

Advocacy Brief

Bridging the Gap: Strengthening the Evidence Base for Gender-Responsive Education in Emergencies



Inter-agency
Network for Education
in Emergencies

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Uganda, 2018. A Oberstadt, IRC

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1. INTRODUCTION

The impact and experience of emergency situations is profoundly different for women and girls than for men and boys. They face different threats and risks, and have different responses and coping mechanisms for dealing with the effects of crisis. Understanding these dynamics and addressing them in education policy and programming are critical to ensuring access to safe and quality education for all.

In 2018, the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), as co-chair of the INEE [Gender Task Team](#) (GTT), conducted a mapping of knowledge on gender and education in conflict and crisis settings.¹ The mapping identified key gaps, as well as opportunities to contribute to the growing body of evidence on gender-responsive education in emergencies (EiE) programming. It also highlighted a clear need for stronger collaborative efforts and knowledge-sharing on gender and education in conflict and crisis situations across actors worldwide in the areas of gender equity, education, protection, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH).

In response to global calls for more and better data and evidence on gender-responsive EiE, and to build on the mapping conducted in 2018, the INEE GTT has developed this brief. The brief also draws from findings of the [2021](#) and [2022](#) editions of the INEE Mind the Gap report on the state of girls' education in emergencies, and from consultations with education and gender experts, including the INEE GTT and [Girls' EiE Reference Group](#).

The objectives of this brief are as follows:

- To highlight key gaps in the evidence base on gender and EiE
- To provide strategic guidance and thematic content for new research initiatives focused on gender and EiE
- To promote collaborative action and knowledge-sharing among key actors working on gender and EiE

¹ Searches of the literature on gender and EiE were conducted across relevant listservs, websites, and resource libraries using a snowballing approach and citation tracking. The review was limited to literature in English that was published between 2004 and 2018. As the mapping was primarily concerned with identifying gaps in and opportunities for knowledge-sharing, the search focused on systematic reviews and other sources of categorized and collated data, rather than on primary studies.

2. AUDIENCE AND USE

This brief is intended to be used by anyone involved in strengthening the evidence base on gender-responsive EiE. This includes academics, practitioners, governments, donors, and many others.

The brief can be used in many ways, including the following:

- Identify priority areas of research and/or research questions to take forward
- Identify opportunities for collaboration around particular research areas or research questions
- Identify opportunities for meta-evaluations of gender-responsive initiatives
- Identify priority areas of research to fund
- Advocate for gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation, and research practices



Image Credit: Gaza Strip. 2017 (c) Wissam Nassar

3. THE STATE OF GIRLS' EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

3.1 PROGRESS

In the past decade, significant progress has been made toward achieving gender parity in education, in improving access to education for crisis-affected populations, and increasing the availability of sex- and age-disaggregated data on EiE (INEE, 2021a). New data sources for girls' education have become available, including [HerAtlas](#) (UNESCO), the [World Inequality Database on Education](#) (UNESCO and Global Education Monitoring Report), the [Girls Education Policy Index](#) (Center for Global Development), and EduView (UNICEF). Further efforts have been made to consolidate emerging research and evidence on gender and EiE through resource hubs like the [Evidence for Gender and Education Resource](#), the [UNGEI Knowledge Hub](#), [INEE's Gender Resource Collection](#), and the USAID Education in Conflict and Crisis Network's [priority area on Equity](#).

This push to provide gender-responsive EiE has been further advanced by global commitments, such as the 2018 [Charlevoix Declaration on Quality Education](#) and the 2021 [Declaration on Girls' Education](#), in which the Group of Seven (G7) leaders committed to support quality education and skills training for young girls, adolescent girls, and women in crisis- and conflict-affected situations.

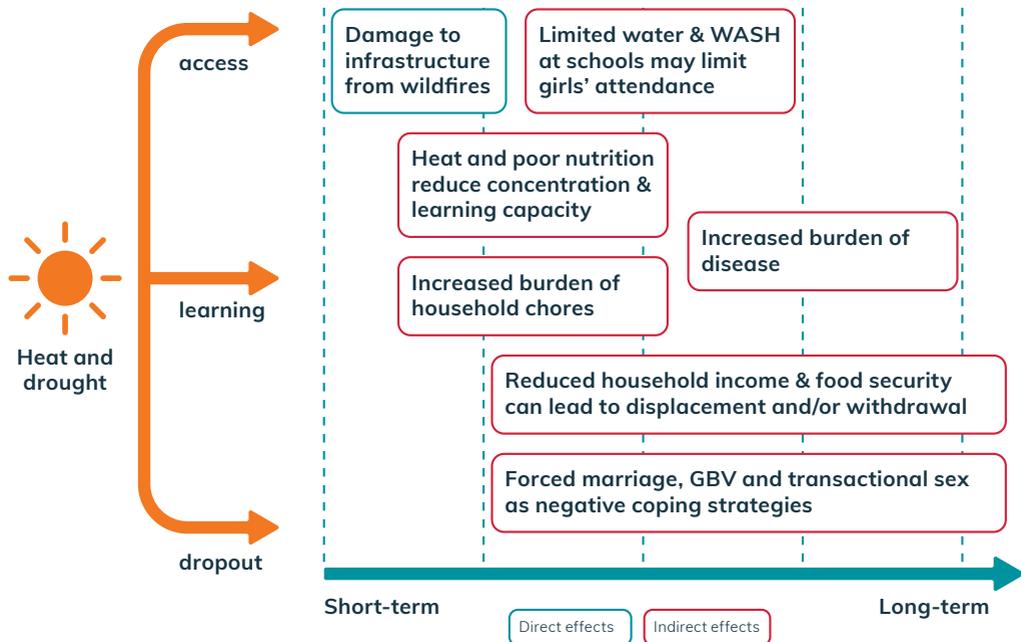
3.2 PERSISTING INEQUALITIES

However, despite this progress, many alarming barriers to gender equality in education remain. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, 69 million girls were out of school in crisis-affected countries, and millions more were in school but failing to hit the minimum learning targets (INEE, 2021a). The COVID-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented disruption of education, which has disproportionately impacted women and girls (UN Women, 2021). During the lockdowns, women and girls lost access to essential sexual and reproductive health services, which has increased their risk of early and unwanted pregnancy (UNFPA, 2020). Girls who are out of school also face a higher risk of child marriage, sexual and gender-based violence (GBV), and child labor, and they have experienced serious challenges in accessing technology and resources for distance learning, which has further exacerbated learning gaps (Webb et al., 2021). According to the Malala Fund (2020), up to 20 million girls are at risk of dropping out of school permanently due to the disruption caused by COVID-19. Girls with disabilities are at an even greater disadvantage, as they now face the new challenges of accessing education from home.

The worsening climate crisis will also compound existing inequalities and barriers to girls' education, including conflict, displacement, and environmental degradation, as

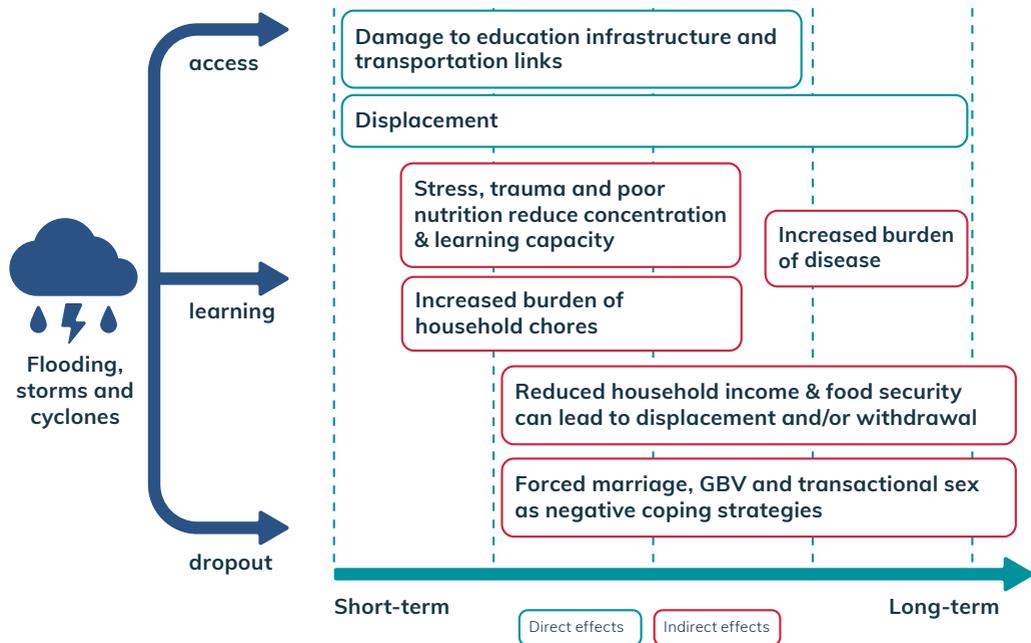
summarized in Figures 1 and 2 (Sims, 2021; UNESCO, 2020). The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2021) reported that 30 million people globally were newly displaced in 2020 due to extreme weather. Displaced people living in camps and tented settlements are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and at increased risk of missing out on education (Devonald et al., 2020).

Figure 1: The direct and indirect impacts of heat and drought on girls' education



Content adapted from: Sims, K. (2021). Education, girls' education and climate change (K4D Emerging Issues Report No. 29). Institute of Development Studies.

Figure 2: The direct and indirect impacts of floods, storms, and tropical cyclones



Content adapted from: Sims, K. (2021). Education, girls' education and climate change (K4D Emerging Issues Report No. 29). Institute of Development Studies.

3.3 DATA GAPS

Despite improvements in data collection, significant gaps remain, including the following:

- **Intersecting vulnerabilities:** While data collection and measurement have improved overall, education data that are disaggregated by vulnerabilities that intersect with gender, such as age, disability, displacement status, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, language, geographic location, etc., are largely unavailable in crisis-affected contexts (INEE, 2021b).
- **Learning outcomes:** Data on girls' learning outcomes are becoming more readily available at the project level but they are less consistently available at the national level, which makes it difficult to track large-scale progress and to disaggregate by gender, displacement status, age, and education level (INEE, 2021b).
- **School safety:** Data-collection systems for measuring violence in schools, particularly GBV, and attacks on schools are being developed at the organizational level. However, they are not yet sufficiently developed to provide comparable data on the prevalence of GBV in crisis and conflict-affected contexts (INEE, 2021b).

- **Girls' perception of education:** There is an assumption that all girls innately view formal education as valuable and that dropping out of school is imposed upon them solely by external forces, such as social norms, discriminatory policies, prohibitive costs, etc. However, there is only limited information available on how girls perceive their individual circumstances, including their experiences of education and displacement, on what value and purpose they believe education has in their lives, and on their sense of agency in deciding whether or not they will attend school (Buckler et al., 2022).

Given these persistent and compounding inequalities, it is now more important than ever to put gender at the forefront of the education response and to ensure that robust evidence is available to enable more effective planning for current and emerging crises. To do so, we must ensure that these data gaps are addressed, that quality, relevant, sex- and age-disaggregated data are available, and that there is strong capacity to analyze data in a gender-responsive manner.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the aforementioned challenges, the INEE GTT recommends strengthening the evidence base for gender-responsive EiE in the following ways:

- **Curate and compare existing evidence:** Existing evidence on promising practices in gender-responsive EiE is often based on information from a single context or a multi-country project, or is transferred from evidence generated in non-crisis-affected contexts (UNGEI, 2018). Extensive information on “what works” in gender-responsive EiE exists mostly at the project and organization levels and largely appears only in unpublished programmatic “field” documents. Promoting open access to this information and comparing evidence across contexts, including regions, stakeholders, types of crisis, etc., would present an opportunity to determine trends in promising practice and strengthen gender-responsive EiE. The emergence in the last five years of curated knowledge hubs on gender, equity, and EiE represent the first steps toward curating and promoting wider public inter-agency access to information on gender, equity, and EiE.
- **Fund and encourage research partnerships across sectors and actors:** Prioritizing cross-sectoral research, as well as research partnerships between international institutions and organizations, national organizations, and individual researchers based in crisis-affected contexts, will help to provide a more holistic picture of women’s and girls’ lives and education experiences.²
- **Generate new evidence:** The relationship between gender, education, and conflict/crisis is complex, and it varies across contexts. More nuanced, gender-focused studies are needed to fully understand how conflict and crisis affect gender equity and education, and what implications this has for policy and practice. There also is a need for more systemic and robust studies that can be compared across interventions/programs and regions. This includes impact evaluations, cost-tracking and cost-effectiveness analyses, participatory action research, and evaluations of programs and interventions that support girls’ EiE. A non-exhaustive list of priority research questions for further study can be found starting on p. 13.
- **Center on the perspectives of women and girls affected by crisis:** Girls and young women should be involved at every stage of the research process, from planning through dissemination. They also should be involved in the development and sharing of research that foregrounds their experiences. Evidence-based advocacy at all levels should involve girls and young women so they can speak to their lived experience and priorities.

² “Cross-sectoral” refers to the sectors of education, social welfare and child protection, health, justice, and finance and planning.

- **Disseminate and encourage the uptake of evidence:** To encourage uptake and inform policy and practice, ensure that the evidence produced is freely available and shared widely with relevant stakeholders, from the local to the international level and across sectors and actors. Sharing evidence in multiple formats can support its use by different stakeholders. This can range from full-length, in-depth journal articles to shorter summary documents, or be in the form of multimedia or multi-format evidence such as infographics, audio, and video. Sharing evidence consistently and widely can also reduce the duplication of research efforts and ensure that funding devoted to EiE research is used most effectively to fill the evidence gaps.
- **Measure the uptake and use of evidence:** Collecting and analyzing data on whether and how stakeholders are using available evidence is imperative. Data on the uptake and use of evidence helps to assess evidence to policy or practice pathways, identify and mitigate any disconnects, and inform which formats are most effective for sharing evidence.

5. GENDER-RESPONSIVE RESEARCH CONSIDERATIONS

Gender-responsive research is an important tool for gaining an understanding of gender inequalities. To ensure that research will provide recommendations that help to achieve measurable gender-equity outcomes, gender must be at the forefront in every stage of the research design and implementation. The INEE GTT recommends considering the following guidance before embarking on any research in order to ensure that your work will be gender-responsive:

- **Collect sex- and age-disaggregated data:**³ Women and men are not homogenous groups, and it is important to collect data that reflect their many differences. Therefore, to get a holistic understanding of communities and trends, further disaggregate data collection as much as possible by other compounding vulnerabilities, such as disability, displacement status, language, etc.
- **Be flexible on timing and location and provide additional support:** Providing free transportation or child care, for example, may enable marginalized people, such as women, girls, people with disabilities, to participate in data collection and feel safe doing so.
- **Establish mixed-gender data-collection teams:** In many contexts, female study participants may feel more comfortable opening up to female interviewers, especially around sensitive topics like GBV and menstruation.
- **Be aware of group dynamics:** When doing qualitative research that uses focus groups, for example, be aware of who speaks and who does not. Some participants may not feel comfortable speaking openly in a large or mixed-gender group. If this appears to be the case, consider having smaller or gender-segregated groups or doing individual interviews.
- **Partner with local organizations and community members to collect and analyze data:** Local actors are already embedded in their communities, familiar with the challenges, and well placed to advise on participant outreach, language, location, etc.

³ It is important to be aware of any potential identification and sensitivity issues when collecting disaggregated data. While there is a strong recommendation to disaggregate data by sex, age, and other factors, you should not disaggregate data if there is a risk that doing so will identify individual subjects.

- **Conduct thorough gender analysis:** Analyze and compare data across gender, age, and other variables, such as disability, displacement status, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc. These comparisons should help you identify disparities in women's and men's access to education and learning. Further analysis may show why these gender disparities exist and help to develop practical recommendations for addressing them.
- **Share findings with all participants:** Sharing findings with your female and male participants allows them see how their data are being used and gives you an opportunity to verify your results, and to seek additional information or context if needed. Sharing your findings also can be a way to start a conversation on gender equity with participants who have differing experiences and opinions.

For further guidance on conducting gender-responsive research, please consult the following resources:

EiE-GenKit (INEE, UNGEI, Education Cannot Wait): To help practitioners ensure that each phase of an EiE intervention is gender responsive, the EiE-GenKit offers tools for practical and immediate use, including checklists, tipsheets, and assessment templates.

Gender-Based Analysis Plus Research Guide (Government of Canada): This analytical tool is used to assess how diverse groups of women, men, and nonbinary individuals may experience policies, programs, and initiatives.

Toolkit for Integrating a Gender-Sensitive Approach into Research and Teaching (GARCIA): This toolkit helps researchers integrate a gender dimension into their ongoing research and teaching. They also can use it when conceiving new projects and curricula.

Toolkit Providing Practical Tips for Conducting Gender-Responsive Data Collection (Biodiversity International): This toolkit offers practical guidelines for researchers on gender-responsive data collection.

Gender Mainstreaming: A Global Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls (UN Women): This toolkit offers guidelines for mainstreaming gender perspectives in policies, programs, and thematic issues at both the programmatic and institutional level.

6. PRIORITY RESEARCH AREAS

Based on the findings of the 2018 mapping and on consultations with gender and inclusive education stakeholders, the INEE GTT has identified the following priority themes and suggested research questions:

TOPIC	SUGGESTED RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Overarching themes	
Strengthening systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the barriers to planning, implementing, and monitoring gender-equitable multi-sectoral approaches in crisis-affected contexts, including the education sector? How have challenges and barriers been mitigated?• What successful strategies have been found to strengthen gender equity in national education systems, and at the intersection of education systems and other sectors (e.g., child protection and social welfare, health, justice, finance and planning, etc.) in crisis-affected contexts? What are the specific entry points for EiE programming?• What institutional barriers and challenges do refugee girls face in accessing, staying in, and completing cycles of education, across all levels of the education system? How might these barriers be removed, and how might education systems be adapted to support women's and girls' needs in crisis- and conflict-affected contexts?
Communication, advocacy, and information campaigns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What impact do communication, advocacy, and information campaigns have on increasing girls' school enrollment and attainment in crisis-affected contexts?• How is girl-led advocacy defined and operationalized across ages, levels of the education system, and geographic contexts? Which types of girl-led advocacy initiatives have been the most effective?• In what ways are local, national, and international actors supporting girl-led advocacy for EiE? How can we ensure that these actors are supporting rather than overpowering girls' advocacy efforts?
Learning outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What factors influence learning outcomes for girls, boys, and gender-nonconforming students in crisis- and conflict-affected contexts? Consider factors specific to certain crises and disaggregate data across all levels of the school system. Such factors could include protracted crises, access to technology/digital solutions, geographic location, access to play and learning materials, household decision-making patterns and norms, length of displacement, length of school closures during crises, etc.• How can measures of learning adapted for use in crisis contexts be further adapted to meet learners' differing and specific gendered needs?

TOPIC**SUGGESTED RESEARCH QUESTIONS****Cross-sectoral linkages****Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH)**

- What impact does the improvement of gender-equitable WASH facilities, menstrual hygiene management (MHM) education, and distribution of menstrual hygiene materials have on girls' access to education and learning outcomes in crisis-affected settings?
- How are men and boys being included in MHM programming (e.g., as advocates, participating in trainings, receiving male-oriented dignity/hygiene kits⁴)? What effect does providing men and boys with MHM information have on girls' education experiences?
- What impact does providing breastfeeding rooms and resources to facilitate breastfeeding (e.g., breast pumps, bottles to store expressed milk, etc.) have on girls' access to and quality of education?

Protection, school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV)

- To what extent do SRGBV policies (e.g., codes of conduct) exist at the school, education facility, and/or national levels? To what extent are they implemented?
- Do schools, non-formal education providers, and national-level stakeholders receive training on SRGBV policies at the national and school level, including how to implement and monitor the policies?
- How successfully are survivors of SRGBV being reintegrated into learning environments? What practices are being put into place to protect their mental and physical wellbeing?

Economic support (cash transfers, school meal programs etc.)

- Can the demand for schooling in crisis-affected contexts be increased through economic support interventions (e.g., conditional cash transfers, school meal programs, etc.)? What types of economic support interventions are most effective? What are the benefits of such support from a gender-equality perspective?
- How can school meal programs promote gender equality in education? What characteristics make school meal interventions most gender equitable?

Peacebuilding

- How does greater gender equality in educational attainment relate to improved social cohesion? What are the practical implications for strengthening peacebuilding programs?
- To what extent do shorter-term program strategies that promote gender-equitable peace education promote shifts in attitudes, behaviors, and opportunities for longer-term peacebuilding efforts?
- In which ways can non-formal education support gender-transformative efforts in (post)conflict settings? Under which conditions might educators support transformative disruption of social norms?
- How have girls been engaged in peacebuilding initiatives at the school and community levels? How are girl-led peacebuilding initiatives being received by school leaders and community members?

⁴ Dignity/hygiene kits are a critical component of humanitarian response; they contain hygiene and sanitary items, such as washable menstrual pads, soap, towels, etc.

TOPIC

SUGGESTED RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Health crises

- How differently do health crises, such as pandemics, affect girls' and boys' access to education and learning outcomes?
- How do EiE programs engage with girls and boys to share information and resources on health crises in their communities (e.g., debunking myths, promoting hand washing, distributing masks, etc.)?
- What types of interventions successfully ensure gender-responsive continuity of learning when schools are closed due to health crises?

Climate crisis

- How does the climate crisis affect girls' and boys' access to education and learning outcomes differently? How does climate education mitigate gendered challenges and promote resilience in the face of crises resulting from climate change?
- To what extent are gender-equitable "green skills" (e.g., digital literacy, agricultural knowledge) embedded in EiE programs? Where these skills are embedded, to what extent do they present opportunities for sustainable gender equity in education, and across the humanitarian response cycle into recovery and beyond?
- To what extent do EiE programs include opportunities for girls and boys to be active in decision-making related to climate change across education levels and ages?

Education type

Alternative education

- What are the long-term outcomes of complementary education programs for girls and marginalized children, such as community-based education?
- What do women and girls say they need to be able to access community-based education and to learn in these spaces? What do they aspire to do after completing a period of education/learning?
- How do long-term outcomes differ between girls and boys who have been enrolled in the same competency-based programs at the same schools?

Early childhood education (ECE)

- How does gender-responsive ECE affect young children's development of gender constructions?
- To what extent are gender-responsive ECE pedagogical practices embedded in crisis-based ECE training, program implementation, and monitoring mechanisms?
- How can ECE educators and parents/caregivers in crisis contexts be supported most effectively in developing gender awareness and implementing gender-responsive pedagogical and caregiving approaches? To what extent do these efforts lead to gender-equitable practices and become embedded in systems beyond the humanitarian program cycle and crisis response?
- How are fathers, male caregivers, and extended family members included in education on gender-sensitive or gender-responsive caregiving? What interventions are most successful in engaging these stakeholders?

TOPIC**SUGGESTED RESEARCH QUESTIONS****Technical and vocational education and training (TVET)**

- What social or livelihoods skills do young women and girls say they need? How successfully do TVET programs support women and girls to develop these skills?
- How does gender-responsive TVET promote gender equity in the short and long term?
- How does the inclusion of livelihoods programming in school curricula impact retention of girls in secondary school? What intervention types have proven most effective?

Distance education

- What types of distance education interventions reach women and girls in crisis-affected contexts most successfully? What resources do women and girls say they need in order to engage with meaningful learning tasks when away from formal learning spaces?
- To what extent do girls and boys in crisis-affected contexts feel that distance learning interventions during COVID-19 school closures were successful? What recommendations do they have for making such interventions more accessible and relevant?
- What role does the community play in supporting girls and young women who are engaged in distance learning?

Digital literacy

- Which interventions have effectively narrowed the digital gap for women and girls in crisis-affected contexts?
- How does the gendered digital divide intersect with other divides (e.g., poverty, disability, displacement status, rural-urban) in crisis-affected contexts? How can these divides be bridged?
- What have we learned from using social media for teaching and learning in crisis-affected contexts during COVID-19-related school closures? What challenges and opportunities do using social media platforms provide during school closures in digitally resource-poor contexts?

Teacher recruitment and professional development

- How effectively does teacher professional development on gender-responsive pedagogy influence teaching practices and the classroom environment? To what extent does it improve learning outcomes for girls and boys?
- How do gender-equitable family services and structures (e.g., access to or incentives for child care, breastfeeding rooms, etc.) promote gender-equitable access to teacher professional development and recruitment in crisis contexts?
- Does having female teachers and supportive adults of the same sex in the classroom improve retention and learning outcomes for girls in crisis-affected contexts? How does it impact the prevalence of and response to SRGBV?

TOPIC**SUGGESTED RESEARCH QUESTIONS****Peer mentorship and support groups**

- What impact do peer mentoring and support groups have in educational settings in crisis-affected contexts, especially for girls whose mothers have had little or no education?
- Does exposing girls and boys in conflict-affected settings to relevant role models in the teaching and science, technology, engineering, and math professions (e.g., through career guidance and counseling activities) lead them to pursue pathways in these careers? If so, how does this impact the gender disparity in these fields?

Psychosocial support (PSS), social and emotional learning (SEL)

- To what extent are PSS and SEL interventions gender equitable? What gender-responsive PSS and SEL approaches are most promising?
- How differently do PSS and SEL interventions affect students and teachers, taking into account gender and other factors, such as age, displacement status, etc.?

Populations**People with disabilities**

- What barriers and challenges do girls living with disabilities face in accessing, staying in, and completing cycles of education and training in crisis-affected contexts?
- Are school- or national-level policies on inclusive education and accessible education infrastructure in crisis-affected contexts gender-responsive? To what extent are women and girls with disabilities included in decision-making about inclusive and accessible education initiatives and infrastructure?
- How does assistive technology impact education access and learning outcomes for girls and boys with disabilities in crisis-affected contexts?
- How does teacher training on inclusive and gender-responsive education practices impact education access and learning outcomes for girls and boys with disabilities in crisis-affected contexts?
- To what extent do teachers, caregivers, and community members value and prioritize education for people with disabilities, especially women and girls? Do children and youth with disabilities feel their education is valued by their parents, caregivers, teachers? Is there a gendered difference?

Men and masculinity

- How do sociocultural expectations of masculinity impact boys' access to education, learning outcomes, and wellbeing in crisis-affected contexts?
- How does protracted crisis influence social and cultural expectations for men and boys? How are these expectations exacerbated or challenged in education settings?
- What impact does positive masculinity programming have on girls' and boys' access to and quality of education across education levels?
- What impact does positive masculinity programming have on girls' and boys' access to responsive caregiving and PSS/SEL opportunities across age and education levels?

TOPIC**SUGGESTED RESEARCH QUESTIONS****Pregnant and parenting learners**

- What specific challenges limit pregnant adolescents' access to and quality of education in crisis contexts?
- What school- or national-level policies on pregnant and parenting learners exist in crisis-affected contexts? To what extent are they implemented in schools? What types of interventions are able to bridge discrepancies between policy and practice?
- To what extent are pregnant learners and their teachers aware of policies allowing or disallowing pregnant learners to continue their education? What do learners think about these policies, if they are aware of them?
- Does the provision of child care in schools and learning centers affect parenting learners' ability to access and complete a quality education? Does it enable them to access economic opportunities (e.g., cash transfer programs, cash for work programs) that provide ongoing educational opportunities or digital literacy training?

Sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression

- What specific challenges do lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual, and agender (LGBTQIA+) learners encounter in crisis-affected contexts that limit their access to and quality of education?
- Do LGBTQIA+ learners in crisis-affected contexts feel safe, supported, and represented in and around schools? How does this affect their learning outcomes?
- What supportive school- or national-level policies on LGBTQIA+ learners and teachers exist in crisis- and conflict-affected contexts? To what extent are these policies implemented? What types of interventions are successful in bridging the policy-practice divide?

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