

Policy in Brief: The Consequences of Not Investing In Education in Emergencies

Education is an investment. Yet around the world and in some of the poorest countries most in need of investments in basic education, more than 59 million primary age children remain out of school. While domestic financing has scaled-up over the last decade, it has not scaled up everywhere or nearly fast enough. Donor aid to basic education, already inadequate, is declining — most rapidly in the poorest settings.¹

Who are these 59 million children left behind by our failure to invest? They are among the poorest and most at risk children in the world. More than 21 million live in conflict and disaster settings where access to a safe place to play and learn could actually mean the difference between a future of exploitation or of rebuilding.²

The financing situation is bleak for basic education, but in conflict and disaster settings it is absolutely devastating. As a recent policy paper from the Education for All Global Monitoring Report (GMR) makes clear, ‘inefficient humanitarian and development aid systems, together with insufficient levels of domestic financing’ are excluding millions of children and adolescents from education.³ The epicenter of the basic education crisis is in these emergency settings and yet in 2014 only 1% of overall humanitarian aid and 2% of humanitarian appeals went to education, leaving millions of children and their families without a way to build a future.⁴

Education, misperceived as not immediately critical to save lives, is the first service sacrificed and the last to be rebuilt in emergencies. The current aid architecture divides aid into humanitarian response and longer-term development. Protracted crises however do not conform to this division. Due to the increasingly protracted nature of conflict,

humanitarian assistance is stretched into basic service provision. And yet, education continues to receive a grossly inadequate part of these funds and development funding does not make up this gap. In fact, countries *not* in crisis receive more development aid for education on average than those in protracted crisis.⁵

Education further slips through the cracks in humanitarian funding — starting early with low requests for funding in the humanitarian appeals process based on a calculation of what’s possible, not what’s needed

Not prioritizing a return to education can be the difference between life and death.⁶ With each child, with each successive year of education lost, the human, social and economic costs rise exponentially — permanently leaving children, families and communities in a desperate fight for survival. This struggle puts children and adolescents at risk for recruitment as child soldiers or labourers, early and forced marriages and other forms of sexual exploitation and trafficking.

With each successive generation, families, communities and countries can become increasingly vulnerable — as refugees lack the skills to return home and rebuild and neglected governance, health and social systems precipitate a slide into future conflict or create a lack of resiliency in the face of epidemics or natural disasters. A study of 55 countries over 7 years indicated that when educational inequality doubled, with it doubled the probability of conflict.⁷

These are the consequences of not investing in education in emergencies. Generations of children lost to tragic alternatives, communities sinking



deeper into poverty, an increased probability of future violence and forfeited economic progress. Layer on layer of human and financial devastation.

Not investing in education in emergencies — not building an appropriate response to this crisis — is a choice. A choice for inaction. A choice to waste the lives and resources of entire communities.

The Economic Impact of Not Investing in Education and Emergencies

The average length of displacement for refugees is 17 years.⁸ With inadequate resources to respond quickly and rebuild schools or find safe places for children to play and learn, education can be interrupted for decades, causing generations to miss out on an education.

The opportunity costs of these lost years — these generations lost — is extremely high. In Senegal, out-of-school children cost 8% of gross domestic product (GDP) — at least two years of economic growth.⁹ The costs of keeping these children out of school is often higher than getting them in. In Brazil, spending just 0.03% of GDP on primary education offsets a cost of 0.19% of GDP if children remain out of school — six times the price.¹⁰

The cost of achieving universal primary education in Brazil is 6 times less than the cost of keeping children out of school

In places where millions of children are still out of school, the returns on investing in education are even clearer. The cost of achieving universal primary education in sub-Saharan Africa is estimated to be 5 times *less* than the cost of keeping 30 million children out of school.¹¹

In conflict and emergencies, investment in education can yield yet higher returns, saving lives in the short-term and billions of dollars in opportunity costs in the long-term. For example, in Pakistan between 2009 and 2012, lack of access to education for 5.5 million children due to conflict is estimated to have cost \$2.9 billion in lost income.¹² Conflict in Syria, which has forced 2.8 million children out of school, has resulted in a loss of 5.4% of GDP.¹³ The direct costs of replacing damaged school infrastructure and training new teachers in Syria — a country that previously had near universal access — is not insignificant (estimated to be \$3.2 billion) but is still lower than the cost of inaction.¹⁴

These economic costs are further compounded by devastating human and social costs associated with hosting refugees — whose number grew to more than 50 million in 2014, the highest since World War II.¹⁵ Providing services for many people who have lost everything puts enormous strain on the humanitarian relief system and can quickly drain already insufficient host country health, social and educational systems.

The Syria Crisis: An Inadequately Shared Burden¹⁶

The Syrian conflict has caused enormous suffering in Syria and in the region — creating the largest refugee crisis in 20 years, with over 4 million Syrians seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. The conflict has claimed the lives of more than 10,000 children, orphaned thousands more and left more than 2 million children in urgent need of psychosocial support and treatment. At least 2.8 million Syrian children are now out of school in Syria and in the neighboring countries of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.¹⁷



In Lebanon, the cost of hosting 1.2 million Syrian refugees is estimated to have resulted in \$7.5 billion in economic losses, and demand for basic services like health and education have far surpassed the capacity of institutions and infrastructure. The massive influx of refugees has also increased the number of those living in poverty in Lebanon 61% and overall unemployment has doubled, slowing domestic growth to 2% of GDP in 2015 – far below the 9% average in the four years prior to the crisis.’

Despite this, over the past four years, aid appeals to share Lebanon’s efforts to get these children in school and learning have failed.¹⁸ For 2015/16 a gap of \$15 million for basic education remains and 300,000 children remain out of school as the Government of Lebanon struggles to finance the placement of refugee children in a system designed for 300,000 Lebanese students. The tremendous economic and social consequences of not addressing and sharing this burden will reverberate in Lebanon and across the region for many generations.

The Compounding Consequences of Not Investing in Education in Emergencies

While refugee populations can put an enormous strain on already weak health, social, and educational systems in host countries, the costs of the alternatives to being in school and the narrowed scope of economic options available without education compound into layer upon layer of additional losses. The case for increased investment in education in emergencies is above all a case of calling for an end to financial architecture that fails to invest and protect these children from the impact of ‘alternatives’ to education.

Conflict limits economic opportunities and increases poverty, decreasing basic protections, narrowing financial paths for survival, and increases the need for all family members — including children — to contribute to basic needs. Out-of-school children are at greater risk of child labor, child marriage, and recruitment into fighting, prostitution, and other life-threatening, often criminal, activities.¹⁹ In emergencies the incidence of all of these activities rises immediately and precipitously. The countries with the highest numbers of child laborers — Nigeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan — have been affected by protracted conflict and emergency situations and are also the countries with the highest out-of-school populations.²⁰

The onset of natural disasters and armed conflict also weakens social institutions and increases the chance of sexual violence against women and girls. Parents may perceive marriage (a form of sexual slavery) as a means to protect and provide for their daughters and secure short-term financial gains to support the survival of other family members.²¹ The availability of educational opportunity — of other options to secure the future — can help prevent child marriage. If all girls in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia had a primary education, child marriage would fall by at least 14%.²²

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Children living in areas of ongoing conflict are also at greater risk of recruitment (often forced) in armed forces and militias, especially if they have little education.²³ The risks to children in Nigeria are well known, yet ‘no funding whatsoever’ was received for education as part of the humanitarian appeals process despite requests and despite having the largest numbers of out-of-school children and adolescents in the world.²⁴

Compounding the extraordinary health risks associated with child marriage, child labour, and child soldiering, out-of-school children lose out on the powerful health outcomes that accompany education, from improved maternal and infant mortality rates to an increased availability of safe birthing options, creating an additional layer of lasting social and economic consequences. If all girls in sub-Saharan Africa completed primary education, maternal mortality would fall by 70%.²⁵

Over the past forty years, the global increase in girls’ education has saved the lives of more than 4 million children.

Significant economic losses are associated with these barriers, layering additional costs and consequences across future generations. Investing in education is critical to eliminating child marriage, child labour, violence against girls and unlocking far reaching benefits to health.

Child Labour

- In Lebanon, 70 to 80% of out-of-school children are estimated to be involved in child labour, between 3-400,000 children.²⁶
- The benefits of eliminating child labor would be seven times higher than the costs associated with allowing child labor to continue.²⁷

Child Marriage

- In India, \$56 billion in potential earnings is lost due to adolescent pregnancy and school drop outs associated with child marriage.²⁸
- The 25 nations with the highest rates of child marriage are fragile states, having suffered either conflict or natural disasters.²⁹

Child Soldiers

- In Syria, children living in conflict zones without open schools have been aggressively targeted for recruitment by armed opposition groups, who offer free schooling programs — later including weapons and military training — to recruit boys as young as 14.³⁰
- If only 10% more children enroll in secondary school, the risk of war drops by 3%.³¹

Violence Against Girls

- Out-of-school girls are at greater risk of violence during conflict and emergencies can result in severe psychological and physical trauma with lasting consequences on their future and their children’s futures.
- Within just a few short months of school closures due to the Ebola crisis many primary school girls were visibly pregnant. As a punishment they were barred from returning to the classroom.³²

Health

- Over the past forty years, the global increase in girls’ education has saved the lives of more than 4 million children.³³
- In South and West Asia, the under-5 mortality rate would fall 62% if all girls reached secondary school.³⁴

Inequality

- Girls are almost 2.5 times more likely to be out of school in conflict-affected countries and young women are nearly 90% more likely to be out of secondary school in conflict-affected countries than girls in non-conflict countries.³⁵



- In conflict-affected countries the gap between the poorest and the richest in access to education — already significant — becomes larger with 39% of the poor accessing education compared to 77% of the richest.³⁶

- Evidence shows that societies with low levels of education are more likely to experience conflict and that unequal access to education can be a key driver of instability and violence.³⁷

Poverty

- If all students in low-income countries acquired basic reading skills, 174 million people could be lifted out of poverty, a 12% reduction in global poverty.³⁸

- We will not achieve the end of poverty without seriously scaling up the fight to get all children in school and learning — particularly in conflict and emergencies. All children. Everywhere.

The Case for Increased Investment is Clear — We Must Act Now

The fractures in the financial architecture that have led to a gross underfunding of education in emergencies — allowing it to slip through the cracks between development and humanitarian aid — and occupy a low priority especially in protracted conflicts are increasingly clear.

The costs of this neglect are exponentially greater than the costs of ending it. Not only does education foster economic growth and save lives in the short and long-term, education can foster peace, prevent future violence and disaster and provide the skills to rebuild. Quality education can help to transform attitudes, increase engagement in politics and support the development of better social understanding post-conflict.³⁹

There is tremendous evidence on value of investment in education — and this echoes the experience and demands of those living in conflicts.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo and Ethiopia — both dealing with ongoing emergencies — 30% of those surveyed ranked education as their first priority — *before* basic services like health, water, food, shelter, and psychosocial support.⁴⁰

Who will rebuild in Somalia and South Sudan, where years of conflict have forced 2 million children out of school? Who will rebuild in Syria, where nearly 3 million children have lost their right to education, or in the Democratic Republic of the Congo where the hopes, dreams and potential of 4 million children out of school have been destroyed? Who will help strengthen systems to deliver basic services in countries like Lebanon, burdened by a massive influx of refugees?



Endnotes

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