



Plan International UK

LEFT OUT, LEFT BEHIND

Adolescent girls' secondary education in crises

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 – Quality Education aims to: ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ by 2030.¹ This goal has been bolstered by additional political commitments, including by Commonwealth and G7 leaders who have pledged to ‘Leave No Girl Behind’ in this effort.

Receiving 12 years of quality education is critical for adolescent girls and boys. However, humanitarian crises are placing this in jeopardy and adolescent girls are being left out, and left behind – particularly at upper secondary level.²

At current rates of progress, SDG 4 will be spectacularly missed.

This report aims to understand more about the intersection between humanitarian crises, gender, age and education, paying close attention to gaps in secondary education. Where data permits, we explore the impact that humanitarian crises have on adolescent girls’ educational attainment, how this contrasts to that of adolescent boys, and how results differ between geographies.

Adolescence – which runs from age 10 to age 19 – is a critical time in a girl’s development. It is a time when different expectations about appropriate behaviour often intensify and gender identities become stronger. During this time – the period when a girl would be transitioning to lower secondary and then on to upper secondary education – domestic and reproductive roles too often begin to dominate their lives at the expense of learning.

Adolescent girls face challenges unique to their age and gender that are different to those faced by adult women and adolescent boys. Harmful social norms that devalue their education, school-related gender-based violence (GBV) and other forms of GBV in the home or the community, early marriage and pregnancy are all major obstacles to learning that are amplified in times of humanitarian crisis. Heightened insecurity, the breakdown of social support networks and cultural structures can exacerbate gender inequality, compounding the challenges faced by boys and girls.

In this context, the ability of girls and boys to continue their education – particularly at secondary level – often comes under strain. This is despite the fact that, when asked, girls and boys consistently prioritise education during and after a humanitarian crisis. Education provides them with a sense of normality, safety and protection, and hope for the future.

However, the number of humanitarian crises continues to grow, and in increasingly protracted ways. The number of forcibly displaced people – 73.5 million³ – is the highest since the end of the Second World War. Climate change – a growing driver of fragility – is expected to force the internal displacement of 140 million people by 2050.⁴ Governments and the humanitarian system are struggling to respond to this demand. **This report shows that in 2018:**⁵

- 14 million children were out of secondary school directly because of humanitarian crises: 7.7 million – or 54 per cent – were girls
- 44 million girls (52 per cent of the total) were out of secondary school in crisis-affected countries – two-thirds of the population of the UK.

Climate change is set to intensify this challenge.⁶

While some progress has been made to improve girls' and boys' access to education during humanitarian crises, staggering gaps remain. This is particularly true at secondary level, for adolescent girls and for refugees:

This report reveals alarming new data on adolescent girls' education in crisis-affected countries, for secondary education in particular. Put simply, adolescent girls are being left behind.

IF CURRENT TRENDS CONTINUE, BY 2030:⁹

ONLY 1 IN 4

adolescent refugees makes it to secondary school and for every 10 refugee boys in secondary education, there are fewer than seven girls⁷



ONLY 1 IN 3 GIRLS

in crisis-affected countries will have completed secondary school



1 IN 10

refugee adolescents in low-income countries enrol in secondary school, compared to one in two at primary level⁸



1 IN 5 GIRLS

in crisis-affected countries will still not be able to read a simple sentence



8.5 YEARS

Girls in crisis-affected countries will receive on average just 8.5 years of education in their lifetime



The report also uncovers significant inequalities between crises around the world, between regions within countries, and between boys and girls:

- Girls in crisis-affected countries lag behind boys across all indicators studied in the report.
- Children in crisis-affected regions consistently perform worse than children in regions of the same countries not affected by humanitarian crises. Of the nine countries we analysed at a sub-national level, the net secondary school enrolment rate for girls in crisis-affected regions was 16 per cent compared with 29 per cent in non-crisis-affected regions.
- In crisis-affected countries, girls are half as likely to enrol in secondary school compared to the global average.
- Refugee girls are half as likely to enrol at secondary level when compared with their male peers.
- As children move through education in crisis-affected countries, the gap between boys and girls in access to education widens: there are 9.4 per cent more girls than boys not in upper secondary school, compared with only 1.8 per cent more at primary level.

The report also shows that national governments and international donors are not spending enough, or in the right places, to turn the tide on these trends:

- Only 13 per cent of crisis-affected countries are reaching the target of spending 20 per cent of government expenditure on education.
- At just 2.1 per cent in 2017, the share of total humanitarian aid spent on education has not changed for 15 years in spite of significantly increased need.¹⁰
- Less than half (43 per cent) of the US\$875 million requested for education in humanitarian appeals was funded in 2018.¹¹
- Humanitarian financing gaps remain widest for ‘forgotten crises’ that fail to capture media and political attention in donor countries. The humanitarian financing gaps for the Lake Chad Basin and Sahel crises are 20 per cent higher than the global average.

Children in ‘forgotten crises’ are at risk of being left behind. For example, girls living in the Lake Chad Basin receive, on average, about two years of schooling in their lifetime, just over three times less than the average across Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria



We propose a five-part plan to ensure no girl is left behind, underpinned by a call to involve adolescent girls, listen to their concerns and ideas, and amplify their voices at all stages of programme, policy and political decision making.

1 Bold political leadership



The pledge to Leave No Girl Behind cannot be delivered without bold political leadership at the international level and in countries affected by humanitarian crises.

2 Fairer financing



National governments should adopt the principle of 'progressive universalism' in their budgetary allocations.

3 Gender-responsive national and global systems



National education systems to be gender-responsive and address the complex and distinct challenges faced by different genders.

4 Targeted interventions to Leave No Girl Behind in crises



Address the barriers to education faced by adolescent girls in humanitarian crises.

5 Listen to and involve adolescent girls



Provide safe spaces for adolescent girls to participate in decisions about their education, to exercise their agency, and make their voices heard.

Bold political leadership. At a time when countries are closing their doors to refugees, schools are indiscriminately bombed in conflict, and girls are denied education because they are too scared to return to school due to insecurity and exposure to attacks, the pledge to Leave No Girl Behind cannot be delivered without bold political leadership. The year ahead presents several opportune moments for world leaders to act on their promise to ensure 12 years of quality education for all girls. The UN High-Level Political Forum, the Global Refugee Forum and the French G7 Presidency all provide platforms for governments, donors and other stakeholders to make ambitious commitments to Leave No Girl Behind.

Fairer financing. National governments should adopt the principle of 'progressive universalism' in their budgetary allocations – increasing overall spending for education but targeting the increase towards the most marginalised learners, such as adolescent girls in regions affected by humanitarian crises. International actors should increase funding and ensure a more equitable, needs-based distribution of development and humanitarian aid. This should include gradually increasing the financing available for secondary education in humanitarian crises but also prioritising 'forgotten crises' across sub-Saharan Africa, where needs are greatest.

Gender-responsive national and global systems. The only sustainable way to ensure all children receive quality education is to build resilient national and global systems capable of ensuring that girls and boys, women and men, not only gain access to and complete a quality education but are empowered equally in and through education. Principally this will require national education systems to be gender-responsive and to address the complex challenges faced by different genders, but also to be resilient, prepared for, and able to respond to, humanitarian crises. It also means a more coordinated international aid architecture that can better respond to the increasingly complex and protracted nature of humanitarian crises in the 21st century, as well as address the differing impacts that crises have on boys, girls, women, and men, particularly those living with a disability or from ethnic or other minority groups.

Targeted interventions to Leave No Girl Behind in crises. Sustainable systems take time to build. For the 13 million girls out of school because of humanitarian crises, this will likely be too late. Humanitarian actors should act immediately to improve the way we collectively address the barriers to education faced by adolescent girls in humanitarian crises. Efforts must be stepped up to support adolescent girls caught in crises to transition from primary to secondary school and to complete 12 years of quality education.

Listen to and involve adolescent girls. Take steps to responsibly and meaningfully consult with children and youth throughout the policy and programme cycle. This could be most effectively achieved by providing safe spaces for adolescent girls to participate in decisions about their education, to exercise their agency, and make their voices heard.

ENDNOTES

- 1 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4>
- 2 Programmes at ISCED level 2, or 'lower secondary' education, are typically designed to build upon the fundamental teaching and learning processes which begin at ISCED level 1 (primary education). Usually, the educational aim is to lay the foundation for lifelong learning and human development on which education systems may systematically expand further educational opportunities. Programmes at this level are usually organized around a more subject-oriented curriculum, introducing theoretical concepts across a broad range of subjects. UNESCO, ISCED 2011, <http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/lower-secondary-education-isced-2>.
- 3 UNHCR mid-2018 data is available in UNHCR (2019) *Mid-Year Trends 2018*, Geneva: UNHCR, p.3. Total displaced based on those figures is 70.4 million people of UNHCR concern, minus 3.9 million stateless people, plus 5.4 million Palestinian refugees under UNRWA: UNRWA (2018) *In Figures*, p.1. https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/unrwa_in_figures_2018_eng_v1_31_1_2019_final.pdf There are 1.6 million more IDPs from conflict and violence in 2018 than 2017 <http://www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data>
- 4 UN OCHA (2018) *World Humanitarian Trends 2018 Highlights*, p.20.
- 5 These figures were calculated by identifying how many school-aged children were in need of humanitarian assistance in 2018 – 50 million – and then applying an out-of-school rate in each country (or an average for crisis-affected countries if national data is not available) and adding to this population an extra percentage to reflect the increased out-of-school rates in crisis-affected regions of countries to this population. We also included the estimated number of out-of-school refugees as noted by UNHCR in their *Turn the Tide* report of 2018. UNHCR (2018) *Turn the Tide: Refugee Education in Crisis*. Geneva: UNHCR. A full methodology can be found in Annex 2.
- 6 UN OCHA (2018) *World Humanitarian Trends 2018 Highlights*, p.20.
- 7 UNHCR (2017) *Left Behind: Refugee Education in Crisis*. Geneva: UNHCR, p.9.
- 8 UNHCR-provided graph of net enrolment rates for refugees. The percentages are based on the population estimates for 5-11-year-olds (primary) and 12-17-year-olds (secondary) and the estimated or reported net enrolment rates for the year 2016.
- 9 Calculations based on analysis of data from Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) and data from The World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE), <https://www.education-inequalities.org>
- 10 UNESCO (2019) *Global Education Monitoring Report*, p.243.
- 11 Education Cannot Wait (2018) *The Humanitarian-Development Nexus: Modelling Education in Crisis*. Presented to the HLSG Spring Meeting Washington, p.3.

Girl in school in Lira district, Uganda





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