The continuity of education for all children and young people in Afghanistan must be guaranteed, along with the development and implementation of a long-term plan for safe, inclusive, and quality education.

With recent developments in Afghanistan focussing attention on the most urgent humanitarian needs, the international community – as well as the current authorities in Afghanistan – must maintain a prominent place for education in the emergency response. Education and early learning need to be recognised as lifesaving, and be a core part of the emergency response and across the nexus with development.

Access to safe and inclusive quality education is not only a fundamental right but also an indispensable tool for the protection, safety and well-being of children and young people affected by the current crisis in Afghanistan.

Within Afghanistan and among the displaced populations residing in neighbouring countries, there are millions of children and young people in urgent need of both humanitarian aid and pathways to a brighter future. These include the nearly 10 million girls and boys living in Afghanistan who depend on humanitarian assistance to survive and the 2.2 million Afghan refugees registered in neighbouring countries, over half of whom are children. The education of millions of these children and young people has been disrupted by COVID-19 and is now further destabilised, putting their immediate wellbeing and long-term development at risk – reversing, in particular, the progress made over the past 20 years on girls’ right to education and women’s employment as teachers.

Afghan children and young people, especially girls and children with disabilities, urgently need a safe, protective, quality learning environment that offers:

- **Psychosocial support** and social and emotional learning opportunities, which can be provided by professional educators and staff.
- **A sense of community and belonging** that comes from being with and learning among their peers.
- **Protection** from exploitation, physical and sexual abuse, recruitment into armed forces or armed groups, child marriage, and child labour, all of which are known to be associated with lack of access to, or inclusion in, education.
- **Access to other essential services** to meet their basic needs such as food, health, water, sanitation, and hygiene.

It is a considerable challenge.

Protecting the right to education of Afghan children and young people will require a significant increase in coordinated international support. Afghanistan’s population includes urban and rural communities with differing needs. It is linguistically and culturally diverse. There is a need to ensure sensitive approaches to meet the needs of girls and boys, as well as ethnic and religious minorities. Solutions for all such issues must be carefully considered and integrated into the response from the start.
We therefore urge global leaders to carefully consider the scale of the needs in Afghanistan, and to respond with urgency to ensure that generations of Afghan children and young people do not lose out on their right to a quality education.

In particular, we call on both global and local leaders to:

- Guarantee the continuity of safe and inclusive quality education for all children and young people, in protective and conducive learning environments – equally accessible to both girls and boys – in compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law. Immediate measures must be taken to minimise disruption, ensuring that all educators, administrators and, where relevant, community members are able to safely resume their roles to facilitate the education of all children and young people.

- Secure immediate, multi-year, predictable and flexible financing for all levels of education in Afghanistan. Currently, 49% of education funding comes from foreign aid. The international community now has a critical window of time in which to ensure continuous access to life-saving education funding and prevent disruptions to children’s learning. With development dollars frozen, humanitarian aid must be directed to education.

- Provide increased support to refugee hosting countries to ensure they have the means to guarantee access to education for refugee children and young people.

- Ensure that quality education services reach all learning settings and groups, including girls and adolescent girls, children with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, and displaced children and young people – for example through scaling up Community-Based Education initiatives by and for girls and women.

- Provide resources for the continued development, training, and capacity-building of all teachers, administrators, and other education professionals, both male and female.

Above all, it is essential that international partners commit to maintaining non-conditional funding and support to education in Afghanistan, both to address immediate needs and to guarantee the continuity of safe and quality education in the long term. The resolve to meet our obligations to the children and young people of Afghanistan is needed now more than ever. Multiple institutions, including the UN and national and international NGOs have made clear their commitment to stay and continue to provide services that the Afghan people require, for as long as they are needed.

We stand alongside these organisations in calling on global leaders to make a commitment of support which is equal to the need. In doing so, it is critical to ensure the full participation and consultation of Afghanistan’s educators, learners, parents and community leaders in developing a comprehensive education plan. This is a vital moment in which the future of millions of Afghanistan’s children and young people hangs in the balance. The international community must hold firm in its commitments to protect the rights of all Afghan children and young people to a quality education.