



Q&A: Education in Emergencies for Displaced Children and Youth

1. What is education in emergencies? How does it differ from general education in developing countries?

Education in emergencies is the formal and non-formal education provided to children and youth whose access to national or community education systems has been destroyed by war or other humanitarian calamities. This document will focus on populations displaced by conflict.

At its best, education in emergencies takes different forms according to the phase a particular emergency is in. Often times these phases are overlapping. In the acute phase of an emergency, just after populations flee, education efforts may offer recreation programs or basic literacy and numeracy. As soon as the situation stabilizes and security is assured, more formal schools are established, utilizing curricula from the country of origin or from the host country. Education in emergencies also includes efforts to reestablish education systems when the conflict has ended. Formal schools are just one of the services offered; non-formal classes for youth and adults, preschools, vocational education, and other non-formal programs are others.ⁱ

2. How many countries are in conflict? How many refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) are there in the world?

An estimated 50 countries are experiencing conflict either directly or indirectly.ⁱⁱ As a result, there are an estimated 21 million IDPs and 12 million refugees in the world.ⁱⁱⁱ Approximately, one-third of those displaced—7 million IDPs and 4 million refugees—are children age 5 to 18.^{iv} These numbers do not count the many children in conflict-affected countries, who, while not displaced, may be missing out on education due to the breakdown of basic services.

3. What is the average length of time of displacement for a refugee? For an IDP?

The average length for refugee displacement is 17 years.^v Therefore, not providing education denies an entire generation schooling, literacy and the potential to contribute to the post-conflict reconstruction of their country. Long-term peace-building and economic development requires an educated population.

4. How many children are out of school in conflict affected areas? How many refugee and IDP children are out of school?

Armed conflict around the world is one of the most formidable obstacles to education. Worldwide, more than 100 million children are estimated to be out of school. More than half of these children—two-thirds of them girls—are living in countries engaged in or recovering from conflict.^{vi} Many of those in areas of conflict are doubly disadvantaged by being refugees or internally displaced. In just 10 countries with conflict-induced displacement in 2002, 27 million children had no access to formal schooling.^{vii}

5. How does education in emergencies relate to the MDGs?

Development, peace and human rights are inextricably linked; education is a precondition for progress on each of the interrelated Millennium Development Goals. It has been well documented that education is one of the best investments a country can make for all children, but particularly for girls. School attendance improves a girl's chances of breaking the cycle of poverty and of becoming contributing members of society, including as women who raise

healthier children with the skills to pursue productive lives; this is no less true during times of conflict. Meanwhile, more than half of all children out of school are in countries affected by conflict. Millennium Development Goals two and three—primary education for all and gender parity in education—cannot be achieved without an increased and sustained effort to ensure quality and relevant education in emergencies for conflict-affected populations, including refugees, returnees and internally displaced people.

6. What kind of education are refugees and IDPs receiving?

The majority of refugee and IDP children who are in school are enrolled in early primary grades.^{viii} Only six percent of all refugee students are enrolled in secondary education; for IDP youth, even fewer opportunities exist.^{ix} Adolescents and youth have the least access to formal education. Many have not completed even primary education and require a range of formal and non-formal education options.^x

Ironically, a crisis situation can provide a “window of opportunity” to promote increased access to education. Due to historical barriers to education in many conflict-affected regions, children living in displaced persons' camps sometimes have access to education for the first time. In Darfur for example, more children, particularly girls, are in school today than before the conflict.

The quality of education in IDP camps is generally much lower than the education provided by international agencies in refugee camps.^{xi} Meanwhile, more than one-third of all IDPs remain beyond the reach of UN assistance.^{xii}

7. What is the education situation for displaced girls and young women?

While girls are almost as likely to be enrolled in pre-primary and grade one, their enrollment decreases steadily after that.^{xiii} Cultural norms may dictate that boys should attend school, and that the role of a girl is to remain home and help with domestic chores. In most emergency situations the majority of teachers are men, leaving girls without role models and subjecting them to situations in which male teachers may demand sex for good grades. In conflict situations, girls may not be able to get to and from the educational site safely and consequently may stay home; it has been shown that the effect of conflict on mobility of girls and boys is very different; boys tend to be more mobile, and girls less. There may be no separate latrines for girls and no sanitary supplies. Classrooms may be age- and sex-integrated and young girls may be seated next to young men, creating a potentially uncomfortable situation for both of them.^{xiv}

8. Why should the international community provide education when displaced people are not receiving adequate food, shelter and health care?

First and foremost, education is a priority identified by conflict-affected communities. Participatory research conducted by the Women's Commission with youth in northern Uganda, Kosovo and Sierra Leone revealed that the number one need identified in all countries was education; young people overwhelmingly viewed education as key to ensuring their physical, emotional and economic security. Before international assistance arrives in conflict-affected areas, displaced communities often start the schools. When refugees from Darfur arrived in eastern Chad in 2003, heads of school and teachers in the burgeoning camps seized the opportunity to educate large numbers of children, including girls.^{xv}

Similar to food, water and shelter, education can be life-saving and life-sustaining. Education can save lives through the dissemination of key survival messages, including landmine awareness, HIV/AIDS prevention, and basic hygiene and health care. Attending school can lessen the

chance that a child will be recruited into or join a fighting group, face sexual or economic exploitation or become exposed to other risks; for girls, this is particularly important given that they more often are subject to rape and other forms of gender-based violence.

Finally, education is a human right, regardless of the circumstance a child is in. This right is articulated in various international humanitarian and human rights instruments, including the Geneva Conventions, which apply in times of war, as well as the Convention of the Rights of the Child, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and many regional rights instruments.

9. What are the benefits of providing quality education in emergencies to displaced populations?

Providing education in emergencies not only ensures that children realize their guaranteed right to education, it provides them with a sense of hope and normalcy when their lives have been disrupted, promotes their psychological and social well-being and cognitive development, and lessens the risk that they will be recruited into dangerous activities. Providing quality education in emergencies is among the best ways to mitigate the impact of conflict on children, and it helps lay a solid foundation for peace and development. Without the skills that a basic education can provide, societies lack an educated workforce to tackle poverty and pursue sustainable development.

10. What are the challenges to providing quality education in emergency situations?

There are many challenges in the provision of education in emergencies. These range from a lack of access, quality and response coordination to the exclusion of specific groups within the population, such as girls or youth. School supplies, curriculum guides, school buildings and furniture are often absent or in short supply. An ongoing, largely unresolved challenge is teacher remuneration. Teacher salaries or “incentives” are often absent and when provided, rarely coordinated between agencies. Teacher certification is an ongoing concern.^{xvi} Another key gap concerns a lack of funding: traditionally education in emergency situations has been seen as a long-term development activity, not a humanitarian priority.^{xvii} Funding shortfalls can significantly exacerbate deficiencies in the provision of education during emergencies, particularly when emergencies are prolonged for years or even decades.^{xviii}

The result of these gaps is that education falls through the cracks. Uneducated children and adults are vulnerable to a future of poverty and violence and lack the more complex skills needed to contribute to their society's peaceful reintegration, reconstruction and sustainable development. In particular, without the stability and structure that education provides in emergency situations, children and youth are more vulnerable to exploitation and harm, including abduction, child soldiering and sexual and gender-based violence. Educational learning environments (whether formal or non-formal) are one of the most significant social structures in young people's lives. In the midst of loss and change, absence of learning and schooling intensifies the impact of conflict.^{xix}

11. Isn't UNICEF meeting the needs? What about UNHCR?

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is responsible for protecting and assisting children, including war-affected children. Because of its mandate to advocate for the rights of all children and youth, UNICEF plays a significant role in countries where children are internally displaced or refugees. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is responsible for protecting and assisting refugees, which includes ensuring access to basic education at the start of displacement. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees.

However, due to funding shortfalls, UNICEF and UNHCR are limited in their ability to adequately respond to educational needs in emergency situations. According to a recent *New York Times* article on humanitarian assistance, “Support for global emergencies is purely voluntary, forcing humanitarian agencies to go hat in hand to governments, not just to sustain continuing programs like refugee camps, but for new emergencies like the 2004 tsunami.”^{xx} This is generally the case for most interventions in humanitarian emergencies but can be even worse for education. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, only 1.5 percent of the total global humanitarian contributions in 2004 (per sector) went toward education.^{xxi} Underinvestment in education in emergencies results in the continued low quality of education available to displaced children and youth, evidenced in most places by high repetition and dropout rates.^{xxii}

12. What are donors doing to support education in emergencies for displaced people?

Traditionally, education has been seen as a long-term development activity and not appropriate for relief assistance funding. Some major donors are restricted by internal regulations from supporting education where conflicts persist. Others prefer to wait until there is peace before supporting education. U.S. government agencies, for example, have not considered education as an emergency response program.

Fortunately, some donors are beginning to take a new look at funding education in all stages of a conflict because there is growing recognition that education is a critical tool for prevention, protection and reconciliation. But, efforts in this field remain extremely under-resourced.

13. What are other organizations/actors doing?

The international community has recognized the importance of education in emergencies in several very important ways. Not only is the international community required by treaty to provide education for children, it knows that it is cost effective to do so; providing education throughout an emergency increases the chances that returning refugees and IDPs will be self-sustaining and will be able to productively contribute to post-conflict reconstruction and peace. There are operational non-governmental organizations, such as the International Rescue Committee and Norwegian Refugee Council, which are providing critically-needed education programs for conflict-affected communities. There are also research and advocacy organizations, such as the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, which are gathering lessons learned, highlighting gaps and disseminating best practices to strength education policies and programs worldwide.

A positive advance in the field has been the creation of the Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE), a global, open network of non-governmental organizations, UN agencies, donors, practitioners, researchers and individuals from affected populations working together to ensure the right to education in emergencies and post-crisis reconstruction. In December 2004, INEE launched the *Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction*.^{xxiii} The standards, indicators and guidance notes articulate the minimum level of educational access and service to be attained in emergencies through to early reconstruction. The standards represent a universal tool to define a minimum level of education quality and help ensure the right to education for people affected by crisis.

14. What more needs to be done?

The responsibility to ensure quality and appropriate education for all resides first and foremost with national governments. National governments have an obligation to respect, to protect and to fulfill the right to education for **all** their citizens and **all** people residing within their borders.

The international community, including donors, the United Nations, and international non-governmental organizations, must demonstrate its support for education in emergencies by:^{xxiv}

- prioritizing educational response in the acute phase of emergencies along with other vital sectors of humanitarian assistance such as food and nutrition, health services, shelter, water, and sanitation;
- increasing funding for education in all emergency and post-conflict reconstruction situations—for both refugees and IDPs;
- improving coordination between “development” and “emergency” donors, NGOs, and other agencies to ensure education programming is consistently available in all stages of the emergency;
- expanding efforts to ensure the right to education for girls, children with disabilities, and children from ethnic or religious minority groups;
- dramatically increasing the availability of education for youth, including post-primary education, vocational and skills training and life skills education;
- promoting and implementing the INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction;
- supporting applied research and advocacy to share lessons learned given that education in emergencies is an emerging field within humanitarian work and much information is needed.

For more information, please visit

<http://www.womenscommission.org/projects/children/index.shtml>

March 2006

ⁱ Marc Sommers, *The Education Imperative*. Academy for Educational Development and Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children. January 2003.

<<http://www.aed.org/ToolsandPublications/upload/EducationImperative.pdf>>.

ⁱⁱ Marc Sommers, *The Education Imperative*. Academy for Educational Development and Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children. January 2003.

<<http://www.aed.org/ToolsandPublications/upload/EducationImperative.pdf>>.

ⁱⁱⁱ US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, *World Survey 2005*.

<[http://www.refugees.org/uploadedFiles/Investigate/Publications_ & Archives/WRS Archives/2005/key statistics.pdf](http://www.refugees.org/uploadedFiles/Investigate/Publications_&_Archives/WRS_Archives/2005/key_statistics.pdf)>.

^{iv} Marc Sommers, *The Education Imperative*. Academy for Educational Development and Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children. January 2003

<<http://www.aed.org/ToolsandPublications/upload/EducationImperative.pdf>>.

^v UNHCR, “56th Session of the Executive Committee: Report on the annual consultations with non-governmental organizations”. (2005) Geneva.

^{vi} UNESCO, *Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality*. 2003. pp. 128-9. See also: UNICEF, *The State of the World’s Children*, 2004; UNESCO, *Education for All: Global Monitoring Report 2003-2004*, Paris: 2004; DIFD, *Education, Conflict, and International Development*, 2003.

^{vii} Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies*, February 2004.

^{viii} Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies*, February 2004.

^{ix} Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies*, February 2004.

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- ^x Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies*, February 2004.
- ^{xi} Marc Sommers. "Education in Emergencies: Critical Questions and Challenges". Creative Associates International. <www.beps.net/publications/Challenges8.5x11ChangesFINAL.pdf>.
- ^{xii} United Nations Secretariat. *In Larger Freedom*. <<http://www.un.org/largerfreedom/chap1.htm>>.
- ^{xiii} Global Survey on Education in Emergencies. Women's Commission. February 2004.
- ^{xiv} Margaret Sinclair and Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies*, February 2004.
- ^{xv} Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. *Don't Forget About Us: The Education and Gender-Based Violence Protection Needs of Adolescent Girls from Darfur in Chad*. July 2005.
- ^{xvi} Marc Sommers, "Education in Emergencies: Critical Questions and Challenges". Creative Associates International. <www.beps.net/publications/Challenges8.5x11ChangesFINAL.pdf>.
- ^{xvii} <http://www.ineesite.org/standards/slides/MSEE_talking_points.pdf>.
- ^{xviii} Marc Sommers, "Education in Emergencies: Critical Questions and Challenges". Creative Associates International. <www.beps.net/publications/Challenges8.5x11ChangesFINAL.pdf>.
- ^{xix} <http://www.ineesite.org/standards/slides/MSEE_talking_points.pdf>.
- ^{xx} Michael Wines, "Zambia's Plight goes Begging in Year of Disasters". *New York Times*. February 23, 2006.
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/23/international/africa/23zambia.html?pagewanted=1&r=1&ei=5094&en=360cd3e90776da66&hp&ex=1140757200&partner=homepage>>.
- ^{xxi} Rebecca Winthrop, "Education in Emergencies: A Strategy for Meeting Education for All". International Rescue Committee. December 2005.
- ^{xxii} Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies*, February 2004.
- ^{xxiii} For a copy of the Minimum Standards or to join INEE, please visit www.ineesite.org.
- ^{xxiv} Based on recommendations from Marc Sommers, *The Education Imperative*. Academy for Educational Development and Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. January 2003.
<<http://www.aed.org/ToolsandPublications/upload/EducationImperative.pdf>>.