



EDUCATION UNDER ATTACK IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

2024 UPDATE

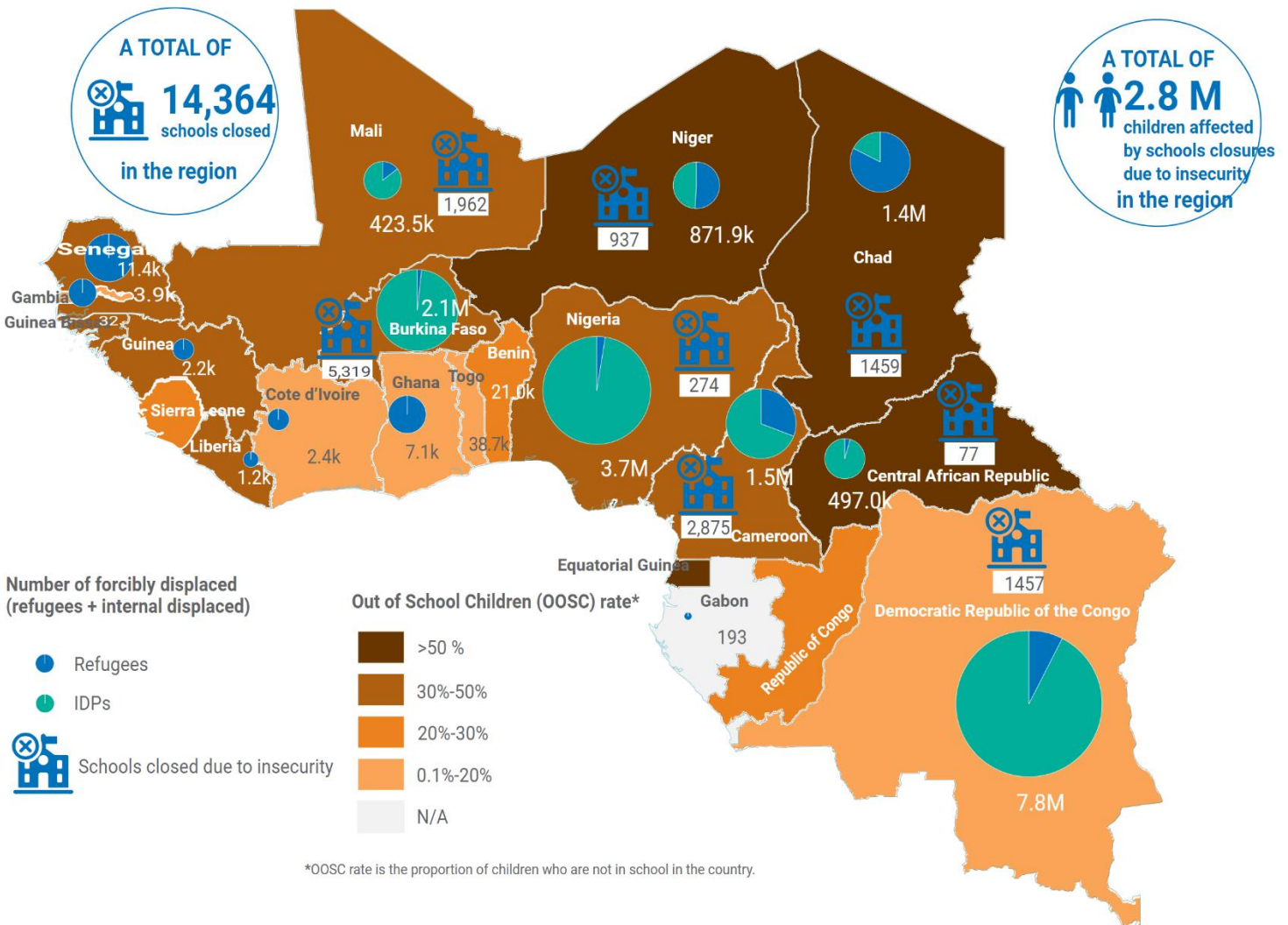
SITUATION ANALYSIS

This year, the number of school closures due to insecurity in West and Central Africa has continued to rise, increasing from 13,263 in June 2023 to 14,364 in June 2024. These closures have impacted 2.8 million children, up from 2.5 million the previous year. Many of these children have been out of school for years.

Countries like Burkina Faso, Mali, Cameroon, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have been particularly hard-hit. The closure of schools not only deprives children of education, jeopardizing their futures, but also exposes them to grave risks such as recruitment by armed groups, child labour, physical violence, and sexual exploitation.

Yet, despite the alarming situation, there are signs of progress in some areas. In Mali and the Central African Republic, the number of attacks on educational institutions decreased between 2022 and 2023, thanks to reduced violence in certain regions. In Burkina Faso, approximately 1,300 schools have reopened this year in areas under government control, enabling thousands of children to return to school. This demonstrates that positive change is possible when political will and concerted efforts are aligned. Such efforts must be expanded and intensified to offer children affected by conflict the chance for a brighter future.

School Closures, Forced Displacement and the Severity of the Impact of Conflict on Education in West & Central Africa, 2024



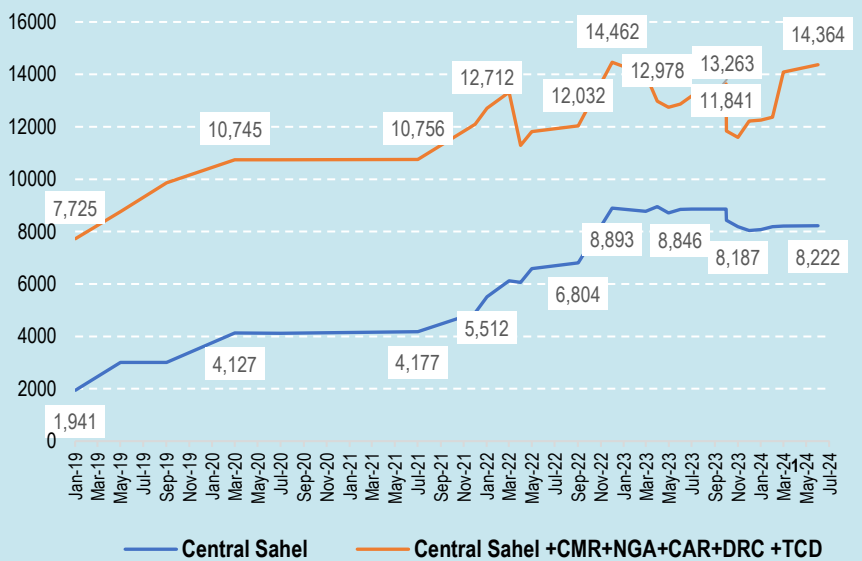
"The school has been closed since 2017. It was a priority school that served the poor and vulnerable farming population in the community because it did not require learners to pay school fees.

When the school closed, I felt uncomfortable every time I received my salary because I wasn't imparting knowledge to the learners and yet I was being paid. What's more, it wasn't easy to stay at home in fear, because teachers were threatened by armed actors and being identified as a teacher could lead to kidnapping. I also had to change my living conditions by moving to a safer area.

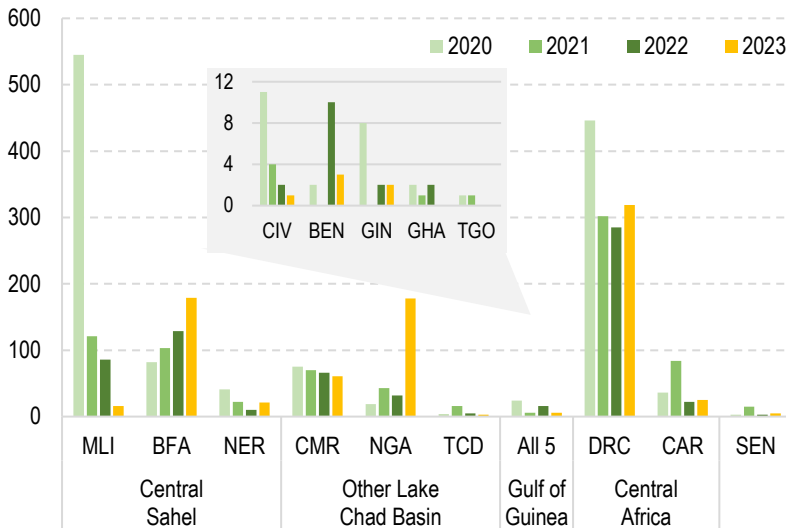
The curriculum and the skills to be imparted to the pupils could not be carried out and, as a result, some children went beyond school age and were exposed to working on farms for wages and to other forms of abuse, including unwanted pregnancies."

Etiendem Birdget, 54, Headmaster of GS Bwiyuku-Tole school in Buea, South-West region (Cameroon).

Trend in Number of Schools Closed due to Insecurity, 2019-2024

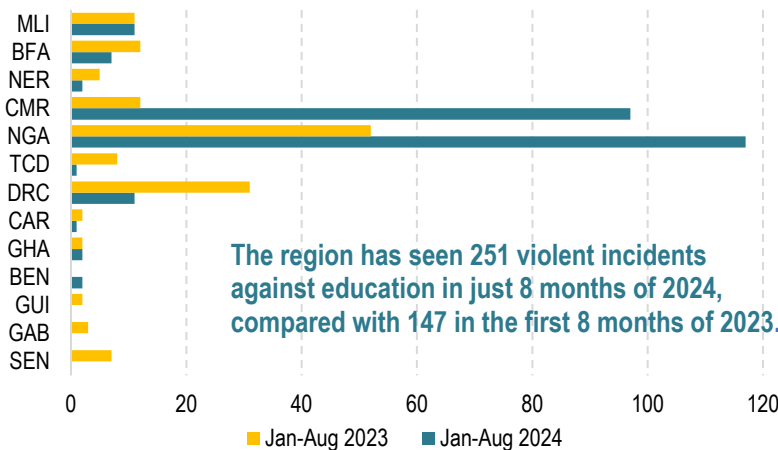


Attacks on Education by Country, 2020-2023¹



Source: GCPEA, 2020-2023

Incidents against Education, 2023-2024²



The region has seen 251 violent incidents against education in just 8 months of 2024, compared with 147 in the first 8 months of 2023.

Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED)



When schools are closed, destroyed or used by armed groups, girls are more likely to never return to school.

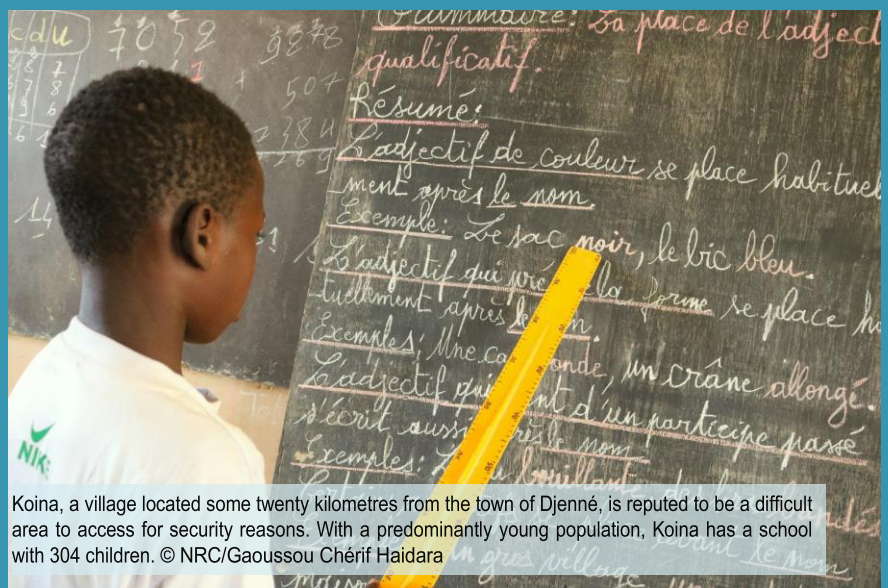
1. Attacks on girls and women often take the form of sexual violence. Armed actors in some contexts target girls and female teachers for abductions. The recruitment or abduction of female students and teachers is sometimes used to “reward” combatants.
2. Attacks on education have immediate and long-term adverse effects on students and educational staff. Girls and boys may continue to suffer from psychological trauma, health complications, stigmatization, which impede their education. Girls are always the first to drop and last to return when an attack occurs against a school.
3. In most cases when there is hunger, girls often do not eat. With the growing food insecurity and the interruption of school feeding programmes, girls are at risk of reducing their nutritional status and likely at high risk of exploitation.
4. For adolescent girls, the impacts of attacks on education can be devastating. It compounds the barriers to access education. More so, attacks against schools often exacerbate pre-existing gender discrimination and harmful practices such as child marriage and early



“My name is Aissata, I'm 13 and I come from the village of Bengôle. We used to go to school, but now we don't. Schools in neighbouring villages have been looted by 'bushmen' and all our teachers have fled in fear, so the school has been closed. Since the school was closed, we've lost our peace of mind and all the knowledge we learned at school.

We are asking the authorities to help us reopen the school so that we can continue to learn with the safe return of our teachers.”

Aissata, Mopti, Mali.



Koina, a village located some twenty kilometres from the town of Djenné, is reputed to be a difficult area to access for security reasons. With a predominantly young population, Koina has a school with 304 children. © NRC/Gaoussou Chérif Haidara

¹ GCPEA defines attacks on education as any intentional threat or use of force—carried out for political, military, ideological, sectarian, ethnic, or religious reasons. Data here include attacks on schools, students, staff and higher education, as well as child recruitment, sexual violence, the military use of schools and targeted attacks on girls and women.
² ACLED tracks all types of reported political violence and protest events. The data presented here cover battles, violence against civilians and explosions/remote violence that refer to “school”, “teacher”, “pupil”, “student”, etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the dramatic number of attacks and out-of-school children because of insecurity in West and Central Africa, governments should make the protection of education a priority, in line with the UNSC Resolution 2601 on the protection of schools in armed conflict³ and should, with the support of their partners:

- Take a holistic view to build school resilience in the face of conflict, with specific focus on disasters and climate change, by seeking to optimize the institutional, technical and implementation convergence and synergies of the SSD with other relevant frameworks, such as the Comprehensive School Safety Framework (CSSF)⁴, the Safe to Learn initiative, and the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards.
 - Multiply actions in favour of the awareness, information, knowledge, learning and understanding of safe school frameworks and their implementation strategies by key education stakeholders at national, regional and local levels.
1. **Adopt holistic, integrated and multisectoral approaches to the implementation of the Safe School protocols and frameworks**
 - Ensure that decision making bodies, and inclusive and transparent coordination mechanisms, gathering both education and protection stakeholders, are put in place and functioning to operationalize and implement the Safe School Declaration (SSD) with concrete actions.
 2. **Immediately negotiate the non-occupation of schools by parties to conflict and the re-opening of closed schools**
 - All parties to armed conflict to immediately cease unlawful attacks on schools and universities, and along routes to school. This includes ceasing specific abuses against female students, teachers and other education personnel.
 - Governments should take concrete measures - for example, through legislation, standing orders, and training - to end the military use of schools, and at a minimum, implement the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict⁵.
 - The international community should ensure that civil military coordination mechanisms document the military use of schools and rapidly identify concrete measures to end it.
 - Governments and the international community should leverage the SSD and guidelines to urge Non-State Armed Groups to respect International Humanitarian Law. This can be done through command orders, internal policies, a code of conduct, or signing Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment for the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflict⁶. These measures should ensure the civilian nature of schools, prohibit military use of schools, stop the recruitment of children under 18, and prevent sexual and gender-based violence, including forced and child marriages.
 - Governments and partners should immediately negotiate the reopening of closed schools through community-based mediation and negotiation approaches.
 3. **Develop and implement response plans based on quantitative & qualitative data, prioritizing the most at risk.**
 - Governments, international humanitarian and development organizations, and civil society should implement the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack's Toolkit for Collecting and Analyzing Data on Attacks on Education⁷ to identify monitoring and reporting gaps.
 - Based on the gaps identified, Governments, with the support of international actors, should strengthen monitoring and reporting of attacks on education and relating to school security, including incidents of sexual violence and specific threats to female students and teachers. Data must be disaggregated by type of attack on education, sex, age, location, person or group responsible, number of days the institution was closed, and type of institution school (all-girl, all-boy, mixed) affected. Data collected must be analysed and utilised in order to improve efforts to prevent and respond to attacks on education.
 - Governments and the international community should establish early warning systems and emergency response plans (in consultation with school communities), build the capacity of education personnel and train children and teachers in self-protection, including through the Safe Schools Common Approach⁸.
 - Governments and the international community should increasingly prioritize children living in hard-to-reach areas, as well as other marginalized children, including internally displaced children and refugees.
 4. **Reinforce alternative, innovative, accelerated, and flexible learning solutions for educational continuity**
 - Governments and partners should introduce or expand initiatives that promote continued learning for children, including those with disabilities, who have had to drop out of school or those that have had long interruptions in their learning. These include accelerated learning programs, and alternative modalities such as distance learning, as well as working closely with koranic education structure, which are often the only structures that remain open in the current context where education is under attack.
 5. **Expand and improve psychosocial support to children, their teachers, and caregivers**
 - Governments and partners should provide increased group and individual psychosocial and socioemotional learning support to children and their teachers, recognizing that the former cannot learn, and the latter cannot teach.
 - This should involve the prior development of related learning opportunities that could build on the Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies' (INEE) toolbox; ii) public and targeted awareness campaigns about the importance of this issue; as well as iii) the allocation or mobilization of funding for this purpose.
 6. **Increase predictable flexible and long-term financing for education in emergencies**
 - Ministries of education, civil society and other stakeholders should advocate to ministries of finance and budget for increased budget allocations that allow for flexible disbursements.
 - Donors should promote innovative financing mechanisms that optimize resource allocation an impact while funding targeted initiatives aimed at preventing, mitigating, and responding to attacks on education across the development-humanitarian nexus.

³ UNSC (2021). [Resolution 2601 on the protection of schools in armed conflict](#)

⁴ GADRRRES (2022). [Comprehensive School Safety Framework 2022-2030](#).

⁵ GCPEA (2014). [Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict](#).

⁶ Geneva Call (2013). [Deed of Commitment for the Protection of Children from the Effects of Armed Conflict](#).

⁷ GCPEA (2021). [Toolkit for Collecting and Analyzing Data on Attacks on Education](#)

⁸ Transforming Education Summit (2022). [Safe Schools Common Approach](#)

Ensemble pour une sécurité globale de l'éducation, pour l'apprentissage, la protection et le bien-être de nos enfants.
Together for the overall safety of education, for the learning, protection and wellbeing of our children.

