

Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies

Submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights regarding the report on equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl, pursuant to HRC resolution 54/19

Introduction

- a. The Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies (“EiE Hub”) makes this submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (“OHCHR”) in response to its call for submissions for a report on how climate change can have an impact on the realisation of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl.
- b. The EiE Hub is an alliance of states, organisations and entities committed to presenting a unified voice in shaping and influencing education in emergencies (EiE) policy in Geneva and beyond, stepping up visibility, political and operational commitments, and funding for EiE.¹ The EiE Hub harnesses the expertise and capabilities of International Geneva’s diplomatic humanitarian, development, human rights, protection, climate migration, and peace communities and organisations, along with academia, to come together for transformative joint action for EiE.
- c. The EiE Hub welcomes the OHCHR’s report on how climate change impacts on the realisation of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl.
- d. The EiE Hub’s input draws primarily on its flagship report *Leveraging Education in Emergencies for Climate Action*.² Additionally, it draws on the expertise of the EiE Hub’s members. The input focusses particularly on the equal enjoyment of the right to education by girls affected by conflict, violence, and natural disasters.

1. Most important barriers for girls to their equal enjoyment of the right to education

- a. *Loss of income and livelihoods forcing families to withdraw children from school, especially girls, can be caused or exacerbated by climate change.*

Recurring rapid- and slow-onset climate-induced hazards can create significant shocks. Many low-income households, which often have limited resources and cope poorly in the face of such shocks, barely recover from one climate-induced event before another strikes, and thus are caught in a vicious downward spiral of poverty. This can increase the risk that the education of the family’s children will be interrupted. Girls are at particular risk of having their education interrupted, as families often prioritise the education of boys in these situations.³

For example, in rural Zimbabwe, when farming income is lost due to drought, families are left with insufficient income to meet the education costs of their offspring, which often forces them to withdraw children from school, especially girls. This therefore affects the accessibility of education.⁴

¹ A full list of EiE Hub members can be found at <https://eiehub.org/about/members>. The EiE Hub was launched in January 2021 after 10 co-signatories pledged at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum to promote Geneva as the Global Hub for Education in Emergencies. The initial co-signatories are Education Cannot Wait (ECW), the Global Education Cluster (GEC), the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Switzerland, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNICEF, the Geneva Graduate Institute and the University of Geneva.

² EiE Hub (2023). *Leveraging Education in Emergencies for Climate Action*. <https://eiehub.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Leveraging-EiE-for-Climate-Action-FINAL-lowres.pdf>

³ EiE Hub (2023), at p. 33.

⁴ Chigwanda, E. (2016). *A Framework for Building Resilience to Climate Change through Girls’ Education Programming*. www.ungei.org/sites/default/files/Building-Resilience-Climate-Change-through-GirlsEducation-2016-eng.pdf

There exists a particular lack of support for young women affected by livelihood loss. The Norwegian Refugee Council's (NRC) and NORCAP's recent research report "Lost Opportunity - Education for out-of-school youth in emergency and protracted crisis settings" concluded that the EiE sector has a pronounced orientation towards young children and primary schooling, a low priority for youth, and a narrow approach to girls' education with limited scope for supporting girls and young women who become unmarried mothers or young wives.⁵ As a result, this suggests the EiE sector's response to support girls as they become young women is lacking. This could further contribute to limiting education and the livelihood opportunities required to overcome deprivation exacerbated by climate change.

b. The burden of girls' domestic responsibilities such as securing food, water, and fuel can increase due to climate change, thus affecting their ability to attend school.

In many contexts, including crisis-affected contexts, girls and women have more domestic responsibilities than men and boys, such as securing food, water, and fuel. Due to declining ecosystems and an increasingly harsh environment, they have to spend more time and travel longer distances to gather necessary natural resources, which exposes them to greater risk of sexual violence and insecurity. It also impacts on their ability to attend school, and so their accessibility to education.⁶

c. Gender inequalities, stereotypes and structural gender-based discrimination against girls, and other discrimination, can be exacerbated by climate change

Effects of climate change can impose additional demands and pressures on households where girls are already disproportionately affected, including through ingrained gender inequalities, stereotypes and structural discrimination that may prevent many girls from gaining access to and completing at least 12 years of quality education.

In a recent NRC gender education survey, when asked about gender specific barriers to youth accessing livelihoods and job opportunities, respondents in more than half of the countries included emphasised gender segregated skills, discriminatory social and cultural norms reinforcing gender-based stereotypes, internalised gender stereotypes, limiting girls' access to skills trainings and work opportunities, and pushing young women to pursue training in traditionally female-dominated fields. Half of them mentioned safety concerns, sensitivity, or limitations to movement for female youth preventing them from leaving their home or engaging with people, particularly in areas where there is a high risk of gender-based violence or harassment. Limited mobility and domestic responsibilities are affecting the capacity of girls and young women to access and attend training programs, leading to dropouts. Climate change-related hazards can further exacerbate their limited mobility and increased domestic responsibilities.

d. Climate change-induced weather-related hazards can lead to school closures and school dropouts, in particular among girls.

Weather-related hazards can lead to school closures, as well as the use of schools as temporary emergency shelters to accommodate disaster-affected populations. This restricts the availability and accessibility of education. Prolonged school closures resulting from their use as shelters can also increase student dropout rates, especially among girls. For example, when Tropical Cyclone Gombé hit Mozambique in 2022, the education system was still recovering from shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic and two cyclones that had hit the country just six weeks before. In the aftermath of

⁵ NORCAP (2024). *Lost Opportunity: Education for out-of-school youth in emergency and protracted crisis settings*. www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/lost-opportunity/education-for-out-of-school-youth-in-emergency-and-protracted-crisis-settings.pdf

⁶ EiE Hub (2023), at p. 22; UN Women (2022). *Explainer: How Gender Inequality and Climate Change are Interconnected*. www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2022/02/explainer-how-gender-inequality-and-climate-change-are-interconnected; UN Women et al. (2022). *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in the Context of Climate Change*. www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/03/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-the-context-of-climate-change

Cyclone Gombe, schools that withstood the destruction were used to shelter the displaced population. Combined with existing multiple vulnerabilities in the affected communities (e.g., high poverty, high student absenteeism, low female student retention), the prolonged school closures created a higher risk of student dropout, especially among girls. Some research evidence indicates that, when schools are closed due to weather-related hazards, girls are less likely than boys to attend any temporary school facilities provided. This is often linked to family fears about girls' safety as they travel to and from the school facilities (compare point 4.e. below).⁷

e. The risks girls are exposed to when travelling to and from school, including gender-specific risks, can increase due to climate change.

Girls are exposed to many risks when travelling to and from school, including gender-specific risks such as sexual violence. A recent NRC gender survey showed that there existed gender-specific risks traveling to and from school/learning centres in 75% (15/20) of surveyed countries. Climate change can create new risks, such as exposure to extreme weather. It can also exacerbate existing risks. For example, weather-related school closures can increase the distance that girls need to travel to school, thus also increasing their risk of being affected by sexual violence. This impacts their access to education. Some research evidence indicates that, when schools are closed due to weather-related hazards, girls are less likely than boys to attend any temporary school facilities provided, often because families fear for girls' safety as they travel to and from the school facilities.⁸

f. Climate change can cause damage to WASH infrastructure, and other infrastructure meeting the needs of female students and teachers, keeping them from attending school.

The lack of adequate WASH facilities at school is associated with absenteeism, especially among adolescent female students during their menstrual periods, which in a significant number of cases leads to permanent dropout. Damage to WASH infrastructure can also increase the risk of violence for learners and teachers, particularly gender-based violence, such as when girls are forced to leave safe places in search of water or sanitation facilities. In Somalia, which has been severely affected by drought, water scarcity is one of the main causes of school closures.⁹

g. Climate-change related high temperatures and other extreme weather conditions disproportionately affect the health and well-being of girls.

In contexts where students have to learn outdoors in the shade of trees or in flimsy tents, they are relentlessly exposed to increasingly high temperatures and other extreme weather conditions. For instance, in South Sudan, an estimated 17,030 classrooms operate in the open air due to a lack of education infrastructure. Learners are exposed to harsh weather conditions that reportedly affect girls disproportionately. This severely affects the acceptability of their education.¹⁰

As the International Rescue Committee (IRC) notes, extreme weather, lack of access to clean water and inadequate sanitation facilities also cause more general health issues such as heatstroke, dehydration, or waterborne diseases. Girls who suffer from poor health are more likely to miss school, experience learning difficulties, or drop out altogether due to these effects.¹¹

⁷ EiE Hub (2023), at p. 29; OCHA (2022a). Gombe Emergency Response Plan Mozambique. <https://educationcluster.app.box.com/s/ky5i7xvpiukofs3ndn604f3nlin9nmsp/file/971460465628> ; Malala Fund (2021). A Greener, Fairer Future: Why Leaders Need to Invest in Climate and Girls' Education. <https://malala.org/newsroom/malala-fund-publishes-report-on-climate-change-and-girls-education>

⁸ Malala Fund (2021).

⁹ EiE Hub (2023), at p. 29; Sharma, M.K. & Adhikari, R. (2022). Effects of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene on the School Absenteeism of Basic Level Students in the Government School in Nepal. *Frontiers in Education*. www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2022.869933/full ; UNICEF (2022a). The Coldest Year of the Rest of Their Lives: Protecting Children from the Escalating Impacts of Heatwaves. www.unicef.org/media/129506/file/UNICEF-coldest-year-heatwaves-andchildren-EN.pdf ; UNICEF (2021). The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Index. www.unicef.org/media/105376/file/UNICEF-climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis.pdf .

¹⁰ EiE Hub (2023), at p. 30; OCHA (2022b). Humanitarian Needs Overview: South Sudan. <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-humanitarian-needs-overview-2023-november-2022> .

¹¹ IRC (2023), note.

h. Climate change-related displacement

In recent years, an increasing number of children and communities have been uprooted from their homes as they fled from climate-induced events and environmental degradation. Millions of children and youth have also been displaced due to conflicts and violence that often are connected to climate change. Children and youth face particular hurdles relating to access to quality education. Those left behind by parents who have been displaced or have migrated are likely to receive inadequate learning opportunities and support. Displaced and migrant girls, and children with disabilities, are at even greater risk of losing their access to education and of dropping out.¹²

2. Concrete measures taken to respond to the barriers

a. Implementing strategies to reduce and mitigate climate-change related risks

EiE actors have put a number of strategies into place to reduce and mitigate identified climate-change related risks. For example, strategies implemented by the NRC include organizing walking groups, drop-off/pick-ups or transportation; child-friendly Complaint and Feedback Mechanisms; school-level risk assessments and Risk Reduction Plans by parents' committee and teachers; community engagement to identify sensitive points/invisible barriers and safe spaces; careful selection of the location of temporary learning spaces; encouraging students to stay home when specific events are prone to occur; school clubs on safety practices; and training and sensitisation activities.

There have also been some technological innovations which use solar energy to make temporary learning spaces cooler in summer and warmer in winter. However, these innovations do not work in contexts such as Syria, where temperatures rise to 48 degrees in summer and fall below zero in winter.¹³

The IRC also advocates for governments, NGOs, and communities to work together to improve local infrastructures. Additionally, climate change adaptation strategies, anticipatory actions as well as investing in climate-resilient school buildings can help create safer and more conducive learning environments for girls.

b. Applying a gender lens in EiE responses to climate change-related disasters.

EiE actors have also paid particular attention to girls and young women in their responses to climate change-related disasters. When one-third of South Sudan was flooded in 2022, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) allocated US\$10 million at the country's request to mitigate the impact of the floods on education. It allocated these US\$10 million to the Education Cannot Wait-facilitated Multi-Year Resilience Programme 2 (MYRP-2), in addition to US\$40 million in seed funding from ECW. This meant that GPE funding was fully integrated into the MYRP-2 scope of work. MYRP-2 has a strong focus on girls and children with disabilities, the return of refugees and IDPs to their homes, and the transition from emergency to development. The programme supports a holistic package of interventions, including school fees, radio education, re-enrolment campaigns, teacher training (female teachers in particular), child protection, and safe and protected learning. It is aligned with the country's education-sector plan, which the bulk of GPE resources is supporting in areas such as improving access, addressing quality, and system management.

c. Provision of add-on education services such as school feeding and childcare

A recent NRC gender education survey shows that add-on education services - such as school feeding, childcare for young mothers and cash-based interventions - can amplify the possibility for girls to enrol, attend and be retained in education programmes. For example, in Ethiopia, NRC offers

¹² EiE Hub (2023), at p. 33 and 45; OCHA (2022). Yemen Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023 (December 2022), www.unocha.org/publications/report/yemen/yemen-humanitarian-needs-overview-2023-december-2022-enar, at p. 24.

¹³ EiE Hub (2023), at p. 30.

childcare services for young parents in our youth education and training program. This ensures the regular attendance of young mothers. School feeding programmes ensure enrolment and the regular school attendance of boys and girls, while cash support specifically targeting vulnerable mothers and children minimise the risk of absenteeism and drop out. In Mali, NRC distributes weekly food vouchers to support good feeding practices for children enrolled in catch-up programmes (CARIS) specifically promoting girls' retention in school. Other mitigation measures being adopted in Ethiopia include childcare services for young mothers, adapting class schedules and offering flexible programmes such as catch-up and accelerated education programmes to recover learning losses.

d. Promotion of good hygiene and sanitation practices

EiE actors have also addressed barriers to girls' education by promoting good hygiene and sanitation practices. In Mali, NRC has integrated the promotion of these practices across education programming. In collaboration with WASH, their programme offers capacity building to teachers and members of the School Management Committees in the management of water and sanitation facilities, hygiene promotion, sanitation in general and the proper use of latrines, Menstrual Hygiene Management, establishment, capacity building, and support for school hygiene clubs covering different themes. Specific guidance for menstrual hygiene management is provided to adolescent girls through a teacher designated as a focal point.

In Mayom county, South Sudan, the NRC Education programme focused on menstrual health support for adolescent girls' education. Interventions included scholastic materials, training teachers, parents, and school management committees.

3. Most important existing gaps and challenges in education to the empowerment of all girls to contribute to the climate change agenda

a. Disruption or discontinuation of education

Schools are the main source of education about climate change. When girls are not at school, their opportunities for learning about climate change are reduced. As noted in section 1, in crisis-affected contexts, girls are particularly at risk of having their education disrupted or discontinued. This therefore also prevents them from receiving education that empowers them to contribute to the climate change agenda. This can create a vicious cycle where climate change-related interruption of their education prevents girls from taking action to address climate change. It also has an impact on the resilience of their families and communities.¹⁴

b. Lack of access to information about climate change for girls, especially in crisis-affected contexts and in male-dominated societies

Girls and women often lack access to adequate information about climate change. This problem is exacerbated in crisis-affected contexts, where the availability of information and of information technology, such as the internet, is usually restricted. Girls' access to information is also often restricted more generally in male-dominated societies.¹⁵ For example, women might lack access to the internet or other technology to obtain access to information about climate change.

c. Lack of voice in decision-making for girls, especially in male-dominated societies.

In many contexts, including crisis-affected contexts and in male-dominated societies, girls often lack a voice in decision-making. Gender norms mean they are less likely to be involved in political,

¹⁴ Plan International (2023). *Real choices, real lives. Climate change and girls' education: barriers, gender norms and pathways to resilience*. https://plan-international.org/uploads/2023/11/Climate-Change-and-Girls-Education_Synthesis-Report_Nov2023_.pdf

¹⁵ UN Women (2022).

community, and household decision-making.¹⁶ This also prevents them from contributing to the climate change agenda.

4. Concrete measures taken to empower all girls, through education, to contribute to addressing climate change

a. Provide climate change education and develop strong climate change curricula

Education and information, whatever its source, is key to the girls' climate change adaptation efforts. EiE actors, such as the EiE Hub and Plan International, have therefore advocated for providing more education on climate change and developing strong climate change curricula, including in crisis settings.¹⁷ A study by Plan International following girls in 9 countries showed that, in countries where schools have a strong climate change curriculum, girls demonstrate more knowledge about climate change, have greater confidence in applying adaptation strategies, and provide more detailed recommendations. Yet, the girls in these countries still feel their curricula could be improved to further develop their climate knowledge. In countries where climate change education is limited, girls report having less understanding and confidence about the topic.¹⁸

b. Equip girls and young women with green skills

EiE actors advocate to equip girls and young women with green skills to empower them to contribute to addressing climate change.¹⁹ The above-mentioned study by Plan International showed that many girls use green skills that they learned in school – such as recycling and participating in youth collective action groups.²⁰ This also demonstrates that these girls are exercising leadership in their everyday lives, because they are keen to do what they can to combat climate change. In Ethiopia, the NRC trained young women in environmentally friendly irrigation and agriculture, who then formed a Youth Self-Help Group with their start-up materials. Now, they are selling their vegetables in the local market and contributing to the savings mechanism of the group to further invest in their businesses.

c. Facilitate the meaningful engagement of disaster-affected young people, especially girls aged 15 to 18, in existing youth advocacy spaces and networks

EiE actors such as NRC are advocating to facilitate the meaningful engagement of disaster-affected young people, especially girls aged 15 to 18, in existing youth advocacy spaces and networks to ensure they are sufficiently reflected in policy making processes. This could include the SDG4 Youth & Student Network; the Conference of Youth process in the COP negotiations, which are coordinated from local COYs to national and international consultation processes; and the Summit of the Future taking place in September 2024. In addition to the above youth advocacy groups, youth networks such as ActionAid Global Platforms, and the “Big Six” Youth Organisations, including IFRC & the Scouts, provide climate related non-formal education opportunities, life skills, funding mechanisms and activist networks. It is essential that EiE actors and donors more actively engage such youth structures across the humanitarian response cycle.

¹⁶ Plan International (2023).

¹⁷ EiE Hub (2023) at p. 10; Plan International (2023).

¹⁸ Plan International (2023).

¹⁹ EiE Hub (2023), at p. 10; Plan International (2023).

²⁰ Plan International (2023).