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Unlocking Futures: A Global Overview of Education in Emergencies Financing

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Introduction

In the face of a global education crisis, the mobilisation of sufficient financial resources for Education in Emergencies (EiE) is an urgent necessity. Conflict, the climate crisis, food insecurity, forced displacement and the aftereffects of COVID-19 continue to disrupt education systems around the world, and to deny millions of children in all their diversity the opportunity to learn and thrive. At present, 224 million school-aged children are affected by crisis and in urgent need of quality education, including 72 million children who are out of school completely.¹ The new analysis of the state of EiE funding presented in this paper follows on from the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies' (EiE Hub) 2022 and 2023 flagship reports, *Education in Emergencies Financing in the Wake of COVID-19: Time to Reinvest to Meet Growing Needs* (EiE Hub Finance Report) and *Leveraging Education in Emergencies for Climate Action* (EiE Hub Climate Report). The current analysis provides both causes for concern and promising opportunities.

Over the last two years, key stakeholders have continued to identify EiE financing as a priority, as emphasised at the *Transforming Education Summit* in September 2022, at the *High-Level Financing Conference of Education Cannot Wait* (ECW) in February 2023 and at the *Global Refugee Forum* in December 2023, amongst other processes. In this same time frame, while attention to high-profile emergencies has overshadowed other neglected crises, many donors have cut their education aid budgets. The education needs of crisis-affected and displaced children continue to rise, due to the impact of such conflicts as Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, Myanmar and elsewhere, alongside the toll taken by increasingly frequent climate-related disasters. As a result, EiE remains chronically underfunded, and the need to mobilise greater financial resources is more urgent than ever. Humanitarian funding alone will not be sufficient to close that funding gap.

Seven Key Insights into EiE Financing: Challenges and Opportunities

The following analysis does not provide a comprehensive overview of all trends in EiE financing (see methodology in annex). Rather, it presents seven key insights that highlight the main developments from June 2022 to May 2024, as well as issues that require further attention. Four of these insights address persistent challenges that explain why EiE continues to be underfunded and not prioritised as highly as other sectors. In contrast, the remaining three key insights pinpoint opportunities to mobilise more funding for EiE and the actions required to achieve this.

Persistent Challenges to EiE Funding: Four key findings

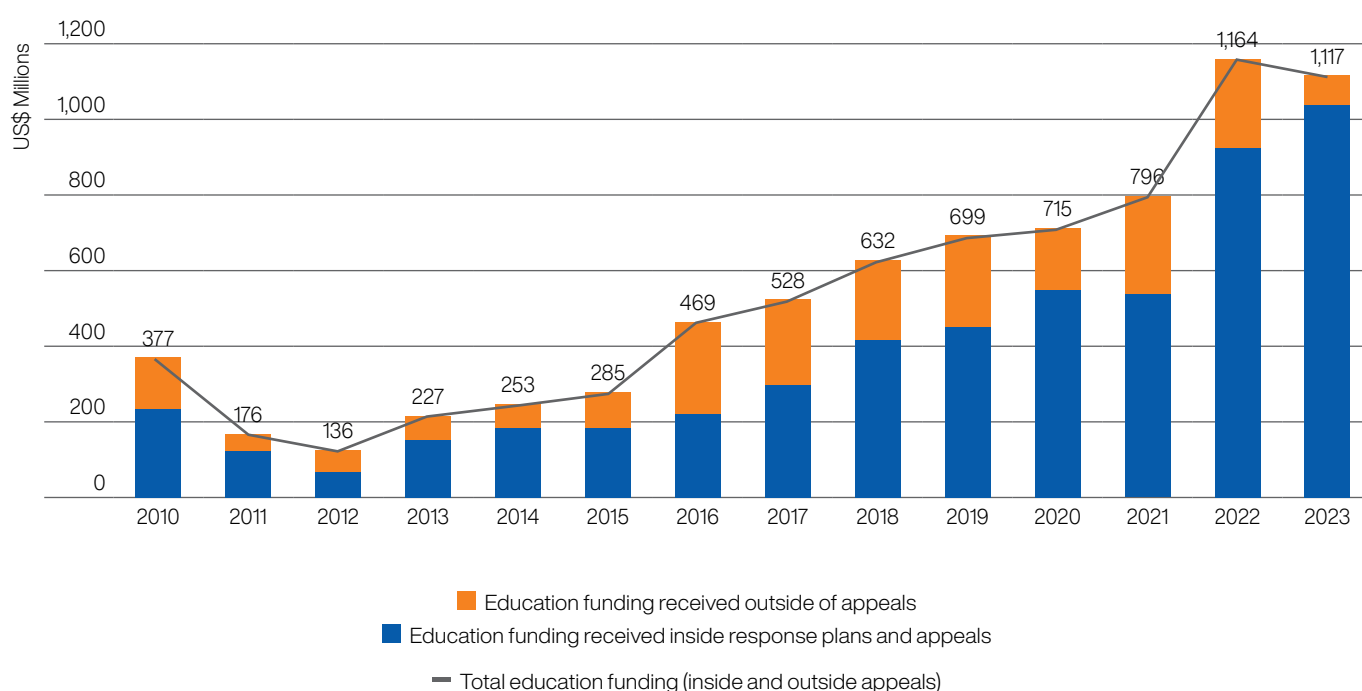
Insight #1: A long-term trend of yearly increases in humanitarian funding for education is at risk following a decrease in 2023—the first in more than a decade.

Humanitarian funding for the education sector should be increased to close the funding gap.

The EiE Hub Finance Report found that the education sector is chronically underfunded, as rising needs outstrip any increases in donor funding year after year. Beginning in 2012, there was a steady

year-on-year increase in humanitarian funding for the education sector (see Graph 1). However, in 2023 this trend came to a halt, when US\$1.12 billion was mobilised to address education needs in humanitarian crises—a 4% decrease from the year before, according to the OCHA Financial Tracking System (FTS). While funding to UN-led humanitarian appeals continued to increase, funding outside these appeals fell, accounting for the overall decline. This reflected a generalised steep downturn in humanitarian funding in 2023, which was caused by several large donors tightening their aid budgets, after having given generously to the Ukraine crisis the year before. Additionally, some countries allocated an increasing proportion of aid domestically to assist refugees. Global humanitarian funding decreased from US\$41.5 billion in 2022 to US\$33.9 billion in 2023, a drop of 18%, which was far greater than the 4% decrease for the education sector. By the end of April 2024, total humanitarian funding had reached US\$7.3 billion, already 36% down from the same period the previous year.² The education sector had received US\$236.8 million.

Graph 1: Humanitarian funding for the education sector: Inside and outside UN-led humanitarian appeals (Source: FTS)



On a more positive note, the funding received for UN-led Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) against requirements for the education sector increased from 24% to 32% between 2021 and 2023. This is still far less than in most other sectors; out of 13 sectors, 9 were better funded than education. However, while the funding gap for education has decreased, it has widened for the overall global appeal. The global UN-led humanitarian appeal received 43% of its required aid in 2023, compared to 53% as recently as 2021. In this sense, the education sector has not been affected as much as other sectors by the sharp global downturn in humanitarian funding since 2023. However, education still faces a massive gap, as funding has not matched the rising needs and the sector remains more seriously underfunded than many other sectors.

BOX 1: FINANCING FOR REFUGEE EDUCATION IN EMERGENCY CONTEXTS

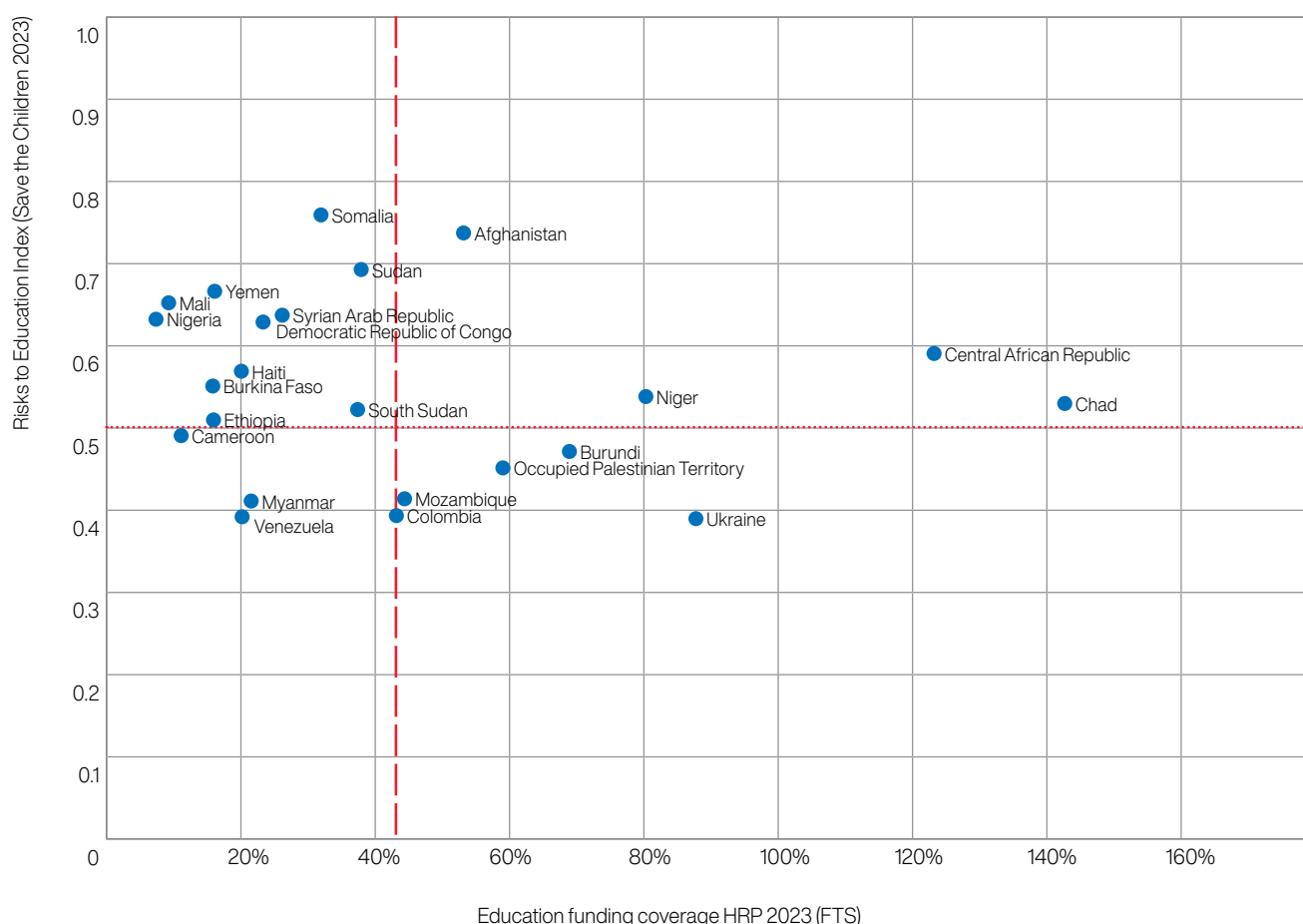
Over the last couple of years, UNHCR has significantly enhanced its efforts to track financial contributions received against Refugee Response Plans (RRPs) at country and regional levels through its dedicated *Refugee Funding Tracker* (RFT) platform. Education requirements in RRP have increased from US\$931 million in 2022 to US\$1.08 billion in 2023. At the time of the analysis, data for 2024 shows a total of US\$541 million required for education (not including the Syria RRP) across 13 country and regional RRP. Education needs typically account for around 8% of the total funding requested under RRP. It should be noted that funding appealed for in RRP does not cover the totality of refugee education needs. Appeals tend to focus on new or rapidly worsening refugee situations. However, many refugees live in protracted situations in countries not covered by RRP or HRP.

Insight #2: The countries where children’s education is at greatest risk are the most underfunded in terms of humanitarian funding.

The scarce financial resources for EiE should be provided more equitably, with countries where children’s education is at greatest risk being given higher priority.

According to the humanitarian principle of impartiality, humanitarian assistance should be provided based on need alone. Donors have signed on to principles to ensure that they allocate their humanitarian funding in proportion to needs.³ However, many neglected crises occur beyond the global media headlines and are in contexts of little strategic interest to donor governments. As a result, they are more underfunded than high-profile crises.⁴

Graph 2: Risks to education and funding for education in HRP countries (2023)



Data analysed for this paper shows that the countries facing the highest risk to education are also the most underfunded. Save the Children publishes an annual *Risk to Education Index* that ranks countries by their school system's vulnerability to hazards that threaten children's right to education. It also identifies where increased resources are required to mitigate existing crises and prevent future ones. As Graph 2 shows, 11 countries that Save the Children viewed as having 'extreme' or 'high' risks to education in 2023 were also the places where the education sector was critically underfunded—that is, they received less than the global average of humanitarian funding that year.⁵

BOX 2: EIE FINANCING OBSERVATORY

As part of its 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, ECW is developing a new Financing Observatory to consolidate existing data on EiE funding and present it in a uniform way to all partners. In 2023, as part of this initiative, ECW and the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report launched an assessment of the completeness, quality and coherence of education financing data in crisis settings. Drawing from humanitarian and development funding sources, their goal is to devise protocols for effectively consolidating data from these diverse databases, and thereby to increase understanding of education financing in crisis settings. ECW and UNESCO GEM will produce annual evidence briefing notes that capture total funding flows to different crisis contexts.

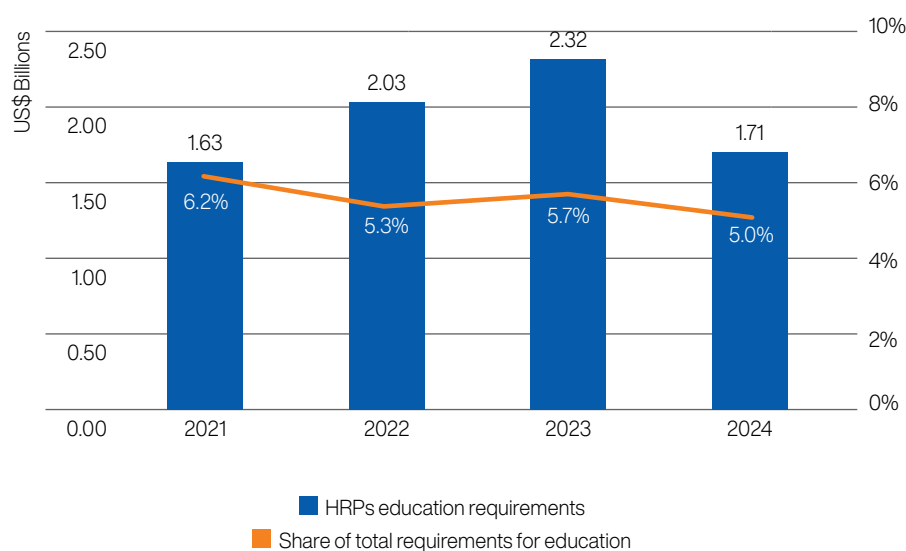
Insight #3: Education financial requirements were revised down in 2024 due to boundary setting in the *Global Humanitarian Overview (GHO)*.

The impact of this boundary setting on the education sector should be assessed, and additional guidance provided for the GHO 2025.

Faced with a record funding gap in 2023, the *Global Humanitarian Overview 2024*—the main consolidated, UN-led global humanitarian appeal—made an effort to prioritise the humanitarian response in areas where people were facing the most life-threatening crises. This so-called 'boundary setting' exercise resulted in lower financial requirements: at its launch in December 2023, the overall GHO was set at US\$46.4 billion, which was 18% less than the previous year's US\$56.7 billion. According to the GHO 2024, the reasons for this reduced estimate of humanitarian needs and targets are: the phasing out of humanitarian appeals in some countries; the improvement of the humanitarian situation in others; and the introduction of a new methodology for needs analysis—the Joint and Inter-Sectoral Analysis Framework (JIAF) 2.00—that has enabled more nuanced and rigorous analysis of humanitarian needs.⁶

As noted in the EiE Hub Finance Report, it is important that education partners provide an accurate picture of children's education needs in humanitarian crises and set the financial requirements accordingly. In the last few years, the Global Education Cluster has been working with its country clusters to improve the calculation of the number of children in need of education support, and to set accurate and feasible targets. It is also crucial to integrate approaches across education and other sectors through the lens of child development, including child protection, food security and health. This integration serves as a gateway to securing more joint funding for EiE.

Graph 3: Education requirements in HRP (Source: FTS)



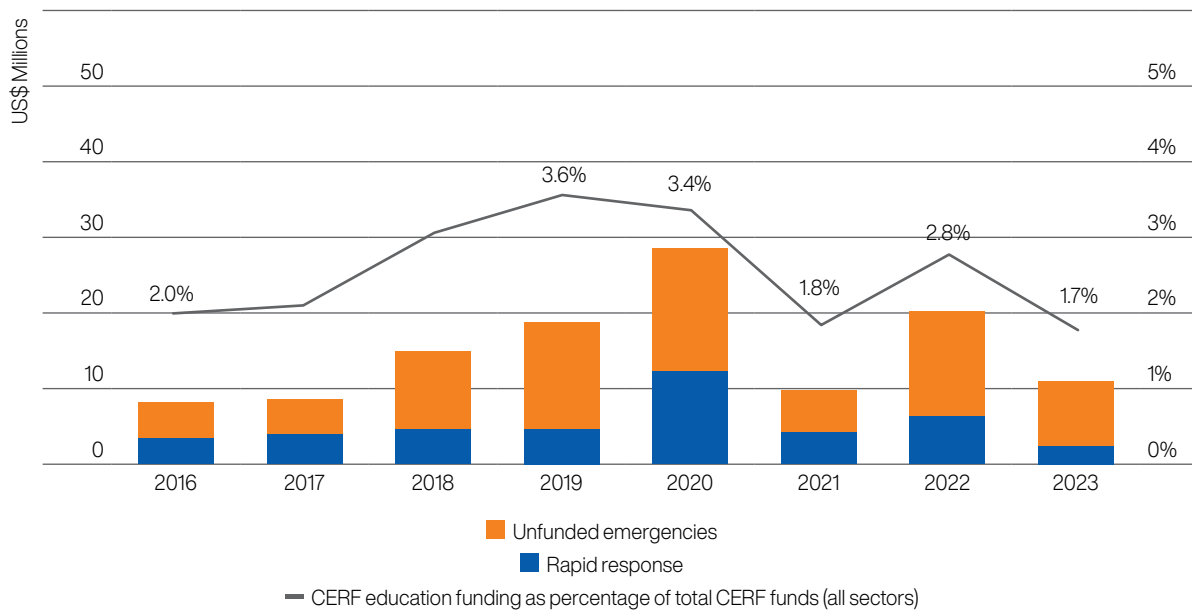
The education requirements in HRP fell to US\$1.7 billion in the 2024 GHO, a decrease of US\$613 million (or 26%) from the year before (see Graph 3) following several years of steady rise. The reduction in education requirements was greater than the percentage of reduction of the overall GHO. The reason for this larger reduction in the education sector financial requirements in the 2024 GHO is unclear. The scaled-back requirements occurred despite the relative share of humanitarian funding to the education sector having increased in previous years from 4.4% in 2021 to 5.1% in 2023, the growing acknowledgement of the life-saving effects of education, and the fact that crisis-affected children and youth consistently identify education as a top priority. It will be important to further assess the reasons for the reduction in education needs in the GHO 2024 and how this might impact the planning of next year's appeal.

Insight #4: Despite policy commitments, education is not being prioritised in OCHA-managed humanitarian funds.

Funding for education from the Central Emergency Relief Fund (CERF) and Country Based Pooled Funds (CBPF) should be increased, in line with guidance from the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) to prioritise education.

As noted in the EiE Hub Finance Report, the ERC issued guidance in 2019 to make education one of four strategic priorities in the funding decisions of OCHA-managed humanitarian funds, namely the CERF and CBPF. The education sector is often overlooked in humanitarian funding decisions because it is not considered as 'life-saving' as other interventions, such as food or health. And yet, education does save and sustain lives in an emergency. It can be an entry point for other life-saving interventions such as health, water and sanitation, food and protection. EiE can also include life-saving messages on health, sanitation, and how to be safe from violence, trafficking, unexploded ordnance, and diseases. It can encompass school meals, family tracing and reunification services, psychosocial support, support to children and youth with disabilities, and protection referrals, including for survivors of gender-based violence. Teachers are critical to all of this. Crisis-affected children value education and often consider it as much of a priority as food, water, health or money. Responding to children's demand for education is an essential element of the humanitarian sector's obligation to uphold their accountability to crisis-affected populations. In March 2024, EiE Hub members published a *Joint Statement* that highlighted why education should be considered essential from the first day of every crisis.

Graph 4: CERF funding for education 2016-2023: Total funds allocated to education and percentage for education from total CERF funding (Source: OCHA Pooled Funds Data Hub)



As the graph above shows, since the ERC issued his guidance, CERF funding for education has decreased, rather than increasing, as would have been expected. At the time of the EiE Hub Finance Report, the decrease in CERF funding for education in 2021 to a mere 1.8% was explained by the understandable prioritisation of health interventions needed to address COVID-19. However, there has been no reversal of this trend since the EiE Hub Finance Report; just 1.7% of CERF funding went to education in 2023. This is far less than the proportion of overall humanitarian funding for education in the same year, which was 5.1%. Despite policy guidance to the contrary, education is clearly not being prioritised in CERF’s funding allocations. The CBPF funding record is better, although the proportion of its funding going to education has fluctuated in recent years. In 2023, 5.2% was used for education. While not as significant in monetary terms as other EiE funding mechanisms, the experience with CERF and CBPF underlines the fact that the education sector needs constant prioritisation to avoid being overlooked in funding decisions.

Opportunities to Address the EiE Funding Gap: Three key insights

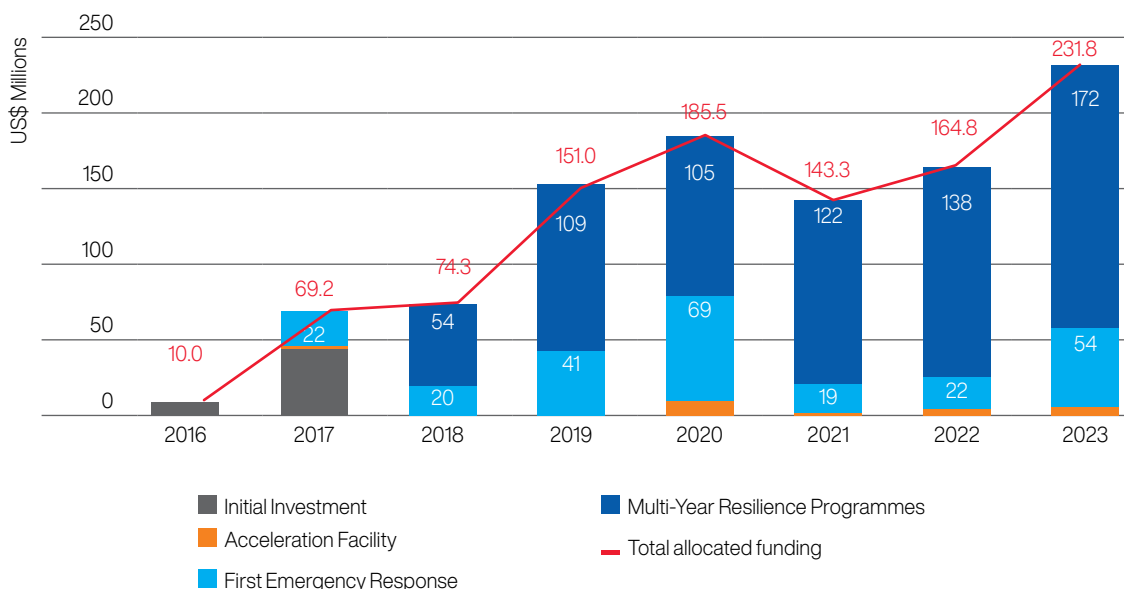
Insight #5: Global education funds remain a key catalyst for mobilising additional EiE funding.

Education Cannot Wait (ECW) and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) should receive increased funding in accordance with stated targets, while collaboration between the two global funds should be further strengthened and institutionalised to build on previous successes.

The EiE Hub Finance Report emphasised the fact that political support and policy commitments are critical to mobilising EiE funding. The existence of dedicated education funds, particularly ECW and GPE, underline the importance of these critical factors in mobilising more resources for EiE. While the EiE Hub Finance Report showed a potential drop-off in ECW funding from 2021, this trend has thankfully

been reversed. Funding allocations to ECW reached US\$231.8 million in 2023 (see Graph 5), with 74% of ECW funding allocated through Multi-Year Resilience Programmes (MYRP) and 23% through First Emergency Responses. The ECW High-Level Financing Conference in February 2023 was instrumental in securing continued support for EiE, with US\$826 million pledged. However, this total still falls well short of ECW’s overall target, which is to mobilise US\$1.5 billion over four years (2023-2026) to reach 20 million children affected by crisis. While GPE has not specifically held a replenishment of its fund since the EiE Hub Finance Report, GPE had 119 Active Grants supporting fragile and conflict-affected countries in 2023, constituting 61% of their Active Portfolio and worth over US\$1.77 billion.

Graph 5: ECW funding allocations by type of investment (Source: ECW)



The EiE Hub Finance Report highlighted the complementary nature of ECW and GPE as funding mechanisms for EiE. It recommended enhanced coordination between the two funds, including the development of a strategic partnership framework. While GPE is a development fund for education, as of 2023, 40% of its partner countries were considered to be affected by fragility or conflict. In 2022, GPE had expanded eligibility to its accelerated funding mechanism to any GPE partner country experiencing a crisis. In 2023 this accounted for 8% of the GPE portfolio. ECW, meanwhile, provides an education response in crisis situations, but 53.7% of its funding is from development sources and 22.9% from humanitarian sources. Close coordination between the two global funds is therefore vital and has been growing stronger in the last few years (see Box 3).

BOX 3: PROMISING EXAMPLES OF ECW AND GPE COLLABORATION

In South Sudan, GPE country partners chose to use \$10 million of GPE funding to mitigate impacts on the education system from relentless flooding in 2022. This provided additional support for the ECW MYRP for South Sudan, to which ECW had already allocated US\$40 million. In Afghanistan, both ECW and GPE have provided funding for the *Humanitarian Response Plan* and *Afghanistan Education Sector Transitional Framework*. They also agreed on common grant agents and target beneficiaries.

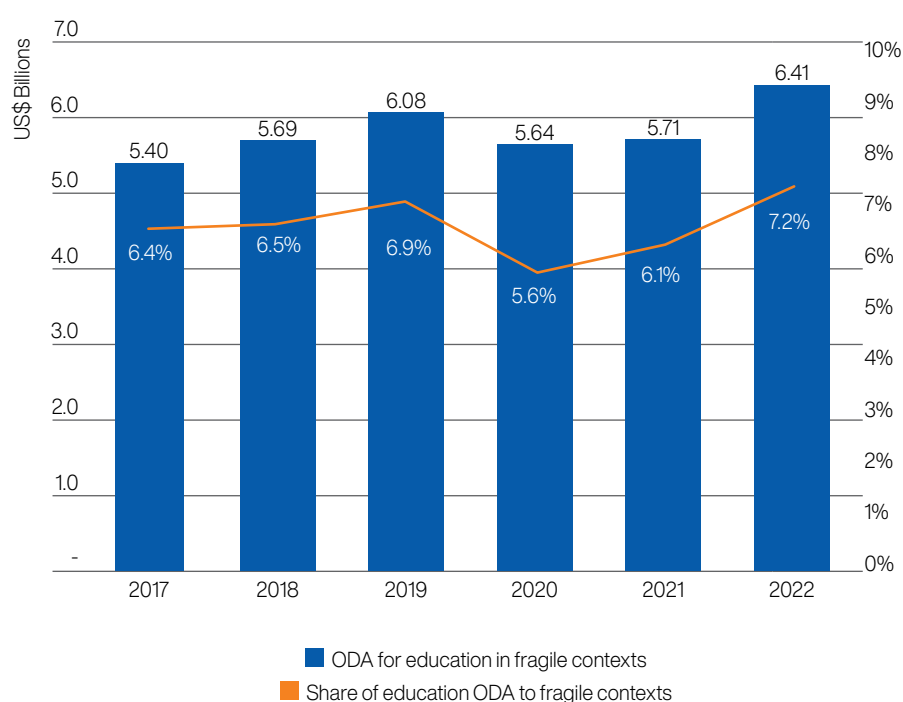
Insight #6: There is still potential for expanding nexus funding approaches for EiE.

Coordination between humanitarian and development funding for education should be further strengthened in crisis-affected countries.

To ensure continued quality education for crisis-affected and displaced children and youth, working across the humanitarian-development nexus is essential. As the experience of ECW and GPE shows, there is already a significant overlap of humanitarian and development funding for EiE in the same crisis contexts, and the distinction between humanitarian and development funding is not always clear. This underlines the need for coordinated funding approaches. Similarly in refugee crises, support to recipient country education systems is crucial with further commitments made through the 2023 Global Refugee Forum's multi-stakeholder pledge on refugee inclusion.

While fluctuating over time, overall development aid to the education sector in fragile and crisis-affected countries has increased in recent years. The proportion of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in these contexts has risen from 6.4% in 2017 to 7.2% in 2022 (see Graph 6).⁷ Additionally, the World Bank has increased its support to education in fragile and crisis-affected countries, raising its portfolio of investments from US\$5.2 billion in 2022 to US\$7 billion in 2024. This represents 27% of the bank's overall education spending.⁸ The World Bank also recognises the importance of supporting refugee-hosting countries to meet the costs of providing refugees with access to education through inclusion in national systems.⁹ Such longer-term financing through the Window for Refugees and Host Communities is an important complement to humanitarian, appeal-based funding. The trend of increased ODA for education in fragile and crisis-affected countries contrasts with a decrease in overall ODA in these countries in recent years.¹⁰ As noted earlier, humanitarian funding for the education sector increased year-on-year until 2022, and then fell in 2023. The concurrent increase of development and humanitarian funding for EiE in the same crisis countries underlines more than ever the need for joined-up funding strategies to provide seamless and coordinated support to fragile education systems. This requires flexibility and a coherent funding approach from donors.

Graph 6: ODA for education in fragile contexts: Total amounts and as share of total ODA (Source: OECD CRS)



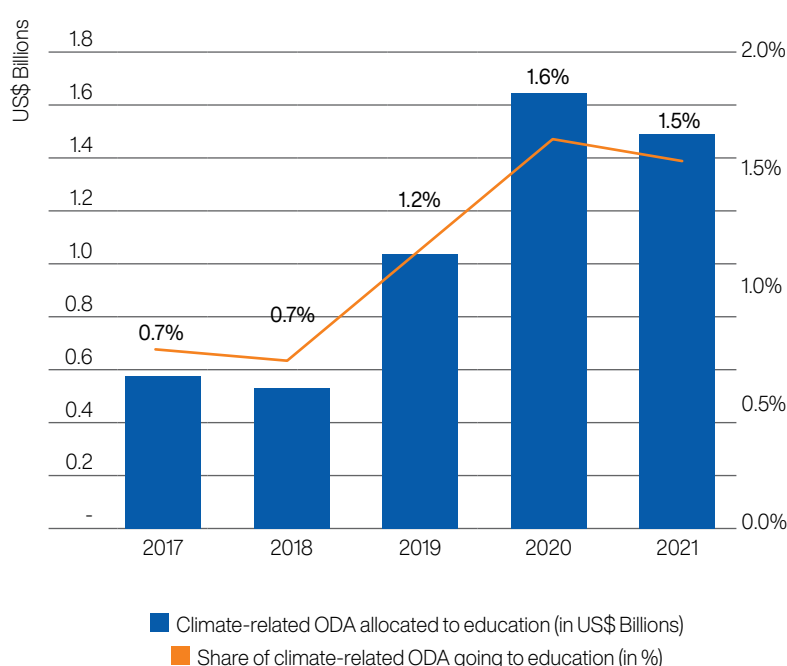
Insight #7: There is significant untapped potential for climate finance investment in EiE.

An appropriate proportion of climate finance should be provided to the education sector, and EiE partners should be given further capacity-building opportunities so they can access the relevant funding mechanisms.

The EiE Hub Climate Report outlined the risk that the climate crisis poses to children's education. It also indicated that education for displaced and crisis-affected children and youth is crucial to promoting climate action. Education helps people address the root causes and impacts of the climate crisis, and empowers them with the knowledge, competencies and skills they need to adapt, take action and transform economies, and to improve their health, well-being and security. According to ECW, since 2020, 62 million crisis-affected children and adolescents in 27 countries were also affected by climate hazards. This exacerbates existing inequalities, including those based on gender, ethnicity, disability and age. At the 2023 UN Climate Change Conference (COP28), held in Dubai, 37 countries signed a groundbreaking *Declaration on the Common Agenda for Education and Climate Change*, the first global political acknowledgement of the critical link between education and climate action as foundational to ensuring a resilient and sustainable future for all children.

To help address the global climate crisis, EiE actors need to ensure that their interventions are recognised as climate-sensitive. Using the *Rio Marker*, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) tracks which education funding is climate-related. According to this data tool, 7% of the OECD *Development Assistance Committee* members' bilateral education funding in 2022 was recorded as making a 'significant' contribution to climate change adaptation, while 0.6% of this funding was 'principally' designed to address the climate crisis. This suggests that the contribution that EiE makes to climate action could still be more clearly articulated, especially in the areas of preparedness, anticipatory action, adaptation and resilience building. The World Bank, for its part, increased its climate-related education funding from 5% in 2018 to 33% in 2024.

Graph 7: Climate-related ODA for education: Total amounts and share of total climate-related ODA (Source: OECD, Development Finance for Climate and Environment)



In addition to making sure that education funding is recognised as contributing to climate action, it is important that a proportion of climate-related development assistance also targets the education sector. According to OECD data from an examination of climate-related development finance from various bilateral, multilateral and private sources, only 1.5% of such funding went to the education sector in 2021. While the proportion is small, it amounted to US\$1.5 billion (US\$761.9 million in fragile contexts), which highlights the potential for the education sector to access climate finance. According to the *Climate Policy Initiative*, average annual climate finance flows (public and private) reached almost US\$1.3 trillion in 2021-2022, which was nearly double the 2019-2020 levels.¹¹ However, a report published in 2023 by Plan International, Save the Children, UNICEF and Capita found that only one of the 591 projects implemented by key multilateral climate funds between 2006 and 2023 had education as its principal objective. Only 13% of the projects made any mention of education.¹²

BOX 4: BRACE INITIATIVE INVOLVING CLIMATE AND EDUCATION FINANCE: A PROMISING EXAMPLE

At COP28, GPE, the Green Climate Fund and Save the Children launched an education and climate finance initiative, 'Building the Climate Resilience of Children and Communities Through the Education Sector', known as BRACE. Starting in Cambodia, South Sudan and Tonga, this US\$70 million programme will invest in a range of practical actions, including retrofitting and constructing greener and more climate-adaptive schools, in line with the *Comprehensive School Safety Framework*. It will also integrate climate into curricula and improve early warning and response approaches, based on each country's needs.

EiE actors are increasingly positioning themselves to access climate finance to step up the role they can play in addressing the climate crisis. In 2023, ECW launched a US\$150 million *Climate Appeal* for additional funding that would be used to expand life-saving access to education for two million children and adolescents living on the front lines of the climate crisis. GPE has also strengthened its partnerships for climate action (see Box 4). The CERF launched a similar *Climate Action Account* to receive climate finance, which will also be open to EiE partners. While the modalities are still to be worked out, the new *Loss and Damage Fund* also holds significant potential for education. However, only a few EiE partners are accredited to the various climate funds. Moreover, the national adaptation plans developed by governments of climate-affected countries to meet their global climate change commitments rarely budget for the requirements of the education sector. More needs to be done to build EiE partners' capacity to access climate financing and develop more strategic partnerships in this area. Climate and environment funds should recognise the role the EiE sector plays in implementing critical climate action.

Conclusion

Without adequate funding to support education systems before, during and after humanitarian crises, millions of children will be left without access to quality education. As explained in this paper, the EiE funding environment remains extremely challenging due to cuts in aid budgets. With the ongoing strain on key donors' humanitarian funding, 2024 will be a critical year in terms of ensuring continued financial support to the education sector. Further efforts are needed to make sure that scarce resources are targeted where the needs are greatest. While the education sector remains critically underfunded and is often not prioritised, EiE actors are finding new and innovative ways to mobilise more funding through effective financing strategies. Ensuring a more streamlined and integrated approach between humanitarian and development funding is critical to supporting education systems before, during and after a crisis. In addition, there is significant potential for climate finance investment to build resilient and climate-smart education systems. Greater investments in these areas will support quality education for all children and yield a higher return for climate action. The EiE Hub urges relevant stakeholders to take note of the analysis provided in this paper and to reflect on the key actions required to address the insights that have been presented.



Methodological Note

The information contained in this report reflects the analysis by the authors, Damian Lilly and Margot Thierry, of all available datasets for EiE funding, including from OCHA FTS, OCHA Pooled Funds Data Hub, GPE, ECW, World Bank and OECD Common Reporting Standard (CRS).

- The OCHA FTS is the main tool for tracking humanitarian funding flows. However, FTS is a voluntary reporting mechanism and has limitations including potential underreporting and delays in data entry. FTS is updated in real time, and the data used for this paper was accessed in April and May 2024. The analysis of FTS data includes the funding that has been disaggregated and reported under the ‘education sector’ in FTS, mainly through HRPs.
- Apart from the Rohingya Joint Response Plan, analysis of other UNHCR-led RRRPs has not been included. FTS is not the primary tool for tracking funding provided to RRP and the RFT does not provide a sector-disaggregated analysis of income received against RRP.
- The analysis on OECD CRS data encompasses aid and concessional finance from all official donors, with figures as gross disbursements in constant prices. The OECD dataset on climate-related development finance includes both concessional and non-concessional finance from bilateral and multilateral institutions, as well as private philanthropic sources, which support climate change mitigation and adaptation, or other environment objectives.

Endnotes

- 1 See ‘Crisis-Affected Children and Adolescents in Need of Education Support: New Global Estimates and Thematic Deep Dives’, ECW, June 2023.
- 2 See ‘Global Humanitarian Overview 2024, March - April Update’, OCHA, April 2024.
- 3 See, for example, ‘24 Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship’, Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative, available at: www.ghdinitiative.org/ghd/gns/principles-good-practice-of-ghd/principles-good-practice-ghd.html.
- 4 The EiE Hub Finance Report found that, from 2016 to 2021, the five HRPs receiving the highest amounts of education funding received 45% of their requirements, compared to just 25% for the rest of the HRPs.
- 5 These countries include Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Syria. This analysis does not account for needs and levels of funding for refugees hosted in these countries. It is interesting to note that, while the Central African Republic and Chad appeared to be well-funded in 2023, the education sector needs for these countries were only 26% and 23% funded, respectively, in 2022—just one year earlier.
- 6 For more details, see the ‘Global Humanitarian Overview 2024’, OCHA, December 2023.
- 7 This trend contrasts with the education share of overall ODA, which has fallen from 7.7% in 2012 to 5.6% in 2022. The sector has lost out to the health sector, which has been prioritised, especially since COVID-19.
- 8 ‘Delivering Education in the Midst of Fragility, Conflict, and Violence (FCV)’, World Bank, March 2024.
- 9 While the average unit cost of refugee education varies by host country income group and level of education, the total annual fiscal cost of educating all refugees in low-income countries is only US\$309 million. See ‘The Global Cost of Inclusive Refugee Education: 2023 Update’, World Bank, December 2023.
- 10 See, for example, the 2023 ‘Global Humanitarian Assistance Report, Development Initiatives’.
- 11 ‘Global Landscape of Climate Finance 2023’, Climate Policy Institute, November 2023.
- 12 ‘Falling Short: Addressing the Finance Gap for Children’, Plan International, Save the Children, UNICEF and Capita, June 2023.

Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies Members

