

ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

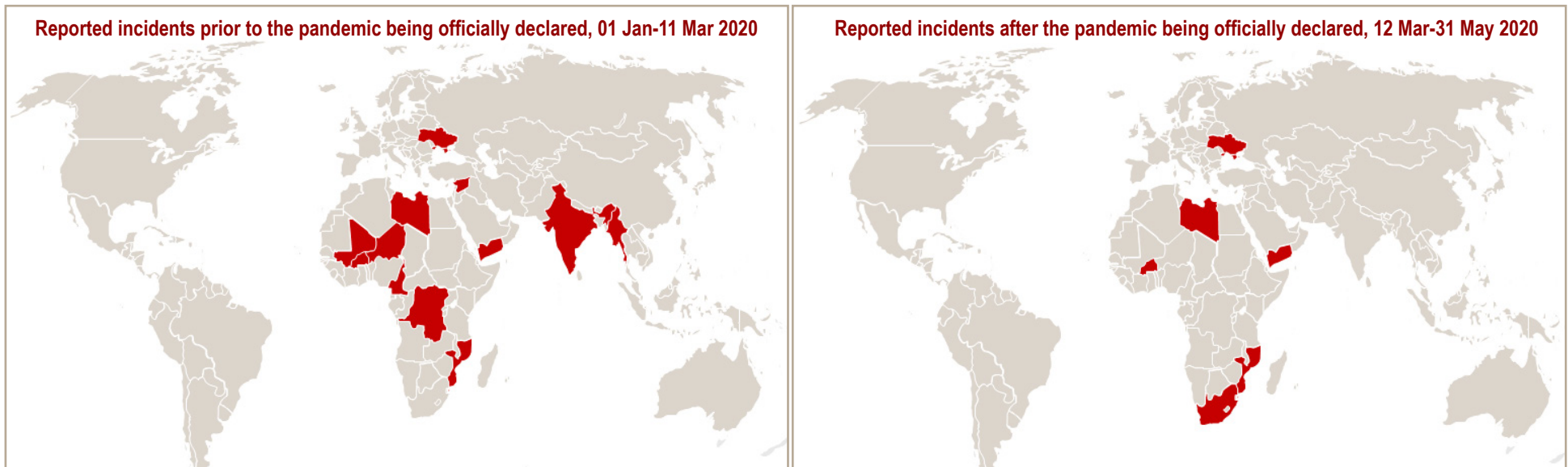
All data for the period January to May 2020	
Total number of reported incidents of violence affecting schools	67
Number of countries covered with reported incidents of violence affecting schools	13

Between 2015 and 2019, the **Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack** (GCPEA) found 11,000 reported attacks on education globally. The 2020 report profiles 37 countries with a systematic pattern of attack. Violence against schools continues in 2020 with dire consequences for children. During January to May 2020, monitoring by Insecurity Insight identified 67 incidents across 13 countries where schools were damaged or destroyed. Schools were stormed, damaged, set on fire and vandalised either in wider attacks on civilians and infrastructure, as part of collateral damage during fighting between state and non-state actors, or in ideological attacks on education. These incidents violate children’s right to education.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges. By the end of May, **UNESCO** reported 142 country-wide school closures aimed at reducing the spread of the virus affecting over 1.1 million learners. In some countries, schools that have been closed as preventive measures, have been earmarked as quarantine centres, a move frequently met with protests from locals in the surrounding school area.

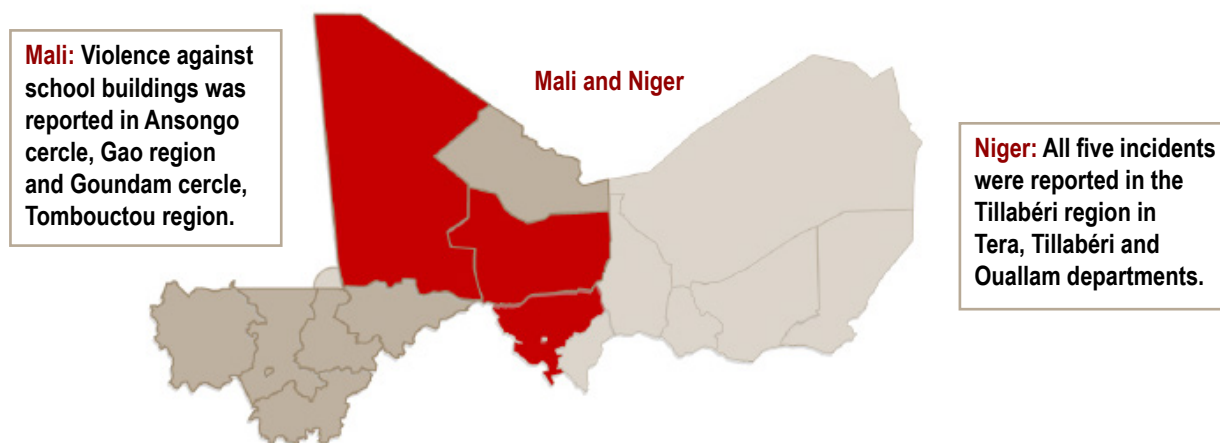
Schools damaged during the COVID-19 pandemic

While attacks on schools continue, the new COVID-19 related challenges appear to influence patterns of such attacks. Since the pandemic was **declared** on 12 March, the overall number of violently damaged schools declined compared to the previous two months of 2020. This is partially due to the ceasefire in Syria, and a ceasefire declared by Anglophone militants in the Ambazonia region of Cameroon. However, closure of schools and the use of school buildings as quarantine centres have triggered violence against school buildings in particular in South Africa. Violence against school buildings also remains a concern in Burkina Faso, Mozambique, Ukraine, and Yemen.

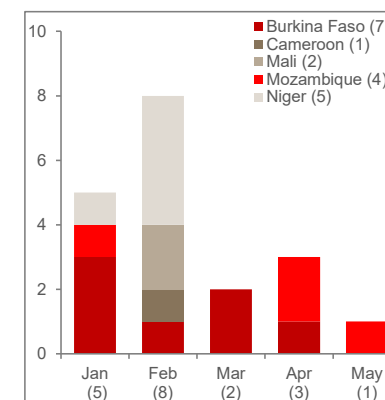


Schools reportedly damaged in 2020

- Collateral damage to schools from fighting continues in Ukraine and Yemen where schools were reportedly hit by aerial bombing and shelling, but decreased in **Syria** following the ceasefire on 23 March.
- In Burkina Faso, targeted attacks on schools continue. In Mozambique, attacks on schools in the context of attacks on civilians have increased in April and May this year and are driven by increased armed activity by Islamic State-affiliated militants.
- Attacks on civilians **increased across the Western Sahel** at the beginning of 2020. Several of these attacks also inflicted deliberate damage to schools. Some attacks on schools appear ideologically-driven and have targeted the education system while others are part of wider violence against civilians. However, since April, no new reports of such violence have been reported from Cameroon, Mali and Niger. The reasons behind these trends are not clear. It is possible that there are bottlenecks in information flow. COVID-19 related school closures may have also reduced the incentive to attack schools as a form of opposition to the education system. It is also possible that it is related to wider security developments within the region.
 - In Niger, all five reported incidents took place in the Tillabéri region bordering Mali's Gao region. Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) militants were named as perpetrators in four incidents. It is unclear whether Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin' (JNIM) or ISGS militants were behind the fifth reported incident.
 - In Mali, JNIM/ISGS militants were named as perpetrators in both incidents without details on which of the rival group was likely responsible. It is unclear to what extent the decline in attacks on schools may be linked to reported infighting between the two **groups**. Reported incidents took place during February in Gao and Tombouctou regions.



Reported incidents, Jan-May 2020



- In Cameroon, a school along with a health centre in the Extrême-Nord region was set ablaze in February in an incident attributed to Boko Haram militants. No further attacks on schools by Anglophone militants in the Ambazonia region have been reported since the militants declared a ceasefire on **29 March**.

ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: JANUARY TO MAY IN 2020

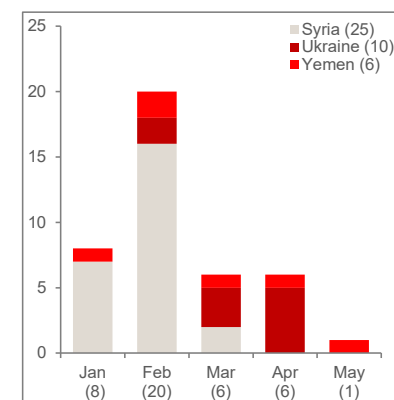
- In Myanmar, an unspecified number of schools were damaged during an incident in Shan State in January. The Tatmadaw, the Myanmar state army, reportedly damaged various civilian houses and a monastery during the same event. In February, artillery fire by unspecified perpetrators in Rakhine state inflicted damage on a school and injured 19 students.
- Burglaries, vandalism and arson attacks on schools rose dramatically in South Africa while schools are closed as part of the ongoing lockdown measures.
- In India, a group of roughly fifty masked individuals reportedly chanting Hindu-nationalist slogans stormed the Jawaharlal Nehru University campus in Delhi in January and attacked students, leaving at least thirty-four injured.
- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a school and nearby houses were set on fire during armed clashes in February in Lugo village, Mahagi territory, Ituri province between Coalition of Congolese Democrats (CODECO) fighters and military soldiers.

Countries where attack on schools continue

Ukraine and Yemen

- Schools continue to be damaged by conflict-related violence despite the UNSG call for a global ceasefire. In most cases, damage was caused by explosive weapon use including aerial bombing and shelling.
- Since January, 16 schools in Ukraine (10) and Yemen (6) have been damaged by fighting.
- On one occasion in Yemen, **a child was injured inside a school** when it was struck by artillery shells.
- In Ukraine, where students are **taught remotely** due to the COVID-19 lockdown, there were no incidents identified where teachers or students were harmed inside a school damaged by explosive weapons. However, a number of children were killed in their home villages. Limited internet connectivity and shelling on civilian homes affects children's ability to learn.

Reported incidents, Jan-May 2020



Mozambique

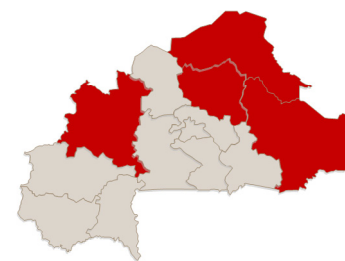
- At least four schools were damaged in wider attacks on civilians by non-state armed groups.
- Incidents took place in Cabo Delgado which this year has seen a rise in insurgency attacks that have also impacted aid access and health care services in the area.
- In one incident **on 28 May**, around 100 heavily-armed militants dressed in Mozambican security force uniforms attacked Macomia town. Government forces retreated after a brief but intense battle with the militants who took control of the town until 31 May. An ISIS flag was raised and government buildings, including primary and technical schools, shops, and religious sites were burnt down. The local offices of the World Food Programme (WFP) were destroyed and **Médecins Sans Frontières** (MSF) suspended activities in the Macomia area after the Macomia Health Centre which it supported was destroyed.



Mozambique:
Four incidents were reported in Muidumbe, Macomia and Quissange districts, and on the island of Quirimba in Cabo Delgado province.

Burkina Faso

- Between January and May 2020, there have been at least seven incidents of schools being set on fire - all by suspected JNIM or ISGS militants. Attacks on civilians that inflicted deliberate damage to schools were most prevalent in the Est region, but were also reported in Boucle du Mouhoun, Centre-Nord, and Sahel regions. The **latest documented attack** took place on 29 April in Logobou town, Tapoa province, Est region. In the incident, two schools were set on fire and a school guard was shot dead. Schools have been closed in Burkina Faso since early March and will remain so until October 2020. Examination classes were reopened on May 11th until the end of July.
- A state of emergency in the country's northern provinces was declared at the end of December 2018 following intensified attacks from Islamist groups in the area. It remains in place until 2021. Initially concentrated in the Sahel region, insecurity has **steadily spread** to the Nord, Centre-Nord, Boucle du Mouhoun, and Est regions, and sometimes led to schools being damaged.
- From April 2020, attacks on civilians by armed groups increased in the Est region, but appear to have declined in the Sahel and Centre-Nord following very high numbers during the first three months of 2020. Since the end of April, attacks on schools by armed groups appear to have stopped in all regions. This follows a similar pattern to the reduction in large scale attacks by JNIM and ISGS militants that resulted in high rates of civilian casualties.
- However, attacks on civilians continue. Violence by armed groups affecting civilians continues on a slightly lower scale. Violence driven by state actors and vigilante groups, who primarily target ethnic Fulani and Peuhl in the northern regions are a concern. At least 180 bodies - mostly ethnic Fulani or Peuhl men - have been found in mass graves in Djibo town, Sahel region, according to **Human Rights Watch** (HRW). Available evidence suggests government security force involvement in mass extra-judicial executions. These government offensives do not appear to damage schools at present, possibly explaining the decrease in attacks on schools in the context of ongoing violence against civilians.



Burkina Faso:
Seven incidents were reported in Est region (4), Boucle du Mouhoun, Centre-Nord and Sahel regions (1 each).

Violence against schools linked to the COVID-19 related school closures

South Africa

- More than **1500 schools** have been burgled, torched or vandalised since the start of the lockdown according to South Africa's Basic Education Minister. Youths or teenagers are thought to be responsible for most school burglaries. It is unclear if they were also responsible for the arson attacks. In the past, schools have been set on fire by protesting students demanding increased student funding, the cancellation of students' debt, and that indebted students be permitted to enroll.

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