
Education Cannot Wait: Protecting Children and Youth's Right to a Quality Education in Humanitarian Emergencies and Conflict Situations



28 million of the world's out of school children currently live in conflict-affected contexts, and enrolment rates in secondary schools are nearly one-third lower in conflict-affected countries compared with other developing countries¹. In addition, millions of children and youth have had their education disrupted by disasters from natural hazards. As a result, generations of young people are denied their rights to achieve their full potential and are trapped in situations of poverty, discrimination and conflict.

The UN General Assembly resolution on '*the right to education in emergency situations*' emphasizes the obligation to secure education for all children regardless of context². The UN Secretary General's Education Initiative, **Education First**, also upholds the right to education in conflict and humanitarian emergencies, reinforcing the GA resolution.

We are committed to protect and uphold the rights of all children and youth to an education in situations of conflict and emergencies, with particular emphasis on marginalized groups including refugees, internally displaced populations, girls, ethnic minorities and children and youth with disabilities. Access to quality education and learning – be it through formal schooling or alternative education opportunities – helps build resilience for children and youth and provides them with stability, structure, and hope for the future. Moreover, safe education spaces provide protection from exploitation and harm, especially for girls. The provision of equitable quality education and investment in teachers are important conditions for countries to recover from crisis; and children, youth, parents and communities in crisis situations consistently list education as a high priority.

To ensure the right to education in crisis-affected contexts, three key barriers need to be addressed:

- 1. Education in emergencies is under-financed**, *accounting for less than two percent of humanitarian aid*: Education is not recognized as a humanitarian priority. No other sector consistently ranks as the least-funded sector or has a smaller share of humanitarian appeals funded.
- 2. Attacks on schools, children and teachers are widespread**: More than thirty countries around the world have been affected by widespread attacks on schools³. Schools are bombed, looted and occupied by armed groups or used for political purposes. For many learners and their teachers, it is dangerous to travel to and attend school. Attacks against schools, students and teachers are gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, amounting to war crimes.⁴
- 3. Education sector plans and budgets are 'emergency blind'**: Few Education Sector Plans and budgets address disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness, response and recovery. This lack of plans, capacity and resources makes it harder for schools to keep children and youth safe and continue to hold classes when a crisis strikes, to inform communities of risks and actions to take, and for education systems to recover after a crisis.

¹ EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011, p. 15

² UN General Assembly Resolution on the right to education in emergency situations, A/RES/64/290 (2010)

³ For more information on attacks on education, see the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, <http://www.protectingeducation.org/problem>

⁴ During situations of armed conflict, attacks on education may violate international humanitarian and criminal law and constitute war crimes (or crimes against humanity during war or peacetime) as set out in the 1907 Hague Regulations, the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and customary international humanitarian law.

A Call to Action:

The organizing partners for this event reaffirm their commitment to protect and uphold all children and youth's right to a quality education in humanitarian emergencies and conflict situations, and call on all governments, donors, humanitarian agencies, and all concerned individuals and institutions to take coordinated action on the GA Resolution and Education First. These actions will include:

Increase levels of humanitarian aid to education and improve its delivery mechanisms

- Elevate education in emergencies so that it receives equal status as other priorities in government and donor humanitarian policy;
- Integrate education as a key component in all Humanitarian Action Plans, whether led by the United Nations or by a government;
- Include education in all consolidated appeals processes (CAPs), Flash Appeals and national strategies to respond to emergencies;
- Ensure that education needs are adequately financed in every humanitarian response, and increase overall humanitarian budget allocations for education to *at least* 4 percent;
- Activate the Education Cluster alongside other clusters in emergencies and ensure it is fully resourced to do its job;
- Promote the use of pooled financing mechanisms to deliver quick results in response to humanitarian emergencies and conflict situations.

Keep education safe from attacks

- Enforce the provisions of International Humanitarian Law, International Human Rights conventions and customary law that protect schools and civilian populations from attack;
- Respect provisions of the UN Security Council Resolution 1998, and act upon reported 'attacks on schools and hospitals' through the UN Security Council-mandated Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), so that victims of attacks receive tangible support;
- Ensure safe passage to and from school, designate schools as conflict-free zones respected by all parties, and take measures to restrict military use of schools;
- Adopt and support community-owned protective measures to reduce the incidence of attacks on education by local actors, armed groups and armed forces;
- Prioritize education within the Global Protection Cluster and ensure that its importance is addressed concretely in policy discussions of UN organs dealing with protection issues.

Integrate emergency prevention, preparedness, response and recovery in education sector plans and budgets

- Include conflict and disaster risk and impacts on the education system as part of all sector assessments, and integrate education in emergency related indicators into Education Monitoring and Information Systems (EMIS);
- Integrate emergency preparedness, response and recovery into sector plans at all levels (national and sub-national);
- Ensure consistency between humanitarian and development interventions, and build national capacity to coordinate and manage education in emergency response and recovery;
- Ensure appropriate line-items in sector budgets and incorporate flexible financing mechanisms that allow for government and donor education funding to be reallocated for emergency response and recovery;
- Ensure that disaster risk and safety considerations in education policy and planning are guided by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) "*Minimum standards for education: preparedness, response, recovery*".

Children and youth do not forfeit their right to education in situations of conflict or when emergencies strike. This right must be upheld and protected at all times. We—all of us—are responsible.