

# Statement by the Members of the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies



## To:

Permanent Missions of Member States to the United Nations Office at Geneva  
Mr. Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, OCHA  
IASC Principals and standing invitees via the IASC Secretariat  
The Global Cluster Coordination Group

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## The learning and development of millions of children and youth are at risk due to the global food and nutrition crisis

*Children and youth living in crisis contexts affected by conflict and climate change are feeling the brunt of the mutually reinforcing global food, nutrition and learning crises. For these children and youth, hunger, malnutrition, and starvation are threats in themselves, as well as being harmful to children's learning capacity by delaying school enrolment and causing grade repetition. Further negative effects include increased risk of dropping out of school, and of sexual and gender-based violence, child and forced marriage, early pregnancy, child neglect, child labour and recruitment into armed groups.<sup>1</sup> To invest in education, especially for those caught in emergencies or displaced, is to support a vehicle to access better food security, health and protection.*

The rising cost of food, cooking oil, fertiliser and fuel has contributed to a global emergency that is causing a surge in humanitarian needs – particularly in countries affected by climate change, conflict and violence. This is due in part to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, regional and national socio-economic factors, political instability, and the ripple effects of wars, especially in Ukraine. This increasingly complex crisis – with countries and regions already experiencing shocks now also seeing a lack of food, safe and clean water, and energy,<sup>2</sup> is pushing millions of people into extreme poverty and hunger.<sup>3</sup> This often leads to a vicious downward spiral and has a devastating impact on crisis-affected and displaced children and youth. The World Food Programme estimates that the current food crisis has pushed an additional 23 million children into acute food and nutrition insecurity since the beginning of the year, bringing the number of affected children to 153 million.<sup>4</sup> **The escalating situation continues to have a direct impact on communities, causing displacement and interrupting the education of girls, boys and young people, while exposing them to a myriad of protection risks.**

Food security is among the top concerns of families unable to afford an education for their children.<sup>5</sup> As the global food and nutrition crisis worsens, we are seeing ever more children and youth dropping out of school and unable to enjoy their right to education. Families are forced to make the difficult choice between sending their children to school or having them look for food, collect water or go to work. Girls are often the first affected, as they are more likely than boys to be taken out of school when families face economic strain. Worst of all, girls face heightened risks, including child and forced marriage, early pregnancies and domestic violence. Even for those who continue to attend school, food and nutrition insecurity is a main barrier to actual learning, as hunger affects the ability to concentrate and learn.<sup>6</sup> **Recognizing the link between food and nutrition insecurity and learning losses must be high on the international agenda.** At the Transforming Education Summit held in September 2022, the global community committed to transforming education. This means that we cannot leave the most vulnerable children and youth behind, specifically those living in humanitarian contexts.<sup>7</sup>

The international community is called on to act so that these crises do not continue the vicious spiral that threatens to erase progress. Interventions that target food and nutrition insecurity, climate resilience and education in emergencies can, and should, be leveraged to secure virtuous cycles and sustainable gains. The education sector has a key role to play in this process, and all actors must be engaged. A country's education system is often its most robust national social service infrastructure, which supports the delivery of social protection programmes – and education has the potential to address the immediate food and nutritional needs of children, particularly those of school-age, while at the same time also addressing other humanitarian needs.<sup>8</sup>

Further, the respect for the rules of international humanitarian law (IHL) related to the conduct of hostilities, to ensuring adequate supplies of food and water, and to allowing and facilitating access for humanitarian relief, can help mitigate the impacts of armed conflict on food security.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, respect for the rules of IHL and International Human Rights Law (IHRL) related to the protection of education<sup>10</sup>, can have a positive impact on the safety of learning environments and on the continuity of services including health, water and nutrition. This will have an impact on the quality of learning and on the opportunities for learners to acquire knowledge and skills to sustain their lives and livelihoods.

### The international community is called on to:

- 1. Prioritise education in emergencies, and recognise its value alongside food, nutrition, child protection and health programmes.** The international community is called on to act to support life-saving and life-sustaining education in emergencies interventions in countries facing acute food insecurity, so as not to undermine the immediate and long-term well-being of children and youth. This includes actions which provide support for pre-primary and early learning aligned with the recent Tashkent Declaration<sup>11</sup>. Access to education must be expanded and maintained, attention paid to children and youth's immediate learning and well-being needs, prior gains must be safeguarded, and existing or new social protection measures to support vulnerable children and youth must be reinforced to contribute to alleviating the food and nutrition crisis. Education in emergencies offers girls, boys and young people protection while also providing them with critical services, a secure supply of food and nutrition (a daily meal), water and sanitation, hygiene, health and mental health, as well as menstrual health and hygiene services.<sup>12</sup> Focused efforts and grants are needed to enable children and youth to enrol in school free of charge, including through scholarships, to recruit and retain teachers, provide psychosocial and mental health support, and reach the most vulnerable children and youth – including girls and children with disabilities.
- 2. Protect and increase funding for critical school feeding and nutrition programmes.** School meal programmes are among the largest and most effective social safety nets for school-age children. They not only keep children, particularly girls, in school, but help improve learning outcomes by providing a better and more nutritious diet. When nutritious food is locally sourced, they also support local economies, create jobs and livelihoods in communities, and ultimately help break the links between hunger and the learning crisis.<sup>13</sup> In the event of school closures, alternative food distribution measures should be identified, such as community and locally led platforms, and cash transfers. These can be used to support the immediate needs of children and young people while helping to re-integrate them into the formal education system. It is key to ensure that such interventions reach the youngest children and adolescent girls caught up in emergencies, including those who had been deprived of their right to education before the crisis.
- 3. Prioritise the development of solutions that can be leveraged to have the most wide-ranging impact across sectors, including education in emergencies.** Interventions could include early warning systems coordinating with the education system to monitor changes in school attendance, which can signal which localities are most impacted by food insecurity. Solutions must also include reducing financial barriers to education, by ensuring that social protection and humanitarian cash programmes are ready to respond to a crisis, and to scale up in line with need. This may also include referrals to longer-term government social protection mechanisms for the most vulnerable.<sup>14</sup>
- 4. Ensure education stakeholders are brought into strategic global, regional, national and sub-national discussions and decision-making processes** that address the impact food insecurity has on the healthy development of children and youth. Education in emergencies programmes are critical to mitigating food insecurity, and to implementing solutions in the face of complex crises.<sup>15</sup> Education must be placed on equal footing with other humanitarian responses in developing holistic solutions that include food security, nutrition, health, social protection and child protection.
- 5. Call upon States and parties to armed conflict to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law, and call for respect for international human rights law.** Upholding the rules of these bodies of law will reduce the risk of food insecurity and famine<sup>16</sup>, and protect the continuity of education during armed conflict and other crises.



<sup>1</sup> INEE Resource Collections, Food and Nutrition: <https://inee.org/collections/food-and-nutrition>

<sup>2</sup> IASC Key Messages, The Global Humanitarian Impact of High Food, Fertilizer and Fuel Prices, November 2022: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/deputies-group/iasc-key-messages-global-humanitarian-impact-high-food-fertilizer-and-fuel-prices>

<sup>3</sup> Plan International, World Hunger & its Impact on Girls, August 2022: <https://plan-international.org/publications/world-hunger-impact-girls>

<sup>4</sup> WFP, A generation at risk, September 2022: [www.wfp.org/news/generation-risk-nearly-half-global-food-crisis-hungry-are-children-say-wfp-african-union](http://www.wfp.org/news/generation-risk-nearly-half-global-food-crisis-hungry-are-children-say-wfp-african-union)

<sup>5</sup> IDMC, Informing better access to education for IDPs, November 2022: [www.internal-displacement.org/informing-better-access-to-education-for-idps](http://www.internal-displacement.org/informing-better-access-to-education-for-idps)

<sup>6</sup> Plan International, *ibid*.

<sup>7</sup> Education in crises: A commitment to action, September 2022: [www.un.org/en/transforming-education-summit/education-crisis-situations](http://www.un.org/en/transforming-education-summit/education-crisis-situations)

<sup>8</sup> While education in emergencies interventions may not directly benefit children under five, most at risk of disease and death in contexts of food insecurity, they can help reduce pressure on families where better services are assured for school-age children. EiE can also highlight areas of vulnerability and needs, including via schools. UNICEF, Child Food Poverty, October 2022: <https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-food-poverty/>

<sup>9</sup> ICRC, Starvation, Hunger and Famine in Armed Conflict, June 2022: <https://shop.icrc.org/starvation-hunger-and-famine-in-armed-conflict-pdf-en.html>

<sup>10</sup> ICRC, IHL and the challenges of contemporary armed conflicts, November 2019: [www.icrc.org/en/document/icrc-report-ihl-and-challenges-contemporary-armed-conflicts](http://www.icrc.org/en/document/icrc-report-ihl-and-challenges-contemporary-armed-conflicts)

<sup>11</sup> Tashkent Declaration and Commitments to Action for Transforming Early Childhood Care and Education, November 2022: <https://euimg.vfairs.com/uploads/vjfnew/10000082/content/files/1668595494tashkent-declaration-en-pdf1668595494.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> CERF Life-saving criteria 2020: <https://cerf.un.org/sites/default/files/resources/CERF%20Life-Saving%20Criteria%202020.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> WFP, A generation at risk, *ibid*.

<sup>14</sup> Global Education Cluster, Cash and Voucher Assistance for Education in Emergencies: [www.educationcluster.net/content-page/cash-and-voucher-assistance-education-emergencies](http://www.educationcluster.net/content-page/cash-and-voucher-assistance-education-emergencies)

<sup>15</sup> INEE Minimum Standards: <https://inee.org/minimum-standards>

<sup>16</sup> ICRC, Food Security and Armed Conflict, October 2022: [www.icrc.org/en/document/food-security-and-armed-conflict](http://www.icrc.org/en/document/food-security-and-armed-conflict)