Education in Emergencies (EiE) can be a powerful tool to advance gender equality. Gender shapes the experiences of children and young people during crises and specifically affects their participation in education. Incorporating a gender-responsive approach to EiE can address the differentiated needs of girls, boys, women and men, helping to close existing gaps in enrolment, participation and attainment for all groups.

Globally, girls of all ages are less likely to have access to quality education due to entrenched cultural, social, financial, and physical barriers. Emergency settings exacerbate these barriers. Girls tend to experience higher rates of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in and around schools. Early marriage, teenage pregnancy, childbearing and increased domestic work can also surge. Additional barriers include lack of adequate facilities and menstrual hygiene management, lack of female teachers, attacks against schools, families in economic hardship favouring boys' education, and more.

Boys of all ages living in emergencies may also face challenges to their education. Some can overlap with those faced by girls, but others differ. For instance, although association with armed groups or gangs and involvement in illicit activities are risks faced by children of all genders, in many contexts this becomes a particular concern for boys. In the same vein, boys may need to work at an early age to sustain their families. In all cases, the risks may lead to learning loss or even school dropout.

In the moment of crisis, education is more important than ever. In the case of girls and young women, education and protection form a virtuous cycle, particularly in emergencies, when risks exacerbate. Educating girls and women in emergency settings can be protective and transformative not only for them but also for communities. It can reduce the likelihood of conflict, transcending generations. It can decrease GBV and contribute to resilience and peace.

“I only went to school for two years in Syria, and I hadn't learnt to read or write yet. In the Azraq refugee camp, I went to school again. I used a computer properly for the first time and fell in love with computers. One can learn anything with a computer! I dream of becoming a computer expert who teaches others how to use a computer.”

–Fatima, 14, adolescent girl, Syria
What We Know

Children and young people who access gender-responsive education are able to achieve equal learning outcomes. Understanding the different barriers to education that female and male learners experience is central to creating appropriate, effective responses. A gender-responsive education can promote equal learning outcomes by recognising and addressing the specific needs and capacities of girls, boys, women, and men, empowering them equally. The result can be transformative, especially for girls and young women, who are empowered to make more positive life choices and reach their potential.

When children and young people in crisis attend gender-responsive education, it contributes to sustainable peace. Education influences cultural norms and identities. Gender-responsive EiE enables children and young people, with the guidance and promotion of qualified teachers, to challenge and reshape existing harmful gender, cultural and social norms, internalising positive gender roles. Moreover, the social upheaval experienced during crises presents a key entry point to promote gender equality, which can be instrumental in building resilience and strengthening the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

Education in Emergencies can save the lives of girls and young women in emergency settings. In humanitarian settings where protection risks are significant, girls and young women who access education can get critical information about Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) and be referred to safe and appropriate services, which can preserve their health and security, and even save their lives. Moreover, educated girls can make better-informed decisions about their and their family’s health. Child survival rates are higher among women with higher education levels due to increased knowledge of nutrition and prevention of water- and insect-borne infectious diseases.

Urgent Actions

Address the need for a strong gendered approach in educational recovery. Girls have faced compounding barriers to learning amidst school closures, as social norms, limited digital skills, and lack of access to devices constrained their ability to keep learning. Education plans, budgets, and policies must prioritise geographical areas with the largest gender gaps in enrolment and attainment, with low numbers of female teachers and a high prevalence of GBV in communities. Bringing girls and young women back to learning may require additional efforts towards accelerated learning opportunities, menstrual hygiene management, school-wide GBV interventions, and sexual and reproductive health education. Collaboration with girl- and women-led movements, and other key influencers, including community and religious leaders, are needed to develop back-to-school campaigns, and ensure relevance and outreach.

Promote safe, inclusive school environments for all children and young people. With the engagement of the entire school community, inclusive learning environments must be promoted, as well as the development of codes of conduct and clear reporting mechanisms, the hiring of teachers and promotion of role models from marginalised groups (women, people with disabilities, etc.). Security and safety in and around schools should also be supported, and education should be linked with gender-related health and protection services.

Involve children and young people’s voices in decision-making processes around EiE. Engage and provide safe spaces and opportunities for children and young people of all genders, especially girls and young women, so they can systematically participate in decisions about their education, exercise their agency, and make their voices heard. Examples include Plan International’s Girls and Allies Advisory Committee (GAAC), World Visions’ Equality for Girls Access to Learning (EGAL), the creation of girl’s leadership clubs, and support to child parliaments to promote gender equality.

Make ALL children and young people in education visible. Data and evidence are urgently needed to understand what strategies and interventions work, and how to scale up good practices. There is a need for more disaggregated data by age and sex on learning outcomes before, during, and after crises – which must encompass children and young people in disadvantaged groups, including girls and young women. Evidence needs to be generated on programmes targeting adolescent girls in crisis situations, children of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities in humanitarian contexts.
GET THE FACTS

Gender inequality affecting girls and young women overlaps with fragility and conflict

- Girls in conflict-affected contexts are more than twice as likely to be out of school than their counterparts in stable settings.³
- In 2021, of the 78.2 million children and young people out of school in crisis-affected countries, 54% – some 42.2 million – are girls.⁴
- More than half of the girls who are out-of-school globally live in conflict-affected countries.⁵
- The 10 countries with the lowest scores in the EM2030 2019 SDG Gender Index were all fragile states.⁶
- By 2030, girls in crisis-affected countries will receive on average just 8.5 years of education in their lifetime.⁷
- By 2030, 1 in 5 girls in crisis settings will not be able to read a simple sentence.⁸
- By 2030, only 1 in 3 girls in crisis settings will complete secondary school.⁹

Further Reading

Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (2017)
IASC Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action

Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) and United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI) (2019)
INEE Guidance Note on Gender

INEE (2021)
Mind the Gap: The State of Girls’ Education in Crisis and Conflict

Building back equal: girls back to school guide

UNGEI, INEE (2021) and Education Cannot Wait (ECW)
EiE-GenKit

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

1. Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys (UN Women).

2. According to the WHO, gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time.


11. UNGEI, INEE (2021) and Education Cannot Wait (ECW). EiE-GenKit.


Additional Sources


Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) and United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) (2019). INEE Guidance Note on Gender.


Website: eiehub.org

Twitter, Instagram: @eiegenevahub

LinkedIn, Facebook: @Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies