



Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
Réseau Inter-Agences pour l'Éducation en Situations d'Urgence
La Red Interagencial para Educación en Situaciones de Emergencia

INEE Good Practice Guide: Inclusive Education of Children At Risk – Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances

Children who do not have their basic needs met are considered to be in “especially difficult circumstances.” As well as child soldiers, girls, minorities and children with disabilities, other groups of children are categorized as being in especially difficult circumstances. Some examples of these other groups are shown in the accompanying text box. These children face difficult circumstances, even in times of peace. However, in emergencies, their situation is often more dire and hopeless. Education has the potential to improve the lives of these children: through access to formal or vocational education, these children can be provided with key life skills.

Examples of Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances

- Street children
- Orphans
- Separated children
- Children with AIDS/AIDS orphans
- Child-headed households
- Juvenile offenders
- Gangs
- Child and adolescent sex workers

Strategies

- **Ensure children's security and support**

It is paramount that children are physically safe and live in a supportive environment. Ideally, they should be in the care of their immediate or extended family. If not, family tracing should be initiated following consultation with the child. If the child cannot be reunited with the family, other alternatives such as foster care or group care with appropriate follow-up and monitoring should be investigated. Whenever possible, siblings should be kept together. If children prefer to stay on their own, measures should be put into place to ensure community support and safety, and access to health care and social services.

- **Modify the curriculum to meet children's daily needs**

Given the precarious position of children in especially difficult circumstances, the subjects and topics taught should be modified to address issues specific to the lives of these children. Teaching children survival skills will help protect them physically because they will be more aware of the dangers to which they may be vulnerable. Teaching relevant life skills will capture their interest, and encourage them to attend classes or participate in activities. For example, street kids may need math skills in order to start up small businesses, child-headed households may need cooking skills, and

children with medical conditions may need to learn how to read medicine bottles and dosages.

- **Reduce the barriers to education**

If children in especially difficult circumstances want to attend school, the barriers preventing them from attending regularly or at all should be identified and addressed. It is important to note that in addition to “simple” issues such as provision of school fees, clothes and shoes, etc., maintaining attendance of children in especially difficult circumstances often entails addressing issues of prejudices within the school and supporting the development of children’s self-esteem. Some children do not want to or cannot attend school because they have to earn an income, or because they have learning disabilities or behaviour problems in their interactions with other children. Therefore, classes should be short and offered at times and places where the children can attend easily. In some instances this may mean early morning or evening classes held in unusual places such as bus stations or markets.

Checklist

- Where do the children live? Where do they sleep?
- How is their health? Do they have access to medical care?
- Are they getting enough to eat?
- Who supports them, or how do they support themselves?
- Do they have sufficient clothing?
- Are the children being exposed to at-risk behaviours, or in danger of being recruited in the military, or for sex work? Is there any chance of removing them from this situation?
- Do the children want to be reunited with their families? Do they want to live with a foster family? Has child tracing been initiated?
- If children have been fostered, is there appropriate follow-up and monitoring to ensure the children's safety?
- What life skills do the children want? Reading? Writing? Vocational Skills?
- What information do they need to live and survive in their environment? Health education, HIV/AIDS, landmine awareness, etc.?
- For those children who want to attend school but are not currently enrolled, what is preventing them from attending now?
- What are the children's educational priorities?
- How do programs relate to children's educational priorities?
- Are the topics taught relevant to the children's daily lives?
- Are the educational programs offered at a suitable time and place for children to participate?

Resources

- [Networks of Support: A literature review of care issues for separated children](#) (2001) By Gillian Mann, *Save the Children Alliance*.
- [Finding a Way Forward: Principles and Strategies to Reduce the Impacts of AIDS on Children and Families](#) (pdf)

- [Children on the Brink: Strategies to Support Children Isolated by HIV/AIDS](#) (pdf)
- [Primary Education in Eastern and Southern Africa: Increasing Access for Orphans and Vulnerable Children in AIDS-affected Areas](#)
- [Responding to the Needs of Children Orphaned by HIV/AIDS, Discussion paper number 7](#) (June 1998) (pdf) *By the Health Technical Services Project by Susan Hunter and John Williamson, for the United States Agency for International Development, June 1998, 30 pages. (As of January 2001, available at <http://www.synergyaids.com>)*
- [World AIDS Day: Fighting HIV Discrimination in the Health Sector](#)
- [Community Mobilization to Mitigate the Effects of HIV/AIDS](#) (pdf)
- [Preventing AIDS and HIV Discrimination : An important responsibility in health-promoting schools](#) (pdf)
- [UNAIDS](#). *Webpage provides reports and guidelines focusing on children, schools, and young people*
- [WHO Fact Sheets on HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections](#)

Child-headed households

- [Action for the Rights of Children \(ARC\) Critical Issues: Separated Children](#) (pdf) *By UNHCR/Save the Children*
- [Working with Separated Children: A Field guide](#) *By Sarah Uppard and Celia Petty. The Field Guide gives a concise overview of the subject, targeted particularly at the staff who will have to set up and co-ordinate family-tracing programmes: for example, senior managers in NGOs, international agencies and government departments. Each chapter of the book opens with an indication of its target audience. For purchase only.*
- [UNHCR Guidelines on the Reunification of Refugee Families](#) (pdf)