



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**EDUCATION
UNDER ATTACK
2022**



Global Coalition to **Protect Education from Attack**

This study is published by the **Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA)**, which was formed in 2010 by organizations working in the fields of education in emergencies and conflict-affected contexts, higher education, protection, and international human rights and humanitarian law that were concerned about ongoing attacks on educational institutions, their students, and staff in countries affected by conflict and insecurity.

GCPEA is a coalition of organizations that includes: Save the Children (Chair), Amnesty International, the Education Above All Foundation (EAA), Human Rights Watch, the Institute of International Education (IIE), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Plan International, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). GCPEA is a project of the Tides Center, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization.

Education under Attack 2022 is the result of independent research conducted by GCPEA. It is independent of the individual member organizations of the Steering Committee of GCPEA and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Steering Committee member organizations.

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EDUCATION UNDER ATTACK 2022

Attacks on education and military use of schools and universities in profiled countries, 2020-2021

Very heavily affected

Reports documented 400 or more incidents of attacks on education or military use of educational facilities or 400 or more students and education personnel harmed by attacks on education

Heavily affected

Reports documented 200-399 incidents of attacks on education or military use of educational facilities or 200-399 students and education personnel harmed by attacks on education

Affected

Reports documented 10-199 incidents of attacks on education or military use of educational facilities or 10-199 students and education personnel harmed by attacks on education



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A classroom in Gaza, Palestine sustained damages due to explosive weapons during fighting in May 2021. Over 290 schools were damaged by attacks during a 10-day escalation of hostilities between Israeli armed forces and Palestinian armed groups.

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KEY FINDINGS

- 1. Attacks on education and military use of schools increased by one-third in 2020 compared to 2019, and remained at the same rate in 2021.** Meanwhile, the number of people harmed in attacks and military use declined by half in 2020, compared to 2019, then doubled in 2021, returning to near pre-pandemic rates. In some countries, during initial public-health lockdowns in early 2020, GCPEA noted a reduction in attacks on education followed by a spike in attacks on schools or school teachers and students when educational facilities reopened in late 2020 or early 2021. **Armed forces and non-state armed groups also took advantage of vacant schools, using them for military purposes during the pandemic in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Syria, and Sudan,** amongst others.

One explanation for the decline in the number of people harmed in 2020 may be that fewer students or staff were present in schools or universities when attacks occurred. Alternatively, with students and teachers out of schools due to the pandemic, armed groups and armed forces opposed to education no longer needed to violently prevent their attendance. As students and educators resumed in-person learning in 2021, the number of people harmed was similar to in years prior to the pandemic.

- 2. In 2020 and 2021, the highest incidences of attacks on education schools were in Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Myanmar, and Palestine.** In each country, hundreds of school buildings were threatened, bombed, burned, or looted, among other violent attacks.

During the same period, **India, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Turkey** had high reported numbers of people harmed as a result of attacks on education. In Nigeria, high numbers of students, including girls, were abducted, while the other countries saw hundreds or thousands of educators or students arrested for protesting education policy.

- 3. Two situations are profiled for the first time in the 2022 report: the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in Azerbaijan and an insurgency affecting the northern Cabo Delgado province of Mozambique.** In Azerbaijan, over 130 schools were reportedly damaged or destroyed by heavy fighting and military use in 2020. In Mozambique, over 110 classrooms were reportedly destroyed due to armed attack.

- 4. Attacks rose in Burkina Faso, Colombia, Ethiopia, Mali, Myanmar, and Nigeria during this reporting period, compared to 2018-2019.** In Myanmar, attacks on schools and military use skyrocketed after a military coup in February 2021. In Colombia, attacks on schools and educators appeared to worsen during the pandemic, as fighting between armed groups and government forces caused an increase in violence in 2020. Hostilities erupted in northern Ethiopia in late 2020, resulting in a significant uptick in attacks on education. In Nigeria and Burkina Faso, the number of students or educators abducted by armed groups increased.

- 5. In Ukraine, South Sudan, Syria, and Yemen, among other countries, attacks on education declined in 2020 and 2021, as compared to 2018 and 2019.** These declines were related to conflict de-escalation.

- 6. Globally, incidents of military use of schools and universities more than doubled in 2020 and 2021, as compared to 2018 and 2019, rising to over 570 incidents.** Driving this increase was a spike in the military use of education facilities in **Myanmar**, where nearly 40 percent of all such cases occurred in the last two years. GCPEA also observed increases in cases of military use in **CAR, DRC, Ethiopia, and Iraq.**

- 7. Girls and women were reportedly targeted because of their gender in attacks on education in at least 11 countries.** In certain contexts, such as **Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Pakistan**, armed groups targeted female students and teachers or their education facilities in efforts to obstruct their access to education. In addition, armed forces, state security forces, and non-state armed groups perpetrated conflict-related sexual violence against women and girls at, or on the way to or from, schools or universities.

- 8. Explosive weapons were used in around one-fifth of all reported attacks on education during the reporting period.** Such attacks were either targeted or collateral and involved air-launched or ground-launched explosives, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), landmines, and unexploded remnants of war. These attacks often caused damage or destruction to educational infrastructure and killed or injured hundreds of students and educators. In 2020 and 2021, these attacks were most frequently reported in **Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Myanmar, Palestine, Syria, and Yemen.** For example, attacks on schools involving explosive weapons killed or injured at least 185 students and educators in Afghanistan, nearly all of them girls, in the first half of 2021 alone.

- 9. Between the publication of Education under Attack 2020 and February 2022, nine new countries endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, with a total of 113 countries now committing to protect education in situations of armed conflict.** The United Nations (UN) observed the first and second International Day to Protect Education from Attack on September 9, 2020, and 2021. Global leaders, including the Secretary-General of the UN, highlighted the importance of the Declaration. The UN Security Council adopted a Presidential Statement on Attacks on Schools in September 2020 and a resolution on attacks on education in October 2021 with explicit mention of the Safe Schools Declaration.



Police use teargas and water cannons to disperse protesting teachers, in Agartala city, Tripura state, India, on January 27, 2021. The teachers protested the elimination of teaching appointments across the state and irregularities in hiring.

© Times of India/PTI Photo

Education came under violent attack frequently over the last two years, even as the Covid-19 pandemic closed schools and universities around the world. Attacks on education and military use increased globally during this period, as compared to the previous two years.

In 2020 and 2021, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) identified over 5,000 reported attacks on education and cases of military use of schools and universities. Over 9,000 students and educators were abducted, arbitrarily arrested, injured, or killed in these events. By comparison, in 2018 and 2019, GCPEA collected over 4,300 reported incidents of attacks on education and military use that harmed approximately 9,400 students and educators.

Two weeks in May 2021 underscore the unrelenting pace and far-reaching effects of these violent attacks. First, on May 8, 2021, an attack on a girls' school in Kabul, Afghanistan, killed or injured over 320 people, the majority of whom were reportedly schoolgirls.¹ Just a day after the funeral for victims of the Kabul attack,² news emerged of escalating hostilities in Palestine. Between May 10 and 21, 2021, a staggering 290 education facilities were damaged or destroyed there.³ Meanwhile, on May 17, 2021, an armed group reportedly abducted 11 teachers and staff from a vocational training center in the North-West region of Cameroon;⁴ on that same day, two schools were bombed in Myanmar, according to media reports,⁵ and, two days later, in Colombia, security forces allegedly fired live ammunition at protesters in a school.⁶ In that same week, an armed group raided a primary school in Mali and stole teachers' personal effects.⁷ Soon after, on May 20, 2021, bombs struck a school in Yemen, killing four children.⁸

These events in May 2021 were not exceptional. **On average, six attacks on education or cases of military use of schools were recorded daily over the past two years.**

The *Education under Attack 2022* report profiles the 28 conflict-affected countries most affected by attacks on education in 2020 and 2021. While analyses reveal a global increase in attacks on education, as the following pages highlight, complex dynamics occurred between and within countries, with rates of attacks rising in some areas alongside declines elsewhere. The Global Overview and country profiles provide background on the contextual factors driving these attacks, along with annual trends and incident reporting.

Trends in the five categories of attacks on education and military use of schools and universities in 2020-2021

GCPEA tracks five categories of attacks on education and military use of educational facilities. The following are global trends for the 2020-2021 reporting period for each of these categories.

Attacks on Schools

Attacks on schools were the most common form of attacks during the reporting period, making up nearly two-thirds of all reported incidents of attacks on education and military use collected by GCPEA. In 2020 and 2021, GCPEA collected reports of over 3,000 attacks on schools which occurred in 27 of the 28 profiled countries.

During the reporting period, **DRC, Mali,** and **Palestine** were the countries most affected by attacks on schools, each experiencing over 400 attacks in 2020 and 2021. Mali experienced hundreds of threats of violence that led over 1,000 schools to close.⁹ In DRC, hundreds of schools were damaged or destroyed during conflict. For example, the UN reported that in 2020, over 340 schools in Tanganyika province had been destroyed due to armed conflict.¹⁰ In Palestine, attacks damaged over 190 education facilities in Gaza during 11 days of heavy conflict May 2021.¹¹ In one incident, an airstrike damaged 29 classrooms and the compound wall of two United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools in Gaza,¹² while over 50 schools in the West Bank received stop-work or demolition orders, among other types of attacks.¹³

Other countries where schools were heavily affected by attacks included **Afghanistan, Azerbaijan,** and **Myanmar.**

“I am afraid that my school will be hit again”

In Syria, at least 70 reported attacks on schools and universities involving explosive weapons occurred in 2020 and 2021, many of which produced damage or destruction. Sometimes schools, or students and teachers, were repeatedly affected. Rose, a 13-year-old student, went to two different schools that were attacked during the conflict: “I used to go to a school at the southern end of my town, but it was destroyed during the ongoing conflict. I moved to another school that was in a basement, but it also was attacked and damaged and is no longer a place where we can learn. I have been displaced again, and now I go to a new school. I never told anyone I was afraid, but our teacher told us that it is OK to be afraid. Now I can tell you I am afraid that my school will be hit again.”¹⁴

Attacks on School Students, Teachers, and Other Education Personnel

In 2020 and 2021, GCPEA identified over 630 reported incidents of attacks on school students, teachers, and personnel across the 28 profiled countries. In these attacks, over 2,400 students, teachers or education personnel were reportedly injured, killed, abducted, or threatened, and around 2,300 were reportedly arrested or detained. These attacks were distinct from students or teachers injured or killed in attacks on schools and universities. In several countries, girls and women were specifically targeted due to their gender.



A survivor of the May 8, 2021, bombing of Sayed Al-Shuhada school in Kabul, Afghanistan, reads a book a week after the attack. At least 85 civilians were killed and over 240 were wounded, the majority of whom were reported to be schoolgirls ages 11 to 18.

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Nigeria had the highest number of people harmed, with over 1,000 students or educators reportedly abducted, injured, or killed, at least one-third of whom were women and girls. The rate of these attacks, many of which were perpetrated by unidentified armed groups, escalated from December 2020 onwards.¹⁵ **Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Palestine, Somalia,** and **Colombia**, also had high numbers of students and educators threatened, abducted, injured, or killed by targeted and indiscriminate attacks.

In **Pakistan**, more than 200 students and teachers were arrested or detained for participating in education-related protests and in **India** the number was over 1,500.

“Teachers are being persecuted every day, every hour.”

On October 5, 2021, Cameroonian teachers held a protest to call for better protections for educators working in conflict-affected areas of the country. In 2020 and 2021, teachers confronted violence from both Boko Haram in the Far North region and armed separatists in the Northwest and Southwest regions.

A spokesperson for the Cameroon Association of Teachers in Crisis told Voice of America:

*“Teachers are being persecuted every day, every hour. Some have been brutally killed. Others, brutally deprived of some parts of their bodies, forced out of their areas to become internally displaced persons. Some are now jobless. My heart bleeds for these teachers. I pray peace should return.”*¹⁶

Military Use of Schools and Universities

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified around 570 reported cases of military use of educational facilities globally. Cases of military use more than doubled as compared to 2018 and 2019, when GCPEA collected reports of around 240 incidents of military use globally.

Military use of schools and universities was reported in 24 countries in 2020 and 2021, 23 of which were profiled in this report.

Myanmar experienced the highest number of education facilities used for military purposes, with at least 200 reported incidents over the 2020-2021 reporting period. The UN reported that security forces used 176 schools and universities between February, when the coup occurred, and September 2021.¹⁷ These cases occurred in at least 13 states and regions, according to earlier UN reports.¹⁸



Troops stationed outside of a burning school in Yeghenut village (Kilbajar), Azerbaijan, in November 2020.

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“There are soldiers inside, and I’m afraid of the soldiers”

In Myanmar, security forces were deployed to schools across the country in 2021, sometimes occupying them to use for bases and other times with the alleged purpose of protecting the schools. Military forces inside of schools deterred students from attending.

As one 10-year-old girl in Magway region told Save the Children, “I wasn’t able to go to school for the whole of last year because of the virus. And this year I dare not go. I want to go to school, but I’m scared. Although the school gates are closed, there are soldiers inside, and I’m afraid of the soldiers. I’m afraid that there might be a bomb blast at our school while we are there.”¹⁹

Child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school

In 2020 and 2021, GCPEA identified reports of child recruitment at, or on the way to or from, school in four countries: **Colombia, DRC, Mali, and Yemen**. In 2018 and 2019, GCPEA identified such reports in six countries; four of the countries where child recruitment and use had been reported between 2018 and 2019 had no new reports of child recruitment related to school in the 2020-2021 period, **Afghanistan, Burundi, Somalia, and Venezuela**. In **Mali**, GCPEA had not identified child recruitment in 2018 or 2019.

Sexual violence at, or on the way to or from, school and university

In the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified reports of sexual violence at, or on the way to or from, school or university in seven countries, including six profiled in this report: **Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Colombia, DRC, Nigeria, and Turkey**. Women and girls were primarily affected by this violation, although GCPEA also identified reports of sexual violence against boys and men. With the exception of Nigeria, GCPEA had not identified any reports of sexual violence in these countries in 2018 or 2019. In 2018 and 2019, GCPEA identified reports of sexual violence in nine countries.

Sexual violence perpetrated by armed forces, law enforcement, other state security entities, and non-state armed groups, at, or on the way to or from, school or university remained one of the most challenging areas to collect data.

Primary school students in Kalemie, DRC stand in front of their classroom that was under repair in November 2021 after being burned down during communal conflicts in Tanganyika province.

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Attacks on higher education

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified over 320 reported incidents of attacks on higher education in the countries profiled in this report. Of these, around 240 reported attacks were directed at university students and personnel, while over 80 reported attacks targeted university facilities. By comparison, in 2018 and 2019, GCPEA collected around 340 reported incidents of attacks on higher education in conflict-affected profiled countries.²⁰

In 2020 and 2021, over 580 university students or personnel were injured, abducted, or killed, as a result of attacks on higher education, and another 1,450 were detained, arrested, or convicted.

The profiled countries most affected by attacks on higher education facilities were **Myanmar, Palestine, and Yemen**, where many of the attacks involved explosive weapons. **India and Turkey** were the profiled countries most affected by attacks on university students and personnel. In both countries, over 400 students and academics were arrested during education-related protests, or in relation to their academic work.



November 2020 Attack on Kabul University

“We were very scared and we thought it could be the last day of our lives... boys and girls were shouting, praying and crying for help,” reported a 23-year-old survivor of the November 2, 2020 attack on Kabul University. The student recounted how he and his classmates were held hostage by Islamic State gunmen for more than two hours before being rescued.²¹

The gunmen detonated explosives, fought state security forces, and held dozens of students and staff hostage in classrooms. The attack lasted over five hours; about 22 students (ten women)²² were killed and over 20 wounded (including many women).²³ The attack damaged classrooms and educational materials and affected the learning of more than 21,000 students (including over 7,000 women).²⁴ Several students reported psychological distress from the attack and did not resume classes. Months later, six perpetrators of the attack were tried and convicted.²⁵ To read more about the impacts of this attack, see GCPEA’s [Case Study on the Impact of Explosive Weapons in Afghanistan](#).

Explosive weapons severely damaged a school in the frontline village of Shyrokyne in eastern Ukraine, in April 2021.

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Schoolgirls abducted from Zamfara state, Nigeria, in February 2021

Over 100 gunmen allegedly stormed a Government Girls Secondary school in Jangebe town in Zamfara state, Nigeria, at 1:00am on Friday, February 26, 2021, while schoolgirls were sleeping in the dormitory.

A witness to the attack reported that: “[The gunmen] broke the school gate and shot at the security man. Then they moved into the hostels and woke up the girls, telling them it was time for prayers. After gathering all of them, the girls were crying and they took them away to the forest. They were also shooting in the air as they were marching to the forest.”²⁶

Authorities reported that 279 schoolgirls were later released.²⁷ In Nigeria, armed groups have previously targeted girls in mass abductions.²⁸

Gendered dynamics of attacks on education

During the 2020-2021 reporting period, GCPEA identified 11 countries where girls and women were reportedly targeted because of their gender in attacks on education. In certain contexts, such as **Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Pakistan**, armed groups, armed forces, and other state security forces specifically targeted girls and women. In those countries, girls’ schools were burned or bombed to suppress female education, and students or staff were threatened, killed or abducted. In other instances, armed groups, military, or other security forces sexually abused or abducted women and girls at, or on the way to or from, schools, such as in **Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Colombia and DRC**. In **Yemen**, armed groups recruited girls from schools.

GCPEA research found that women and girls are differentially impacted by attacks on education, including experiencing more difficulties in resuming education after an attack.

Belongings of abducted students are seen inside the premises of Bethel Baptist High School as their parents pray for their return. Gunmen abducted the students in Chikun Local Government Area, Kaduna state, Nigeria on July 14, 2021.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has found that attacks on education are on the rise in many armed conflicts around the world. These attacks cause acute and lasting impacts on teaching and learning, from physical damage inflicted on education infrastructure to lasting trauma and physical injury on students and educators. The findings of this report have also underscored the gendered impact of attacks on education and disproportionate effects these attacks have on women and girls. GCPEA's core recommendations hinge on the endorsement and implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration.

End attacks on education and Implement the Safe Schools Declaration and Guidelines

- Parties to armed conflict should immediately cease unlawful attacks on education.
- States should endorse, implement, and support the Safe Schools Declaration to ensure that all students and educators can learn and teach in safety.
- States should implement the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2601 on the protection of schools in armed conflict.
- Armed forces and armed groups should avoid using schools and universities for military purposes, including by implementing the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*.

Monitor and report on attacks on education

- States and other monitoring bodies should strengthen monitoring and reporting of attacks on education, including disaggregating data by type of attack on education, gender, age, location, person, or group responsible, number of days the institution was closed, and type of institution to improve efforts to prevent and respond to attacks on education. Use GCPEA's new *Toolkit for Collecting and Analyzing Data on Attacks on Education*.

Hold perpetrators to account and provide assistance to survivors

- National and international justice institutions should systematically investigate attacks on education and appropriately prosecute those responsible.
- States and other institutions should provide nondiscriminatory assistance for all survivors of attacks on education, regardless of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background, or other attributes, while taking into account their distinct needs and experiences based on gender, and potential vulnerabilities such as disability and displacement.

Plan for and mitigate the impact of attacks on education

- Where feasible, states should maintain safe access to education during armed conflict, including by working with school and university communities and all other relevant stakeholders to develop strategies to reduce the risk of attacks, and comprehensive safety and security plans in the event of these attacks.
- Education providers should ensure that any post-Covid-19 “back-to-school” campaigns and catch-up classes include learners who previously ended their studies due to attacks on schools, insecurity, or displacement; they should also continue to expand distance-learning and other alternative education programs established in response to Covid-19 to benefit these learners.
- Education providers should ensure that education does not exacerbate conflict but promotes peace and provides physical and psychosocial protection for students, including by addressing gender-based stereotypes and barriers that can trigger, exacerbate, and result from attacks on education.
- Education providers should “Build back better” after attacks on education and ensure funding not only to repair but to improve schools and make them safer and more inclusive to all students and educators.

A 12-year-old student answers questions during a science class held in a tent at Al-Hamzi school, Hajjah, Yemen, in March 2021. The school was open despite the destruction of its second floor due to a missile strike years earlier.

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¹ *Afghan Voice Agency; Afghan Islamic Press News Agency; GardaWorld; AP; Anadolu Agency; New York Times; Shamshad TV; Afghanistan Times; Xinhua; Kabul Now; AFP; TOLO News*, as cited in Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), Event ID AFG54302. “Urgent to Protect Girls & Education in Conflict Said UN Officials After Deadly Attack in Afghanistan,” SRSg Virginia Gamba and SRSg Dr Najat Maalla M’jid, Office of SRSg CAAC, May 12, 2021. Heather Barr, “Killing Schoolgirls in Afghanistan,” Human Rights Watch dispatch, May 10, 2021. Jennifer Deaton and Sheena McKenzie, “Death toll rises to 85 in Afghanistan girls’ school bomb attack,” *CNN*, May 10, 2021.

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¹³ For example: OCHA, *oPt Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022 Working Draft*, OCHA, December 2021, p. 46.

¹⁴ United Nations Security Council, “Letter dated 23 December 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council,” S/2020/1257, December 30, 2020, p. 18.

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¹⁸ “Occupation of schools by security forces in Myanmar is a serious violation of children’s rights,” Joint Statement of Save the Children, UNESCO and UNICEF, March 19, 2021.

¹⁹ “Myanmar: More Than 100 Attacks on Schools in May,” Save the Children press release, June 11, 2021.

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²¹ “‘Act of terror’: At least 22 killed in Kabul University attack,” *Al Jazeera*, November 2, 2020.

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²⁵ “2 Sentenced to Death for Kabul University Attack,” *Afghan Voice Agency*, March 4, 2021.

²⁶ “Nigeria’s Zamfara school abduction: More than 300 Nigerian girls missing,” *BBC News*, February 26, 2021.

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²⁸ See the 2018 and 2020 editions of the *Education under Attack* report series for details on incidents at Chibok and Dapchi.

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(Cover) A survivor of the May 8, 2021, bombing of Sayed Al-Shuhada school in Kabul, Afghanistan, looks inside a classroom days after the attack.

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