



CONFLICT EXPOSURE, FORCED DISPLACEMENT AND THE EROSION OF EDUCATIONAL ACCESS IN SOKOTO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Armed banditry, kidnapping and forced displacement increasingly disrupt educational access in Northwest Nigeria, yet evidence on how changing conflict exposure affects schooling at subnational level remains fragmented. The study examined conflict exposure, forced displacement and educational disruption in Sokoto State from June 2019 to January 2026. Guided by a cumulative conflict-exposure perspective and a two-sided displacement-pressure framework, the study employed a spatiotemporal secondary-data design. Evidence was synthesized from International Organization for Migration Displacement Tracking Matrix reports, UNICEF education and safe-school monitoring, National Bureau of Statistics/UNICEF household data, federal policy documents and peer-reviewed literature. Findings show recurrent and spatially uneven exposure, with Isa, Sabon Birni, Wurno and other local government areas repeatedly affected. By February 2025, Sokoto hosted an estimated 99,729 internally displaced persons, while seven schools were reported closed because of insecurity in 2024 and school premises were used as displacement shelters. January 2026 attacks across Isa, Wurno and Sabon Birni affected 17,797 people, including 9,966 children. The study concluded that displacement simultaneously depletes educational capacity in communities of origin and compresses capacity in receiving areas. It recommended hotspot-based early warning, protected learning spaces, cross-LGA learner tracking, surge support for receiving schools, flexible education-continuity pathways and integration of displacement data with education planning.

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INTRODUCTION

Education systems in conflict-affected settings are disrupted not only when schools are deliberately attacked, but also when insecurity changes the conditions under which children, teachers and institutions can sustain ordinary participation. Violence can make journeys to school unsafe, trigger precautionary closures, displace households, reduce teacher availability, damage or

repurpose learning spaces and create psychosocial conditions that weaken attendance and learning. In protracted crises, these effects accumulate and can convert a pre-existing development deficit into an education emergency (Akkari & Radhouane, 2023; Mousse & Mosisa, 2026). This distinction is especially important in contexts where direct attacks on educational institutions form only one part of a wider ecology of insecurity.

Nigeria illustrates this complexity. Recent national evidence shows that different forms of conflict can generate different educational effects rather than a single uniform “conflict penalty.” Ajogbeje and Sylwester (2024), using difference-in-differences analysis, found that farmer-herder violence was associated with stronger reductions in educational attainment than the Boko Haram conflict in their study design, underscoring the importance of exposure type, location and mechanism. At the same time, qualitative and mixed-method evidence from Northwest Nigeria identifies armed banditry, abduction, fear, displacement, reduced enrolment and abandonment of educational facilities as interconnected threats to schooling (Ojewale, 2024). These findings caution against treating insecurity merely as a background variable and instead encourage spatially and temporally specific analysis.

Sokoto State provides a critical case for such analysis. It shares a long and porous boundary environment with areas of Northwest Nigeria affected by armed banditry, and some of its rural local government areas (LGAs) have experienced repeated attack, kidnapping and displacement. Importantly, the state entered this security deterioration with severe educational disadvantage. The 2021 Nigeria Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) reported adjusted net attendance rates in Sokoto of 44.2% at primary level, 14.1% at junior secondary level and 15.3% at senior secondary level (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS] & UNICEF, 2022). For girls, lower-secondary net attendance was reported at 15.8% and upper-secondary attendance at 12%, far below national levels (UNICEF, 2025a). In such a setting, insecurity can amplify an already narrow margin of educational participation rather than interrupt an otherwise resilient system.

The security evidence has also become increasingly concrete. An International Organization for Migration (IOM) rapid assessment in June 2019 reported that all Sokoto LGAs bordering Zamfara—Dange-Shuni, Goronyo, Rabah, Sabon Birni, Kebbe, Isa, Tangaza and Tureta—were affected by the regional security challenge (IOM, 2019). Subsequent IOM event tracking documented renewed displacement in Goronyo and Rabah in January 2021, Sabon Birni in November 2021, Wurno and Rabah in March–April 2022, and Sabon Birni and Tureta in May 2022 (IOM, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c). From 2024 onward, the interface between displacement and education became even more visible: people fleeing attacks were accommodated in school premises, a school-based camp was attacked, and UNICEF recorded seven schools in

Sokoto closed because of insecurity during 2024 (IOM, 2024a, 2024b; UNICEF, 2025b).

At state level, the displacement burden is substantial. The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), drawing on IOM data, reported an estimated 99,729 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Sokoto by February 2025, up from 96,232 in November 2024; armed banditry and kidnapping accounted for 81% of displacement (EUAA, 2026). The same security assessment reported 497 security incidents and 867 fatalities in Sokoto between January 2024 and December 2025 using ACLED-derived data (EUAA, 2026). These indicators do not by themselves measure educational loss, but they establish the intensity and persistence of exposure within which schooling must operate.

Despite this expanding evidence, a subnational analytical gap remains. Much Nigerian scholarship either estimates national or regional conflict effects, focuses on the Northeast insurgency, or uses perceptions and interviews to document the consequences of banditry. Sokoto-specific records exist across humanitarian event reports, school-safety monitoring and household surveys, but they are rarely integrated to show how the geography of conflict-related displacement intersects with the functioning of educational access. The absence of a harmonized longitudinal Education Management Information System (EMIS) dataset publicly linked to conflict events makes it inappropriate to fabricate causal estimates; however, it does not prevent rigorous spatiotemporal secondary-data analysis of documented exposure, displacement and direct school interfaces.

This study therefore asks three questions. First, how did the spatial distribution and intensity of conflict-related displacement in Sokoto State change between 2019 and January 2026? Second, through which observable mechanisms did conflict and displacement disrupt educational access, particularly through closure, school-premise conversion or occupation, child displacement and pressure on host communities? Third, which LGAs repeatedly appear as hotspots, and what do these patterns imply for geographically targeted school-safety and education-in-emergencies planning?

The article contributes in three ways. Empirically, it assembles a cross-source chronology of verified Sokoto exposure and education-interface events. Conceptually, it advances a two-sided displacement-pressure mechanism in which insecurity reduces access in communities of origin while simultaneously straining educational capacity in destinations. Methodologically, it demonstrates what can—and cannot—be inferred from event tracking, displacement data and school-safety indicators when longitudinal school-level administrative data are unavailable. This bounded approach is intended to support evidence-based policy without overstating causal certainty.

Conceptual Framework: Cumulative Conflict Exposure and Displacement Pressure

The analysis is situated at the intersection of conflict-and-education research and education-in-emergencies (EiE). EiE scholarship treats education during crisis as simultaneously a right, a protective service and a platform for continuity and recovery. Akkari and Radhouane (2023) summarize the field around the linked objectives of protection, educational continuity and reconstruction. This is useful for Sokoto because the relevant problem is not limited to whether a school building exists; it is whether children can safely reach, remain in and meaningfully use an educational service while households and institutions are exposed to repeated shocks.

Conflict exposure is therefore defined here as the local experience of armed attack, banditry, kidnapping, threat, forced movement or associated security disruption documented at LGA or ward level. The study does not assume that all exposed communities experience identical educational effects. Instead, it treats exposure as a sequence of shocks whose educational consequence depends on timing, repetition, distance, household resources, school-system capacity and the response of receiving communities. This approach is consistent with evidence that conflict type and context matter for educational outcomes in Nigeria (Ajogbeje & Sylwester, 2024) and with research showing that perceived school safety can independently shape learning experiences in protracted conflict settings (Zuilkowski & Marty, 2021).

Forced displacement is conceptualized as both an origin-side and destination-side educational process. On the origin side, an attack can remove learners and teachers from a community, interrupt school calendars, depress attendance through fear, and reduce the viability of operating a school. On the destination side, displaced households may arrive in towns or host communities whose schools already face classroom, teacher, water, sanitation, protection and learning-material constraints. When school buildings themselves become shelters or camps, the physical resource that should provide education may temporarily perform a humanitarian shelter function. The result is not simply “school closure”; it is a substitution of institutional function.

This article terms this dynamic the two-sided displacement-pressure mechanism. The first side is educational depletion at origin: fewer learners present, disrupted household routines, teacher flight or absenteeism, and reduced willingness to travel. The second side is capacity compression at destination: additional school-age children, greater demand for teaching and psychosocial support, crowded facilities and, in some cases, direct use of school premises for accommodation. Both sides can operate simultaneously, meaning that an attack in one rural locality can produce education consequences in both the attacked community and a distant receiving ward.

The framework also distinguishes structural vulnerability from security shock. Sokoto's low pre-crisis attendance rates do not prove that insecurity caused educational exclusion; rather, they indicate limited baseline resilience. Nwoke et al. (2024) identify insecurity alongside household economy, governance and other structural factors in Nigeria's out-of-school challenge. In this paper, low baseline attendance is therefore treated as an exposure multiplier: when participation is already low and infrastructure scarce, even temporary closures, mobility restrictions or displacement may produce larger risks of permanent dropout or non-return.

Four observable propositions follow. First, conflict-related displacement should be spatially concentrated rather than evenly distributed across the state. Second, repeated exposure should be visible in recurring LGA mentions across independent event reports. Third, where insecurity intersects directly with education, the record should show mechanisms beyond violence itself, including precautionary closure, military or humanitarian use of schools and concentration of displaced children in host communities. Fourth, policy response should increasingly shift from conventional schooling alone toward continuity, early warning, accelerated learning, psychosocial support and safe learning spaces as the crisis becomes institutionalized as an education problem.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Educational access in Sokoto State is constrained by longstanding structural challenges, particularly at the post-primary level. The 2021 Nigeria Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey reported adjusted net attendance rates of 44.2% for primary education, 14.1% for junior secondary education and 15.3% for senior secondary education in Sokoto State (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS] & UNICEF, 2022). The situation is particularly concerning for girls, whose reported net attendance was 15.8% at lower-secondary level and 12.0% at upper-secondary level (UNICEF, 2025). These existing limitations in educational participation are occurring alongside recurrent armed banditry, kidnapping and forced displacement, creating additional threats to the continuity and accessibility of schooling.

The security situation has become persistent and geographically extensive. The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA, 2026), drawing on Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED), reported 299 security incidents in Sokoto State between January 2024 and August 2025, resulting in 550 fatalities; 215 of these incidents involved violence against civilians. The same assessment reported an estimated 99,729 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Sokoto State as of February 2025, compared with 96,232 in November 2024. Armed banditry and kidnapping accounted for 81% of the reported causes of displacement (EUAA, 2026). At the incident level, the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2025) documented that an armed banditry and kidnapping

incident in five communities of Isa Local Government Area on 11 May 2025 affected 8,219 people and resulted in displacement both within Sokoto State and into neighbouring Zamfara State. Such recurrent displacement can interrupt learners' established school routines and access to education while simultaneously increasing demand for services in receiving communities.

The disruption is also evident in the operation and availability of schools. UNICEF (2024) reported that 19 schools in the North-West were closed because of insecurity during the reporting period, including seven schools in Sokoto State. The report also indicated that one school in Sokoto was occupied by the military, thereby reducing the availability of the facility for its intended educational purpose. In addition, research based on affected communities in Sokoto, Zamfara and Katsina found that banditry affected everyday mobility and access to education, demonstrating that the educational consequences of insecurity extend beyond formal school closure (Kleffmann et al., 2024). More recently, UNICEF (2026) reported that conflict and displacement had disrupted the education of children in Sokoto State and that a EUR 1 million European Union-supported intervention was established to reach more than 25,000 conflict-affected children in IDP camps and host communities through accelerated learning, remedial education, safe-school measures, WASH support, teacher development and psychosocial services. The intervention illustrates the continuing need for education-in-emergencies responses in affected parts of the state.

However, the problem is not merely the occurrence of individual attacks, school closures or isolated episodes of displacement. The more fundamental problem is the cumulative and spatially differentiated disruption of educational access associated with recurrent conflict exposure and forced displacement. Existing evidence is dispersed across humanitarian displacement assessments, security-event databases and education-monitoring reports, with differences in reporting periods, geographical units and indicators. Consequently, there is limited integrated evidence showing how recurrent insecurity and population displacement have unfolded across Sokoto State over time and how these processes intersect with school disruption and pressures on educational access in both communities of origin and receiving locations. Although recent empirical research has established that conflict can be associated with reductions in educational attainment in Nigeria, much of the evidence is based on broader national or regional analyses rather than a detailed spatiotemporal examination of the conflict–displacement–education interface within Sokoto State (Ajogbeje & Sylwester, 2024). This constitutes an important evidence gap for state-level education planning and education-in-emergencies preparedness.

The paper therefore examines conflict exposure, forced displacement and the erosion of educational access in Sokoto State from June 2019 to January 2026. It focuses on the recurrence and spatial distribution of insecurity, patterns of forced displacement, school disruption and the

resulting pressures on educational access in communities of origin and receiving locations. By integrating conflict, displacement and education evidence within a spatiotemporal framework, the study seeks to provide a more coherent account of how prolonged insecurity affects educational access and to generate evidence relevant to hotspot-based early warning, protected and alternative learning spaces, displacement-sensitive education planning, learner tracking and targeted support for receiving communities.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between conflict exposure, forced displacement and the erosion of educational access in Sokoto State, Nigeria, from June 2019 to January 2026. Specifically, the study seeks to trace the temporal recurrence and spatial distribution of insecurity across affected local government areas; examine patterns and movements of conflict-induced displacement; document associated disruptions to schools, learners and educational facilities; and assess how displacement simultaneously depletes educational capacity in communities of origin and increases pressure on educational resources in receiving locations. The study further aims to integrate evidence from conflict, displacement and education-monitoring sources to provide a spatiotemporal account of the education consequences of prolonged insecurity and generate evidence to inform education-in-emergencies planning, early-warning systems, learning continuity measures and displacement-sensitive educational interventions in Sokoto State.

METHODS

Study Design and Period

The study used a spatiotemporal secondary-data design focused on Sokoto State from June 2019 to January 2026. The starting point reflects the earliest directly verified IOM rapid assessment identified in the present evidence corpus that named affected Sokoto LGAs in relation to the expanding Northwest security crisis. The endpoint was set at 31 January 2026 to include the latest verified displacement episodes preceding manuscript preparation while avoiding the false appearance of complete 2026 coverage.

The principal unit of observation was the documented event or reporting window linked to one or more Sokoto LGAs. This is not equivalent to an LGA-year panel. Event reports vary in geographic granularity and some aggregate affected populations across multiple states or LGAs. Consequently, the study uses event data to identify recurrence, spatial diffusion, displacement direction and direct educational interfaces, but does not estimate causal coefficients for enrolment, attendance or school closure.

Data Sources and Source Hierarchy

Five source families were integrated. IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) rapid assessments and flash reports provided dated information on locations, displacement triggers, numbers affected or displaced, demographic composition and destinations. UNICEF humanitarian and safe-school reports provided education-specific indicators such as school closure, school occupation and implementation of the Minimum Standards for Safe Schools (MSSS). NBS/UNICEF MICS data provided pre-existing attendance conditions. Federal Ministry of Education documents established the national policy framework for school safety and early warning. Peer-reviewed studies and the EUAA security assessment were used for triangulation, interpretation and state-level context. Table 1 summarizes the source logic and measures.

TABLE 1: DATA SOURCES, MEASURES AND ANALYTICAL ROLES

Source family	Period used	Variables extracted	Analytical role
IOM DTM rapid/flash reports	2019–Jan. 2026	LGA/ward, trigger, affected/displaced persons, destination, children, school-site use	Event chronology, hotspot recurrence, displacement direction, education interface
UNICEF humanitarian reporting	2024–2026	School closures, school occupation, continuity response	Direct education-system disruption and response
UNICEF MSSS monitoring	2023 monitoring, published 2024	State safe-school fulfilment and result areas	Institutional preparedness and resilience
NBS/UNICEF MICS	2021 survey	Adjusted net attendance by education level; gender indicators	Baseline structural educational vulnerability
Federal Ministry of Education	2021–2025	Safety policy, early-warning procedures	Policy-response benchmark
Peer-reviewed studies/EUAA	2021–2026	Conflict-education mechanisms and state security context	Triangulation and interpretation

Event-file Construction and Coding

Each verified report was read for date, source, LGA or ward, incident type, number affected, number displaced, destination, age/sex composition where stated, and any explicit reference to a school, education facility, school closure, school occupation or school-based camp. LGA names were standardized to current common spellings (for example, Dange-Shuni/Dange Shuni). Multi-state reports were retained only when they explicitly named at least one Sokoto LGA. Where a multi-state total could not be disaggregated to Sokoto, the total was not attributed to Sokoto; the event was used only as evidence that the named Sokoto LGA experienced a displacement episode.

A direct education interface was coded when a source documented at least one of the following: a school closure due to insecurity; a school occupied by armed or military actors; a school premises used as a camp or shelter for displaced people; an attack on a school-based camp; or a programme explicitly designed to maintain education for conflict-affected or displaced children. This conservative rule separates documented system effects from plausible but unobserved effects such as absenteeism or teacher flight.

Two derived quantities were calculated only where source arithmetic was transparent. In the 22–28 April 2024 IOM report, 2,694 of the 3,220 displaced persons were from Sokoto communities (the remaining 526 originated in Zamfara). Of the Sokoto-origin group, 675 were accommodated at Kubliya Islamiya School and 748 at Sarkin Gobir Primary School, both in Isa North. Thus, 1,423 people—52.8% of the Sokoto-origin displacement recorded in that reporting window—were accommodated in two named school premises. Similarly, children comprised 9,966 of 17,797 people affected in the January 2026 multi-LGA Sokoto attacks, or approximately 56.0% (IOM, 2024a, 2026).

Event counts were never summed across reports to claim a cumulative number of unique people displaced. DTM reports can capture repeated movement, continuing displacement, overlapping populations and successive shocks to the same communities. The large June 2025 Isa figures, for example, followed major May 2025 displacement in the same LGA and were based on remote key-informant assessment (IOM, 2025c). Treating all successive counts as independent persons would risk substantial double counting.

Spatial and Temporal Analysis

Spatial analysis proceeded through recurrence mapping in tabular form. An LGA was classified as recurrently exposed when it appeared in two or more verified reporting windows after the 2019 baseline or when later reports documented a substantial episode or direct education interface. The method does not rank LGAs by causal risk because reporting intensity is uneven; rather, it identifies places that repeatedly surface in independent humanitarian records and therefore warrant priority verification using administrative and school-level data.

Temporal analysis organized the evidence into four practical stages: initial border diffusion (2019), persistent and recurring displacement (2021–2022), direct education-interface escalation (2024), and high-intensity repeated displacement plus institutional EiE response (2025–January 2026). The stages are analytical, not claims that violence was absent in unreported years. The evidence is strongest from 2024 onward because Sokoto-specific event tracking and education-sector

documentation become more frequent and detailed.

Inference Boundaries and Research Ethics

The study relies on public, aggregate secondary sources and involved no direct human participants; institutional ethics review was therefore not required. Its inferential boundary is explicit: the analysis demonstrates documented co-occurrence, recurrence and mechanisms of disruption, not the causal effect size of conflict on enrolment or attendance. Testing the latter requires harmonized LGA-year or school-year EMIS data linked to geocoded events, appropriate exposure windows and socioeconomic controls. This distinction is central to the credibility of the paper.

FINDINGS

- 1. Educational access was structurally fragile before the most intense documented displacement:** The first result is that conflict exposure entered a low-access education environment. MICS 2021 reported Sokoto adjusted net attendance at 44.2% for primary education, 14.1% for junior secondary and 15.3% for senior secondary education (NBS & UNICEF, 2022). These figures indicate that educational exclusion cannot be attributed to insecurity alone. Poverty, rural service availability, household constraints, gender norms and institutional capacity pre-dated the latest security escalation. Indeed, Nwoke et al. (2024) identify insecurity as one factor within a broader Nigerian ecology of out-of-school risk rather than an isolated cause.

Gender-specific evidence underscores the vulnerability of the participation margin. UNICEF reported from MICS 2021 that girls' net attendance in Sokoto was 15.8% at lower secondary and 12% at upper secondary, compared with 48.8% and 49.2% nationally (UNICEF, 2025a). These data should not be interpreted as proof that later conflict had a larger causal effect on girls; the event reports used here do not contain adequate gender-disaggregated education outcomes for such a test. They do show, however, that insecurity unfolded where many girls were already outside sustained secondary participation.

Institutional preparedness also showed gaps. UNICEF's monitoring of the Minimum Standards for Safe Schools reported an overall Sokoto fulfilment rate of 26% in 2023. Although performance on the conflict result area improved between monitoring rounds, the state remained weak across several other safety and infrastructure dimensions, including staff training, violence prevention, natural hazards and WASH-related needs (UNICEF, 2024a). The implication is not that the safe-school agenda was absent; rather,

the system faced security shocks before minimum standards were comprehensively institutionalized.

2. **Spatial diffusion: from a border-zone problem to recurrent multi-LGA exposure:** The 2019 IOM rapid assessment establishes a broad early spatial footprint. It identified all Sokoto LGAs bordering Zamfara—Dange-Shuni, Goronyo, Rabah, Sabon Birni, Kebbe, Isa, Tangaza and Tureta—as affected by the regional security challenge. Sabon Birni was reported with 10,000 affected persons and Rabah with 2,300, although the assessment was a rapid humanitarian estimate rather than an education dataset (IOM, 2019). The pattern matters because it shows that the crisis was geographically linked to a belt of rural LGAs rather than confined to Sokoto metropolis.

Event tracking in 2021 and 2022 demonstrates persistence rather than a one-off 2019 shock. IOM reported attacks affecting Goronyo and Rabah in January 2021 and new displacement involving Sabon Birni in November 2021 (IOM, 2021a, 2021b). In 2022, Wurno appears repeatedly: March reporting identified displacement to neighbouring wards involving Wurno, late March–early April reports named Rabah and Wurno, and mid-April reporting again included Dange-Shuni and Wurno. Late May 2022 event tracking named Sabon Birni and Tureta (IOM, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d).

From 2024 onward, the record becomes both more intensive and more directly linked to schooling. Isa emerges as the clearest recurrent hotspot, with multiple attacks and displacement episodes in April 2024, May 2025, early June 2025, mid-June 2025 and January 2026. Gwadabawa enters the education-interface record in July 2024 when armed bandits attacked Model Primary School Camp. Sabon Birni is documented again in April 2025 and January 2026; Tangaza in July 2025; Dange-Shuni and Tureta in late July 2025; and Wurno in January 2026 (IOM, 2024b, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c, 2025d, 2025e, 2025f, 2026).

Across the verified corpus, at least ten Sokoto LGAs appear in documented insecurity or conflict-related displacement evidence: Dange-Shuni, Goronyo, Rabah, Sabon Birni, Kebbe, Isa, Tangaza, Tureta, Wurno and Gwadabawa. Reporting density is not an unbiased measure of true violence intensity, so this list should not be read as an exhaustive risk ranking. Nevertheless, the recurrence of Isa, Sabon Birni, Wurno and the Zamfara-border belt provides a defensible basis for prioritizing detailed school-level safety audits in these locations.

**TABLE 2: SELECTED VERIFIED CONFLICT/DISPLACEMENT EPISODES AND THEIR EDUCATION INTERFACE**

DATE/REPORTING WINDOW	SOKOTO LOCATION(S)	DOCUMENTED EXPOSURE/DISPLACEMENT	DIRECT EDUCATION INTERFACE	SOURCE
June 2019	Dange-Shuni, Goronyo, Rabah, Sabon Birni, Kebbe, Isa, Tangaza, Tureta	All eight Zamfara-border LGAs reported affected; Sabon Birni 10,000 affected, Rabah 2,300	No direct school measure in report	IOM, 2019
4–10 Jan. 2021	Goronyo, Rabah	Multi-state attacks affected 609 people; Sokoto LGAs explicitly named	No direct school measure	IOM, 2021a
15–21 Nov. 2021	Sabon Birni	633 displaced across Sabon Birni and Anka (Zamfara)	No Sokoto-only count	IOM, 2021b
Mar.–May 2022	Wurno, Rabah, Dange-Shuni, Sabon Birni, Tureta	Repeated multi-state displacement reports naming these LGAs	Recurrence indicates continuity risk; no school outcome measured	IOM, 2022a–d
25–28 Apr. 2024	Isa	3,220 displaced across Sokoto and Zamfara; 2,694 originated in Sokoto communities	675 to Kubliya Islamiya School; 748 to Sarkin Gobir Primary School	IOM, 2024a
4–6 Jul. 2024	Gwadabawa	Armed bandits attacked Model Primary School Camp; report also covered a separate Katsina event	Attack directly involved school-based camp	IOM, 2024b



DATE/REPORTING WINDOW	SOKOTO LOCATION(S)	DOCUMENTED EXPOSURE/DISPLACEMENT	DIRECT EDUCATION INTERFACE	SOURCE
2024 annual	Statewide	19 insecurity-related school closures across three states; seven were in Sokoto	7 Sokoto schools closed; 1 school reported occupied by military	UNICEF, 2025b
3 Apr. 2025	Sabon Birni	800 affected/displaced, including 448 children	Population sought refuge in Ungwar Lalle Primary School camp	IOM, 2025a
11 May–15 Jun. 2025	Isa	8,219 affected (11 May); 18,500 movements reported 2–3 Jun.; 1,400 displaced 15 Jun.	Large repeated child/household movement toward Isa town and host communities	IOM, 2025b–d
2 Jul. 2025	Tangaza	538 displaced to Tangaza town; 15 fatalities and 35 injured	Host-community capacity pressure; no school outcome reported	IOM, 2025e
23–25 Jul. 2025	Dange-Shuni → Tureta	3,829 displaced by bandit attacks; 2,267 moved to Tureta	Cross-LGA receiving-community pressure	IOM, 2025f
9–12 Jan. 2026	Isa, Wurno, Sabon Birni	17,797 affected; 16,517 displaced; 9,966 children	Destinations included GDSS Isa Camp	IOM, 2026

Note. Multi-state or repeated-event figures are not summed as unique displaced persons.

3. Temporal Intensification: Repeated Displacement Became a System-Management

Problem: The temporal pattern suggests a qualitative shift from exposure documentation to system-management pressure. In 2019–2022, the public record chiefly documented affected LGAs and displacement waves. By 2024–2026, reports increasingly identified destinations, child composition, school-site use, school closure and explicit continuity interventions. This shift may partly reflect improved reporting, but it also indicates that displacement had become sufficiently recurrent to require organized camp and host-community responses.

Isa provides the clearest example of repeated exposure. In late April 2024, attacks across multiple Isa communities displaced thousands, including 1,423 Sokoto-origin people accommodated in two school premises. On 11 May 2025, another armed banditry and kidnapping incident affected 8,219 people across Bafarawa, Kagara, Arume, Gebe and Kamarawa, with movement both to neighbouring Zamfara and to host communities in Isa North (IOM, 2025b). On 2–3 June 2025, IOM reported 7,500 displaced from Kamarawa to Isa town, 5,500 from Arume and Subduru to Isa town and 5,500 to Zamfara; the assessment was conducted remotely, making caution about overlap essential (IOM, 2025c). A further 1,400 people were displaced within Isa after an attack on 15 June 2025 (IOM, 2025d).

The repeated movement into Isa town illustrates why a destination-sensitive education model is necessary. The educational effect is not confined to schools in attacked villages. Receiving wards must absorb children whose prior enrolment, grade placement, documentation, language needs, psychosocial condition and length of stay may vary. Even where no receiving school is formally “closed,” a rapid increase in school-age population can alter pupil-teacher ratios, classroom density, learning-material demand and WASH pressure.

The July 2025 Dange-Shuni episode provides a similar cross-LGA illustration. Armed bandit attacks displaced 3,829 people; 1,562 moved within Dange-Shuni while 2,267 moved to Lambar Tureta in Tureta LGA (IOM, 2025f). This is a direct example of one LGA exporting humanitarian and potentially educational demand into another. The education system therefore requires information flows that follow displaced learners across administrative boundaries rather than treating the school as a stationary unit.

January 2026 marks the largest single Sokoto-only event in the verified corpus used for this study. Attacks across Isa, Wurno and Sabon Birni affected 17,797 people and displaced 16,517. Children numbered 9,966, approximately 56% of those affected; destinations

included GDSS Isa Camp as well as locations in Wurno and Sabon Birni (IOM, 2026). This demographic composition is educationally consequential because a humanitarian displacement episode in which more than half the affected population are children immediately creates a schooling, protection and psychosocial-support challenge.

4. **Direct Educational Disruption: Closure, Occupation and Conversion of School Space:**

The strongest evidence of education-system disruption comes from records that explicitly identify school status or school premises. UNICEF's 2024 humanitarian reporting documented seven Sokoto schools closed because of insecurity and one school reported occupied by the military (UNICEF, 2025b). These are direct losses or restrictions of educational space, not inferred outcomes. They also occurred in a state whose implementation of national safe-school standards was still incomplete.

School-premise conversion is equally significant. The late-April 2024 Isa report documented 675 displaced persons housed in Kubliya Islamiya School and 748 in Sarkin Gobir Primary School. Because the Zamfara-origin group can be separated from the Sokoto-origin group in the report, it is possible to establish that 1,423 of 2,694 Sokoto-origin displaced persons in that event window—52.8%—were placed in the two named school sites (IOM, 2024a). This is a clear case of the same public infrastructure serving both education and emergency shelter functions.

In April 2025, the pattern recurred in Sabon Birni. An attack on Garin Faji, Garin Abara and Kimba village affected 800 people, including 448 children, and forced the population to seek refuge at Ungwar Lalle Primary School camp (IOM, 2025a). In July 2024, armed bandits attacked Model Primary School Camp in Gwadabawa (IOM, 2024b). In January 2026, GDSS Isa Camp again appeared as a displacement destination (IOM, 2026). These cases demonstrate that the education-displacement relationship is not merely statistical: school spaces are physically embedded within humanitarian response.

The educational implications of school-site use depend on timing and duration, which the flash reports do not always specify. A school used outside term time or with rapid alternative accommodation may experience limited instructional loss, whereas prolonged occupation can displace classes, damage facilities or create protection and WASH challenges. The evidence therefore supports the existence of the mechanism, not a uniform estimate of days of learning lost. Future administrative monitoring should record start and end dates of non-educational school use, displaced learner numbers, temporary learning-space provision and reopening dates.

5. **Safe-School Capacity Improved Selectively but Remained Insufficient:** Nigeria has a formal policy architecture for protecting education. The National Policy on Safety, Security and Violence-Free Schools establishes a zero-tolerance approach to threats, including conflict and war, and calls for holistic protection of learners, staff, facilities and school communities (Federal Ministry of Education, 2021). The 2025 Early Warning Handbook further translates school threats into preventive and response actions, including access control, kidnapping-prevention training, community monitoring, emergency communication and psychosocial support (Federal Ministry of Education, 2025).

At implementation level, however, UNICEF's safe-school monitoring showed uneven readiness. Sokoto's overall fulfilment rate was 26% in the 2023 monitoring. The conflict result area improved, and selected indicators such as safety-trained school-based management committees and continuity planning performed better, but weaknesses persisted across staff training, infrastructure, hazards, violence prevention and WASH (UNICEF, 2024a). This pattern supports a broader interpretation of resilience: protection from armed attack is necessary but insufficient if receiving schools lack the basic capacity to absorb displacement safely.

The trajectory of external support also reveals a shift toward EiE. In April 2026, the European Union's humanitarian arm and UNICEF launched a EUR 1 million initiative intended to reach more than 25,000 conflict-affected children aged 5–17 in Sokoto IDP camps and host communities. Its design combines access to schooling, accelerated learning for out-of-school children, remediation, safe-school practices, WASH rehabilitation, crisis-sensitive teacher development, mental-health and psychosocial support, and stronger EiE coordination (UNICEF, 2026). The intervention architecture closely corresponds to the two-sided pressure identified in this study: it addresses both displaced learners and receiving institutions.

TABLE 3. SELECTED EDUCATIONAL VULNERABILITY, DISRUPTION AND RESPONSE INDICATORS

Indicator	Observed value	Interpretive significance
Primary adjusted net attendance, Sokoto (MICS 2021)	44.2%	Low baseline participation before latest documented escalation
Junior secondary adjusted net attendance (MICS 2021)	14.1%	Very narrow participation margin
Senior secondary adjusted net attendance (MICS 2021)	15.3%	Low continuation into upper secondary
Girls' lower-/upper-secondary net attendance	15.8% / 12.0%	Pre-existing gender vulnerability; not a conflict-effect estimate
MSSS overall fulfilment, Sokoto	26%	Incomplete school-safety institutionalization
Schools closed due to insecurity in 2024	7	Direct education-system disruption
School reported occupied by military in 2024	1	Direct restriction/non-educational use of school space
IDPs in Sokoto, Feb. 2025	99,729	Scale of host-community and service pressure
Share of displacement attributed to banditry/kidnapping	81%	Security-related displacement dominates state IDP burden
Children targeted by EU–UNICEF Sokoto EiE programme, 2026	>25,000	Institutional recognition of conflict-disrupted education

Sources: NBS & UNICEF (2022); UNICEF (2024a, 2025a, 2025b, 2026); EUAA (2026).

DISCUSSION

Conflict in Sokoto Functions as a Cumulative Access Shock

The evidence supports a cumulative rather than a single-event understanding of educational disruption. A school can remain physically intact and yet become less accessible because surrounding roads are insecure, families have moved, teachers are unwilling to travel, or parents perceive attendance as unsafe. Conversely, a receiving school can remain open while its operating conditions deteriorate as displaced learners and humanitarian functions increase demand on scarce space and personnel. This explains why direct counts of attacked schools alone underestimate the educational footprint of insecurity.

The findings align with Ojewale's (2024) identification of fear, reduced enrolment, abandonment and forced displacement as major education consequences of Northwest banditry, but add a more localized spatial and institutional dimension. Sokoto records show where displacement recurs and how school premises enter the displacement system. The pattern also complements Ajogbeje and

Sylwester's (2024) national evidence that conflict effects vary according to the nature of violence and its interaction with civilian life. Banditry can disrupt education through household mobility and chronic uncertainty even when ideological hostility to schooling is not the primary motive.

The distinction between structural and shock-related exclusion is equally important. Sokoto's very low secondary attendance predates much of the 2024–2026 event evidence. It would therefore be analytically wrong to claim that banditry “caused” the state's low attendance rates. A more defensible interpretation is that insecurity compounds structural disadvantage. When a system already has large numbers of out-of-school children, weak infrastructure and gender disparities, displacement may increase the probability that temporary interruption becomes prolonged exclusion.

The Two-Sided Displacement Mechanism is the Paper's Central Contribution

The most distinctive finding is the visibility of a two-sided displacement mechanism. Origin communities experience depletion: people flee, normal routines collapse and schools may lose the population required to operate consistently. Destination communities experience compression: population increases, school-age children require placement, and existing facilities may be used for shelter. The late-April 2024 Isa event demonstrates both sides simultaneously, with people displaced from multiple attacked communities and more than half of the Sokoto-origin displaced group in that reporting window housed in two school premises.

This mechanism has practical implications for how education data are organized. Conventional EMIS systems are location-centred: a school reports enrolment, teachers and facilities for a particular administrative area. Displacement is movement-centred. If education planning does not link origin and destination data, a fall in enrolment in one rural school and overcrowding in an urban or semi-urban receiving school may be recorded as separate administrative anomalies rather than consequences of the same security event. Integrating displacement tracking with EMIS would make the relationship visible.

The mechanism also complicates simple closure indicators. A school can be “open” but partly unavailable for instruction because a building is occupied, a camp is located on the premises, or a large displaced population changes capacity need. Conversely, a closed school may have learners accessing temporary learning spaces elsewhere. High-impact monitoring should therefore distinguish school status, instructional-space availability, pupil movement, teacher availability and continuity modality rather than coding access as open versus closed only.



Spatial Concentration Supports Hotspot-Specific Policy Rather than Uniform Statewide Response

The recurrence of Isa is especially policy-relevant. It appears in the 2019 border-risk assessment and repeatedly in 2024, 2025 and January 2026 event reports, with substantial movement into Isa town and across the Zamfara boundary. Sabon Birni also recurs across 2019, 2021, 2022, 2025 and 2026 evidence, while Wurno features repeatedly in 2022 and again in 2026. These patterns justify treating exposure as geographically uneven.

A uniform distribution of security resources across all schools may therefore be less efficient than risk-tiered planning. High-recurrence LGAs require school-specific early-warning protocols, safe transport and route assessment, crisis communication, pre-identified temporary learning spaces, learner-tracking arrangements and agreements for rapid teacher redeployment. Receiving wards require surge plans for textbooks, classroom space, WASH, school feeding where available, psychosocial services and accelerated learning.

This conclusion is consistent with the Federal Ministry of Education's shift toward explicit early warning and with recent empirical work in Katsina showing how inadequate physical barriers and security provision can increase perceived school vulnerability (Aderinto et al., 2025). Yet infrastructure hardening alone is insufficient. The Sokoto data show that displacement may occur even when a particular receiving school has not been attacked. Resilience therefore requires both site protection and continuity planning across a network of schools.

Child-Heavy Displacement Makes Education a Core Humanitarian Service

Several Sokoto events contain a high proportion of children. The April 2025 Sabon Birni event involved 448 children among 800 affected/displaced persons, and the January 2026 Isa–Wurno–Sabon Birni attacks involved 9,966 children among 17,797 affected people (IOM, 2025a, 2026). This demographic structure means education cannot be treated as a post-emergency add-on. Large-scale displacement immediately generates demand for learning continuity, child protection, psychosocial support and identification of children who were already out of school before the event.

The issue is particularly important because displacement status and prior school participation are not equivalent. Some displaced children were enrolled before moving, some may have dropped out after repeated displacement, and others may have never entered formal schooling. Programmes focused only on transferring enrolled learners risk excluding the most marginalized. The 2026 EU–UNICEF approach—combining accelerated learning for out-of-school children with remediation

for enrolled learners—is therefore well matched to the layered access problem documented here (UNICEF, 2026).

The broader evidence base supports this integrated approach. A systematic review across the Horn of Africa found conflict and displacement consistently associated with lower enrolment, attendance, progression and performance, alongside teacher shortages and psychosocial trauma (Mousse & Mosisa, 2026). While the regional context differs from Sokoto, the mechanisms provide a plausible framework for what local administrative data should test.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that recurrent conflict and forced displacement have increasingly disrupted educational access in Sokoto State from June 2019 to January 2026 through school closures, population displacement and pressure on educational facilities. The disruption affects both communities of origin and receiving locations, highlighting the need for conflict-sensitive education planning, early warning, protected learning spaces, continuity support for displaced learners and targeted assistance to receiving schools and communities.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

1. First, Sokoto needs an integrated education-security-displacement information architecture. IOM event data identify where people move; EMIS identifies schools, learners, teachers and infrastructure. Linking the two at LGA, ward and—where ethically and operationally appropriate—school level would allow education authorities to detect sudden enrolment loss at origin and surge demand at destination. A minimum crisis dashboard should include school operational status, closures, learner transfers, temporary learning spaces, teacher availability, displaced learner counts, WASH status and reopening dates.
2. Second, risk should be tiered geographically. Isa, Sabon Birni, Wurno and other recurrently exposed LGAs should receive enhanced early-warning implementation, communication protocols, safe-route planning and pre-positioned continuity resources. The national Early Warning Handbook provides a policy basis for such action, including community monitoring, emergency communication and response procedures (Federal Ministry of Education, 2025). State implementation should translate these national measures into LGA-specific trigger thresholds and responsibilities.
3. Third, education authorities should establish a protocol governing the emergency use of school premises. Where schools must temporarily provide humanitarian shelter, the protocol should record the start date, expected duration, safeguarding arrangements,

WASH and sanitation responsibilities, protection of educational materials, alternative instructional space and a time-bound restoration plan. This would reduce the risk that humanitarian use becomes an unrecorded educational loss.

4. Fourth, receiving communities require surge financing. The two-sided displacement mechanism means resources cannot be allocated only to attacked communities. Schools in Isa town, Tangaza town, Tureta and other receiving areas may need temporary teachers, additional learning materials, classroom tents or modular spaces, school feeding adjustments, WASH expansion and psychosocial-support personnel. Funding formulas should be able to respond to temporary population shocks rather than relying only on annual enrolment.
5. Fifth, continuity should include multiple pathways. Accelerated education, remediation, flexible calendars, radio or offline digital materials, community learning spaces and rapid re-entry procedures are necessary because conflict-affected children have heterogeneous educational histories. Technology can support displaced learners, but Nigerian evidence also warns that access, electricity, connectivity and device availability constrain technological solutions (Elegbede et al., 2024). Technology should therefore complement, not replace, protected local learning spaces and teacher support.
6. Finally, implementation of the Minimum Standards for Safe Schools should be monitored as an educational-development indicator rather than only a security compliance exercise. The 26% Sokoto fulfilment rate reported from 2023 monitoring shows considerable room for improvement. Progress should be publicly tracked at LGA level, especially in recurrent hotspots, and linked to school continuity outcomes rather than merely the presence of plans or committees.

LIMITATIONS AND AGENDA FOR CAUSAL EXTENSION

1. The first limitation is reporting bias. IOM flash reports prioritize sudden and significant displacement and depend on field access, key informants and operational priorities. An LGA appearing more frequently may reflect higher event intensity, better reporting access or both. The recurrence matrix is therefore a screening tool, not a definitive violence ranking.
2. Second, event totals may overlap. Families can be displaced multiple times and later reports may include people affected in earlier episodes. The study intentionally avoids summing reports into a statewide cumulative unique-person count. The June 2025 Isa report, conducted remotely, is particularly important in this regard and is treated as evidence of movement scale and recurrence rather than a separate additive population.

3. Third, the study cannot estimate causal effects on school enrolment, attendance, completion, examination performance or teacher absenteeism because a harmonized longitudinal school-level dataset was not provided. The MICS indicators are cross-sectional baseline evidence and should not be read as post-conflict outcomes. Likewise, the seven 2024 school closures are a direct disruption measure but do not identify the number of learners affected or duration of each closure.
4. The next research phase should construct a school-year or LGA-year panel linking EMIS outcomes to geocoded conflict and displacement exposure. A preferred model would estimate within-LGA or within-school changes with year fixed effects while controlling for baseline poverty, rurality, school availability and other shocks. Count outcomes such as closures could be modelled with Poisson or negative-binomial specifications; attendance or enrolment rates with appropriate linear or fractional-response models; and school-closure risk with binary-response models. Lagged exposure should test whether insecurity in year t predicts outcomes in year $t+1$, while spatial buffers around schools can distinguish proximate from more distant events.
5. Such analysis should also separate origin and destination effects. A school losing learners after an attack and a receiving school gaining displaced learners are two outcomes of the same event. Models that use conflict incidents only at the school's own location could miss destination-side pressure. A displacement-flow matrix linking origin ward to destination ward would therefore be more informative than a conventional incident-count model alone.
6. Finally, future research should incorporate qualitative evidence from learners, parents, teachers and school leaders to explain decisions behind the observed patterns. Administrative data can show that attendance changed; interviews can clarify whether the mechanism was fear, transport, household income loss, school capacity, teacher absence, gendered protection concerns or repeated displacement. Mixed-method triangulation would substantially strengthen causal interpretation.

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