Education in emergency situations

Guarantee the basic right to education especially in times of crisis and conflict

October 2023
“Education in emergencies” refers to the opportunities available to access inclusive and quality learning at all ages during crises, including early childhood, primary and secondary, non-formal, technical, professional, higher and adult education.

Children’s rights and educational rights should be guaranteed and protected in all contexts, including emergencies, since they save lives. Quality education protects cognitive development and supports psychosocial wellness. At times of crisis, it offers a sense of hope to young boys and girls.

The content of Sustainable Development Goal 4 – to ensure an inclusive and equitable education for all by 2030 – cannot be achieved without a major compromise when it comes to planning, prioritisation and protection of education, above all at moments of crisis and conflict.

There are currently an estimated 224 million school-aged children and adolescents in need of support in their educational process due to the impact of humanitarian crises. This highlights not only the disruption of the educational process caused by crises and school closures, but also the learning difficulties experienced by child and adolescent learners living in contexts of crisis, displacement, asylum and refuge. Of the 224 million children and adolescents affected by crises, approximately 78.2 million are outside the school system. The negative impact of this situation is twofold: on the one hand, it greatly impedes the cognitive and personal development of these children, and on the other hand, it puts them at greater risk of violence. A further 119.6 million students affected by humanitarian crises are failing to achieve minimum literacy and mathematical skills despite attending school. Finally, an

1 Global Estimates. 2022. Education cannot wait
estimated **24.2 million students** may appear to be achieving an acceptable level in the aforementioned skills but are still suffering from the effects of crises and therefore require specific humanitarian support (e.g. through psychosocial support, a crucial component of Education in Emergencies).

Humanitarian crises have a serious impact on the education sector; some of the main consequences are: **schools closed, destroyed, lacking adequate teachers, lacking appropriate materials, lacking security.** Globally, incidents in which schools and universities were used militarily more than doubled in 2020 and 2021 compared to 2018 and 2019, reaching a total of approximately **5,000 incidents with 9,000 students and educators abducted, arrested, injured or killed in 85 countries**.

According to various reports, **girls and women are specifically targeted for attacks on education because of their gender**. They are also the population at highest risk of sexual violence both in the school environment and en route to school. The recruitment or abduction of female students and teachers is used as a "reward" for combatants, turning them into slaves, either for sexual purposes or for other roles in support of military operations. In humanitarian crises, girls, adolescents and women are also often assigned the responsibility of caring for dependents in the family environment, another of the main constraints faced by girls and adolescents wanting to continue their studies. In crisis contexts, girls are more likely than boys to be absent from school, as they have to take on the increased work associated with caregiving or household chores. One of the most common duties is fetching water, which often involves long journeys, where they are more vulnerable to sexual abuse.

**Girls living in conflict- and crisis-affected contexts are almost 90% more likely to be out of the secondary school system than their counterparts in non-conflict-affected countries.** It is estimated that by 2030, one in five girls in crisis contexts will not be able to read a simple sentence.

While children represent one-third of the world's population, they make up more than half of all those affected by humanitarian crises. By the end of 2021, of the **89.3 million people in forced displacement, around 36.5 million (41%) were children under the age of 18.** By mid-2022, the number of displaced people had increased to 103 million. Half of the world’s out-of-school children live in conflict and crisis contexts, and nearly half of primary school-age refugees are out of school.

In contexts such as Central America, where there is a humanitarian crisis due to high levels of structural violence, migration is practically the only alternative for adolescent girls looking...
for a better future. According to the studies consulted\textsuperscript{11} children on the move suffer from institutional and administrative barriers that impede the continuity of their educational pathway. Educational institutions consider the migrant population to be “fluctuating” and therefore efforts to integrate them are considered “lost” once they resume their migratory process\textsuperscript{12}. As occurs in other humanitarian contexts, the administrative and financial barriers associated with documentation or the payment of fees and other expenses are also conditioning factors that prevent the continuity of the educational process for millions of children and adolescents in the context of human mobility.

\textsuperscript{11} Plan International 2023. Adolescent women in crisis: life in mobility contexts in the region of Central America and Mexico
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid
2. Financing the education sector: why is it important to fund education in emergencies?

**Education in emergencies is underfunded.** Although donor disbursement has quadrupled in the last 10 years (from $163M to $786M), these efforts fall short of the amount demanded by OCHA for educational needs, a figure that has multiplied by 7 during the last decade (from just over $400M to $2,900M)\(^\text{13}\). In 2022, only **26% of the demand for funding for the education sector was met.** Between 2016 and 2022, the education sector received only 3% of the total humanitarian budget\(^\text{14}\), far from the 10% of humanitarian funding for education requested by the Global Campaign for Education. While it is true that those financial contributions to the education sector provided as part of multi-sectoral responses (i.e. projects where other services such as health, food, shelter, etc. are provided in addition to education) cannot be easily accounted for by current global humanitarian funding monitoring systems, the trend shown by the global humanitarian financial analysis remains clear: **the humanitarian system does not prioritize education.**

Spain’s contribution to education funding in crisis situations (through both AECID and decentralized cooperation agencies) has represented on average 3% of the total Spanish contribution to humanitarian aid over the last 10 years, with the years 2021 and 2022 being two important exceptions with a contribution equivalent to 7% and 11% respectively. It remains to be seen whether these will be isolated cases or, on the contrary, a new trend responding positively to the education sector’s demand for adequate and stable funding\(^\text{15}\).

As educational needs increase in a global context of interlinked crises, **investment in the education sector in emergencies remains of vital importance.** Primarily because education is not a privilege but a fundamental right widely recognised in multiple national and international regulatory frameworks, including the Charter of Human Rights (1948) or the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), as well as the Geneva Conventions (1949) and their Additional Protocols (1977). The universality of the right to education is also reflected in other regulatory frameworks such as the Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). The need to ensure access to quality, inclusive and safe education has also been taken up by global and regional resolutions and covenants such as the Global Compact for Refugees (2018), the various UN resolutions since 2010, the Declaration on Safe Schools (2015), as well as the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

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\(^{13}\) “OCHA/FTS data. Analysis submitted by EDUCO within the framework of the event “Education in Emergencies. The Urgent Right.” Analysis of its funding. 27/04/23. Madrid

\(^{14}\) Ibid

\(^{15}\) Ibid
Moreover, investing in education in crisis situations is investing in child protection and sustainable development. To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda, education must be prioritized and all children and young people in crisis must be reached. Education provides a critical combination of safety, socialization, cognitive development and skills, preparing children and young people to be active and resilient members of their community and society. Financing education not only makes sense as a human right and an enabling tool, but is also a demand expressed by children, young people and communities affected by crises.

Failure to invest in education in crisis contexts can contribute to perpetuating conflict and undermine claims of lasting global peace. Inequalities in education can create a sense of injustice and worsen the disadvantages of marginalized groups, ultimately fuelling conflict. Education is a powerful tool for social transformation, equity enhancement, prosperity and peace building. However, poor, abusive or manipulative management of education can exacerbate conflict through oppression, unequal opportunities and outcomes, or the promotion of hatred and violence.

Support for education in crisis contexts must ensure the quality of education, the protection of children and the educational community, and the elimination of gender inequalities and discrimination, for the benefit of fairer and more equitable societies.

16 The protective role of education in emergency situations. Global Cluster of Education and Permanent Missions to the United Nations of Norway and Switzerland. 2018
Based on the INEE Minimum Standards Handbook\textsuperscript{19} the signatories to this document commit to ensuring that learning opportunities in emergency contexts lead to IMPACT EDUCATION. We understand IMPACT Education as education that ensures the quality of intervention in both the short and long term through sustainable financing; education that protects and is protected; education that is accessible to all people at all times; education that ensures free participation; and education that transforms society towards more just and inclusive models.

WHAT SHOULD IMPACT EDUCATION IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS LOOK LIKE?

\textit{Education must be protective.} The spaces where learning opportunities take place, as well as the surroundings and means of access, must be safe and risk-free.

Infrastructure and teachers should be non-threatening, responding to both good building and behavioural practices, respectively. Protective also means that the educational plans and practices used do not fuel conflict nor perpetuate inequalities, while reducing and/or mitigating risks.

Ensuring the protection of children also means ensuring the protection of the educational community and in particular the teaching staff. While claiming that the educational community is ready and able to offer psychosocial support and socio-emotional learning to children affected by the crisis, the fact that teachers are also victims of the crisis, and in many contexts lacking adequate preparation and remuneration, is disregarded. Gender-based and sexual violence is exacerbated in crisis contexts. Education has a key role to play in protecting those most vulnerable to violence, namely young girls, adolescent girls, young women and women. This protection also includes supporting girls’ and women’s self-care and empowerment. Education in emergencies must support the transformation towards more just societies, backing women leaders who can inspire future generations.

\textsuperscript{19}The Interagency Network for Education in Emergency Situations (INEE) developed the Minimum Standards for Education in 2004, subsequently revised in 2010, with the goal of increasing the quality of educational preparedness, response and recovery; boost access to safe and relevant learning opportunities and ensure accountability of those providing these services.
Education must be accessible and continuous. Education is a right and should be enjoyed regardless of the context, including in crisis contexts. During periods of crisis, the capacities of families and communities to overcome the many barriers to education are greatly diminished. It is therefore vital that education interventions in emergencies offer the widest range of programmatic possibilities in order to respond to a multiplicity of different situations.

Education must be physically accessible. This means removing physical and infrastructural barriers that hinder the participation of, among others, students with reduced mobility and menstruating girls due to lack of water and sanitation infrastructure. But education and learning opportunities are not exclusively synonymous with school. Therefore, when the context of a crisis forces schools to close, the humanitarian response must be able to offer other learning opportunities such as community schools or distance learning.

Education must be accessible to all people at all times. The educational pathway of learners can be strongly affected by the outbreak of a crisis. Displacement and conditions of human mobility prevent regular school attendance. Educational interventions should be able to offer different entry points for affected learners, ensuring that the disruption is as short as possible. Offering support and reinforcement, distance learning tools, bridging classes or an accelerated curriculum are some of the options that favour the reintegration of school dropouts into new educational opportunities.

Educational opportunities in crisis contexts must strike the necessary balance between flexibility and sustainability. In order to ensure access to education for the largest number of affected populations, accreditation of the different training processes must be provided, as well as validation of the knowledge acquired before and during internal displacement, international shelter and human mobility processes.

In contexts of human mobility, forced displacement and international hosting, humanitarian and development actors should combine their strategies for response, integration and support to voluntary return processes, for example by ensuring the recognition of curricula and accreditation on the part of both origin and host countries. Depending on the context, it will also be relevant to provide learning opportunities in both mother tongue and host country languages and to implement culturally and norm-sensitive teaching practices. These strategies reinforce access to education for all.

Education must be of good quality. Learning spaces in emergency contexts are oases for children in distress. In such spaces they find routine, essential to their cognitive development and wellbeing, as well as access to key and vital information. These are all highly valid objectives of emergency education programming, but they are not enough.

It is imperative that children in education programmes acquire age-appropriate skills and knowledge in the areas of literacy and numeracy. Therefore, emergency education

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20 During the Ebola response, radio-based tools for distance education were developed in West Africa. These practices continue to allow access to education for boys and girls who reside in areas where schools are closed due to violence and conflict.

21 These two curricular formulas are part of the so-called Accelerated Education Programmes. AEPs are flexible, age-appropriate programmes put into place within an accelerated timeframe that aim to provide access to education to disadvantaged, older and/or out-of-school children and adolescents.
programmes must have curricula that are context-specific, include key information related to the crisis, and be appropriate to the age and level of development of the learners.

For education to be of good quality, it is essential to strengthen teachers’ pedagogical capacities to provide psychosocial support to crisis-affected learners and to use emotional learning as a tool for resilience. In contexts where learning conditions were poor even before the crisis, the humanitarian response to education in emergencies must be adequately resourced to ensure that the timely response to the crisis will also strengthen the education system in a sustainable way. Revising educational content to ensure the promotion of diversity and the use of positive pedagogical practices are key actions. Humanitarian interventions must ensure that the content is recognised by national authorities. In this regard, teacher training, development and support, as well as adequate supervision and funding, are essential.

While community schools are highly appropriate operational strategies to strengthen access to education, especially in hard-to-reach areas where schools are attacked or remain closed, the key role of teachers in ensuring the quality

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Education must be gender transformative and promote gender equality. Due to their gender and age, young girls, adolescent girls and young women face greater barriers to accessing education, completing their education and preparing themselves to be active members of society with opportunities for the future, including employment. These gender-based discriminations are exacerbated in contexts of crisis or emergencies. Contributing to gender equality is essential to ensure access to education for all people, in all contexts.

Education is key to reducing the violation of children’s rights in general, and of girls and young women in particular. It is a powerful channel for reducing the violence of practices such as early and forced marriage, early and unwanted pregnancies, or child labour - negative strategies that families in crisis situations are forced to employ. Gender transformative education that challenges hegemonic practices linking masculinity to the use of force would also reduce the exposure to violence suffered by children and young people in crisis contexts, who because of their gender are pushed to face other types of risks linked to this stereotypical conception of masculinity.

Just as care is taken to provide conflict-sensitive education in emergency contexts in order to avoid inflaming the issues causing
the crisis, education in emergencies must also be concerned with reducing the unequal opportunities created by entrenched gender inequality in our societies.

Providing gender-transformative education should not be relegated to a second-tier priority. The speed of response humanitarian crises require must not deter the willingness to provide gender-sensitive education programmes that respond to the diversity of needs and transform practices towards gender equality. Ensuring sexual and reproductive health education in education programmes in emergencies responds to the humanitarian imperative to save lives by providing key information. Providing safe and hygienic spaces, in terms of water and sanitation, allows menstruating students to participate with dignity. Ensuring gender parity among members of the educational community enables the creation of safe spaces and increased participation of girls in activities.

In the revision of curricula and pedagogical practices that accompany emergency education programmes in their application of the triple nexus, it is imperative to strive for gender-transformative education that respects legal commitments to non-discrimination on the basis of sex and/or gender.

**Education must be inclusive.** The learning opportunities offered in a humanitarian response must guarantee the presence, participation and achievement of educational goals for all girls and boys. From its initial design, Education in Emergencies programming should take into account intersectionality, i.e. the systemic inequalities created by the overlap of different social factors such as gender, status (refugee, internally displaced) or conditions of persons with disabilities, among others.

Inclusive education also ensures the participation of the most marginalized groups, those children who are ‘hard to reach’, such as those who are on the move, young mothers or those who end up out of school system for a long period of time.

Providing inclusive education in the context of a crisis should not be an exception, or an option to be covered in the more stable phases of a crisis. On the contrary, it should be the norm, and it should be done starting from the initial phase of the response. Inclusive education helps to ensure the visibility of the most marginalized populations, those most impacted by the crisis.

Where possible, learning opportunities should use “universal design” to maximize the enjoyment of services by different population groups regardless of their status. Where this is not possible, reasonable adaptation of services should be chosen with the aim of reducing barriers and ensuring that all people, regardless of their condition, can exercise their rights equally. In some cases, this requires investment in infrastructure such as the construction of access ramps or the installation of handrails; in others, it involves a change in pedagogical approaches such as use of the mother tongue as a vehicle for learning.

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**Education in emergencies must have a long-term perspective.** Education in emergencies must ensure the rapid return of crisis-affected children to learning spaces that are as normalized as possible. There are operational modalities for rapid response that ensure the return to school in the first phase of the humanitarian response. This emergency component is key as it facilitates the transmission of vital information in complex contexts, provides psychosocial support and wellbeing to children and families in difficult situations, and reduces the risk of permanent school dropout. The establishment of so-called safe and child-friendly spaces where pedagogical activities are offered with an appropriate balance between play and study is a highly appropriate operational modality in the first months of the emergency.

But the objectives of an Education in Emergencies programme also include the acquisition of knowledge and competencies in literacy and mathematics at an appropriate level to the child’s cognitive development, as well as the recognition of efforts and accreditation of what has been acquired. It likewise encompasses the acquisition of skills and abilities, as well as the necessary technical knowledge for entering the labour market and other life and livelihood opportunities. Last but not least, education in emergencies must also contribute to the creation and sustenance of more just, inclusive and peaceful societies.

Humanitarian actors have the capacity to secure a rapid return to learning opportunities for crisis-affected children. In order to ensure the sustainability of such actions, efforts to achieve a rapid return to school should be done in the framework of a medium- to long-term strategy, in collaboration with development actors from the nexus approach.

If SDG 4 is to be met, it is urgent that both humanitarian and development actors are accountable for their competencies and mandates, and focus their efforts on actions that have added value, responding from their specialization to common results. Humanitarian action contributes to SDG 4 through a rapid return to learning opportunities, and investment in education from development programmes ensures the sustainability of that learning. However, this cannot be achieved without continued and predictable support from funders and donors.

**Education in emergencies must be well funded.** More and better-planned and distributed money is needed. There is a need to ensure funding that is able to respond to the education requirements identified in the context of a crisis, but also with a duration and predictability that allows for medium- and long-term strategies to be put in place. If the current average duration of a crisis (around 9 years) exceeds the time foreseen for basic schooling, the humanitarian response in education cannot be designed and financed with short funding cycles.

The efforts towards multi-annual funding initiated since the Grand Bargain must continue, and with even greater urgency when it comes to the education sector. The funding procedures in place do not meet the educational needs of the population.
concerned, firstly because the funding cycles and school calendars do not correspond, and secondly because the acquisition of knowledge is a long process and requires continuous support. Funding based on the short-term project cycle is not efficient. The efforts and resources invested in setting up educational structures, identification, recruitment and training of staff, community mobilization, identification and enrolment of students, distribution of school materials, among many other preparatory and necessary actions for the achievement of the main objective, – the acquisition of skills – end up being jeopardized, and in too many cases disappear, during the time lag between two funding cycles.

It is imperative that the currently scarce funding be increased and also better allocated. If the aim is to ensure the sustainability of
humanitarian action and provide the best value for money, it is essential to base actions on the existing capacities of affected populations. For its part, the Grand Bargain points to the importance of localizing humanitarian action, but this cannot be achieved without continued support to build trust with the affected populations, technical support to identify their capacities, and financial support to develop these capacities. Again, short funding cycles are the main barrier to providing education in emergencies that achieves sustainable results over time.

**Education should be participatory.**

Voluntary community involvement in decision-making processes and enjoyment of activities should be ensured. Children, families, education personnel, community leaders, civil society and local authorities should also be involved in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of learning opportunities. Only in this way will the provision of learning opportunities be tailored to the context and needs of affected populations.

Such participation must be meaningful. For this reason, people must be able to participate on an equal footing, have relevant information to hand, be able to understand the processes and know how to make their voices heard. To this end, efforts and resources must be invested in identifying the most vulnerable population groups, in learning to listen to them, in building trust, and in strengthening their capacities to become involved as frontline participants. Giving voice to the voiceless may also mean having to break down patterns, habits and customs, including overcoming gender stereotypes and the barriers to participation they pose.

Although at first it may seem incompatible to provide a rapid humanitarian response while ensuring meaningful participation by the affected population, practice shows that the solution lies in preparedness. By focusing efforts on better preparing local actors, those who happen to be the first actors in the response, it is possible to create the levels of trust necessary for meaningful participation in the humanitarian response framework.
The H-D-P triple nexus is the approach that captures the links between the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors, in an attempt to work together to more effectively meet people’s needs, mitigate risks and vulnerabilities, and move towards sustainable peace.

Given the complexity of today’s crises and their average duration of nine years, it is impossible to consider that the educational needs of crisis-affected children and adolescents will be met quickly through development interventions or durably through humanitarian interventions. The triple nexus approach does not refer to a linear, time-bound relay race from humanitarian to development funding at a specific point in a crisis; rather, it aims to guarantee the relevance of interventions by establishing a set of strategic outcomes that are common to all three sectors.

How to ensure that children affected by crisis benefit from education sector interventions from the earliest phase of humanitarian response?

How to ensure that humanitarian responses in the education sector have a lasting impact, build resilience and do not result in aid dependency?

How to ensure the full potential of education in the process of building just and peaceful societies?

How to ensure the achievement of SDG4 in a world of interlinked crises?
From Humanitarian Response

Objective: Prioritise education from the outset of a crisis
Outcome: Crisis-affected children are ensured access to learning opportunities from the first phase of humanitarian response

In partnership with Development

Objective: Strategic Planning with Predictable Financing
Outcome: Crisis-affected or at-risk countries have joint planning with common results among all education actors

Contributing to Peace

Objective: Transformative and conflict sensitive education
Outcome: Children, families, teachers and communities are active actors for change towards more just, equitable and peaceful societies
4. Recommendations

ADVOCATE FOR THE RECOGNITION OF EDUCATION AS A PRIORITY SECTOR IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

- SDG 4 cannot be achieved without also ensuring access to education in crisis contexts. Education in emergencies must be considered a priority.

- Maintain a committed discourse on Education in Emergencies in spaces related to the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda

- Use humanitarian diplomacy as a tool to overcome barriers to education. In consultation spaces, advocate for the abolition (at least temporarily during the crisis period) of student and family charges associated with education such as fees; for the recognition of accreditations and certificates obtained through alternative learning opportunities; for the temporary abolition of administrative requirements (such as the provision of birth certificates during school registration); advocate for the recognition of the important role of teachers in ensuring the quality of education and the emotional wellbeing of children in crisis contexts and equip them with the tools to fulfil this key role.

- Ensure that all investments in the education sector are aligned with the Comprehensive School Safety Framework so that buildings are safe and the educational community – especially teachers and students – is prepared and resilient.
Ensure 0.7% of Gross National Income be spent on Official Development Assistance (ODA), of which 20% should be earmarked for education and 10% for Humanitarian Aid, and 10% of the latter for education in emergencies.

Implement multi-year financial planning linked to the school calendar in order to consolidate results and secure investment.

Lead a review process of Spanish cooperation architecture that allows for joint strategic planning with decentralised cooperation.

Support, through the Team Europe approach\(^\text{22}\), the establishment of working groups, cabinets, committees and other national ministerial platforms that bring together the ministries in charge of Finance, Education, Health, Children, Labour, Social Protection, Gender, Water, Environment and/or their equivalents for the planning and coordination of humanitarian response in education.

Support the Localisation Agenda by investing in the preparedness and response capacities of local actors and at-risk communities themselves.

Support gender parity in the educational community by supporting the recruitment of education management professionals and female teachers to facilitate girls’ continuance in education and to inspire future generations of girls.

Follow the lead of Education Cannot Wait and establish a minimum % of funding for gender-responsive or gender-transformative education interventions in emergencies\(^\text{23}\).

Support innovative operational modalities that ensure the inclusion of different population groups under the “leave no one behind” approach (children in human mobility, young mothers, children in conflict with the law, etc.).

\(^{22}\) https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/team-europe-initiatives_en

\(^{23}\) Responsive interventions is programming that includes specific actions to try to reduce gender inequalities within communities. Transformative interventions is programming that is designed around a fundamental goal of addressing the structural causes of gender-based inequalities that exist in a society. UNICEF, UNFPA. Issue Note. Gender responsive and gender transformative approaches (2021)