

Global Campaign for Education

Briefing paper on key priority areas informed by the Strategic Plan 2023-2027

Education in Emergencies and Crises

1. Background

A range of international Human Rights instruments make provision for the right to education in emergencies with clear binding obligations on States, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the European Social Charter, the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities, the African Union Continental Education Strategy and the Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the Area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Specific to refugee concerns, the New York Declaration for refugees and migrants, the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its Protocol, and the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families reiterate the right to educational choice and the obligation of the contracting States to accord to refugees the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to “elementary education” and to ensure “equal opportunities” with respect to non-elementary education. Moreover, according to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (General Comment No. 6), equality of treatment irrespective of nationality, immigration status, or statelessness should also be guaranteed to unaccompanied and separated children.

Conflict and climate change-related emergencies are leaving millions of internally displaced people, refugees, and asylum seekers without the opportunity to enjoy their right to education. Worldwide, according to Education Cannot Wait¹, the climate emergencies are impacting the education of 40 million children every year. Globally, 222 million vulnerable girls and boys are affected by conflict, climate-induced disasters, forced displacement, and protracted crises. They need urgent support to enjoy their right to education.

Alternative sources show that the number of children living in high-intensity conflict zones has risen by nearly 10 percent to a total of 230 million. This figure is expected to increase dramatically because of ongoing conflicts such as those in Myanmar, Yemen, Ethiopia, Syria, and the war in Ukraine ².

¹ <https://www.educationcannotwait.org/news-stories/press-releases/the-climate-crisis-disrupts-the-education-40-million-children-every>

² GCPEA. Attacks on education and military use of education facilities in Ukraine in 2022. February 2023

Afghanistan and the occupied Palestinian territory were identified as the top two countries with the highest number of children who were either killed or maimed. In addition, the Middle East topped the charts as the region with the highest proportion of children and youth living in conflict zones - one-third of the youth population³.

To this, it should be added 59.1 million internally displaced population, of whom 25.2 million are children under 18 and 7.1 million children and adolescents, many of whom are at risk of never returning to school⁴.

Climate change related disasters, including cyclones, floods, droughts, and heat stress, had disproportionately affected countries in the Global South and the most marginalised members of the communities. In any case, all children, and adolescents in and out of schools are affected by climate crises, and the numbers are expected to significantly increase due to ongoing emergencies in many corners of the world. It is worth mentioning that an unknown number of children and youth's education has been dramatically affected because of the recent earthquake in Turkey and Syria.

2. The GCE Strategic Plan (2023-2027)

The Global Campaign for Education has long been concerned that people living in emergency contexts, including refugees and displaced people, are often excluded from education, or enrolled in parallel systems. Unequal access to education is severe among people who move within and across national borders. In the heart of Europe, children with low performance are not allowed to attend schools and, following an assessment, can be transferred to non-regular courses. In some countries, students with refugee backgrounds can be enrolled in less demanding tracks, compromising their opportunities for higher education⁵.

The GCE Strategic Plan includes education in emergencies as a crucial area of our work. We globally campaigned for Education in Emergencies with #ProtectEiENow, reaching over 75,000 people across social media platforms. The project "Voices on the Ground" was implemented in four countries. With the support of local reporters, GCE gathered stories on the challenges faced by communities and national coalitions to enjoy and protect the right to education in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our worldwide joint advocacy addresses Education in Emergencies and Crises, including:

- Crisis-sensitive and inclusive education planning and budgeting
- School safety, security, protection (psychosocial support and socio-emotional learning)
- Space/voice of students, parents, teachers, and civil society in response
- Education for refugees, internally displaced people, returnees, asylum seekers, migrants, and stateless people

³ <https://www.warchildholland.org/news/number-children-in-war/>

⁴ Pérez Murcia, Luis Eduardo. El derecho a la educación y la acción humanitaria. Entreculturas. 2020

⁵ Global Campaign for Education (2019). Between moving backward and moving forward towards achieving SDG4. Spotlight Report for the High-Level Political Forum. Johannesburg.

GCE asks that governments and decision-makers at all levels:

1. To ensure the safety and protection of schools

- Adopt and operationalize the safe-school declaration
- Keeping schools safely open to the maximum extent possible while providing safety, security, and protection (psychosocial support and socio- emotional learning)

2. Prioritise adequate funding, policy frameworks and planning for Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crises

- Conduct crisis-sensitive and inclusive education planning and budgeting at all levels so that schools can actively mitigate crisis and disaster risk for learners in all their diversity
- Prioritise funding for education in emergencies applying a development-humanitarian-peace nexus approach
- Provide adequate policy frameworks that enable recovery of education after disaster and crisis

3. Strengthen Education systems, including local preparedness and emergency planning

- Enabling effective distance learning when school closures are necessary ensuring that digital divides for learners in all their diversity are being addressed
- Implementing social welfare and health programs to support teachers and learners during emergencies, and other measures to support their material and emotional well-being
- Strengthen coordinated education planning and response in crisis, ensuring that civil society, as well as students, parents, and teachers, actively participate in decision-making processes and that response is localised wherever possible
- Instituting education system reforms that build the resilience of and social cohesion within education institutions, learners, and teachers as well as greater trust in education systems and services

4. Invest in teachers to boost Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crises responses

- Invest in teachers to be better equipped and prepared to teach learners about disaster risks and climate change, health, human rights, causes and consequences of conflict and how to live and interact peacefully; and to support learners and colleagues' safety and well-being when and after disaster strikes
- Recognition of qualifications and fair remuneration of teachers working in emergency

5. Protect students and their rights to education, academic freedom, freedom of expression and right to assemble

- Guarantee education for refugees, IDPs, returnees, asylum seekers, migrants, and stateless people in all their diversity, free from discrimination and conscious or unconscious bias

- Set up student at-risk schemes, and temporary protection programs for student activists under threat of political persecution, to ensure students' and pupils' right to continue their education in other countries, through paid scholarships, and supporting their safe return after the crisis
- Protect students' rights to assemble, to unionise and to exercise their right to academic freedom and freedom of expression
- Support monitoring of SDG4 and attacks against students, teachers and other personnel including cases of violent repression of student protests that take place whether within or off-campus.

GCE offers its support to Governments to help achieve these asked for goals.

3. Critical challenges

Persons living with disabilities and girls are dramatically affected in emergency situations, with increased risk of exploitation, school dropout, and psychosocial distress. Displacement and migration are significant barriers to people's right to education that affect countries all around the world, from low-income countries in Africa, Asia, and Central America, to middle-income countries in the Middle East and Latin America, and wealthy nations in the heart of Europe and North America. Following displacement, children, youth, and adults consistently struggle to attend school and universities, and their lack of education opportunities often means long-term poverty traps and a significant waste of talent and skills for social development⁶.

Despite the magnitude of children, youth, and adults currently left behind by education systems, humanitarian responses tend to focus on providing shelter, food, and sanitation. Education for internally displaced people, refugees, and asylum seekers, however, needs immediate attention, not only because it is a fundamental human right for all, but also because education will enhance their opportunities for recovery and self-reliance.

Available evidence reveals that both underinvestment and inequity remain serious challenges in education in emergencies financing. In recent years, appeals for education in emergencies often receive just 10 to 30 percent of the amounts needed, with significant disparities across countries and regions and sensitivity to the eruption of new crises. According to the Financial Tracking Service (as of 2nd January 2023), the education in emergencies funding received by Afghanistan and Ukraine crisis responses in 2022 was larger than that received by all 27 African and Middle East appeals combined⁷. This shows the significant imbalances and inequalities that lie behind the distribution of aid and development cooperation.

⁶ Global Campaign for Education (2019). Between moving backward and moving forward towards achieving SDG4. Spotlight Report for the High-Level Political Forum. Johannesburg.

⁷ UNICEF Transforming education with equitable financing. New York, January 2023, p. 5

In 2021, the Education Cannot Wait fund made new allocations of US\$143 million to grantees via its three investment modalities: the Multi-Year Resilience Programme (MYRP), the First Emergency Response (FER) and the Acceleration Facility (AF). ECW approved six new MYRPs (Burundi, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Pakistan, and the Sudan) and one renewed MYRP (Bangladesh) in the total amount of US\$121.2 million; 12 FERs (US\$19 million); and 13 new AF grants (US\$2.6 million). With these allocations in 2021, ECW expanded its portfolio of active grants to a total amount of US\$495.8 million⁸.

During its High-Level Financing Conference on 16-17 February 2023, ECW asked the international community for \$1.5 billion needed to deliver ECW's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan and build knowledge of and commitment to education in emergencies and protracted crises (EiEPC). Unfortunately, only half of the pledge was reached.

Climate change has immense costs on the education sector. Education systems have a key role to play in mitigating and adapting to climate change. But the education sector's climate action needs are almost invisible in climate change discussions. Urgent actions are needed to 'climate-proof' the education sector and be more effective in climate change-related actions and decisions⁹.

Schools are the first to be closed and occupied or made available to shelter disaster victims or rescue teams, in the event of conflicts, natural or climatic emergencies or even elections, which considerably reduces learning time.

The GCE should also call for the protection of school premises in all circumstances.

4. Way forward

Against the general backdrop, the Global Campaign for Education continues to advocate with governments and the international community for developing and implementing comprehensive frameworks to secure the right to high-quality public education for people living in conflict and disaster settings, as well as internally displaced persons, asylum seekers and refugees across the world.

Special measures should be taken in terms of securing funding to address education needs in contexts of disasters, emergency, and post-conflict scenarios, including the reconstruction of school facilities, and the adaptation of schools and the entire education systems to respond to the specific needs of displaced people, including the language of instruction, curricula adaptation to students' cultural background, and emotional and psychological support when needed.

GCE stresses that education is a universal human right and calls for the governments to adopt actions when disasters occur and provide education for all in temporary shelters as well as

⁸ Education Cannot Wait. 2021 Annual Results Report. We have promises to keep. August 2022, p. 10

⁹ UNICEF. It is getting hot. Call for education systems to respond to the climate crisis. Bangkok, 2019, pp.6-7.

distance learning modalities and to develop a comprehensive plan to reopen schools when weather conditions permit and plan for future emergencies. This includes, as recommended by the GCE #ProtectEiENow campaign, ensuring that education sector planning - national education plans and budgets - integrate emergency preparedness measures, taking into account both rapid and slow-onset climate-related disasters.

GCE will also continue reminding the international community that cooperation to protect and fulfil the right to education of those who are living in contexts of emergency can be understood as moral and legal obligation¹⁰. Consequently, GCE calls for the international community to mobilise financial and technical resources to assist countries to reconstruct school infrastructure in affected areas and provide emergency support for those whose education opportunities are more affected.

GCE and its members will ask governments and decision-makers at all levels to:

- Adopt and operationalize the safe-school declaration
- Conduct crisis-sensitive and inclusive education planning and budgeting at all levels so that schools can actively mitigate crises and disaster risk for learners in all their diversity
- Prioritise funding for education in emergencies applying a development-humanitarian-peace nexus approach
- Provide adequate policy frameworks that enable recovery of education after disaster and crisis
- Keeping schools safely open to the maximum extent possible while providing safety, security, and protection (psychological support and social-emotional learning)
- Enabling effective distance learning when school closures are necessary ensuring that digital divide for learners in all their diversity are being reduced
- Implementing social welfare and health programs to support teachers and learners during emergencies, and other measures to support their well-being
- Strengthen coordinated education planning and response in crisis ensuring that CSOs, as well as students, parents and teachers are at the table when decisions are being taken and that response is localised wherever possible

¹⁰ See The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), articles 2, 22 and 23.

- Instituting education system reforms that build the resilience of and social cohesion within education institution, learners, and teachers as well as greater trust in education systems and services
- Guarantee education for refugees, IDPs, returnees, asylum seekers, migrants, and stateless people in all their diversity, free from discrimination and bias
- Invest in teachers to be better equipped and prepared to teach learners about disaster risks and climate change, health, human rights, causes and consequences of conflict and how to live and interact peacefully; and to support learners and colleagues safely and well-being when and after disaster strikes
- Recognition of qualifications and fair remuneration of teachers working in emergency
- Set Up Student at-risk schemes, and temporary protection programs for student activists under threat of political persecution, to ensure students and pupils 'rights to education in other countries.
- Protect students' rights to assemble, to unionise and to exercise their rights to academic freedom and freedom of expression
- Support monitoring of SDG4, and attacks against students, teachers, and other personnel including cases of violent repression of student protests that either occur at institutions of higher education, or, if they occur off-campus, focus on education-related policies and laws monitored by UNESCO

To exercise together pressure for change, we are conjointly:

- Systematically engaging with local, regional, and global education clusters
- Advocating and campaigning vis-à-vis donors to ensure increased and more effective funding across the development-humanitarian-peace nexus
- Draw attention to emerging and forgotten crises and its education impacts
- Research on how funding and education leadership enables or disables preparedness, response, and recovery from crisis
- Represents systematically the voice of CSOs in Education Cannot Wait processes and platforms on Education on Emergencies (EiE), putting a particular emphasis on gender equality and the centrality of protection.