

Forum: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Issue: Addressing Educational Inequalities In Conflict-Stricken Zones

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Introduction

Education is essential to human development because it gives people the information, abilities, and chances they need to live successfully. However, in areas devastated by conflict, access to education can be severely restricted, depriving millions of youngsters of the chance to develop and learn. From infrastructure and instructor availability to the general safety of learning spaces, armed conflict has a substantial impact on education. This keeps youth from reaching their full potential and sustains cycles of instability and poverty in already vulnerable areas such as Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, and Somalia.. Since education provides people with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities they need to lead successful lives, it is crucial to human growth. The consequences are profound, leading to lost generations of youth who are unable to reach their full potential, perpetuating cycles of poverty and instability in already fragile regions.

More than 222 million children and adolescents in crisis-affected countries urgently require educational help, according to the Global Education Monitoring Report 2023. In regions like Syria, Yemen, and the Sahel, schools have been forced to close due to ongoing political turmoil and violence, making it dangerous for children to attend classes. The regular attacks on schools and educational supplies, especially during times of conflict, cause severe damage to the educational infrastructure in these areas, including the destruction of classrooms, learning materials, and essential facilities, which often renders schools unusable. As a result, many students lack safe learning environments, and teachers are forced to leave for their safety or are unable to work because of a lack of resources.

The challenges extend beyond physical infrastructure. Conflict exacerbates pre-existing inequalities in access to education, particularly among marginalized groups such as females, refugees, and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). In many instances, traditional gender roles,

combined with the risks of violence or harassment, prevent girls from attending school during times of crisis. For example, in Afghanistan, the political instability following the Taliban's resurgence has further restricted access to education for girls, with over 1.1 million girls barred from attending secondary school (*Human Rights Watch*), reversing years of progress toward gender equality in education.

Lack of consistent finance is another major obstacle to the effective maintenance of educational services in areas devastated by conflict. International agencies like UNICEF and NGOs like Save the Children have attempted emergency education programs, but these efforts are usually hindered by short funding cycles and shifting donor priorities. This constancy makes it difficult to plan for long-term educational rehabilitation for millions of youngsters who have little chance of returning to normalcy.

Not just individual children are impacted by interrupted education; entire communities and nations are as well. The absence of education among the teenage population hinders efforts at peacebuilding and economic recovery since illiterate youth are more likely to be recruited and utilized by armed groups. This is because they lack the knowledge and skills needed to participate in economic activity, communities affected by conflict experience prolonged periods of economic stagnation, which hinders efforts at post-conflict rehabilitation. As the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlight, attaining inclusive and equitable quality education is crucial for promoting sustainable development and ensuring that no one is left behind, particularly in communities recovering from violence.

To meet the educational requirements of children in violent areas, national governments, international organizations, and civil society must work together. By assessing the different challenges of providing education in conflict zones, examining the roles of significant parties, and proposing practical solutions, UNESCO's work can become more effective. Furthermore, by creating safe learning environments, supporting teacher preparation, and ensuring continuous funding, the international community can significantly contribute to ensuring that every child, regardless of their circumstances, has the opportunity to learn and develop (UNESCO).

Definition of Key Terms

Educational Inequalities

Some common factors that influence the disparities in educational quality and access among different populations are socioeconomic level, location, gender, and conflict situations. Due to disruptions in education, a lack of infrastructure, and safety concerns that separate children affected by violence from those in stable situations, educational disparities are especially noticeable in conflict zones (Smith). This discrepancy may manifest as higher dropout rates, lower enrollment rates, or trouble recruiting skilled educators.

Conflict-Stricken Zones

Areas where people are displaced and basic services like schooling are disrupted due to political unrest, violence, or military conflicts (Thompson). These regions are typically inhabited, undergoing conflict, or have been internally displaced as a result of violence. It is challenging for local governments and international organizations to provide reliable educational services in these areas because of the ongoing insecurity.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs):

Conflict, bloodshed, or natural disasters cause people to leave their homes, yet they stay inside the borders of their nation. Internally displaced individuals often live in temporary shelters or camps due to the abundance of local resources, and often have significant challenges when attempting to access basic services like education (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Global Trends Report).

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

Independent, nonprofit groups with humanitarian objectives frequently play a crucial role in delivering emergency education services in areas where government capacity is restricted. During calamities, non-governmental organizations such as Save the Children and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) concentrate on setting up makeshift schools, educating instructors, and providing educational resources (Save the Children, Education amid Calamities).

Psychosocial Support

A type of support intended to meet the mental health requirements of kids who have suffered from conflict-related trauma. It is commonly included in curricula in conflict zones to help children manage their stress and to provide a supportive learning environment. Students require psychological support to return to school following traumatic experiences such as being uprooted or seeing violence (UNICEF, psychosocial Support for Conflict-Affected Children).

Key Issues

Disruption of Schooling

Armed conflicts often devastate educational facilities, depriving children of even the most basic education when schools and learning centers are destroyed or repurposed. For instance, in Syria, almost 2.5 million children have been unable to attend school due to the ongoing civil war; countless schools have been demolished or converted into shelters for displaced families (UNICEF, Syria Crisis Education Fact Sheet). This disruption results in a generation of children missing critical years of learning, impacting their literacy and skill development. Such interruptions lead to high dropout rates, leaving children vulnerable to child labor, early marriage, or even recruitment by armed groups, perpetuating cycles of poverty and social instability.

Moreover, organizations like UNICEF and Education Cannot Wait (ECW) have been working to establish temporary learning spaces and digital learning platforms to bridge the gap, ensuring that children receive some level of education even amid conflict. Access to education in such settings is essential, as it offers a path to social stability and the prospect of peace once the conflict subsides, and it gives children a chance to rebuild their communities. In this context, Syria has become a focal point for international efforts from bodies such as UNICEF and ECW.

Teacher Shortages

There is a serious teacher shortage in conflict areas as a result of the displacement brought on by violence and threats to the safety of educators. It is difficult to provide high-quality instruction in these environments since many teachers are compelled to quit because they are unable to find safety or sufficient compensation. For instance, Yemen's protracted conflict has resulted in years of underpayment of more than 170,000 teachers, which has caused

the country's public education system to collapse (Thompson). The quality of schooling is greatly diminished by this teacher scarcity, depriving kids—especially those who have suffered trauma—of the assistance they require. Students' academic and emotional resilience are impacted by learning gaps brought on by a shortage of qualified teachers in conflict areas.

To combat this, regional NGOs and organizations like the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) provide teachers with training and stipends, allowing them to continue teaching in crisis zones. Long-term education and the development of young people's resilience—which will be vital to their countries' futures—require a steady teaching team. The efforts of GPE and Human Rights Watch to protect Yemen's educational system despite severe adversity serve as the best example of these initiatives. Children are consequently not receiving the proper treatment, particularly those who have experienced trauma.

Safety Concerns

In conflict-ridden regions, the safety of students and educators is paramount, yet increasingly difficult to secure. Schools often become targets for attacks, and schools for girls are especially vulnerable, as seen in Afghanistan. Due to the heightened risks, many parents fear sending their children, particularly daughters, to school, resulting in significant gender disparities in educational access (Taylor). This reluctance to attend school due to safety concerns compounds existing gender inequalities, barring girls from acquiring the skills they need to contribute to societal recovery and development.

Organizations like the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) advocate for measures like the Safe Schools Declaration, which calls for schools to be recognized as non-military zones and for increased international commitments to ensure educational facilities remain secure. Access to safe education is critical for achieving gender parity and protecting the rights of all children to learn in a secure environment. Afghanistan remains central to these efforts, with organizations like GCPEA working to safeguard the future of education for girls.

Inconsistent Funding

Education programs in the conflict zone are usually heavily dependent on foreign

donations. However, the direction of foreign donations can be erratic and influenced easily by the shifting priorities of the donor or a change in political power. This mostly results in shortage areas that affect educational stability. For instance, dependence on foreign aid in South Sudan has seen financing for education drop significantly and thus hurt the continuance of key programs within the country. World Bank, South Sudan Education Sector Analysis.

Inconsistency in funding impedes the construction of reliable educational systems in these key areas, building resilience and recovering a community. When funding halts, students are denied the opportunity for education; this exacerbates long-term gaps in workforce skills and may hurt economic recovery. Global alliances, like Education Cannot Wait, have thus constructed multi year programs that focus on sustainable educational support for conflict-affected regions. These seek stable, long-term funding models to prevent such disruptions.

Reliable funding mechanisms are very crucial to ascertain that education is carried out to the highest level possible, so children living through crises grow into educated, skilled adults with the potential to lead rebuilding efforts. South Sudan stands out with support from the World Bank and the ECW-to underscore the importance of consistent funding in enabling sustainable progress in education amid adversity..

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

United States

The United States has made a substantial contribution to international education initiatives, particularly those targeting conflict-affected regions. Through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), it has provided significant financial aid, including over \$1 billion specifically directed toward educational programs in nations like Afghanistan and Iraq over the past two decades (USAID, Education in Crisis and Conflict).

Additionally, the U.S. has offered technical resources such as teacher training programs, curriculum development, and materials for building safe learning environments. USAID has also integrated psychological and social support frameworks into educational curricula, providing trauma-informed training for teachers and counselors to support children who have experienced

severe distress due to conflict. This comprehensive support highlights the U.S.'s commitment to improving educational access and quality in war-torn regions.

However, shifts in U.S. foreign policy priorities can impact the longevity and consistency of these educational initiatives, leading to potential fluctuations in funding and resource allocation. The United States has also initiated partnerships with private sector companies to develop technology-driven educational tools, such as virtual classrooms and online teacher training modules, tailored for conflict-affected areas.

Moreover, USAID has recently launched programs focusing on climate-resilient education to address the intersection of environmental challenges and conflict in vulnerable regions. These innovative approaches aim to bolster the sustainability and adaptability of educational initiatives.

Germany

Germany emphasizes the importance of integrating education into humanitarian response programs, firmly advocating for educational support during crises. As a leading donor, Germany has consistently contributed large financial resources to the Education Cannot Wait (ECW) fund, which aims to secure educational opportunities for children affected by emergencies and conflicts, especially in regions like Syria, Sudan, and the Sahel (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Education Cannot Wait - Germany's Contribution). This financial commitment has helped ECW expand access to safe, quality education in areas where educational infrastructure has been severely damaged.

Moreover, Germany's proactive support has positively impacted educational access in conflict zones, enabling many displaced and vulnerable children to continue learning despite challenging circumstances. Germany's involvement is essential for advancing Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on quality education, as it positions education as a central pillar in humanitarian aid, directly contributing to global stability and resilience.

Consequently, Germany has been instrumental in advocating for the inclusion of education in global humanitarian response frameworks, working closely with the European

Union to increase funding for education in emergencies. In addition to financial contributions, Germany has deployed experts to conflict zones to support capacity-building efforts, particularly in rebuilding educational infrastructure and improving teacher training in post-conflict scenarios.

Syria

Syria faces one of the most severe educational crisis globally due to the ongoing civil war, which has ravaged the country's educational infrastructure and left millions of children without access to formal education. The Syrian government's limited control over parts of the country, combined with widespread displacement, has made it challenging to implement cohesive educational programs. International humanitarian organizations like UNESCO have provided support, attempting to rebuild schools and reintegrate displaced children into educational systems. However, ongoing conflict, funding shortages, and damaged infrastructure hinder these efforts, creating a situation where educational support remains fragmented and difficult to sustain (UNESCO, Rebuilding Education in Syria). Despite international interventions, the impact has been mixed, with improvements in some areas but limited reach overall. Syria's crisis underscores the urgent need for comprehensive, well-funded educational initiatives to prevent a lost generation and promote long-term stability in the region. Several Syrian diaspora organizations have established online learning platforms to address the lack of access to formal education, enabling children to continue their studies remotely. Additionally, UNESCO and its partners are working to implement accelerated learning programs aimed at helping children who have missed years of schooling catch up, although these efforts face significant challenges due to the ongoing conflict.

Nigeria

In northeastern Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency has had a devastating impact on the educational system, with the group's explicit stance against Western education leading to violence targeted at schools, teachers, and students. Since the onset of the crisis, over 1,400 schools have been destroyed by fire, leaving countless children without access to education (Human Rights Watch, They Set the Classrooms on Fire). The Nigerian government, alongside international partners like UNICEF, has made efforts to reconstruct schools and provide psychological support to children affected by the trauma of violence. While these efforts have made a positive difference by helping children return to school and receive mental health

support, significant challenges remain, particularly in ensuring the safety of teachers and students in affected areas. Nigeria’s situation highlights the importance of international collaboration in rebuilding educational systems and safeguarding schools in conflict zones, essential for breaking cycles of violence and fostering development. International organizations, such as Save the Children, have intensified efforts in Nigeria to provide mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services to children traumatized by violence. Moreover, partnerships between the Nigerian government and regional bodies, like the African Union, have emphasized creating safer school environments through community-driven safety initiatives and surveillance systems.

Lebanon

The educational system in Lebanon is under immense strain due to the large influx of Syrian refugees, which has created an overcrowded school environment and increased pressure on public resources. To accommodate refugee students, the Lebanese government has adopted a double-shift schooling system, where Syrian and Lebanese students attend classes at different times (UNHCR, Lebanon Crisis Response Plan). Collaborating with international organizations, Lebanon has expanded school capacities and infrastructure to address this increased demand. However, maintaining these programs has proven challenging due to Lebanon’s ongoing economic crisis, which limits resources and financial stability for sustained educational support. The situation in Lebanon demonstrates the critical need for long-term, sustainable support from the international community to address educational gaps created by refugee crises, ensuring that both local and displaced children can access uninterrupted, quality education. The Lebanese government, with support from the World Bank, has initiated a program to integrate digital tools into classrooms, aiming to enhance the quality of education for both refugee and local students. However, the program's rollout has been slowed by Lebanon’s persistent economic instability, which has also resulted in teacher strikes and frequent interruptions to the school calendar.

Development of Issue/Timeline

Date	Event	Outcome
26/04/2000	Dakar Framework for Action on Education	164 countries pledged to achieve "Education for All" by 2015, with a focus on universal

		primary education. However, growth in violent areas has been hindered by instability (UNESCO, Dakar Framework).
15/03/2003	Outbreak of the Darfur Conflict in Sudan	Over a million children were forced to leave their homes and schools due to fighting in Darfur, and many of them were denied access to secure learning environments (Save the Children, Darfur Education Crisis).
24/03/2011	Outbreak of the Syrian Civil War	More than 2.5 million children were denied formal education as a result of the devastation of schools, the displacement of teachers, and the flight of families from the war (UNICEF, Syria Crisis Education Fact Sheet).
14/04/2013	Escalation of Conflict in Central African Republic	In the Central African Republic, schools served as relocation sites for fleeing families, disrupting the education of almost 400,000 children (UNICEF, CAR Education Response).
25/09/2014	Rise of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria	Boko Haram's attacks on schools in northeastern Nigeria prevented thousands of children, primarily girls, from receiving an education (Human Rights Watch, They Set the Classrooms on Fire).
24/05/2015	Adoption of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	According to the fourth Sustainable Development Goal, "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all." These goals were not met by Afghanistan and other conflict-affected regions (UN, Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda).

<p>25/08/2016</p>	<p>Launch of Education Cannot Wait (ECW) Fund</p>	<p>At first, ECW focused on offering emergency educational assistance in countries like South Sudan and Yemen. It has helped create temporary learning settings and funded teacher training programs (ECW, Annual Report 2022).</p>
<p>26/04/2017</p>	<p>Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar</p>	<p>Over 700,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh, leading to the establishment of makeshift schools in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. NGOs, like Save the Children, have provided informal education to displaced children (Save the Children, <i>Rohingya Education Response</i>).</p>
<p>17/12/2018</p>	<p>Adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees</p>	<p>This UN agreement emphasised the need for host countries to offer education for refugees, especially in vulnerable regions such as Lebanon, where a significant portion of Syrian refugees reside (UNHCR, Global Compact on Refugees).</p>
<p>11/03/2020</p>	<p>Impact of COVID-19 on Conflict Zones</p>	<p>The pandemic exacerbated educational gaps in conflict-affected areas, where there was inadequate internet connectivity and infrastructure to facilitate remote study. Additionally, in countries like Yemen and Nigeria, school closures infringed upon the rights of vulnerable children (UNESCO, Education in a Post-COVID World).</p>
<p>15/08/2021</p>	<p>Taliban Takeover of Afghanistan</p>	<p>When Kabul fell, many Afghan girls' schools were shut down. Geographically, access to</p>

		education varies widely, and many girls continue to skip school in spite of international pressure (Human Rights Watch, Afghanistan: Girls' Education in Crisis).
15/04/2023	Renewed Violence in Sudan	Millions of people in Sudan were unable to attend school because of the unrest, particularly in Khartoum and Darfur. UNICEF's attempts to provide emergency education kits were hampered by the ongoing war and restricted access (UNICEF, Sudan Education in Crisis).

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Education Cannot Wait (ECW)

In order to reduce the expense of education during emergencies and prolonged crises, the Education Cannot Wait (ECW) global fund was established in 2016. ECW aims to provide urgent and continuous educational help to children and youth affected by war and natural catastrophes. The fund prioritises education through a multi-year resilience model that blends immediate emergency assistance with longer-term development objectives. Since its establishment, ECW has provided funding for projects in over 30 nations, including aiding in the education of displaced children in the Central African Republic, Yemen, and Syria. Repairing damaged schools, training teachers for emergencies, and setting up temporary classrooms are all part of ECW's goal. For example, by providing traumatised children with psychosocial assistance and essential educational resources, ECW has helped to restore educational opportunities for children in the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in the Central African Republic (Education Cannot Wait, Annual Report 2023). ECW also focuses on fostering partnerships with local communities to ensure that the initiatives are culturally relevant and sustainable in the long term. It aims to expand its reach by prioritizing digital and distance education programs for children in inaccessible regions. The program has also been exploring innovative financing mechanisms, such as blended finance, to increase funding availability for prolonged crises.

Global Partnership for Education (GPE)

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) is another important initiative to reduce educational disparities in war-torn nations. GPE offers financial and technical assistance to low-income nations so they can improve the quality and accessibility of education while fortifying their educational institutions. In countries like South Sudan and Somalia, where ongoing instability has made schooling challenging, GPE has proven essential outside of war-torn areas (Global Partnership for Schools, Annual Report 2023). Together, efforts have been undertaken to educate children who have been displaced by conflict, improve educational facilities, and train teachers. GPE has recently enhanced its focus on promoting gender equality in education by funding initiatives that directly target barriers to girls' education in conflict zones. The partnership also emphasizes building the capacity of local education systems to respond to future crises, ensuring that schools are resilient against ongoing and emerging challenges.

Safe Schools Declaration

Since its introduction in 2015 as a political commitment to protect schools, teachers, and students from the effects of armed conflicts, the Safe Schools Declaration has been approved by more than 100 countries. The Guidelines for Protecting Campuses and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict instruct member countries not to use campuses as military operations centres or barracks. The Safe Schools Declaration, a global coalition to safeguard education from attack, urges countries to report attacks on educational institutions, aid victims, and foster collaboration with international organisations in order to increase the security of these establishments. To further its impact, the declaration encourages member states to incorporate protective measures into national education policies, such as constructing fortified school buildings and creating rapid response protocols. By fostering partnerships with humanitarian organizations, the declaration helps implement practical steps to ensure the safety of students and teachers in conflict-affected areas

UNICEF's No Lost Generation Initiative

Together with other international agencies and non-governmental groups, UNICEF started the No Lost Generation (NLG) campaign in 2013 to address the appalling living

conditions that children affected by the violence in Syria and Iraq were facing. To reduce the long-term harm that violence causes to children, the program is built on three main pillars: youth involvement, education, and child protection. (UNICEF's No Lost Generation Report) NLG aims to ensure children have access to formal and informal education, even in challenging environments such as war zones and refugee camps. Despite its achievements, the NoLost Generation program continues to face many challenges. The initiative is also focusing on expanding vocational training programs for older children and adolescents to prepare them for future employment opportunities. By integrating mental health support into its education programs, UNICEF aims to address the long-term psychological impacts of conflict and displacement on children.

Possible Solutions

Establishing Safe Learning Environments

Creating secure learning spaces is essential to mitigating the risks faced by students and teachers in conflict zones. Implementing physical security measures, such as perimeter walls, reinforced school structures, and emergency communication systems, can significantly reduce the risk of attacks and ensure that children can focus on learning without fear. Beyond physical infrastructure, community-based safety initiatives also play a pivotal role. Programs that involve local patrols or parent-teacher associations to monitor school security, as highlighted in the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack's Safe Schools Implementation Report, can enhance security through local ownership and quick response to potential threats. These approaches are predicted to be effective, as they combine both structural and social strategies for protecting schools. The involvement of community members fosters accountability and heightens awareness, creating a shared responsibility for educational safety that is both proactive and adaptable to changing conditions. Together, these strategies can not only safeguard learning environments but also help communities feel invested in preserving these spaces as safe havens for their children.

Strengthening Teacher Training Programs

In emergency situations, well-trained teachers play a crucial role in providing stability and support to affected children, especially those who have experienced trauma. Local teacher

training programs focusing on trauma-informed education, classroom management, and adaptive teaching methods have shown promise in creating resilient learning environments, as seen in UNICEF's efforts at the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan. Teachers trained in these methods are better equipped to support children's mental health, facilitate learning recovery, and manage diverse classrooms where students may have varying academic levels due to disrupted schooling. Strengthening such programs can be highly effective because teachers, as trusted figures in children's lives, can serve as both educators and sources of emotional support. Preparing them to address mental health needs and adapt their instruction ensures a sustainable, quality education system that is not solely reliant on external aid. By building capacity within the local workforce, these training initiatives contribute to a more self-sufficient education framework that can adapt even in prolonged crises.

Securing Sustainable Funding

Inconsistent funding has long hindered educational efforts in emergency settings, and ensuring steady, multi-year financial support is crucial to overcoming this obstacle. By prioritising education in humanitarian aid appeals and encouraging commitments from governments, businesses, and international donors, the education sector can gain the stability needed to execute long-term projects. For example, with sustained funding, programs can focus on reconstructing damaged schools, establishing community education centres for displaced populations, and incorporating digital learning solutions to reach remote students. This approach is likely to be highly effective because it enables planners to set realistic, long-term goals rather than relying on short-term, piecemeal funding. The corporate sector's involvement, such as partnerships with technology firms to create digital learning platforms, further expands reach and accessibility, particularly for students in hard-to-reach areas. These collaborations can provide innovative, cost-effective solutions that are more sustainable than traditional aid approaches. By securing consistent funding and involving private sector expertise, emergency education initiatives can foster continuity, expand access, and support educational resilience in crisis-affected areas.

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