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EDUCATION UNDER ATTACK IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA: 2022 UPDATE

A note by the Regional Education in Emergencies
Working Group

Since *EDUCATION UNDER ATTACK IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA: A note by the Regional Education in Emergencies Working Group* was published in October 2021, on the occasion of the Fourth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration in Nigeria, the situation in the region has further deteriorated, bringing the issue of protecting education to the forefront.

The West and Central Africa region has seen a sharp increase in the number of schools closed due to insecurity during the past year.

By the end of the 2021-22 school year, over 12,400 schools were closed in eight countries of the region¹, either because they are a direct target of attacks by Non-State Armed Groups

¹ According to National Education Clusters in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Mali, Niger, Nigeria. DRC figures relate specifically to direct attacks on schools.

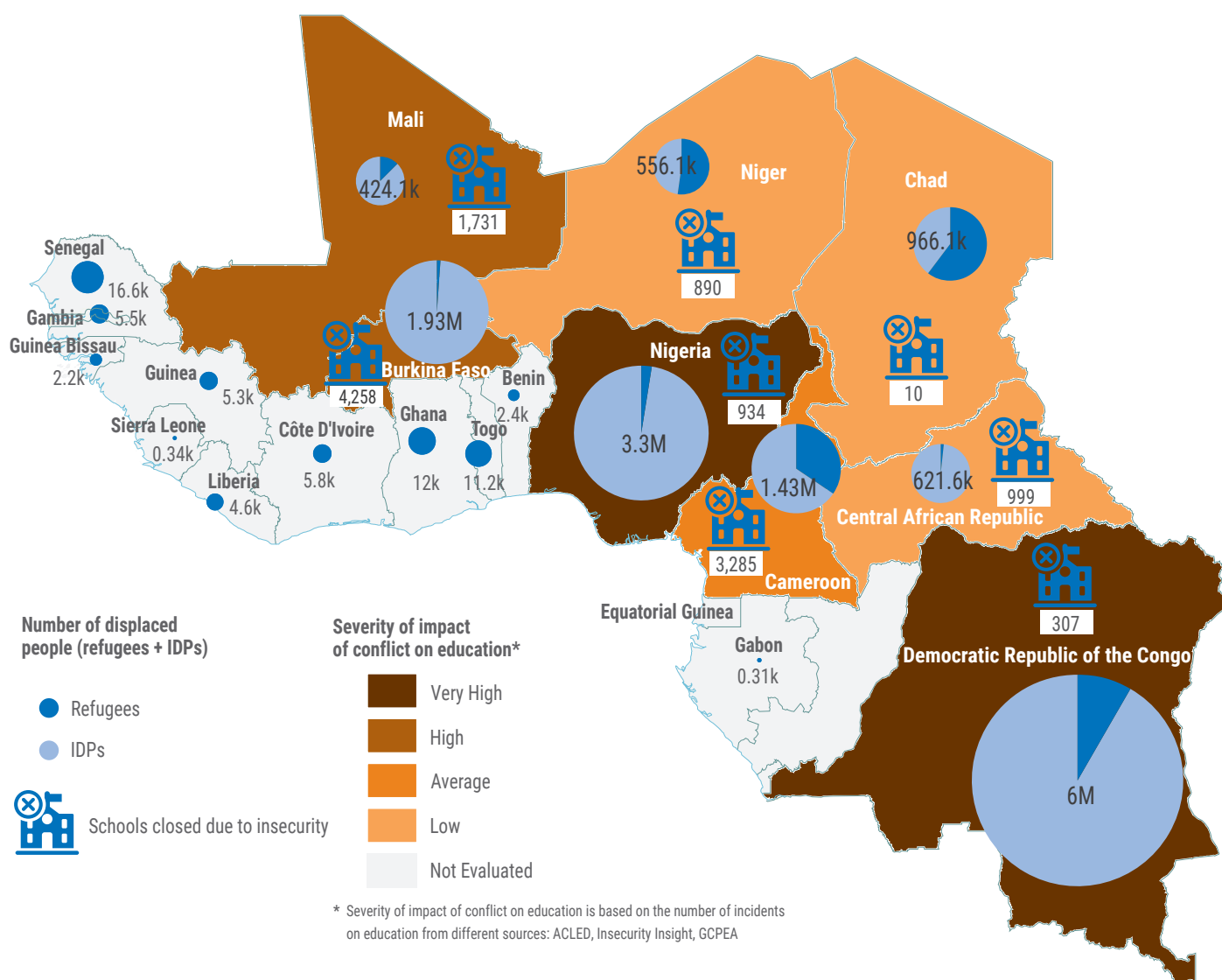
(NSAGs) or because teachers have fled leaving no-one to teach, or because parents are too frightened to send their children to school or are themselves in a process of repeated forced displacement to safer areas. The spread and intensification of conflict is having an ever more devastating effect on access to and continuity of learning, affecting the future of entire generations of children.



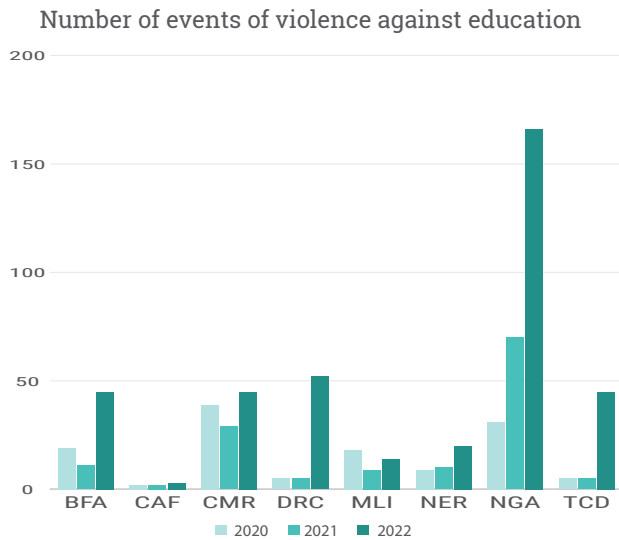
12,400 schools closed

as of June 2022, in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, DRC, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria.

Attacks on Education and Displacement Trends in West & Central Africa (as of September 2022)



Sources: UNHCR, IOM, ACLED, Insecurity Insight, GCPEA



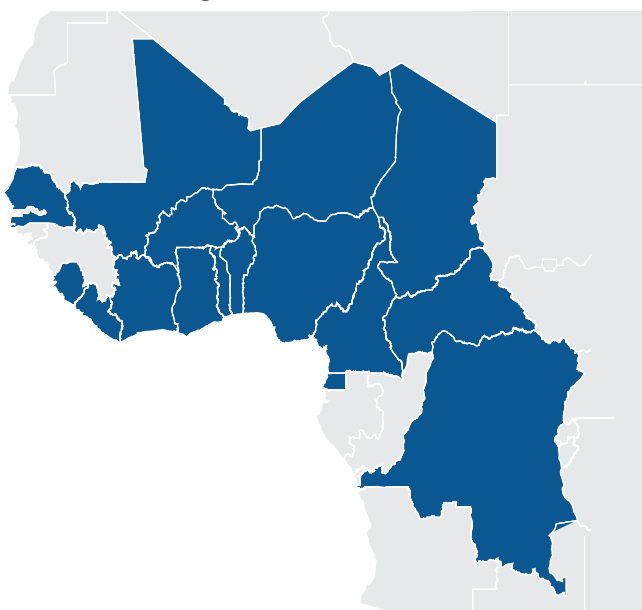
Sources: ACLED, Insecurity Insight, GCPEA, Education in Danger

With the spillover effect of the Central Sahel crisis, schools in the West African coastal countries are now experiencing insecurity that despite its small scale is of high concern.

In recent years insecurity has risen dramatically in the Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger), increasingly affecting the neighboring coastal countries. Since the beginning of 2021, numerous incursions by NSAGs have been reported in countries bordering the south of Burkina Faso², notably in Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Ghana, and more recently Togo, leading to further population movements and the start of basic social services' closure, including schools. The fear is that this situation will escalate; underlying the importance of prevention and preparedness to ensure continuous access to quality education services.

² A 143% increase in attacks in the southern areas of Burkina Faso was reported from January 2021 to May 2022. This resulted in the displacement of thousands of Burkinabe refugees to north-eastern Côte d'Ivoire and northern Benin: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cote-divoire/outil-de-veille-multirisques-pour-les-pays-du-golfe-de-guinee-benin-cote-divoire-ghana-togo-au-30-mai-2022>.

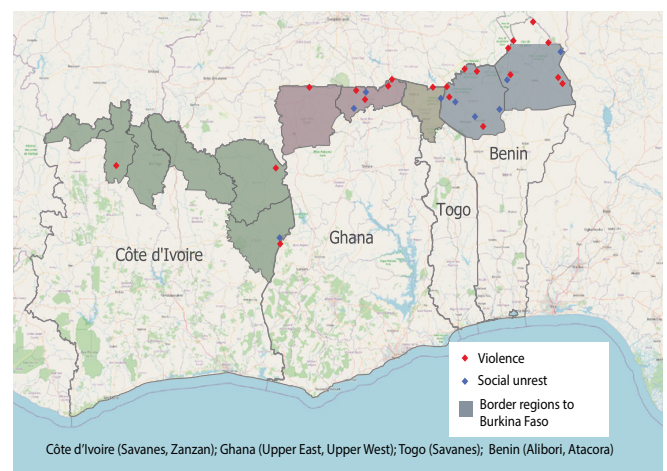
SSD endorsing States in West & Central Africa



Source: GCPEA

Attacks on students, school personnel, and education institutions have a devastating impact on access to learning and on a society's overall development. In addition to the deaths and injuries caused by the attacks, they also often result in a decline in student attendance, issues with teacher deployment and retention in insecure zones, a decline in education quality, an increased exposure to serious forms of violence and other risks including child marriage, early pregnancy, forced displacement, child labour and the risk of being recruited by parties to conflict.

Security incidents in the neighbouring coastal countries of the Central Sahel between February and May 2022

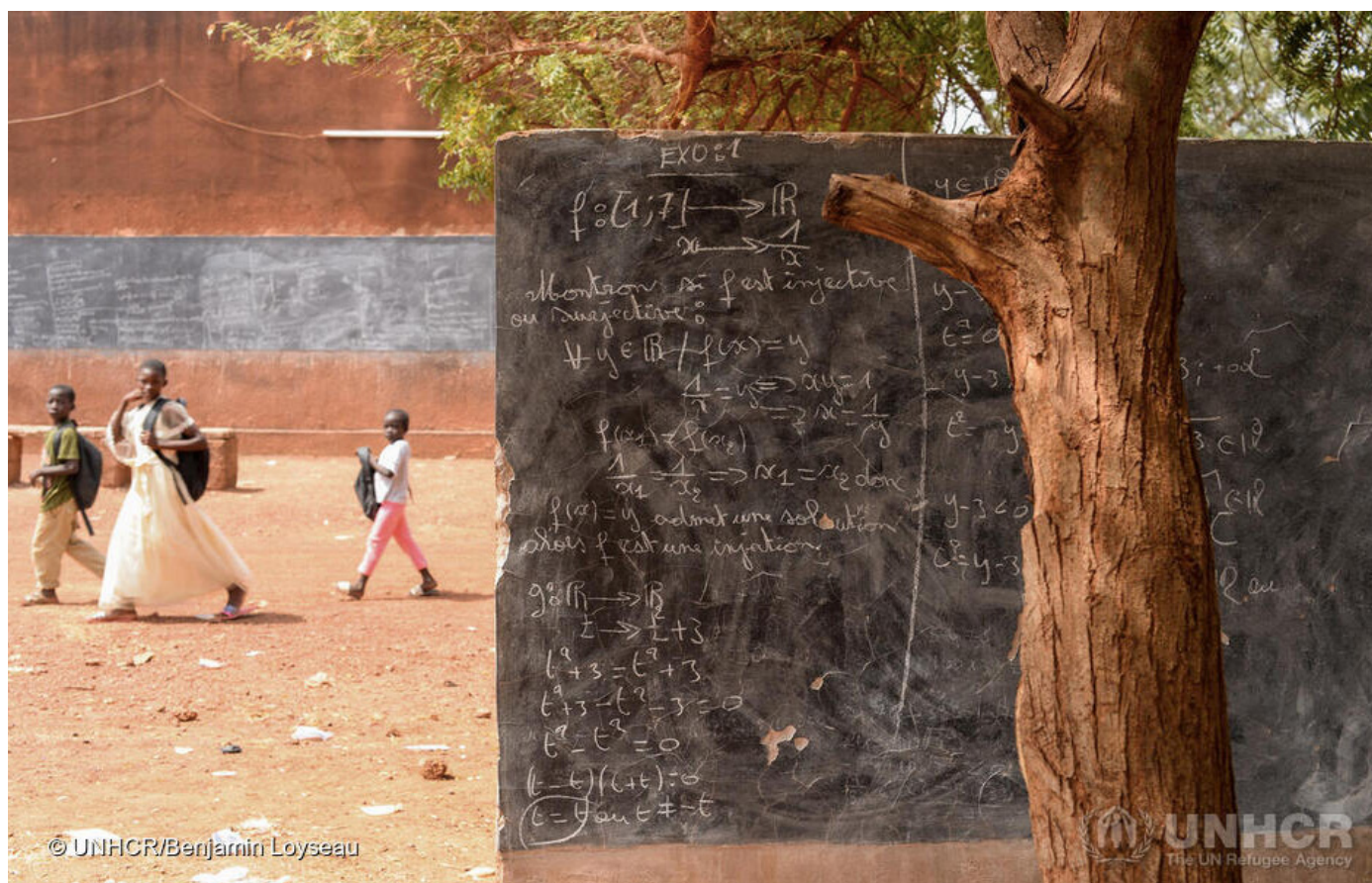


Sources: GRANIT (OCHA, OIM, REACH); ACLED.

The degradation of the situation has occurred despite a number of encouraging developments.

As of September 2022, most West and Central African countries have endorsed the [Safe Schools Declaration \(SSD\)](#)³ and have taken varied political and grassroots steps to operationalise it. For example, in 2020, CAR adopted a child protection code, which criminalizes attacks on schools and their occupation. In October 2021, the Nigerian Ministry of Defense, with the Education in Emergencies Working Group, launched the SSD trainer's guide and participants' manual for Nigerian security agencies and human rights institutions and released its national policy for safety, security and violence-free schools. Mali is working on a draft law on protecting schools and universities during armed conflicts. A State-led implementation network is also available to support states that have endorsed the SSD. It aims to promote cooperation, assistance, and provides states with support from global experts. A similar dedicated SSD platform was established for the Sahel countries to promote regional cooperation.

³ The Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) is an inter-governmental political commitment to protect students, teachers, schools, and universities from the worst effects of armed conflict: <https://ssd.protectingeducation.org/>.



The number of children in need of humanitarian assistance has multiplied, as has the share of unmet needs.

57 million children, adolescents and youth are not in school today in West and Central Africa, which represents almost one in four out-of-school children (OOSC) in the world⁴. This figure is all the more alarming when considering that it is twice the region's share of the global population of children of the corresponding age (6 to 18 years old – 12.05 per cent)⁵.

For forcibly displaced children access to education is even more difficult. In the 2021-22 school year, just over half of primary school-age refugee children in the West and Central Africa region were enrolled in school, while barely 20 per cent had access to secondary education and less than 2 per cent to higher education⁶.

Growing insecurity has a particularly negative impact on access to school: based on data collected by the regional protection monitoring mechanism, *Project 21*⁷, between January and April 2022, on average 52 per cent of children did not regularly go to school in the Central Sahel region with the main reason being the closure or destruction of the school (27 per cent)⁸.

 **57 million out-of-school children**

1 in 4 OOSC in the world is in West and Central Africa

The reduction in enrolment and attendance is also due to the fact that 53 per cent of children reveal that they do not feel safe at school, with almost two-thirds (64 per cent) of children reporting having little to no hope for their future⁹.

The region therefore faces an unprecedented challenge, and an important part of its response will be its ability to provide a better future for its youth. Despite this frightening situation and increased awareness of the problem, the education sector and more specifically the humanitarian response to education needs are still severely underfunded: for example, in 2021, the education sector in humanitarian responses was only 22 per cent funded, half of what it was in 2018¹⁰.

9 NRC, UNHCR, UNICEF (January 2022). [Central Sahel: Improve children's wellbeing and learning- Increasing psychosocial support in schools](#).

10 Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies (2022). [Education in Emergencies Financing in the Wake of COVID-19: Time to Reinvest to Meet Growing Needs](#). This figure does not include the Refugee Appeals.

4 UNESCO GEMR and UIS (2022): <https://education-estimates.org/>.

5 UNPD/DESA (July 2022), Population Estimates 2022: <https://population.un.org/wpp/>.

6 UNHCR RBWCA (August 2022), Refugee Education Statistics.

7 Project 21 online platform: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/west-and-central-africa/project-21>.

8 Project 21, [January-April 2022 Analysis](#).

Recommendations

Nothing short of a dramatic increase in all education stakeholders' mobilization behind the implementation of the SSD in the region will suffice to protect children's fundamental right to learn in security.

We call on governments, all parties to conflict and the international community to take concerted action to stop attacks and threats against schools, students, and school personnel in West and Central Africa, and to step-up accountable, sustainable support for quality learning for every child in the region.

Recommendation 1: Adopt holistic, integrated and multisectoral approaches to the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration

- States must operationalize *Resolution 2601 (2021)*¹¹, adopted by the United Nations Security Council on October 29, 2021, aimed at ensuring the protection of children affected by armed conflict and facilitating the continuity and protection of education in times of armed conflict.
- 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 Conflict*¹².
- The international community should support strong global and regional cooperation and the peer-to-peer exchange of good practices and lessons learned through the State-led implementation network or the Sahel platform on implementing the *Safe Schools Declaration*.

Recommendation 2: Systematize measures to prevent attacks on education

- Governments and partners should immediately negotiate the non-occupation of schools by parties to conflict and prioritise the rehabilitation and securing of damaged or destroyed schools (including through demining).
- Governments and partners 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 approach.
- Coastal countries should urgently strengthen all prevention and response plans to protect schools and educational continuity in the event of a rapid deterioration of the security situation.

Recommendation 3: Reinforce alternative, innovative, accelerated, and flexible learning solutions for educational continuity

- Governments and partners should immediately negotiate the reopening of closed schools on the one hand and introduce or expand initiatives that promote continued learning for children who have had to drop out of school or those that have had long interruptions in their learning on the other. This requires ministries to be flexible in their approaches and requires partners to be innovative and experiment with various alternative education options including distance learning.
- Education stakeholders need to work with Koranic education structures, understanding that they are often the only ones that remain open in the current context where education is under attack, promote the inclusion of foundational literacy and numeracy therein, and support pathways to continued education for their learners.

Recommendation 4: 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 traumatized children and their teachers, recognizing that the former cannot learn, and the latter cannot teach.

Recommendation 5: Increase predictable and flexible financing for education in emergencies

- Ministries of education need to advocate to ministries of finance and budget for increased budget allocations that allow for flexible disbursements.
- Ministries of education need to be accountable to the hardest to reach and most marginalized children including refugees and ensure equitable access to education services.
- Donors should promote synergies and complementarities of funding to ensure the best usage thereof, and fund specific measures to prevent, mitigate, and respond to attacks on education across the development-humanitarian nexus, including at Education Cannot Wait's upcoming pledging conference in February 2023.

¹¹ Security Council resolution 2601 (2021) on children and armed conflict: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3946523?ln=fr>.

¹² GCPEA (2014). *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*.



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Global Coalition to **Protect**
Education from Attack



Education Under Attack in West and Central Africa: 2022 Update

Education in Emergencies Working Group