Education in Emergencies & Crisis-Sensitive Planning
The crises facing our world are complex and ever-evolving. Conflicts, natural hazards, climate change, as well as pandemics and epidemics can have severe consequences on the economic and social development of affected countries and threaten the future of a generation of learners. Effects on education include the destruction of school infrastructure, the use of schools as temporary shelters, a reduction in the number of teachers, diminished wellbeing among teachers and learners, an increase in gender disparities and other forms of inequity, and overall systemic dysfunction. Furthermore, more and more countries, particularly those in protracted crises, are faced with multiple risks at once. It is estimated that 128 million primary and secondary-school-aged children are out of school in crisis-affected countries. The detrimental effects of crises on education systems and school-aged children cannot be underestimated. Planning for education in crises context is therefore key to ensure educational continuity and strengthen the resilience of education systems, education personnel and learners.

In recent years, crisis-sensitive educational planning has become a priority for education authorities in many countries affected by crises. Crisis-sensitive educational planning involves identifying and analysing the risks to education posed by conflicts, natural hazards, climate change and epidemics, among others. This means understanding how these risks impact education systems in order to ensure that education systems can better prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from crises, and ultimately ensure educational continuity. The aim is to lessen the negative impact of risks on education service delivery while at the same time fostering the development of education policies and programmes that will help prevent future crises arising in the first place.

Crisis-sensitive educational planning also entails analysing capacities and existing resources for risk reduction and the emergency response in the education sector, including the capacities of teachers, school leaders and other education personnel, as well as educations stakeholders at the central and sub-national levels. To reduce risks of conflict and violence, crisis-sensitive educational planning also requires identifying and overcoming patterns of inequity and exclusion in education. This is particularly important as these risks may have longer-term consequences on the most vulnerable and marginalised populations, exacerbating already existing disparities within the education system. The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the need for more significant investments in prevention of and preparedness for all types of crises within the education sector. The challenge today is to avoid what the World Health Organization has termed a cycle of “panic-then-forget” once a crisis is under control. Adopting crisis-sensitive planning and risk reduction strategies has therefore been recognised by governments and humanitarian and development partners as a key element in safeguarding education and learning of children and youth in times of crisis. This will also help countries attain Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

*The members of the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies contributed their knowledge and expertise to this document. Contact us.*

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“When COVID-19 came, we realised how ill-prepared we were as an education system to face risks such as this pandemic. By creating a risk management policy, we could get the data and assess where the education system is in relation to the various types of risk and work to be able to reach the most vulnerable learners. Resilience is important for us because it can protect our most prized possession – human capital – and it facilitates the continuity of learning in times of crisis.”

– Nicola Johnson, Chief Planning Officer, Guyana Ministry of Education
What We Know

Education saves lives and helps maintain a sense of normalcy in crisis situations. Education can provide a safe environment for learners, protecting them from violence, abuse and exploitation. It can also protect adolescent girls from forced marriages and early pregnancies. School staff also play an important role in identifying children’s needs and linking them to appropriate protection services.

Crisis-sensitive planning is a cost-effective way to ensure that education continues during and in the aftermath of crises. Educational planning that addresses the risk of conflict or disaster, including those due to climate change, is cost-effective. It can save the cost of rebuilding or repairing expensive infrastructure and education materials. In the long term, crisis-sensitive education content and planning strengthen the resilience of education systems and contribute to the safety and social cohesion of communities and education institutions.

Crisis-sensitive planning must focus on equity and inclusion of the most marginalised populations. Crisis-sensitive planning must focus on equity and inclusion of the most marginalised populations, including girls, learners with disabilities and children and youth from forcibly displaced populations who are more likely to face discrimination. Past experiences demonstrate that inequalities are exacerbated during crises. For instance, the inequitable distribution of qualified teachers or learning resources can create social grievances and become a driver of conflict. Educational inequality can lead to imbalances in the societal fabric, reinforcing tensions between ethnic, religious, and subnational groups, for example. Therefore, crisis-sensitive planning places a strong emphasis on the equitable distribution of resources and the provision of access to quality education for all populations, even the most marginalised. It should also help to ensure that marginalised groups are engaged in all stages of the crisis response to ensure that their views and expressions are taken into account.

Urgent Actions

Ensure that countries risk management strategies and plans for the education sector include prevention and preparedness measures. Institutionalisng crisis risk reduction and management into education planning processes can help education authorities better anticipate crises, and lead the planning and delivery of education before, during, and after a crisis. This means putting in place measures that address vulnerabilities to potential risks. Institutionalising crisis and risk management in education systems, notably by having a dedicated team of education staff tasked with developing and implementing such crisis and risk management policies. Strong coordination mechanisms are needed, to strengthen education systems’ resilience and ensure Ministries of Education (MoEs) can respond adequately to crises.

Strengthen the individual, organisational and institutional capacities of MoEs and their partners for crisis-sensitive planning to ensure stronger preparedness and response during crises. MoEs are in a stronger position to lead in times of crises when they have already invested in human resources and organizational structures such as a risk and crisis management units across various governance levels. Such structures can facilitate coordination with partners and across levels of the government. Strengthening human resources at the central and sub-national levels, as well as at the school level, is essential for putting in place education systems that are adaptable and resilient to crises. Strengthening MoE capacities for crisis management will ensure that they are prepared for and lead sector-wide crisis responses and that priorities for shorter-term humanitarian assistance are aligned with longer-term recovery and development.

Foster MoE leadership, by ensuring that MoEs have the ability to lead and shape opportunities for greater coherence across the education response before, during and after a crisis. Education leaders need to have abilities to set and achieve challenging goals, but also to adapt to ever-evolving situations. Effective MoE leadership should not only focus on equity and inclusion but also capitalise on a pre-existing culture of risk reduction and management within the MoE and prior experience responding to emergencies as well as existing emergency response strategies. Recognising the leadership of the national
Education authorities leadership at all levels is essential to crisis-sensitive planning in order to ensure the relevance and sustainability of educational continuity in crisis situations. Education systems should make sure that sub-central decision-makers and education actors are involved in planning processes, given their knowledge of local risks and capacities. Establishing strong communication and coordination mechanisms across all levels, but also across sectors, creates a foundation for leaders to be able to advocate for the provision of education that will be sustainable before, during and after crises.

The timely collection and use of reliable information and data is central to effective crisis-sensitive planning, reporting and evaluation. Education authorities and partners increasingly recognise the need to adopt evidence-informed crisis-sensitive educational planning. In many countries, the ability of MoE to collect and use relevant data has proven very helpful in responding to the COVID-19 crisis, for example. Consolidating and using data and information from a range of stakeholders, including humanitarian partners, but also school leaders and teachers, as well as from affected populations themselves, who are at the centre of education responses, is therefore essential to evidence-based programming. Data collection and use should move beyond access issues to also assess the learning of crisis-affected learners.

Administration at all levels is also key and may require humanitarian and development actors to reflect on the extent to which their actions support and strengthen, or undermine and replace, endogenous leadership in crisis settings.

Develop strong and resilient education management information systems (EMIS) to support the collection and use of data in crisis prevention, preparedness, response and recovery in the education sector. Detailed, granular data can show who is affected by a crisis and where, which will guide an effective and targeted response and help to mobilise funding. Ensuring that risk-related indicators are integrated into planning tools such as EMIS will make sure that reliable, timely and updated information about schools, students and teachers is available. This will inform decision-making on emergency responses as well as medium and long-term strategies. This should go hand in hand with support to MoE officials to equip them with knowledge and skills on the use of data and information for planning and managing quality and equitable education services in emergency contexts.

Facilitate coordination and communication across administrative levels and sectors, and with affected populations to ensure sustainability and ownership of education responses. This includes ensuring that strong communication and coordination mechanisms are in place, with a balance of bottom-up and top-down approaches, which are participatory and inclusive. Indeed, enabling the participatory and representative engagement of crisis-affected populations, including refugees, internally displaced persons and other marginalised groups can help ensure that their views are included at all stages of crisis response.

Bridge the humanitarian-development divide to facilitate effective and timely responses to crises. While education for emergency-affected populations, including for refugees and IDPs, has traditionally been financed by short-term humanitarian funds, there is a recognised need to improve the humanitarian-development coherence, including through longer-term planning to ensure sustainable access to quality education, regardless of the type of emergency. In addition, there is a recognised need to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, which is embodied by the so-called “New Way of Working” (NWOW) approach that aims to create synergies between humanitarian assistance, development activities and peacebuilding.
GET THE FACTS

Millions of primary and secondary-school-aged children remain out of school in crisis-affected countries
- 128 million primary and secondary-school-aged children are out of school in crisis-affected countries.6
- Children in fragile, conflict-affected countries are more than twice as likely to be out of school as those in countries not affected by conflict; similarly, adolescents in fragile, conflict-affected countries are more than two-thirds more likely to be out of school.7
- 1 in 4 of the world's school-aged children and youth live in countries affected by crises.8

Access to quality education for displaced children remains limited
- As of mid-2021, 91 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide due to conflicts, persecution, and natural hazards.9
- An estimated 38 million of those displaced were children below 18 years of age.10
- 1 million children were born as refugees between 2018 and 2020.11
- Low- and middle-income countries hosted 85% of the world's school-age refugees in 2021.12
- Access to education for these children is, however, limited. Gross enrolment rate for primary school-age refugees is 68%. The rate decreases to 34% at secondary level. Enrolment is at 5% for refugees in higher education.13

Crises disproportionately affect girls and women, denying their right to education
- Around the world, 129 million girls are out of school, including 32 million of primary school age, and 97 million of secondary school age.14
- The gaps are larger in countries affected by fragility and conflict, where girls are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than boys.15
- More than 41,000 girls under the age of 18 marry every day.16

Crisis-sensitive planning can protect investments and ensure continuity in education
- The number of disasters is increasing, and their costs are growing. However, growth in development assistance for C/DRR has been moderate, and while the majority of international aid finance flows to emergency response and reconstruction and rehabilitation, only 13% is allocated to C/DRR.17
- Every US$1 invested in risk reduction and prevention can save up to US$15 in post-disaster recovery and every US$1 invested in making infrastructure disaster-resilient can save US$4 in reconstruction.18
- With respect to education, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted countries' lack of preparedness. Many MoEs were left without a contingency plan to ensure educational continuity. In response, at least 65 countries developed COVID-19 response strategies for the education sector.19
- Each year of education reduces the risk of youth's involvement in conflict by around 20%.20
- People with a secondary education show more tolerance toward people of different race or religion than people with just a primary education.21
- Rebuilding education systems after conflict can rebuild trust and accountability with government.22
- Education still only receives 2 to 4% of humanitarian aid (ECW, 2022).

KEY TERMS

Conflict: refers to armed conflicts or declared war as well as other instances of insecurity, such as inter-community clashes, etc.

Disaster: a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society at any scale due to hazardous events interacting with conditions of exposure, vulnerability, and capacity, leading to human, material, economic and/or environmental losses.

Hazard: a process, phenomenon or human activity that may cause loss of life, injury or other health impacts, property damage, social or economic disruption, or environmental degradation. If identified and addressed through good planning, a hazard will not necessarily lead to a disaster.
Conflict and disaster risk reduction (C/DRR): is defined as the concept and practice of reducing conflict and disaster risks through systematic efforts to analyse and manage the causal factors of disasters, including through reduced exposure to hazards, lessened vulnerability of people and property, good management of land and the environment, and improved preparedness for adverse events. C/DRR includes prevention and mitigation measures as well as response activities.\(^5\)

Preparedness: activities put in place to effectively anticipate, respond to, and recover from the impacts of hazards.

Prevention: activities undertaken to avoid the adverse impact of disasters, including through physical risk reduction and environmental protection. This concept encompasses mitigation.

Resilience: can be defined as the ability of education systems and learners to withstand, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses in ways that promote safety and social cohesion. Resilience is also the ability for the education system to continue functioning in crises, or to restart relatively quickly after an emergency.

Further Reading

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SOURCES

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