacks on schools related to both armed conflict and inter-communal tensions.

The UN verified five attacks on schools in 2020, attributed to Boko Haram-affiliated or splinter groups. Separate attacks on schools in 2020 from media and other sources, although it remained unclear if any of these incidents were included in the UN count. Several reported attacks were related to the conflict in the northeast, while at least one was related to inter-communal tensions. For instance:
On January 31, 2020, a Boko Haram-affiliated or splinter group allegedly attacked an open-air Islamic school on the outskirts of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state, reportedly by sending a 12-year-old girl to detonate a person-borne IED, also known as a suicide bomb. Three boy students and the girl were killed in the attack and four boy students were injured, according to local media.1225

On February 25, 2020, a militia reportedly damaged the Government Secondary School during an attack on Agila town, Benue state. A church was also damaged in the attack, as reported by Daily Post.1226

The UN reported that non-state armed groups set several community schools on fire on December 24, 2020, in Hawul Local Government Area, Borno state, and Gombi Local Government Area, Adamawa state.1227

In 2021, the UN verified four attacks on schools.1228 Separately, GCPEA collected approximately six reported incidents of attacks on schools from media outlets.1229 For example:

On April 9, 2021, Boko Haram-affiliated or splinter groups reportedly attacked Kopre village, Adamawa state, burning down schools, houses, centers of worship, and markets, according to local media outlet Vanguard.1230

In late July 2021, unidentified armed assailants reportedly threatened a school administrator and stole National Examination Council exams from a government secondary school in Ungwar Sarki town, Kaduna state, as students sat for the test. According to media outlets, the assailants mistook the learning materials for money.1231

On September 13, 2021, members of the separatist group the Indigenous People of Biafra reportedly entered a secondary school and prevented an exam in Nkume town, Imo state, after imposing a stay-at-home order in the area, according to local media source Daily Trust.1232

Attacks on school students, teachers, and personnel

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified at least 21 reported incidents of attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel. At least 1,850 students and educators were injured, abducted, or killed, and more than five were arrested or detained. This marks a slight increase as compared to Education under Attack 2020, which included approximately seven reported attacks on students and education personnel in 2019 and one attack in 2018.1233

Due to several high-profile abductions of hundreds of students from schools, government authorities temporarily closed more than 600 schools across seven northern states between December 2020 and April 2021, according to International Crisis Group and The Washington Post. The closures occurred only months after schools were reopened for in-person learning after Covid-19 lockdowns.1234

Criminal organizations, rather than non-state armed groups, were reportedly responsible for several high-profile abductions of school and university students in the northwest during the reporting period.1235 The Nigerian government generally referred to these groups as “bandits,” although the Federal High Court in Abuja ruled in late 2021 that several of these groups are “terrorist organizations.”1236

In 2020, GCPEA identified approximately seven reported attacks on students, teachers, and personnel, including the abduction of hundreds of students in the northeast and northwestern regions.1237 For instance:

On February 9, 2020, a Boko Haram-affiliated or splinter group allegedly kidnapped three students, two of them girls, who were travelling on Maiduguri-Gubio Road, near Maiduguri city, Borno state. According to an army officer interviewed by local media, the students were identified by their school uniforms. Local media outlet Vanguard reported that the army rescued the students after an armed clash with the insurgents.1238

On August 24, 2020, an unidentified armed group reportedly abducted seven students and their female teacher from Prince Academy secondary school in Damba-Kasaya town, Kaduna state. The students were attending lessons to prepare for their Junior Secondary School exams. According to local media outlet The Post, a civilian was also killed in the attack.1239

Armed assailants abducted more than 330 male students from the Government Science Secondary School and killed a security guard in Kankara town, Katsina state, on December 11, 2020, as reported by the Associated Press, Al Jazeera, and Sahara Reporters.1240 More than 600 students reportedly attended the school, but many...
were able to flee the grounds. As a result of the attack, all public schools in the state were ordered to be closed, which according to an education sector plan published in 2010, would have been approximately 2,500 schools. Government army, air force, and police reportedly launched a joint mission in the Zango/ Paula forest, resulting in the students’ release. Although JAS released a video claiming responsibility for the kidnapping, as reported by the media, security experts cast doubt on the armed group’s direct involvement in the attack, and the government referred to the kidnappers as “bandits.”

A week later, armed assailants abducted over 84 students also in Katsina state, on December 19, 2020, according to local and international media outlets Premium Times and France 24. The students, who attended an Islamic school, were reportedly abducted in Dandume local government area on their way back from a celebration. Police and a community self-defense group reportedly engaged the assailants in an armed confrontation, after which the school children were released.

In 2021, GCPEA identified approximately 14 reports of attacks on school students, teachers, and personnel, primarily in Nigeria’s northcentral and northwestern regions. Separately, the UN reported that 1,436 children were abducted from schools in Nigeria between January and September 2021. Examples of incidents GCPEA collected from news reports include:

- On February 17, 2021, three teachers, 27 students, two staff, and nine others were abducted from the Government Science College in Kagara town, Niger state, according to Amnesty International. According to media reports, the unidentified armed assailants wore military fatigues and killed at least one student before abducting students and staff from the public boarding school’s quarters. Schools in the region were closed temporarily after the attack, as reported by Human Rights Watch and local and international media outlets Premium Times and CNN.

- The Associated Press reported that armed assailants abducted 136 students and three teachers from Salihu Tanko Islamic School in Tegina town, Niger state, on May 30, 2021. Some of the abducted students were reportedly as young as five years old. Schools in the area closed in response to the attack due to safety concerns, according to media reports.

- On June 17, 2021, armed assailants abducted at least 80 students, mostly girls, and five teachers from the Federal Government College Birnin-Yauri, in Bin Yauri town, Kebbi state, according to media outlets Al Jazeera and Premium Times. A police officer was reportedly shot dead in the attack and one student was injured.

- On July 5, 2021, armed group members kidnapped 121 students and at least one teacher from a secondary school in Kaduna state, according to ACLED and international media outlets France 24 and The Guardian.

- On September 1, 2021, gunmen reportedly kidnapped 73 students from a government secondary school in Kaya town, Zamfara state, according to local media sources Vanguard and KESQ News.

**Military use of schools and universities**

GCPEA identified approximately eight reported incidents of military use during the 2020-2021 reporting period. In comparison, Education under Attack 2020, included four and 18 reports of military use in 2019 and 2018, respectively. Amnesty International and international media outlet France 24 reported that on August 23, 2020, the separatist group Indigenous People of Biafra held a meeting in a community school in Emene neighborhood in Enugu city, Enugu state. Nigerian police, army, and air force officers, along with Department of Security Services agents, reportedly responded to the scene and opened fire. Several civilian deaths and deaths among separatist group members and Nigerian security forces were reported.

In 2021, GCPEA gathered reports of the Nigerian military using approximately seven primary and secondary schools for military purposes in Borno state.

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

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA collected one report of sexual violence at, or on the way to or from, school or university. Education under Attack 2020 included two reports of sexual violence at, or on the way to or from, universities in 2019.
On September 22, 2021, police officers reportedly detained three male and three female Abia State Polytechnic students after entering their off-campus student hostel in Aba city, Abia state. Five of the students were released but an 18-year-old female student was allegedly raped by a police officer while in custody, as reported by local and international news outlets. The Abia State Police Command reportedly arrested an officer in response.1260

 Attacks on higher education
During 2020 and 2021, GCPEA identified more than 20 reported attacks on higher education in which over 100 students and academics were reportedly injured, abducted, or killed. In comparison, GCPEA collected approximately 12 and eight attacks on higher education in 2019 and 2018, respectively.1261

In 2020, GCPEA collected approximately six reports of attacks on higher education facilities, students, and academics.1262 For example:

- In January 2020, members of a Boko Haram-affiliated or splinter group allegedly abducted and killed a student while he was returning to the University in Maiduguri, in Maiduguri city, Borno state, as reported by local and international media outlets Xinhua and Premium Times.1263
- Scholars at Risk reported that on April 29, 2020, police arrested a political science lecturer and an administrator at Akwa Ibom State University in Mkpat-Enin town, Akwa Ibom state, for statements made on a Facebook page concerning unpaid salaries to university personnel.1264
- On December 16, 2020, police fired teargas to disperse students protesting the government’s closure of Sa’adatu Rimi College of Education and other institutions in the middle of semester examinations, Scholars at Risk and local media reported.1265 The students reportedly demonstrated and blocked traffic along Kano-Zaria Expressway, in Kano Municipal local government area, Kano state.1266 Local media outlet Daily Post reported that police actions injured several students.1267
- In 2021, GCPEA collected approximately 15 reported incidents of attacks on higher education.1268 For example:
- On February 1, 2021, Nigerian army and police officers used teargas and batons to disperse students protesting tuition increases at the main gate of the University of Abuja, as covered by local media and Scholars at Risk.1269 International media outlet Sahara Reporters wrote that army and police actions injured several students during the demonstration.1270
- On April 20, 2021, armed assailants abducted 20 students and killed one staff member from Greenfield University in Kasarami village, Kaduna state, according to Scholars at Risk and local media outlets. The assailants reportedly killed five of the abducted students in the weeks after the attack.1271
- Scholars at Risk and media outlet Reuters reported that armed assailants killed one student and abducted eight students and two professors from Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic in Zaria city, Kaduna state, on June 10, 2021. Three students were reportedly shot in the attack; two were injured and one was killed.1272
- On September 20, 2021, Nigerian army soldiers reportedly fired live ammunition and teargas at students protesting at Plateau State University Polytechnic, in Barkin Ladi local government area, Plateau state, killing one student and injuring several others. According to Scholars at Risk and local media sources Daily Trust and Sun Nigeria, the students were engaged in a nonviolent protest over the suspension of several academic activities and a delay in exams due to a faculty strike.1273

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


Information shared by a UN respondent via email on April 20, 2022.

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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