

PROTECT

OUR EDUCATION

Making Schools in Conflict Safer for Girls



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When we arrived in the camp, my friends and I were very happy to go to school every day. But we started being afraid to go because some armed people used to come and attack our school and take some girls away. Now we are not regularly in school.

SARATA, 14, INTERNALLY DISPLACED GIRL IN BURKINA FASO¹

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KEY MESSAGES

- In conflict settings around the world, attacks on education and military use of schools are profoundly undermining children’s right to education. Children are often denied their right to education for several years and live with life-long trauma. Generations of young people are being failed.
- Between 2015 and 2019, 22,000 students, teachers, and education personnel were deliberately targeted and harmed. **In 21 countries, girls and women were directly targeted in attacks on education because of their gender.**² Girls’ education may be a specific target, and girls and women are disproportionately affected by sexual violence in and around schools.
- For adolescent girls in particular, the impacts of attacks on education can be devastating and compound the barriers they already face in accessing education. Attacks often exacerbate pre-existing gender discrimination and harmful practices such as child marriage and early pregnancy, which have lifelong consequences. **Girls living in conflict and crisis affected contexts are nearly 90 percent more likely to be out of secondary school** than their counterparts in countries not affected by conflict.³

1 Quote from Plan International. 2020. Adolescent Girls in Crisis: Voices from the Sahel

2 GCPEA. 2020. Education Under Attack 2020

3 UNESCO. 2015. Humanitarian aid for education: why it matters and why more is needed

THE SAFE SCHOOLS DECLARATION

The [Safe Schools Declaration](#) (SSD) is an inter-governmental political commitment by states to better protect schools and universities, their students, and staff during armed conflict. While an increasing number of states have endorsed the SSD, more needs to be done. It is critical that all governments endorse and fully implement the SSD and allocate adequate resources to keeping schools safe. **It is also essential that implementation of the SSD at national and local levels applies a gender responsive approach.**

PLAN INTERNATIONAL'S WORK TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SAFE SCHOOLS DECLARATION

Since 2016, Plan International has been supporting the promotion of the Safe Schools Declaration across West and Central Africa.⁴ With the widespread endorsement by countries in the region over the last five years, our focus has shifted to supporting implementation of the SSD guidelines at national level.⁵ Under our regional project, supported by the Norwegian Government, Plan International is supporting the establishment and strengthening of Safe Schools Declaration Working Groups and their collaboration with the Education Clusters. We are also working at regional and global levels to promote and support the effective implementation of the Safe School Declaration, including through our roles networks and alliances including [Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack](#) (GCPEA); [Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict](#) (CAAC); the CAAC steering group at the AU level; and the [Joining Forces alliance](#).

PLAN INTERNATIONAL'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Plan International is calling for governments and other actors to apply a **gender responsive approach to implementing the Safe Schools Declaration, which explicitly acknowledges and addresses the experiences and needs of girls and women** who are at risk of or who have experienced attacks.

This includes:

- Ensuring that girls and women are able to participate in planning and implementing the Safe Schools Declaration at all levels.
- Targeted efforts to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence in the context of attacks on education, including forced and child marriages, and holding perpetrators accountable.
- Providing non-discriminatory assistance to all survivors of attacks on education, which considers the distinct needs and experiences based on gender and other potential vulnerabilities.
- Targeted reintegration interventions for girls and women who have experienced sexual violence, abductions, or recruitment and use by armed forces and armed groups
- Ensuring that monitoring and reporting of attacks on education includes incidents of sexual violence and specific threats to female students and teachers. Data collected should be fully disaggregated.
- Investing in and ensure that contextual and gender responsive alternative and distance learning programs are made available to all students out of school due to armed conflict.

4 Countries covered: Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, CAR, Guinea, Senegal

5 Two of the countries covered through this project have not yet endorsed the SSD, namely Guinea and Senegal. We are continuing to advocate for SSD endorsement in these countries.