



Global Coalition to **Protect**  
**Education from Attack**



# IDENTIFY AND REDUCE RISKS RELATED TO ATTACKS ON EDUCATION

A Guidance Note to Strengthen Implementation  
of the Safe Schools Declaration

March 2023



**FRONT COVER:** A student looks at her old school, damaged by conflict, in south Syria in February 2022.

© 2022 UNICEF/UN0635253/Shahan

# IDENTIFY AND REDUCE RISKS RELATED TO ATTACKS ON EDUCATION

A Guidance Note to Strengthen Implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration

March 2023

## CONTENTS

- Introduction and Background**.....2
  - The Definitions of Risk .....3
  - The Comprehensive School Safety Framework.....3
- Identify the Risk of Attacks on Education** .....5
  - Risk Assessments & Resource Prioritization.....5
  - Conflict Analysis related to Attacks on Education .....6
    - Early Warning Criteria .....6
    - Gender-Based Violence Criteria .....6
    - Education-Specific Criteria .....7
    - School-level risk assessment .....8
  - Assess Particular Vulnerabilities.....8
    - Country-specific Experiences:.....9
  - Assess School Community’s Capacity .....10
    - Country-Specific Examples:.....10
  - Update risk assessments regularly .....11
    - Assess School Facilities .....11
    - Safe School Facilities Criteria .....11
    - Country-Specific Examples:.....12
- Reduce Risks related to Attacks on Education** .....14
  - School Safety Committees.....14
    - Country-specific Experiences: .....15
    - School-based Safety Plans.....15
    - Country-specific Experiences: .....16
    - Emergency Preparedness Training for Teachers, Students, and Others .....17
    - Country-specific Experiences: .....18
    - Early Warning Systems and Emergency Communications .....18
- Conclusion** .....20

**Purpose:** This guidance introduces a conceptual framework for risk identification and reduction in contexts with attacks on education.

**Target Audience:** This guidance supports humanitarian and development actors, governments, and researchers.

## INTRODUCTION

Governments have a responsibility to protect schools and ensure that they are safe for students and teachers, including in times of heightened insecurity and armed conflict. Subnational and local government authorities, communities, parents, school administrators, teachers, and students also play an important role in making schools safe. To date, 116 states have endorsed the Safe School Declaration (SSD). These states have committed to strengthening the protection of education from attack and ensuring the continuation of education during armed conflict.

Yet in conflict settings, governments may be confronted with difficult decisions regarding how best to ensure the safety of students, teachers, and school infrastructure. For example, governments may have to decide whether it is safe for schools in a specific area to remain open or whether students should be relocated to alternative locations or educated through alternative delivery methods such as distance learning until it is safe to return to their schools. Similarly, given limited resources, governments may have to decide which schools should be prioritized to receive rehabilitation or upgrading of school facilities and protective security systems. This paper discusses the importance of school risk assessments as one concrete tool to help make such decisions and facilitate the implementation of SSD commitments.

The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) has previously identified risk assessments as a component of safety planning. It has recommended that humanitarian and development actors and governments:

Build schools' capacity to conduct a risk assessment. Assessment tools can be designed locally, but schools and school management committees can also adapt tools developed by other education actors.

Questions might include: What are the types of attacks on education? What are risks and vulnerabilities as perceived by education personnel and students? What measures can be implemented to mitigate these risks?<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, GCPEA identified risk assessments as a critical component in governments' efforts to ensure safe access to education during armed conflict. To ensure that government decisions on school safety, as well as the deployment of scarce resources for school security, are evidence-based and informed by the best available information, GCPEA has called on governments to:

**Conduct a thorough risk analysis for each functioning school in locations at risk of attack.**

Prioritize schools at high risk of attack, including those located in remote areas with female students. The risk analysis should identify possible threats to the school, students, teachers, and community members, and assess the probability of attack. Also assess vulnerabilities in school infrastructure, assess and map evacuation routes, and identify the adequacy of means to mitigate risks and vulnerabilities.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> GCPEA, "What Schools Can Do to Protect Education from Attack and Military Use," (New York: GCPEA, September 2016), [http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what\\_schools.pdf](http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what_schools.pdf), (accessed September 23, 2020), p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> See GCPEA, "What can be done to better protect women and girls from attacks on education and military use of educational institutions," (New York: GCPEA, 2018), [http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what\\_can\\_be\\_done\\_to\\_better\\_protect\\_women\\_and\\_girls.pdf](http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what_can_be_done_to_better_protect_women_and_girls.pdf), p.5. While this recommendation

## The Definitions of Risk

There is no single shared definition of risk, but it is commonly understood to mean the likelihood that a future harm or negative impact will occur. In the field of disaster risk reduction<sup>3</sup> (DRR), risk is recognized as the interaction among several interrelated variables. The UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) defines risk as “the combination of the probability of an event and its negative consequences.”<sup>4</sup> Risk is commonly analyzed using the Hazard, Vulnerability, and Capacity Assessment (HVCA), which can be presented as a formula:

$$\text{Risk} = \frac{\text{Hazard} \times \text{Vulnerability} \times \text{Exposure}}{\text{Capacity}}$$

According to Save the Children, the HVCA is “a globally-recognized best practice for determining risk. HVCA analyses potential hazards, assesses the vulnerabilities of people, property, services, livelihoods, and the environment on which they depend, and assesses the capacities to mitigate the risk situation.”<sup>5</sup>

The HVCA underscores that the likely negative impact of a given risk is a combination of factors: the hazard itself, the likelihood of that hazard occurring, and the predicted severity of the harm that is likely if the hazard occurs. The risk may be greater or lesser depending on the capacity of the affected community to mitigate the risk and the harm associated with it.

While this formula was developed for assessing risk in the context of natural disasters, it has also been applied to multi-hazard risk, including conflict risk. For purposes of this note, the risk that is to be assessed is understood as the potential loss of life, injury, or psychological harm to students, teachers, or other education personnel, or destruction or damage to schools or other education assets which occur because of an attack on education; this includes actual or threatened violence which can impact education continuity.<sup>6</sup> This risk should be evaluated with consideration for the specific characteristics of certain education populations that may increase their vulnerability to attack or harm from attack and, by contrast, those capacities that reduce the likely occurrence or negative impact of an attack.

## The Comprehensive School Safety Framework

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the multiple threats to school safety and an evolving international consensus regarding the importance of school safety. In 2015, this led to the development of a Comprehensive School Safety Framework (CSSF) by a “broad coalition of organizations advocating for disaster risk

---

emerged in the context of GCPEA’s field research on the impact of attacks on education on women and girls, it is not limited to protecting women and girls, but also enhances protections for men and boys. In fact, the recommendation to conduct risk analyses is intended to contribute to better protection of education for all.

<sup>3</sup> Disaster Risk Reduction is a systematic approach to reduce disaster risk by minimizing vulnerabilities and preventing or limiting (mitigating and preparing for) the adverse impacts of hazards. While this definition relates to natural hazards, much of the analysis is relevant to man-made hazards, including conflict. See UNICEF, *Child-centered Disaster Risk Reduction*, (New York: UNICEF, July 2015), <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/unicef-and-child-centred-disaster-risk-reduction>, (accessed July 17, 2020), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> UNISDR, “Terminology on disaster risk reduction,” (Geneva: UN, 2009), [https://www.unisdr.org/files/7817\\_UNISDRTerminologyEnglish.pdf](https://www.unisdr.org/files/7817_UNISDRTerminologyEnglish.pdf) (accessed July 17, 2020), p. 25. “The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) is a global framework established within the United Nations for the promotion of action to reduce social vulnerability and risks of natural hazards and related technological and environmental disasters.”

<sup>5</sup> Save the Children, “Safe Schools Common Approach, Action Pack 2: Safe Schools Management,” (London: Save the Children, 2019), <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/safe-school-common-approach-action-pack-2-safe-school-management/>, p.17. See UNICEF, “Child-Centre Risk Assessment: Regional Synthesis of UNICEF Assessments in Asia,” (Katmandu: UNICEF, January 2014), [https://www.preventionweb.net/files/36688\\_36688rosaccriskassessmentfeb2014.pdf](https://www.preventionweb.net/files/36688_36688rosaccriskassessmentfeb2014.pdf) (assessed October 12, 2020), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> GCPEA defines attacks on education as any intentional threat or use of force—carried out for political, military, ideological, sectarian, ethnic, religious, or criminal reasons—against students, educators, and education institutions. Attacks on education may be perpetrated by State security forces, including armed forces, law enforcement, paramilitary, and militia forces acting on behalf of the state, as well as by non-state armed groups. Attacks on education include attacks on students of all ages, educators, including schoolteachers, academics, other education personnel, members of teacher unions, and education aid workers. Attacks on education also include attacks on education institutions: any site used for the purposes of education, including all levels of education and non-formal education facilities, and buildings dedicated to the work of ministries of education and other education administration. For more detail, see Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, <http://www.protectingeducation.org/what-attack-education>.

reduction in the education sector.”<sup>7</sup> The CSSF takes an all-hazard approach, meaning that it is intended to address the full spectrum of risks that emerge from both natural and man-made threats, such as climate change, pandemics, violence, and conflict. While a significant focus of the framework is on natural and environmental hazards, recommendations are often relevant to reducing all risks to the education sector, including from armed conflict. In its most recent edition, covering 2022-2030, the CSSF places importance on understanding the interconnectedness of risks facing the education sector, such as how climate change drives conflicts in some regions.

The CSSF 2022-2030 is comprised of a cross-cutting foundation - Enabling systems and policies – and three pillars: safe learning facilities, school safety & educational continuity management, and risk reduction and resilience education.<sup>8</sup> Within this framework, risk assessments and the importance of evidence-based information to inform protective responses feature prominently. For example, one of the CSSF’s recommended strategies related to its foundation (Enabling systems and policies) is to “conduct all-hazards child-centred risk assessments [...] to provide a shared evidence base for risk-informed and collaborative strategic planning and programming.”<sup>9</sup>

Some governments have incorporated risk assessment and monitoring into their school security and safety policies. However, these plans vary widely, are often ad hoc, and frequently lack concrete and actionable steps. The first Comprehensive School Safety Baseline Survey conducted in 2017, which surveyed 68 countries, found that “over a third of the countries do not systematically collect, update, or publicly share education-sector risk data.”<sup>10</sup>

Governments may also lack a clear set of risk indicators to be monitored systematically as part of risk assessments. In other contexts, risk assessments are not carried out at all, and decisions about school safety, including decisions regarding the closure of schools due to insecurity, may be made on an ad hoc basis or based on practical impediments unrelated to security. For example, a representative of an international organization covering the Sahel region observed that “decisions to close schools are rarely based on a concrete assessment of the security situation. Instead, it is a very localized decision that schools cannot function often because teachers have fled the area due to insecurity.”<sup>11</sup>

### ***Aims and objectives of this guidance note***

GCPEA has developed the following guidance note to facilitate risk assessments, including identifying some factors and indicators that should be considered as part of such assessments. Consistent with GCPEA’s mandate, this document focuses exclusively on the risks associated with attacks on education, and more specifically, the risks of physical attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel, and school and other learning facilities.<sup>12</sup>

This note is not intended to be definitive or exhaustive. Given the context-specific nature of conflict risks for schools, the criteria that may be relevant in one context or region may not be applicable in another. This note was developed by conducting an extensive document review, as well as interviews with humanitarian actors in some conflict settings. This is intended to be a working document that may be updated over time to draw on the practical

<sup>7</sup> Rachel Paci-Green, et al., “Comprehensive school safety policy: A global baseline survey,” *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 44 (2020), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212420919305400> (accessed October 14, 2020), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> GADRRRES, “Comprehensive School Safety Framework 2022-2030,” September 2022, <https://gadrrres.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/CSSF-2022-2030-EN.pdf>, (accessed November 15, 2022), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Paci-Green, et al., “Comprehensive school safety policy,” *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212420919305400><https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212420919305400>, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> GCPEA phone interview, August 24, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> GCPEA defines attacks on education as any threatened or actual use of force against students, teachers, academics, education support and transport staff (e.g., janitors, bus drivers), or education officials, as well as attacks on education buildings, resources, material, or facilities (including school buses). These actions may occur for political, military, ideological, sectarian, ethnic, or religious reasons. GCPEA, *Education Under Attack 2018*, (New York: GCPEA, May 2018), [eua2018.protectingeducation.org](http://eua2018.protectingeducation.org).

experiences of governments, humanitarian actors, education administrations, and schools. This note draws on previous GCPEA research, analysis, and recommendations.

The following sections provide practical examples of:

- Identification of risks of attacks on education at school community level
- Development of protective responses at the school community level

## IDENTIFY RISKS RELATED TO ATTACKS ON EDUCATION

In situations of heightened insecurity, it is imperative that governments and education personnel identify risks to students, teachers, and school infrastructure. Risk assessment is a necessary first step toward developing effective responses that can prevent and mitigate harm. The following factors may be relevant indicators of increased risk (in general) and specific increased risk to schools, students, and education personnel. Each assessing entity will need to tailor the indicators to its specific context; this process is enhanced when schools and communities are involved and reinforces their ability to withstand and assess risks.

### RISK ASSESSMENTS & RESOURCE PRIORITIZATION

In countries with inadequate security and scarce resources, risk assessments can provide critical information regarding how best to determine priorities. For example, a report on school safety in Afghanistan, which was submitted to the Afghanistan Ministry of Education for approval in 2020, noted that in countries such as Afghanistan with severe resource and security constraints, “it is especially important that actions are strategic. It requires each school community as a whole... to conduct regular environmental scans to assess and prioritize

- the types and levels of threat in and around the school, the probability of these events happening and the degree of harm they would cause
- capacities available to prepare and respond, how strong these are and what is required to make them compliant
- the levels of vulnerability among different children and schools
- actual costs in time, human resources, and budget ... and
- opportunity costs of not taking action....”

Similarly, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which regularly conducts security risk assessments of UNRWA schools through its Safety & Security Division (SSD), states that a security risk assessment (SRA) is important because it “means the best use of resources to reduce risks, rather than attempting to deal with all risks or risk in a random order.” As part of the risk assessment, UNRWA assesses not only the threats, but also 1) the likelihood – “How likely a threat might happen to the school, even if it has never occurred before” and 2) the impact of such a threat – “What a threat will do to UNRWA school staff, students, activities, equipment, installation or reputation if it does occur.” UNRWA underscores that it is the combination of the threat, likelihood, and impact that equals risk, as well as the weakness and strengths related to an individual school.

## Conflict Analysis related to Attacks on Education

UNICEF has emphasized that conflict analysis itself must be a part of any multi-hazard risk assessment, including an analysis of the causes and dynamics of violent conflict. UNICEF explains, “Conflict analysis is understood as the systematic study of the profile, causes, actors and dynamics of conflict. In essence, a conflict analysis seeks to understand who is involved in a conflict and what they want to achieve and why – including the historic and current events and developments that influence them.”<sup>13</sup> It is not within the scope of this document to discuss the large and complex field of conflict analysis. However, it is useful to note that, among other things, UNICEF identifies a range of “conflict dynamics” (such as land disputes, discriminatory government policies, or historical grievances) and “proximate causes” (such as human rights abuses, worsening economic conditions, and aggressive rhetoric and violence incidents) that should inform any analysis of the potential for an eruption or escalation of hostilities.<sup>14</sup>

The follow are examples of criteria related to conflict early warning, gender and gender-based violence, and education that can support a conflict analysis related to attacks on education.

### *Early Warning Criteria*

Analysis of early warning signs can enable school communities to understand the risks faced in a broader context. A conflict analysis is an essential component of efforts to have the earliest warning of deteriorating security in each region. And early warnings of the possible eruption of conflict in an area are critical to efforts to prevent attacks on schools and mitigate harm from such attacks.<sup>15</sup>

Such an analysis should include, for example, monitoring and assessing changes in the:

- 1 Displacement of civilians
- 2 Movements of armed groups (both security forces and armed non-state actors)
- 3 Recruitment into armed groups
- 4 Conflict-related deaths (male/female)

### *Gender-Based Violence Criteria*<sup>16</sup>

Gender-based and sexual violence has been identified as a driver of conflict. The experiences of women and girls, including increasing levels of gender-based violence, can also indicate heightened risk of such conflict. OSCE notes that “The lower status that most women generally hold relative to most men may cause them to be among the first to experience the weakening of security levels. Thus, their experiences can potentially serve as foreshadowing of more widespread armed conflict.”<sup>17</sup> As such, an assessment of such risks should be included in over-arching conflict analysis and may include assessments of:

- 1 House raids and searches by armed forces or armed groups
- 2 Combatants operating under the influence of alcohol or drugs

<sup>13</sup> UNICEF, “Guide to Conflict Analysis,” November 2016, <https://www.unicef.org/media/96581/file/Guide-to-Conflict-Analysis.pdf> (accessed November 15, 2020), p. 6. See also UNICEF, “Guidance on Risk-informed Programming, Annex 1,” (New York: UNICEF, April 2018,) <https://www.unicef.org/documents/guidance-risk-informed-programming> (accessed November 13, 2020), p. 102, for additional resources related to risk and conflict analysis.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>15</sup> An increasing number of recent conflicts have involved attacks on education. See, for example, UNICEF, Education Under Attack, <https://www.unicef.org/education-under-attack>

(accessed September 9, 2021), stating “For children living in conflict, education has become even more dangerous. In 2020, there were 535 verified attacks on schools — an increase of 17 per cent compared to 2019.”

<sup>16</sup> These indicators are adapted in part from a more comprehensive list of gender-sensitive indicators at UN Women, Gender-Responsive Early Warning: Overview and How-to Guide, October 2012, <http://www.cu-csds.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/unwomen2012vdk.pdf> (accessed July 26, 2020), pp. 6-7, and UN Action, Matrix: Early-Warning Indicators of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, 2011, <https://issat.dcaf.ch/download/127367/2601654> (accessed July 6, 2020).

<sup>17</sup> Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Gender and Early Warning Systems: An Introduction, 2009, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/a/40269.pdf> (accessed July 30, 2020), p. 10.



- 3 Reports of girls and women fleeing specific areas
- 4 Changed patterns of women and girls going to market, to work in fields etc.
- 5 Women's lack of participation in social gatherings due to increased insecurity
- 6 Medical professionals indicating increase in cases of sexually transmitted diseases
- 7 Medical professionals indicating increase in cases of SGBV
- 8 Sexual harassment or abuse by security forces or law enforcement agencies
- 9 Killing, abduction, and disappearances of women and girls
- 10 Cases of women/children being trafficked
- 11 Rumors or reports of increased levels of sexual and gender-based violence
- 12 Increase in child marriage

### ***Education-Specific Criteria***<sup>18</sup>

Criteria that can help assess increased risk of attacks on education include:

- 1 Combatants having anti-education ideology or opposition to education in general or for specific groups (for example, hostility toward education for girls)
- 2 Unequal or discriminatory provision of education by national or sub national authorities.
- 3 Schools and/or education personnel are perceived by some as politically biased, agents of government
- 4 Schools and/or education personnel or students are perceived by some as members of opposition groups
- 5 Increase in anti-education graffiti or propaganda
- 6 Changes in school enrollment or attendance by different groups (girls v. boys, for example) or avoidance of schools by some groups due to insecurity
- 7 Teachers fleeing an area
- 8 Reports/rumors of sexual harassment or violence in and around schools (see above)
- 9 Damage to schools due to insecurity or conflict
- 10 Casualties of students, teachers, and other education personnel
- 11 Injury to students caught in crossfire at school or on the way to or from school.
- 12 Recruitment or forced conscription in and around schools
- 13 Abductions of students or teachers from school or on routes to/from school because of their status  
as student or teacher
- 14 Presence of armed forces or groups near school
- 15 Occupation of school or school grounds by armed groups
- 16 School closures due to insecurity
- 17 Teachers leaving their posts due to insecurity or displacement
- 18 Threats/warnings sent to schools or teachers

These criteria can also help to show shifts in conflict, such as escalations or new tactic used by armed groups and armed forces. For example, assessments may identify an increase in the use of explosive devices in an area where arson was the most common tactic used by an armed group.

---

<sup>18</sup> See also GCPEA, Toolkit for Collecting and Analyzing Data on Attacks on Education, Table 3: Indicators on Attacks on Education, January 2021, <https://protectingeducation.org/publication/toolkit-for-collecting-and-analyzing-data-on-attacks-on-education/> (accessed July 2021), p. 14-16.

## School-level risk assessment

As already discussed above, communities can help to assess and map risks to schools, as well as to identify the capacities already present in the community to respond to identified dangers. This contributes to the prevention of attacks on education and mitigation of the harm from such attacks. The information provided by communities can support the development a risk reduction plan.

Risk assessments and associated risk and capacity mapping are key activities to ensure protective learning environments in Safe Schools programming.<sup>19</sup> Save the Children describes that “the risk and resource map is a sketch of an area or a place made by people in the community ... used to analyze what hazards and related risks there are in the school community, or on the way to and from school, how vulnerable the boys and girls, teachers and parents are to these risks, and what capacity the school, parents, children, teachers and wider community have to respond to these risks.”<sup>20</sup> See activities 4-7 in Save the Children’s Safe Schools Common Approach technical guidance on school management on risk mapping and school safety planning.

## Assess Particular Vulnerabilities

Different groups of students, teachers, and other education personnel (girls, boys, women, or men) may experience attacks on schools differently and may face different risks when an attack occurs. What is more, different categories of students (disabled, ethnic minorities, those living far from school, etc.) may have characteristics that affect their risk of harm (protection needs) during an attack, including both the likelihood of being attacked and their capacity to prevent or mitigate harm from an attack. UNICEF has stated that “girls and boys, women, individuals with disabilities, and the most impoverished are disproportionately vulnerable to, and affected by, the impacts of crisis.”<sup>21</sup> This applies equally to those most vulnerable when education is attacked.

UNICEF has noted that “The specific characteristics and circumstances that drive vulnerability are unique to each context and population. Broad groups commonly vulnerable to hazards include women and girls, children, urban dwellers, the elderly, the disabled (including those with cognitive, physical, and emotional disabilities), migrants, refugees, displaced persons, nomads, indigenous minorities, orphans, and the poor. Specific characteristics and circumstances of vulnerability can be related to physical, social, economic and environmental factors.”<sup>22</sup>

In the case of attacks on education, the nature of certain conflicts can also lead to different types of violence against learning facilities, students, or educators ; for example, non-state armed groups may be more prone to use arson or improvised explosive devices which may cause less damage to schools than airstrikes or shelling, which are generally employed by militaries or international armed forces.

Furthermore, boys and girls frequently have different vulnerabilities in times of armed conflict, but the nature of these vulnerabilities can vary among different contexts. For example, UNRWA reported that:

In the West Bank, UNRWA boys’ schools have been disproportionately impacted by the armed violence – the majority of education-related incidents recorded by UNRWA in 2015 occurred in boys schools....On the other hand, in Syria, anecdotal evidence suggests that girls, more than boys, are prevented by their parents from going to school due to the lack of security, which shows a greater impact of conflict on girls’ ability to access education in the country.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Save the Children’s Safe Schools Common Approach is an all-hazards, integrated program to protect children in and around schools. <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/collection/safe-schools-common-approach/>

<sup>20</sup> [https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/szop\\_guidance\\_version\\_1.pdf/](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/szop_guidance_version_1.pdf/) , p.8.

<sup>21</sup> UNICEF, “Guidance on Risk-informed Programming,” April 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/documents/guidance-risk-informed-programming> (accessed November 13, 2020), p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> UNICEF, “Risk-informed Education Programming for Resilience: Guidance Note,” May 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/media/65436/file/Risk-informed%20education%20programming%20for%20resilience:%20Guidance%20note.pdf> (accessed November 13, 2020), p. 27.

<sup>23</sup> UNRWA, “Schools on the Front Line: The Impact of Armed Conflict and Violence on UNRWA Schools and Education Services,” (Amman: UNRWA, 2016, [www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/schools\\_on\\_the\\_front\\_line.pdf](http://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/schools_on_the_front_line.pdf), (accessed August 17, 2020), p. 7.

Because of these different vulnerabilities and the role that specific characteristics may have in different contexts, Save the Children has stressed the importance of including “the whole school” in the process of assessing risk, to “ensure that all voices are heard, and that the protection needs of all children – which might be different depending on their age, gender, identity, abilities, ethnicity, socio-economic status and other factors – are identified and responded to.”<sup>24</sup> Referring specifically to gender aware risk and capacity mapping, Save the Children states: “We should ensure all voices are heard. That may mean to consult with girls and boys, women, and men separately, because traditions and power structures could intimidate some from speaking up in mixed groups – or they may simply not be used to their views and experience being valued. Also, some behaviors of boys and men represent risks to girls and women, and it is therefore unlikely they will address these in mixed groups.”<sup>25</sup>

### *Country-specific Experiences:*

#### **Democratic Republic of Congo**

Given ongoing insecurity and repeated threats and attacks on students and schools in the province of North Kivu, DRC, Save the Children developed a project in 2016 to identify priority risks for 30 schools (selected based on specified risk criteria) in the province and develop plans to reduce those risks. Participants in project workshops:

- Identified consequences of historical events relevant to violence and armed conflict,
- Identified, classified, and prioritized threats and school capacities, including with students’ participation in risk mapping,
- Received a briefing by the Provincial Civil Protection Coordinator on the drivers of threat, vulnerability, and capacities of the schools,
- Attended trainings and workshops on use of assessment tools to identify threats, vulnerabilities, and capacities in identified community schools, and
- Consolidated the individual assessments into a global response plan for the authorities in North Kivu province.<sup>26</sup>

#### **Nigeria**

In August 2021, the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education in consultation with the Nigeria Education in Emergencies Working Group, adopted the National Policy on Safety, Security, and Violence-Free Schools.<sup>27</sup> This comprehensive policy calls on the Federal Ministry of Education to “conduct bi-annual assessments of hazards that may threaten the safety of learners and staff in all schools that are open.... The risk analysis should identify possible threats to the school, learners, teachers, and community members, and assess the probability of attack. Risk analysis should also assess vulnerabilities in school infrastructure, assess and map out evacuation routes and identify the adequacy of means to mitigate risks and vulnerabilities.” The policy calls on State Ministries of Education to “conduct hazard assessments of schools within their purview and put necessary measures in place to ameliorate or remove identified hazards...” The Nigerian policy also includes a checklist to guide decisions about when to close or re-open schools in conflict-affected areas.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Save the Children, *Safe Schools Common Approach, Action Pack 2: Safe Schools Management*, 2019, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/SAFE-SCHOOLS-MANAGEMENT.pdf>, p.5.

<sup>25</sup> Save the Children, “*Safe Schools Common Approach, Action Pack 2: Safe Schools Management*,” 2017, [https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/sites/default/files/documents/safe\\_schools\\_action\\_pack\\_2.docx](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/sites/default/files/documents/safe_schools_action_pack_2.docx), p.6. See also Adolescent Girls’ Vulnerability-Capacity Profiles at Women’s Refugee Commission, “I’m Here,” <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/research-resources/im-here-steps-tools-to-reach-adolescent-girls-in-crisis/>, p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> Provincial Gouvernement of North Kivu and Save the Children, *Plan de Réduction des Risques des Catastrophes au Sein des écoles soutenues par le projet SZOP Save the Children au Nord-Kivu*, (Disaster Risk Reduction Plan for Schools supported by the SZOP Save the Children project in North Kivu), June 2016), (Copy on file), pp. 5-7. The project was conducted as part of Save the Children’s Schools as Zones of Peace (SZOP).

<sup>27</sup> National Policy on Safety, Security, and Violence-Free Schools With its Implementing Guidelines,” Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education, August 2021, <https://education.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/National-Policy-on-SSVFSN.pdf>, (accessed September 10, 2021), sections 11.1.a and 11.2.a, p. 15.

## Assess School Community's Capacity

A component of the risk assessment is the identification of capacities within the school or within the surrounding community that may be brought to bear to counter identified hazards. In some respects, vulnerabilities and capacities are interrelated. UNICEF has stated that, as part of the process of analyzing risk, it is necessary to “determine which exposed populations (girls, boys, women, and men) and systems have the capacity to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the effects of the hazard, and their location. Of those education populations and systems that are particularly vulnerable, determine the strengths, attributes and resources that make them capable of preventing, preparing for, and responding to the effects of the hazard.”<sup>29</sup> Or formulated as a question, “what capacities do communities, authorities, institutions, or systems have (or need) to prevent, mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from a specific shock or stress?”<sup>30</sup>

As with the other aspects of the risk assessment, capacities are context-specific and closely related to the vulnerabilities of the school and affected population. However, relevant capacities may include the extent to which:

- Schools and communities have an environment of safety awareness and prioritization.
- Communities, schools, and officials have an awareness and understanding of the risks associated with specific schools and educational environments (including routes to and from school).
- Students, teachers, and other educational personnel are knowledgeable about and have received training on how to identify hazards/risks and how best to respond to them.
- Effective safety policies exist and specific committees, focal persons, and/or other entities with specific responsibilities for ensuring their implementation have been established at the school, district, and national levels.
- Student and teacher safety training programs and refresher courses are held.
- Regular safety drills are conducted.

### *Country-specific Experiences:*

#### **Democratic Republic of Congo**

During a risk assessment exercise conducted as part of the Save the Children SZOP program in North Kivu (see above), participants identified their school's capacities to reduce risks related to violent armed conflict. Among other things, participants identified the following:

##### Existing Capacities

- Three of 30 schools had sentries equipped with whistles
- Existence of texts prohibiting the occupation of schools and the recruitment of children
- Existence of Parent-Teachers Committees, School Management Committees, Student clubs, school administration etc.

##### Needed Capacities

- Comprehensive system for the protection and safety of schools in the network

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., Annexure 11, p. 86-91.

<sup>29</sup> UNICEF, Risk-informed Education Programming for Resilience, <https://www.unicef.org/media/65436/file/Risk-informed%20education%20programming%20for%20resilience:%20Guidance%20note.pdf>, p. 82.

<sup>30</sup> UNICEF, Guidance on Risk-informed Programming, <https://www.unicef.org/documents/guidance-risk-informed-programming>, p. 25.

- Various groups (including government officials, school management, military, and armed groups) have a basic understanding of the concepts of protection against attack and occupation of schools
- A framework for consultation between the school authorities and the security and intelligence services

#### Capacities not yet acquired

- School guards and school perimeter delimitation
- Public awareness of standards regarding the protection and safety of schools from armed conflict
- System of referral for cases of violence and rape<sup>31</sup>

## Update risk assessments regularly

While it is critical that each school and learning facility has a baseline risk assessment, the identification and assessment of risk is not a one-time activity. School risk assessments should be conducted and monitored on an ongoing basis and reviewed at least annually to inform school risk mitigation efforts. These risk assessments may also take place during other annual or semi-annual assessments, such as during a Joint Education Needs Assessment or a multisectoral needs assessment. The Asia Pacific CSSF, for example, called on its members, as part of their efforts to strengthen risk management, to ensure that schools annually review school disaster risk reduction and management measures.<sup>32</sup> The Afghan CSSF report stated: “Identifying the nature and likelihood of threat and weighing potential impact requires continuous and collaborative monitoring of the physical, social and political environments of schools/learning spaces.”<sup>33</sup> Similarly, in its training materials, UNRWA states that “the first SRA (Security Risk Assessment) for a school is comprehensive, but that after the first, it is a matter of review and updating on a regular basis or when the context changes.”<sup>34</sup>

### *Assess School Facilities*

In addition to assessing the existence of various external risk factors, there should be an assessment of the school/learning facility itself to determine whether it is located, built, and equipped to offer maximum protection from the risks that have been identified, including specifically the possibility of violent attack. Specific risks and vulnerabilities should be assessed and adapted to each context.

As noted earlier, the CSS Framework focused on the importance of safer learning facilities and provides guidance on necessary steps to ensure that safety. Yet the 2017 Comprehensive School Safety Baseline Survey found that “only 31% [of the 68 responding countries] had funded the hazard risk assessment of their school building stock” and only “19% had funded the retrofit or replacement of weak schools.”<sup>35</sup>

### *Safe School Facilities Criteria:*

- 1 Barrier wall surrounding the school perimeter
- 2 Car blockades
- 3 Reinforced, blast-proof windows

<sup>31</sup> Provincial Gouvernement of North Kivu, Save the Children, “Plan de Réduction des Risques des Catastrophes au Sein des écoles soutenues par le projet SZOP Save the Children au Nord-Kivu.”

<sup>32</sup> Asia Pacific Coalition for School Safety, Policy Brief: Advancing Comprehensive School Safety for Asia and the Pacific, November 2016, <https://www.rccr-resilience-south-eastasia.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/APCSS-Policy-brief-advancing-CSS-in-Asia-Pacific.pdf> (accessed November 24, 2020), p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Bernard, Comprehensive Safe and Secure Schools Framework, p. 16.

<sup>34</sup> UNRWA, Educate a Child Safety & Security, Training Module 4 – Security Risk Assessments of Schools & Installations, p. 19.

<sup>35</sup> Paci-Green, et. al, “Comprehensive school safety policy,” International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212420919305400>, p. 9. It should be noted that the survey relates to multi-hazard risks, not exclusively risks associated with attacks on education or more generally armed conflict.

- 4 School site: Distance from zones of expected military activity?
- 5 School site: Is the school located near or far from the community/town?
- 6 More than one emergency evacuation doors and exits
- 7 Clearly identified safe evacuation routes
- 8 Shelter-in-place bunkers
- 9 Teachers or student housing, alternative transportation, and accompaniment to and from school
- 10 Other relevant protection measures, such as metal detectors, fortified steel doors, trenches, sandbags

GCPEA has also previously identified measures that may strengthen school safety infrastructure, including “building boundary walls, installing razor wire on top of school walls, and installing safety and security equipment (e.g., security cameras and metal detectors).”<sup>36</sup> There are questions, however, regarding the extent to which schools can make their facilities resistant to conflict. For example, Save the Children notes that “although ensuring new and in-use existing schools have sufficient emergency exits and space is important, the ways in which school structures can be made more resistant to direct attack is relatively limited to window barriers (to minimize blow in) and sandbagging of external walls may help reduce the damage and impact of a nearby air attack. In active warzones (like Syria) bunkers have also been established in some schools for students and teachers to move to during air raids but are still no guarantee of safety in the event of a direct hit.”<sup>37</sup>

### *Country-specific Experiences:*

#### **Pakistan**

Following the 2014 attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar, Pakistan, the Government of the Punjab, Home Department, issued an advisory note requesting that all schools increase school security within 48 hours through specified measures. Among the list of 24 activities were several physical protection measures, a few of which are excerpted below.

- Constructing boundary walls around the school up to 8 feet in height
- Fencing the boundary wall with razor wire up to another 2 feet in height
- Using a single entry/exit gate generally and using a second gate only in exceptional circumstances or as an emergency exit
- Erecting concrete barriers at the entry/exit gate
- Installing a walk-through gate and using metal detectors for physical search of the entrants and using bottom view mirrors for checking vehicles
- Ensuring zigzag entry into premises by deploying concrete barriers<sup>38</sup>

#### **Gaza Strip, Palestine**

In its training materials, UNRWA’s Safety and Security Division defines physical safety and security as “measures that are designed to deny unauthorized access to facilities, equipment and resources, and to protect personnel and property from damage or harm.”<sup>39</sup> While some of the concerns that fall under this category are not specific to

<sup>36</sup> GCPEA, “What Schools Can Do to Protect Education From Attack and Schools From Military Use,” [https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/documents\\_what\\_schools.pdf](https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/documents_what_schools.pdf), (accessed September 23, 2020), p. 18. See also GCPEA, “What Ministries Can Do to Protect Education From Attack and Schools From Military Use,” (New York: GCPEA, December 2015, [http://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/documents\\_what\\_ministries.pdf](http://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/documents_what_ministries.pdf)).

<sup>37</sup> Save the Children, “Education in Emergencies Toolkit: Foundation 2 Physical Protection-Learning Space Safety Management,” (London: Save the Children, December 2017), [https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/17088/pdf/sc\\_eie-toolkit\\_version2\\_2017-12-18-18-pdf.pdf](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/17088/pdf/sc_eie-toolkit_version2_2017-12-18-18-pdf.pdf) (accesses July 17, 2020), p. 78.

<sup>38</sup> GCPEA, “What Ministries Can Do to Protect Education From Attack and Schools From Military Use,” [http://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/documents\\_what\\_ministries.pdf](http://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/documents_what_ministries.pdf), p. 14.

<sup>39</sup> UNRWA, Educate a Child Safety & Security, Training Module 6 – Physical Safety & Security of Schools/Installations, p. 7.

attacks on schools (for example, fire may be a threat from “cooking or smoking” and from “gunfire or an explosion”),<sup>40</sup> the Safety and Security Division’s discussion of hardening of the school building is particularly relevant for consideration in preparing security plans. SSD describes hardening as “the process of making a building more resilient to physical threat, such as explosions, armed conflict, or civil unrest.”<sup>41</sup> In order to harden a school, the SSD identifies the following as useful:

- Windows: blast film, heavy curtains, bars
- Doors: bolts, heavy materials
- Stand-off: Distance between road and the school
- Walls, fences and even plants can help with hardening
- Sandbags and reinforced materials for the building<sup>42</sup>

#### Link schools with national and sub-national initiatives

While the assessment of a school’s risk will typically be conducted at the local level, there is an important role to be played by all levels of government. National and subnational governments have an overarching obligation to ensure that schools are safe and to create an enabling legal and policy environment so that risk assessments and risk monitoring can be a regular part of school safety management. Communities and local education personnel need government support, including financial and human resources to develop the capacities to identify and assess risks.

National and sub-national governments have a particularly important role to play in ensuring that there is a flow of security-related information to and from the local level and that this information can routinely inform protective responses to attacks on education. The government should ensure that risk-related information identified at the local level during the risk assessment influences protective responses and response planning, not only at the local level, but also with security and educational authorities at higher levels of government. What is more, national, and regional security institutions should ensure that a broader conflict analysis (country- or region-wide or cross-border in nature) is conducted and that those analyses are shared with key actors at the local level, including with local and regional education bodies. For example, the Asia Pacific Coalition for School Safety (APCSS) recommended in November 2016 that: “a) national/sub-national/school-level staff have the capacity to assess hazards and risks, b) there is guidance available to all levels to ensure consistent understanding and availability of information, and c) there is a system in place to ensure this information is transferred from the sub-national level to national level for analysis and planning...”<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 13. See also discussion of safe room or space as “a hardened location within a school or installation where staff and students can shelter in an incident,” Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>43</sup> Asia Pacific Coalition for School Safety, “Policy Brief: Advancing Comprehensive School Safety for Asia and the Pacific,” November 2016, <https://www.rccr-resilience-southeastasia.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/APCSS-Policy-brief-advancing-CSS-in-Asia-Pacific.pdf> (accessed November 24, 2020), p. 6.

# REDUCE RISKS RELATED TO ATTACKS ON EDUCATION

Risk assessments are important because they help governments, communities, teachers, parents, and students better understand the types of threats and hazards they face, as well as the resources and capacities already available to help them respond to risks. These findings can help school communities and governments to design risk reduction and response measures to better protect education from attack. This paper does not provide a comprehensive list of such measures. The following section introduces some actions to improve schools' abilities to address identified risks. School-related contextual factors, along with the findings of the risk assessment, should guide the prioritization of protective responses.

## School Safety Committees

Every school should have a body with specific responsibility for overseeing the school's safety preparations and responses. GCPEA has previously called for "the establishment of School Safety Committees, comprised of principals, teachers, parents, and community leaders that reflect the diversity of the community."<sup>44</sup> These bodies have different names (School Security Committee, School-based Safety Committee, School Disaster Management Committee, Safe Schools Team, etc.), but they should have explicit responsibility for developing and implementing comprehensive school-based safety plans and procedures. As Save the Children notes in its guidance on the SZOP:

To improve the capacity of the school to respond to attacks, and reduce risks linked to such attacks, School Disaster Management Committees (SDMC) have been established in schools [as part of the project]. These committees are responsible for managing the school's response plan when there is an emergency, including attacks on education.<sup>45</sup>

The CSS Framework (in Pillar 2 - School Safety and Educational Continuity Management) calls for "representative, inclusive, and participatory school safety management practices at local school community level, engaging and accountable to students, staff, parents, caregivers, and local community members." It also calls for the implementation of "school practices for peacebuilding and social cohesion - integrating strategies to protect education in armed conflict (as outlined in the Safe Schools Declaration)."<sup>46</sup> The security committee's responsibilities should include conducting regular risk assessments and risk mapping or ensuring that such assessments are carried out by others, using the findings of such assessments to develop appropriate security protocols, emergency response plans, and ensuring that all voices are heard and the needs of all are taken into consideration in developing protection plans.

School Safety Committees should have responsibility for conducting future annual risk and capacity assessments and may be tasked with ensuring that protective measures and responses are developed to reduce the risks identified in the assessment process. For example, Save the Children identifies the "development of an Emergency Response Plan and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for emergencies in schools," and the updating of "the Emergency Response Plan, School Improvement Plans, Code of Conduct, and referral pathways" as responsibilities of a "typical safe schools team."<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> GCPEA, "What Schools Can Do to Protect Education from Attack and Military Use," [http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what\\_schools.pdf](http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what_schools.pdf), pp. 38-39.

<sup>45</sup> Save the Children, "Project Guidance: Schools as Zones of Peace," [https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/12201/pdf/szop\\_guidance\\_version\\_1.pdf](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/12201/pdf/szop_guidance_version_1.pdf), p. 8.

<sup>46</sup> GADRRRES, "Comprehensive School Safety Framework 2022-2030," September 2022, <https://gadrrres.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/CSSF-2022-2030-EN.pdf>, (accessed November 15, 2022), p. 10.

<sup>47</sup> Save the Children, "Safe Schools Common Approach, Action Pack 2: Safe Schools Management," <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/SAFE-SCHOOLS-MANAGEMENT.pdf>, p.7. See also other responsibilities of a safe school team, as well as the criteria for its composition, *ibid.*, pp. 7-8.



School Safety Committees should ideally be “built upon existing school-based management committees to strengthen local systems for protecting children in and around school.”<sup>48</sup> This is particularly helpful in contexts where a range of obstacles at the school, district, and national levels inhibit meaningful participation in such processes, particularly in conflict areas where schools are poorly resourced and where staff and parents may have serious constraints to participating. If there is low capacity for a school-based committee, an existing community safety or security committee could oversee security and safety of schools. Similarly, establishing community focal points with local or international organizations working on the issue could support the transfer of information to facilitate responses.

See activities 1-3 in [Save the Children’s Safe Schools technical guidance on school management](#) for practical tips on the establishment of a School Safety Team.

### *Country-specific Experiences:*

#### **Afghanistan**

The “Afghan CSSSF” report called for a school safety committee to be put in place in each school (whether by adding security and safety responsibilities to an already existing structure such as the School Shura or creating a new body). Among other things, the School Safety Committee would have responsibility for “generating, implementing and monitoring School Safety Plans.”<sup>49</sup>

#### **Nigeria**

Nigeria’s National Policy on Safety, Security, and Violence-Free Schools states that “all schools should set up school safety and security committees.... Individual schools should also appoint school safety focal point teachers and school safety and security prefects to anchor the operation of safety-related actions at the school level...”<sup>50</sup> The roles of committees with safety and security responsibilities, should include “creating and strengthening safety awareness into school orientation...”<sup>51</sup>

#### **Gaza Strip, Palestine**

As part of a crisis-disaster risk reduction (c-DRR) program in the Gaza Strip, Palestine, UNESCO’s team helped establish school-based safety committees, which were active in identifying safety priorities, coordinating safety activities in the schools, and taking steps to ensure that all activities were responsive to the safety needs identified by the community. The school-based safety committees were also instrumental in identifying community capacities and resources, and in preparing school-based contingency plans.<sup>52</sup>

### **School-based Safety Plans**

Another important component of a school’s security preparations is the development of a comprehensive safety plan, as well as contingency plans, and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for responding to an emergency.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>48</sup> <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/SAFE-SCHOOLS-MANAGEMENT.pdf>, p.8.

<sup>49</sup> Bernard, “Comprehensive Safe and Secure Schools Framework,” p. 24.

<sup>50</sup> National Policy on Safety, Security, and Violence-Free Schools,” <https://education.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/National-Policy-on-SSVFSN.pdf>, sections 11.4.a and c, p. 16.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, section f.

<sup>52</sup> This section is drawn from Bilal Al Hamaydah, Jo Kelcey, and Ferran J. Lloveras, “Palestine: Lessons from UNESCO’s crisis-disaster risk reduction programme in Gaza,” (Paris: UNESCO, 2015), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000234791/PDF/234791eng.pdf.multi> (accessed May 28, 2020), p. 16. This material was previously discussed in GCPEA, “Study of Field-based Programmatic Measures to Protect Education from Attack,” (New York: GCPEA, December 2011), [https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/documents\\_study\\_on\\_field-based\\_programmatic\\_measures\\_to\\_protect\\_education\\_from\\_attack\\_o.pdf](https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/documents_study_on_field-based_programmatic_measures_to_protect_education_from_attack_o.pdf), p.12.

<sup>53</sup> See Save the Children, Education in Emergencies Toolkit, : Foundation 2 Physical Protection-Learning Space Safety Management, [https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/17088/pdf/sc\\_eie-toolkit\\_version2\\_2017-12-18-pdf.pdf](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/17088/pdf/sc_eie-toolkit_version2_2017-12-18-pdf.pdf), p. 75.

In fact, in its paper entitled *What Schools Can Do to Protect Education from Attack and Military Use*, GCPEA suggested that:

school-based actors should focus on implementing ... comprehensive school-based safety and security plans, adapting the different components of the plan to their particular context. These comprehensive plans represent a coordinated approach to integrating the other measures [other measures are unarmed physical protection, armed physical protection, negotiations as a strategy to protect education, early warning/alert systems, alternative delivery of education and psycho-social support] into a cohesive strategy for protecting education in situations of armed conflict.<sup>54</sup>

The School Safety Committee should oversee the development of the school's safety plan, based on risks identified in the risk assessment.<sup>55</sup> The vulnerabilities and gaps between needed and existing capacities that were identified by the risk assessment provide a clear indication of what the priority components of the safety plan should be. For example, unsafe school structures or gaps in terms of needed security equipment are often identified in the risk assessment process, indicating that these concerns should be addressed as part of the development of protective responses. For example, Save's SZOP describes school disaster management plans as "plans that each school has in order to reduce the risks within the school related to known hazards. This plan must take into account different risks and needs for boys, girls, men and women (be gender sensitive). This plan would normally state what to do, who will do it, by when and any costs that would be incurred."<sup>56</sup> GCPEA has underscored that "[Comprehensive School-based Safety and Security Plans] incorporate an array of measures, including protection, mitigation, and response actions."<sup>57</sup> It has identified a range of components that could be included in a comprehensive school-based safety and security plan, including school safety committees, coordination mechanisms, comprehensive planning processes, assessments, protection measures, response plans (such as evacuation, delivery of first aid, and the repair and rebuilding of schools)...<sup>58</sup>

See activity 7 in [Save the Children's Safe Schools technical guidance on school management](#) for practical tips on the development of a school safety plan.

### *Country-specific Experiences:*

#### **Afghanistan**

The "Afghan CSSSF report" recommends that schools develop safety plans, stating that "a school's Safety Response Plan is key to its ability to safeguard its own integrity and protect the lives and well-being of students and their teachers.... Through annual review and renewal, the School Safety Response Plans should serve as a critical benchmarking and accountability tool to indicate where the gaps in risk reduction readiness are, and the resources that will be brought to bear to both address them and track progress toward meeting those targets."<sup>59</sup> The report also recommended that students: "contribute ideas to the School Safety Plan on the basis of the information they are gathering, help to ensure the Plan prioritizes the risks accurately, suggest possible prevention and response approaches, and identify links to community resources."<sup>60</sup> The CSSSF was finalized and its operationalization was

---

<sup>54</sup> GCPEA, "What Schools Can Do to Protect Education from Attack and Military Use," [http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what\\_schools.pdf](http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what_schools.pdf), p. 11.

<sup>55</sup> For additional information, see GCPEA, "What Schools Can Do to Protect Education from Attack and Military Use," [http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what\\_schools.pdf](http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what_schools.pdf), pp. 38-39.

<sup>56</sup> Save the Children, *Project Guidance: Schools as Zones of Peace*, [https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/12201/pdf/szop\\_guidance\\_version\\_1.pdf](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/12201/pdf/szop_guidance_version_1.pdf), p. 8. See also Save the Children, *Education in Emergencies Toolkit: Foundation 2 Physical Protection-Learning Space Safety Management*, [https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/17088/pdf/sc\\_eie-toolkit\\_version2\\_2017-12-18-pdf.pdf](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/17088/pdf/sc_eie-toolkit_version2_2017-12-18-pdf.pdf), p. 75.

<sup>57</sup> GCPEA, "What Schools Can Do to Protect Education from Attack and Military Use," [http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what\\_schools.pdf](http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what_schools.pdf), p. 36.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>59</sup> Bernard, *Comprehensive Safe and Secure Schools*, p.37.

<sup>60</sup> Bernard, *Comprehensive Safe and Secure Schools Framework*, p. 32.

being explored with humanitarian and development partners, however the Ministry of Education had not yet approved it at the time of writing.<sup>61</sup>

## Ukraine

In response to the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine in March 2014, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) developed the Safe Schools Programme, which focused on improving school safety and security.<sup>62</sup> In July and August 2015, “ICRC conducted a risk assessment of seventy-seven schools and kindergartens in the government-controlled areas of Luhansk and Donetsk provinces, including nine schools which were no longer operational.”<sup>63</sup> As a result of the risk assessments, ICRC “classified thirty-four [of the sixty-eight operational schools] as high-risk due to their location in contact-line areas, vulnerability to shelling, history of direct hits and/or military presence in their vicinities. Twenty schools were considered medium-risk...”<sup>64</sup> Based on these risk assessments, ICRC, together with parents, children, and the schools, developed a response plan to address identified safety concerns. Among the activities, ICRC implemented: “1) school rehabilitation; 2) mine risk education and risk awareness; 3) evacuation drills; 4) provision of assistance for emergency preparedness; 5) first-aid trainings; and 6) psychosocial assessments and support for teachers.”<sup>65</sup> Because of the risk of exposure to shelling and shooting, children and teachers were trained how to respond to such incidents, both while at school and on the way to or from school. In addition, the ICRC revised school evacuation drills and developed recommendations to improve the safety of evacuation routes.<sup>66</sup>

## Emergency Preparedness Training for Teachers, Students, and Others

Safety and security training is an essential component of any school’s preparedness. Students, teacher, and other education personnel, as well as parents and community leaders, need to understand the contents of the safety plans and protocols and how to use them in the event of an emergency. In its briefing paper, *What Schools Can Do to Protect Education from Attack and Military Use*, GCPEA stated: “Education personnel, community members, parents, and students should be trained to implement all phases of the school-based safety and security plan, and training should be done at regular intervals to ensure there are a sufficient number of persons with the capacity to implement the components of the plan.”<sup>67</sup>

Emergency preparedness training should also incorporate regular school drills related to identified risks, as well as a review and updating of security protocols to reflect lessons learned from such drills. Students and teachers should understand what types of events trigger an emergency response and what steps they should take to respond. For example, GCPEA has stated that:

The authorities should provide teachers and other educational personnel with appropriate emergency preparedness training, including by conducting regular school drills and review of security protocols, to ensure that students and staff know what steps to take if their school is attacked and enhance their ability to implement relevant security protocols. This training should

<sup>61</sup> Information received from UN and NGO respondents in March 2022. See also: UNICEF, *Afghanistan: Country Office Annual Report 2021*, p. 8.

<sup>62</sup> Geoff Loane and Ricardo Fal-Dutra Santos, “Strengthening resilience: The ICRC’s community-based approach to ensuring the protection of education, *International Review of the Red Cross*, (Geneva: ICRC, 2017), [https://international-review.icrc.org/sites/default/files/irrc\\_99\\_905\\_17.pdf](https://international-review.icrc.org/sites/default/files/irrc_99_905_17.pdf) (accessed July 14, 2021), p. 813. See also ICRC, “ICRC Support to Schools and Kindergartens - Eastern Ukraine, <https://icrc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=5e138b65ad994674a68f6a5f8dd1dce3>.

<sup>63</sup> Loane and Fal-Dutra Santos, “Strengthening resilience, *International Review of the Red Cross*, [https://international-review.icrc.org/sites/default/files/irrc\\_99\\_905\\_17.pdf](https://international-review.icrc.org/sites/default/files/irrc_99_905_17.pdf), p. 814.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 815.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 816.

<sup>67</sup> GCPEA, “*What Schools Can Do to Protect Education from Attack and Military Use*,”

[http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what\\_schools.pdf](http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what_schools.pdf), p. 39. See also Save the Children, *Education in Emergencies Toolkit: Foundation 5 School Leadership and Management*, December 2017, [https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/17088/pdf/sc\\_eie-toolkit\\_version2\\_2017-12-18-pdf.pdf](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/17088/pdf/sc_eie-toolkit_version2_2017-12-18-pdf.pdf) (accesses July 17, 2020), p. 164.

be updated on a regular basis, taking into account recent developments in the conflict and the context of attacks on education.<sup>68</sup>

Another key activity for each school’s emergency preparedness is the creation of an education and protection continuity plan. Such a plan will help a school community maintain the education and protection of children in the event of an attack on education. See activities 10-12 in Save the Children’s Safe Schools technical guidance for practical tips on emergency preparedness in schools.

## Country-specific Experiences:

### Afghanistan

The “Afghan CSSSF report” recommends that the provincial education directorate, as well as the security shura and school safety committees:

- “Design and schedule training and follow-up practice sessions for teachers in emergency response e.g., protocols for handling intruders; conflict management and dispute resolution; procedures for interacting with the military and armed groups; understanding their own and students’ human rights.”<sup>69</sup>

### Palestine

Training and related support was a key component of UNESCO’s c-DRR program in Gaza. The training, which was informed by field visits to affected schools, covered a range of topics, including on first aid, good safety practices, school evacuation and preventing and putting out fires, and INEE’s Minimum Standards, with a view toward developing school-based contingency plans.”<sup>70</sup> Of particular interest, UNESCO reported that, as a result of the impact of the trainings, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) gave the decision on whether to evacuate a school to “the head teachers based on their assessment of the risks,” thereby reducing delays in responding to security threats.

Also in Palestine, Save the Children conducted an assessment of damages to kindergartens in Gaza following an escalation of hostilities in May 2021. Save the Children and UN Development Program (UNDP) developed an assessment tool adapted from INEE’s toolkit to evaluate damages to 80 kindergartens and whether they were safe to reopen. Among the indicators evaluated was a question on whether the staff or children were aware of unexploded ordnance near the kindergarten.<sup>71</sup> The assessment also looked at whether or not there was a need to respond to children’s and teachers’ needs for psychosocial support following the violent attacks.

## Early Warning Systems and Emergency Communications

Early warning systems and emergency communications plans and protocols are essential components of any school’s emergency preparedness. To move toward prevention of attacks on schools and greater and more effective mitigation of harm from such attacks, it is important that emergency information can be communicated quickly and effectively to those who need it most: those at risk from and those responsible for responding to the emergency. As noted above, the CSSF stresses that the education sector staff at all levels (national/sub-national, and school-level) have the guidance and the capacity to assess hazards and risks. What is more, the Framework stresses the importance that information on risks, hazards, and vulnerability is shared, calling not only for a

<sup>68</sup> GCPEA, “I Will Never Go Back to School: The Impact of Attacks on Education for Nigerian Women and Girls,” (New York: GCPEA, October 2018), [http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/attacks\\_on\\_nigerian\\_women\\_and\\_girls.pdf](http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/attacks_on_nigerian_women_and_girls.pdf), p. 78.

<sup>69</sup> Bernard, Comprehensive Safe and Secure Schools Framework, p. 56.

<sup>70</sup> Al Hamaydah, Kelcey, and Lloveras, “Palestine: Lessons from UNESCO’s crisis-disaster risk reduction programme in Gaza, UNESCO,” <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000234791/PDF/234791eng.pdf.multi>, p. 10. See also discussion of discussion at Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>71</sup> Samar Al Moghany, “Assessment of Damages to Kindergartens in Gaza: Post-Escalation Assessment,” Save the Children, July 2021, [https://unicef-my.sharepoint.com/:w/g/personal/lkhoury\\_unicef\\_org/EXNVqITVEqRMlePHUpyWEwMBlyDjYca1-UoASijUGfLx7A?rttime=WR7z3sj72Ug](https://unicef-my.sharepoint.com/:w/g/personal/lkhoury_unicef_org/EXNVqITVEqRMlePHUpyWEwMBlyDjYca1-UoASijUGfLx7A?rttime=WR7z3sj72Ug), p. 6

“hazard mapping and risk analysis framework to exist within the Ministry of Education, but that the “education sector has access to hazard and vulnerability information at sub-national and school levels.”<sup>72</sup> In a discussion paper on gender and early warning, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, also noted that: “Early warning systems can provide a wide array of actors with the necessary information and strategies to be proactive and not reactive to conflict, to be prepared for conflict, and to invite early action for the prevention of conflict.”<sup>73</sup>

GCPEA has also underscored the importance of early warning systems: Where appropriate, promote early warning systems, including SMS alert systems or systems utilizing other technology, and establish coordination mechanisms between school leaders and local and national Ministries to ensure information is transmitted in a timely manner and that there is rapid response system in place (e.g., by local security forces).<sup>74</sup>

Improved communications systems are essential, especially in remote areas, if school administrators and teachers are to be able to alert students and take appropriate action when a threat is imminent. Such systems should include direct lines to the nearest security forces and police, with a specific, pre-designated contact point within these units. Communication should go two-ways. Schools should be able to contact security agencies, but the warning system should also ensure that local security agencies or community leaders contact schools as dangers approach, so that school administrators can make timely plans.

Among other steps, the Global Education Cluster has advocated for: “the establishment and function of a multi-hazard early warning system accessible by sub-national education authorities and schools, with input from disaster management agencies.”<sup>75</sup> Similarly, at the sub-national level, it calls for “the establishment and functioning of provincial early warning mechanisms,” and “functional linkage between provincial early warning mechanisms and the national early warning system,” as well as “functional linkages and communications between sub-national early warning mechanisms and schools/communities.”<sup>76</sup> Finally, at the school and community level, the GEC calls on “the establishment of a school-wide early warning mechanism” and steps to “ensure everyone in school and community knows how to respond to early warning signals.”<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> GADRRRES, CSS Targets and Indicators and Concept Note for Phase Two, 2016, gadrrres\_css\_targets\_and\_indicators\_and\_phase\_2\_cn\_2015\_04.pdf (accessed December 18, 2020), 13.

<sup>73</sup> OSCE, Gender and Early Warning Systems, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/a/40269.pdf>, p. 6 and fn. 18.

<sup>74</sup> GCPEA, “What Schools Can Do to Protect Education from Attack and Military Use,” p. 11.

<sup>75</sup> Global Education Cluster, Disaster Risk Reduction in Emergencies: A Guidance Note for Education Clusters and Sector Coordination Groups, October 1, 2012, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/disaster-risk-reduction-education-emergencies-guidance-note-education-clusters-and>, p. 6.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

## CONCLUSION

GCPEA is convinced that risk assessments lead to better risk preparedness, which in turn leads to better responses (prevention and mitigation of harm). Accurate and regularly updated information about the security environment surrounding schools is critical to a better understanding of the phenomenon of attacks on education, but it is even more important that a concerted effort is made to ensure that the findings of risk assessments inform efforts to develop effective protection measures. The goal is to prevent attacks on education from occurring whenever possible and to develop the most robust evidence-based protection and mitigation strategies when prevention is not successful.

To ensure that government decisions on school safety, as well as the deployment of scarce resources for school safety, are evidence-based and informed by a clear understanding of the specific risks affecting schools, GCPEA urges national governments in countries affected by insecurity and at risk of attacks on schools to ensure the regular risk assessment of all schools, including by ensuring that schools have the resources and skills necessary to carry out risk assessments and risk mapping themselves. GCPEA also calls on governments to ensure that national and subnational government entities, as well as the schools, have the necessary resources and capacities to respond effectively to the risks that are identified through the assessments, including by improving physical protection of school buildings and routes to school, exploring alternative school sites and schedules, and other means of ensuring that the commitments in the Safe School Declaration become a reality. Furthermore, the monitoring of hazards and changes in conflict-related risk should be linked to early warning and emergency communications systems, and schools and subnational education ministries should have access to security and other protection forces who are mandated to respond when a school is at risk of being attacked or under attack.





Global Coalition to **Protect**  
**Education from Attack**

# IDENTIFY & REDUCE RISKS RELATED TO ATTACKS ON EDUCATION

---

A Guidance Note to Strengthen Implementation  
of the Safe Schools Declaration

**Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack**  
Secretariat  
350 5th Avenue, 34th Floor, New York, New York 10118-3299  
Phone: 1.212.377.9446 · Email: [GCPEA@protectingeducation.org](mailto:GCPEA@protectingeducation.org)

[www.protectingeducation.org](http://www.protectingeducation.org)