

Statement by the Members of the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies



To:
Permanent Missions of Member States to the United Nations Office at Geneva
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Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Secretariat
The Global Cluster Coordination Group

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Education – A Priority From the First Day of Every Crisis

In today's environment of tightening humanitarian budgets and unprecedented crises, the humanitarian community must stay focused on effective actions that meet the greatest needs and can be leveraged for the biggest impact, while leaving no one behind.

The scale of the problem

About 224 million crisis-affected children need quality education.¹ This includes 72 million children who are out of school completely.² Unfortunately, education is often one of the first services to be disrupted by emergencies, and one of the last to restart. Education in emergencies is critically underfunded. On average, the education sector receives less than three per cent of humanitarian aid.³ In the face of attacks on and military use of education facilities,⁴ displacement, and the impact of the climate, food and nutrition crises, we must take action to ensure learning and wellbeing are supported from the first day of every crisis.

Emergency responses must be accountable to the people affected by crisis

Lessons from humanitarian operations have shown that affected people often frame their needs holistically, and prioritise the services that support their capacity to cope during and after a crisis.⁵ Affected communities are urging the prioritisation of education.⁶

Responding effectively to affected populations means setting humanitarian priorities right. It means being flexible to demands across sectors and being ready to support crucial services – including education – from the first day of a crisis response.

Children in crisis value education as much as food, health, water or money⁷

Surveys conducted in some of the world's most difficult contexts reveal that education is the first priority for children living there. Of 1,215 children surveyed in six countries, nearly one in three (29%) said education was their top priority. That's more than twice the number who identified food (12%), health (12%), or water and sanitation (12%) as their primary concern. It was three times the number who said they needed shelter (9%) or money (9%).⁸

As the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child makes clear, children have a right to be heard and taken seriously. When children report education as a priority, it is the duty of aid workers, international donors and world leaders to listen.

Why is education as important as food, health, water, and shelter in a first emergency response?

Education is essential for protecting children and youth during and after a crisis. Education saves and sustains lives. It is critical to reducing risks, especially to the most vulnerable, enabling mental health and psychosocial support to help children and youth cope with and recover from crises. For every day that schools are closed, children and youth face more risks including abuse, exploitation, recruitment, child marriage, sexual violence and child labour.⁹

Education also provides an entry point for the provision of integrated child-focused basic services to support children and youth affected by emergencies. These services include food, health, mental health and psychosocial support, water and sanitation, protection, and identification of at-risk children and youth for referrals to more specialised support.

Teachers are critical to all of this. Much like doctors, they are frontline workers and need support to fulfil their role in the most difficult of circumstances.¹⁰

Providing continuity of learning ensures that children and youth do not fall behind. It reduces the risk of school dropout – a key long-term social and economic concern – and is linked to shorter conflicts.¹¹

How is education delivered from the first day of a crisis?

Education is associated with schools, daily classes and textbooks. In emergencies, education may involve the establishment of temporary spaces where children and youth can safely gather with teachers, trusted adults and friends, and keep learning.

In a crisis, education can also be an entry point for wrap-around services that are tailored to local needs. This can include life-saving messages on health, sanitation, and how to be safe from violence, trafficking, unexploded ordnance, and diseases. It can also 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.

Education should be prioritised even when access is limited, or the establishment of physical safe spaces is not possible due to conflict. In these situations, innovative adaptations such as life-saving learning and activity packs, supporting mental health, radio or interactive voice recordings for psychosocial support, and play-based learning or mobile safe spaces, provide enormous benefits.

What needs to be done, now?

- Include education in preparedness, anticipatory action, and the first emergency response, including in rapid multidisciplinary assessments.
- Prioritise education for its capacity to facilitate other life-saving interventions such as health, water and sanitation, food and protection.
- Protect education from attack and military use during conflict and violence by encouraging adherence to international humanitarian law, and the endorsement and implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration.
- Prioritise education and align emergency responses and longer-term policy and planning, to create the conditions to include refugee children and youth in national education systems.
- Ensure the education in emergencies response is inclusive of all children and youth, and implement the INEE Minimum Standards.¹²
- Donors should increase the proportion of predictable, multi-year funding for education in emergencies.
- National governments should prioritise adequate budget allocations for education for all children and youth.

Notes:

1. www.educationcannotwait.org/news-stories/press-releases/number-crisis-impacted-children-in-need-education-support-rises
2. Of these out-of-school children, 53% are girls, 17% have functional difficulties, and 21% (about 15 million) have been forcibly displaced.
3. www.unicef.org/education/emergencies
4. More than 3,000 attacks were identified in 2022 alone, with 6,700 students and educators reported killed, injured, abducted, arrested, or otherwise harmed.
5. www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2023/04/05/whats-flagship-initiative-emergency-aid
6. www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/Activities/2021-2026_access_to_education_strategy_final.pdf
7. www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/education-against-the-odds
8. Other concerns children identified as top priorities include clothing (3%), sport and leisure activities (3%), safety (2%) and family (1%).
www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/education-against-the-odds
9. www.unicef.org/media/50936/file/Investment_Case_for_Education_and_Equity-ENG.pdf
10. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000388832>
11. See, for example:
 - The social impacts of education: www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/Activities/2021-2026_access_to_education_strategy_final.pdf
 - Education is one of the best economic investments possible, as in the longer term each additional year of schooling is associated with an increase of 0.37% in GDP, rising to 1.0% with improved learning outcomes: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/cb09c589-14c6-5675-8026-39333ff71532/content>
 - Education is a vital strategy for building lasting peace: www.globalpartnership.org/node/document/download?file=document/file/2024-01-gpe-iep-education-path-to-peaceful-future.pdf
12. See:
 - 2020 - Inclusion and education: all means all: www.unesco.org/gem-report/en/node/168
 - <https://inee.org/minimum-standards>

