



An Education Free from Violence

Theirworld

Research and main report prepared by
Kate Moriarty for Theirworld, with additional writing
and contributions from Justin van Fleet, Ben Hewitt,
Ewan Watt, Stephanie Parker, and James Cox.

Cover Picture: Ahmed, 6, sits in his damaged school,
in Idlib, north Syria. — Photo credit: UNICEF/
UN055730

Back Cover Picture: Hostilities in eastern Ukraine
have damaged or destroyed hundreds of schools,
many of which were used for military purposes
— Photo credit: Yulia Gorbanova / Human Rights
Watch

*“Children are both our
reason to struggle to
eliminate the worst
aspects of warfare,
and our best hope for
succeeding at it”
- Graça Machel¹*

Summary

The right for all children to have a childhood and education free from violence should be universal, yet millions of children and young people are having their childhood and youth disrupted by conflict and violence, often with the most devastating consequences.

This can change.

Every child has the right to a violence-free education and every single attack on a classroom is an attack on the universal value that we all hold dear. It is an attack on those children's futures. It is an attack on hope itself. Not only is education the cornerstone of childhood development, it also plays a vital role in helping children overcome past traumas. Every school in the world should be safe from violence.

This can be a reality.

To do so requires action and those who hold power must take the lead to ensure children living in such vulnerable situations find safety at school. Action is also needed to ensure that their education provides them with the skills to protect them from possible harm from violence and any future conflicts they become caught up in.

The evidence is clear, safe quality education is fundamental to a child's development, to her or his well-being, future life and for each country and for our shared global future.

- Governments, donors and the international community can bring the change that is needed by:
- Implementing stronger legal measures to end attacks on schools, teachers and pupils
- Investing more funding for children living in countries affected by conflict and chronic violence
- Implementing better policies to support children and young people in vulnerable situations

The cost of not doing so is great.

Conflict, Violence, and Children: The Scale of the Problem

Hundreds of millions of children are growing up in situations of conflict and chronic violence, denied their most basic rights, with devastating consequences. It is not only in the conflicts caught in the glare of the world's media - such as Syria - where children are suffering unnecessarily. Away from the headlines, hidden crises and deep-rooted violence are also damaging the lives of hundreds of millions more children, adolescents and young people, often with lasting impacts on their wellbeing and development.

Every five minutes a child loses her or his life to violence.² Beyond those children whose lives are tragically cut short, toxic stress in very young children, the maiming of children of all ages, sexual abuse and mass displacement caused by conflict and violence are all robbing girls and boys of their childhood and youth.

For too many children and young people violence is their daily reality:

- Around the world three out of four of the world's children have experienced interpersonal violence in the last year – 1.7 billion children in total.³
- In 2015, one child was born into conflict every two seconds – a total of 16 million babies.⁴
- At least 28 million children have been driven from their homes by conflicts.⁵
- An estimated 158 million school age children and adolescents (6 to 17 years) are living in the 24 countries and areas affected by armed conflict.⁶

Against this backdrop of chronic violence and conflict there are clear steps that governments, donors and the international community can take that would change the lives of millions of children around the world. Childhood should be a time of safety and security, free from worry or stress, a time for children to play and learn, for young people to develop knowledge and skills for the future, to flourish.

Education can and should be key to addressing this crisis.

Making schools and classrooms safe must be a priority, supported by relevant policy, planning and financial commitments. Protecting children and young people, enabling them to learn in vulnerable situations, is an increasingly urgent priority.

Education is the cornerstone of development, it is every child's right. Education is fundamental to a child's development, from the earliest years to reaching their full potential. It is key to their future opportunities, as well as those of their families, communities and country. It can also be a powerful tool for overcoming past trauma for those children and young people who are or have experienced conflict and violence. It can promote tolerance and foster social cohesion, reducing the likelihood of future violence and conflict.

Ensuring children living in vulnerable situations of conflict and extreme violence have access to safe quality education that leads to strong learning outcomes is key to a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable future for both people and planet.

The Right to Education was first articulated on the 10th of December 1948 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), since then this right has been strengthened through the development of additional human rights conventions, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC). Every country in the world - through the ratification of one convention or another - has made a legally binding commitment to fulfilling the right to education for all children. What is more, for children growing up in contexts of conflict, fragility and violence the need for this right, according to the Committee on Rights of the Child, is further reinforced by the role education can play in both physical and cognitive protection, in mitigating psychological impacts and for bringing structure and hope and a sense of normalcy to their lives.⁷

International law protects the rights of children to an education in times of peace and in times of conflict, yet almost 70 years on from the signing of the UDHR, hundreds of millions of children are being denied their right to quality education and these figures are not the whole picture. Estimates suggest that the global figures on out of school children could be out by a factor of 350 million⁸ – that would mean almost double the number of children are out of school than are currently counted.

Conflict and violence are a major barrier in terms of both access and completion of education and to learning:

- Around 37 million children are out of school as result of conflict globally.⁹ There is no global data on children missing out on school because of generalised violence.
- Conflict is destroying education: Of those out of school, 35% of children of primary school age, 25% of adolescents of lower secondary age and 18% of youth of upper secondary age live in conflict-affected areas.¹⁰
- Children in fragile, conflict-affected countries are more than twice as likely to be out of school compared with those in countries not affected by conflict.¹¹
- Adolescents in countries affected by conflict are more than two-thirds more likely to be out of school compared with those in countries not affected by conflict.¹²
- Less than a quarter – 23 per cent – of all adolescent refugees are in secondary school – for those hosted in low-income countries the figure is only 9% – and only 1% of refugees globally are in tertiary education.¹³
- Girls are almost two and a half times more likely to be out of primary school if they live in conflict-affected countries, and nearly 90 percent more likely to be out of secondary school than their counterparts in countries not affected by conflict.¹⁴

Where education is available, conflict, violence and forced displacement mean that children and young people often drop out due to fear of schools being attacked, or due to the risks associated with the journey to school. Economic or cultural pressures from families to undertake labour, or for girls to marry early, impact on participation in schooling. Conflict increases these pressures, rates of child marriage among Syrian

refugee girls before the age of 18 have seen a significant increase, in 2011 only 12% of Syrian refugees in Jordan involved girls under 18, in early 2014 this had risen to 32%. In Lebanon 41% of Syrian refugee girls were married before the age of 18.¹⁵

Conflict and violence leave children and young people unsafe and disrupt their education, with both short and long term consequences. What happens in the environment surrounding the school, what happens to the school and what happens inside the school and classroom are significant areas for concern to ensure children are safe and that their right to education is fulfilled.

Education must be part of the solution: schools can offer a place of safety, of security and support for children and young people, an opportunity to reach their potential and learn for a better future.

The everyday experience of young people in complex humanitarian emergencies and areas impacted by violence is one where a lack of safe schools can put learning and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at risk. As we see progress on the Sustainable Development Goal on Education (SDG 4), we know that many more young people will go to school in communities plagued by issues of lack of safety or security. Across all contexts in which we have been involved, attacks on schools and places of learning, as well as safety on the journey to school, and violence in schools have threatened progress that is being made in delivering each child's right to education.

SDG 4, calls on governments and their partners to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030. SDG 4 requires us to look at the youngest children (e.g. 4.2 focuses on access to early childhood development, care and pre-primary education) as well as children enrolling in primary and secondary school and youth (e.g. 4.3 calls for education at the technical, vocational and higher education levels). Moreover, SDG 4 calls for specific action to support education for children in vulnerable situations and ensure schools are safe.

To achieve these targets and the overall goal of SDG 4 action is needed to ensure children living in vulnerable situations find safety at school; and through a quality education, are able to gain the skills to mitigate possible harm from violence and to prevent future conflicts and violence. The scale of this challenge is huge, and education alone will not be able to eliminate conflict and violence, however, quality education in safe learning environments is vital to support children growing up in such vulnerable contexts and help to disrupt patterns of violence, conflict and poverty.

All children should be able to live - and learn - without fear, free from violence of any kind.

This can only be achieved if governments, donors and international community take targeted measures to uphold their promises and ensure "safe, nonviolent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all" (SDG 4a).¹⁶ Where schools are protected from attack and classrooms are free from violence and children and young people are able to enjoy their right to education in security and peace, enabling every child to have the best possible start in life.

While it may seem impossible given the scale of conflict and violence around the world,

supporting good practice, ensuring strong policy, upholding legal frameworks that protect education and ensuring adequate financing of education for children and young people in vulnerable situations - in complex emergencies and in chronic violence - makes the reality that all children can enjoy their right to education and learn in safety much more probable.

It is time that the promise of education is realised. It is time for action.

Every School in the World should be Safe from Violence

In conflict and fragile contexts violence is pervasive, schools, teachers and students are often deliberately attacked and the surrounding violence can easily penetrate into classrooms, with often devastating consequences. Schools are protected under international law, they should always be places of safety for children and young people, tragically this is not the case. Schools are often deliberately targeted in conflict or other violent contexts, in 2016 there were almost 400 verified attacks on schools and education personnel¹⁷, the actual figure will be much higher and the situation is getting worse with the 2017 figures looks set to exceed those of the previous year.

Action on all levels can help bring about change.

Protection

Governments and donors, as well as the UN have a key role to promote the actions that are needed. International humanitarian law protects schools as 'civilian objects', yet attacks continue with impunity. Bringing those responsible to justice is key although not easy, one important step is removing any perceived ambiguity of a school's status. Their status as a protected "civilian object" is undermined if the school is used for any purposes associated with military forces. For example, if schools are used as barracks for military personnel, if they are used as look outposts by the military, or to store ammunition, or even having an armed military guard may undermine their civilian status and protection under international law. In 2015, the Governments of Norway and Argentina called on UN member States to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration, this declaration is a promise by those parties to adhere to the Guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use during armed conflict, and bring the Guidelines into domestic policy and operational frameworks.¹⁸ To date, the Safe Schools Declaration has been signed by 71 countries.¹⁹

Funding

In the last decade, there has been increased recognition, along with action, to uphold children's right to education in emergency contexts (not just in natural disasters but in complex humanitarian crisis caused in full or part by conflict). The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring report stated that that "Humanitarian aid to education increased by more than 50% in 2016 to US\$303 million".

In 2016, following months of high level advocacy and global campaigning, the new Education Cannot Wait Fund for education in emergencies was established, designed to increase funding for children's education in conflict and crisis. Coupled with the Global Partnership for Education's conflict and fragility fund, more funding is now available in contexts of conflict, fragility and violence.

Despite this progress, donors are still failing to ensure that children and young people have access to education.²⁰ For example, less than 3% of all humanitarian aid funding goes to education when at least 4-6% is needed. In a breakthrough in September 2017 the European Union pledge to give 8% of their humanitarian funding to education, a lead which other donors can follow.²¹

Education Cannot Wait

Education Cannot Wait (ECW) was launched in 2016 to help ensure that every crisis-affected child and young person is in school and learning. It is the first global fund to prioritise education action in humanitarian emergencies. ECW aims to raise almost \$4 billion to provide quality education to more than 13.6 million children and youth over the five years from its 2016 launch - and to reach 75 million children by 2030. It has five core functions:

- Inspire political commitment so that education is seen by governments and funders as a top priority during crises.
- Enable those in the humanitarian (short-term) and development (long-term) sectors to plan, respond and work together with shared objectives.
- Generate and disburse additional financing to close the \$8.5 billion funding gap needed to reach 75 million children and youth.
- Strengthen capacity to respond to crises, including the ability to coordinate emergency support.
- Improve accountability, including collecting better data and sharing knowledge of what works and what doesn't.

Policy and education content

Governments, with the support of international partners, need to develop conflict sensitive education systems to reduce risk and mitigate impact. As UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning highlights "[t]he urgency of developing education content and sector plans that address these risks is undeniable" and while they note that no one context is the same, they also suggest that few countries are completely exempt from the risk of crisis, conflict or violence. They call for educational planning to enable "informed decisions about making the education environment safe, building resilience in education systems and among students, and ensuring that education policies are not a source of grievance but contribute, instead, to social cohesion."²²

Tackling prejudice and discrimination – often the root cause of conflict and violence – in teaching and learning materials can help address what are often hidden sources of tension, intolerance and conflict. Removing negative stereotypes in textbooks, which might portray: different ethnic or religious groups as lesser members of a society; or perpetuate negative gender stereotypes of girls and women that can lead boys and men to see women as subordinates; or which fuel ongoing

hostilities between nations or groups, is an important step.

Innovation in teaching and learning can mitigate the trauma that conflict violence brings, it can help foster values of tolerance and social cohesion and contribute to the eradication of violence in schools and in the community.

Ensuring an adequate number of qualified teachers who adhere to codes of conduct that protect children and young people is also key. Teachers - who are themselves protected from conflict and violence - play a pivotal role in delivering safe quality education.

In many countries around the world physical violence against children in school is sanctioned through the legal practice of corporal punishment. This means that globally 732 million children between 6 and 17 years live in countries where corporal punishment at school is not fully prohibited, that is 1 in 2 school-aged children in the world.²³ Bringing an end to corporal punishment would be one way to end the risk of children facing violence that is legal at the hands of their teachers. Codes of conduct for teachers to ensure children do not face abuse of any kind is also important for children to be able to learn free from violence of any kind.

The Human Impact of War and Violence on the Lives of Children and Young People

Born into conflict

Of the 16 million babies born into conflict in 2015, many were born in Syria, or born to Syrian parents forced to flee into neighbouring countries to escape the war. Neither scenario signals a positive start in life but sadly that is not where the story ends.

At least 3.7 million Syrian children under the age of six, one in every three, have grown up knowing nothing but war.²⁴ These children are growing up amidst often extreme violence, watching their friends and family members die, their homes become piles of rubble, witnessing events no child should, being forcefully displaced from their homes within their country, or born stateless as refugees - the trauma and chaos of war has a profound and lasting impact on children. The risk these children face goes beyond the risk of their own death - although tragically child deaths in Syria increased by 20% from 2015 to 2016.²⁵ It is the risk of injury, of permanent disability, the impact of grief, of the deep psychological trauma that war inflicts on the youngest children with often dire consequences for their development.

The terrifying experiences and chaos of war faced by young children, inside and outside of Syria, is intolerable. It will also have lasting consequences. Growing up in conflict or in situations of chronic violence children risk psychological trauma, post-traumatic stress and in the youngest of children toxic stress.

A child's early life is a time of rapid development, with 90% of the brain development occurring by the time a child is five years old. For a child to develop to her or his full potential, children need quality nurturing care in their early years, including play, adequate health care, nutrition, early learning and protection. In Syria – or any context of conflict or chronic violence – achieving the basics for development is a huge challenge, traumatic experiences, direct or indirect, can mean a child's development is severely constrained. Toxic stress is caused by heightened levels of the stress hormone cortisol, which can flood a child's brain and there is extensive evidence documenting the disruptive impacts it has on a child's development.²⁶ Toxic stress restricts neural connectivity,²⁷ it can have a profound and lasting impact, altering the wiring and structure of the brain, limiting cognitive and socioemotional development.

While no exact figure exists on the number of children who have or are suffering from toxic stress globally, toxic stress is likely to be endemic in children growing up in conflict or violence. With the number of children suffering in the tens – if not hundreds - of millions, given one in 11 children aged six or younger has spent the most critical period of their brain development growing up in conflict,²⁸ and millions more in situations of chronic violence.²⁹ A 2015 study of Syrian refugee children in Turkey found that 45% showed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – ten times the prevalence among children around the world – and 44% showed symptoms of depression.³⁰

Quality early years' education in safe spaces can help reduce the likelihood of toxic stress. Many international organisations already recognise the critical importance of supporting the youngest in emergency settings and have developed and implemented successful early childhood development interventions, but on a large scale Early Childhood Development (ECD) remains seriously under-prioritised in emergency response. While nutrition and health sector interventions almost always include targets for the youngest children, current humanitarian response plans generally overlook the specific cognitive and psychosocial needs of babies and toddlers and a 'whole child' approach for the youngest children is visibly absent. Over 60 per cent of active 2016 humanitarian response plans, flash appeals and refugee response plans did not include comprehensive ECD services, early childhood development or early childhood education within education sector responses.³¹

All babies, young children and their caregivers living through emergencies urgently need Safe Spaces where they can access everything children need to grow and thrive in emergency, conflict or vulnerable environments. These "Safe Spaces" are effectively holistic early childhood development centres for crisis contexts, providing protection, physical and psychological support, opportunities for play and early learning, access to clean water and sanitation, and support for caregivers.

Youth skills of a different kind

At the other end of childhood, youth are also suffering the consequences of violence and conflict. One third of the world's youth live in countries that have suffered a violent conflict (UNDP) and millions more growing into adulthood in contexts of chronic violence. Too often rather than learning skills for a productive and prosperous future many are forced to develop skills of a different kind, violence and criminal behaviour, in order to survive in the harsh and brutal contexts of violence.

Away from the full glare of the world's media, and often low on the priority of the international community or donors, and rarely considered a 'conflict', there is a crisis of violence of massive proportions, impacting on children and in particular on youth. This global crisis can be found in contexts of chronic violence, which often bring the same risks and impact of conflict on young people's lives, and in some cases risk of death is higher than places considered war zones. The continent of the Americas is one example of this, from the United States, through Central America, to parts of South America; violence is destroying the lives of adolescents and youth:

- In 2015, the risk of being killed by homicide for a non-Hispanic black adolescent boy in the United States was the same as the risk of being killed due to collective violence for an adolescent boy living in war-torn South Sudan, and higher than the risk of being killed due to collective violence for an adolescent boy living in countries including Libya and Yemen.³²
- Every 15 minutes, a young Latin American—usually an adolescent male—is murdered.³³
- Ciudad Juárez, a border town in northern Mexico has witnessed extreme levels of violence, especially sexual violence and femicide, with young women 15 to 25 often from rural backgrounds with little education and limited economic resources being the most frequent victims of such crimes.³⁴

Violence in many countries, in particular in the so-called Northern Triangle of Central America, made up by Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala is endemic, and is costing young people their lives and their dreams.

Adolescents are being robbed of any hope for better life as violence reaps havoc on the education system, denying their right to quality education and an opportunity to break out of intergenerational cycles of poverty and violence. Even where education is available it is not necessarily accessible to young people as fear of violence often curtails school attendance. Gang activity in or around schools disrupts students learning, leaving them feeling vulnerable, fearful and often unwilling to run the risk of attending school. For others, lack of access to school or poor quality education heighten their risk of being recruited into gangs, through either coercion or because the low quality of education offers no skills for an alternative path. In Guatemala almost 60% of students fear attending school, and "at least 23% of students and nearly 30% of teachers have been victims of violence or know someone who has been besieged by local gangs known as maras when entering or leaving school".³⁵

This fear is justified. Going to school has become extremely dangerous.

In El Salvador, during 2015 it is reported that there were:

- In 2015, there were more than 10,000 known cases of schools dropout associated with violence caused by gangs.³⁶
- 57% schools were identified with the practice of carrying bladed weapons/firearms; and 46% for extortions.
- There were detected cases of rape and trafficking in 21% and 17% schools respectively.³⁷
- 13 students were murdered inside school or their surroundings.³⁸

El Salvador is not considered a war zone or even classified as a humanitarian emergency but as a senior advisor on education in emergencies at UNICEF noted "This pervasive violence in schools is an emergency. As in other crisis contexts around the world, the education of children and youth in El Salvador cannot wait."³⁹

The violence in the region and its impact on children and young people and their education is a hidden crisis.

While the challenges for these young people are real and their education is disrupted, quality education and skills training can be part of the solution. In 2015, the UNICEF Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office and the Global Business Coalition for Education launched the 'Strong Schools and Communities Initiative' designed to:

- Identify and strengthen policies and programs that effectively create safe schools and protective learning environments.
- Support governments to improve their capacity to fulfil the educational rights of children and adolescents, which include ensuring that schools are safe.

- Promote an open dialogue among families, children and adolescents, authorities, the private sector and communities for immediate action as well as building long-standing responses.

These type of measures are essential for the safe schools and classrooms needed to protect children and young people and mitigate the impact of violence they may have experienced or witnessed.

Education alone cannot solve every challenge, it can – and should – however, play an important role in helping young people learn the skills for a future free from violence, one with hope, where the skills they learn enable them to live peaceful lives and help their countries on a stronger path to peaceful and sustainable development.

Political will to develop and implement policies designed to protect education and create safe environments for children and young people growing up in these contexts is critical.

Protect and empower girls through Safe Education

While the extent of bullying or violence varies across countries, data suggests this is a near universal problem.⁴⁰ The violence and bullying can be physical or psychological, it can be sexual, including rape, and it can also take place via mobile phones or online. It can vary in severity or occurrence.

- An estimated 246 million children and adolescents experience school violence and bullying in some form every year.⁴¹
- A third of countries still permit corporal punishment in schools, children living in 73 countries today lack full legal protection from this form of violence, this includes US and Australia.⁴²
- School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) is a significant barrier to the right to education.

School bullying, violence, sexual abuse and harassment of children can occur anywhere, in rich and poor communities and in any country. The perpetrators can be teachers or other school staff and are very often other children and young people. What is certain is that any form of violence or harassment is never acceptable and is a violation of child's rights. It can cause harm to both short and long term health, well-being. Violence and bullying also reduce academic ability, impacting on learning.

For girls, whose education often does not have parity with that of boys, there are additional barriers, including being targeted for simply going to school. In conflict situations girls are often singled out for attack, facing sexual violence, abduction, intimidation and harassment. While the plight of some of these girls make the headlines and build awareness of the scale of the crisis, such as the attack on the then 15-year-old Pakistani schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai and school friends in 2012 or the abduction of the 276 Nigeria schoolgirls in Chibok, Nigeria in 2014, millions more girls have and continue to face attack, abuse and harassment.

The risks include sexual violence, which while also perpetrated against boys is more often committed against girls. Globally it is estimated that 120 million girls – that is at least 1 in 10 girls - have been subjected to sexual violence, raped or other forced sexual acts, the most common age is late adolescence, between 15 and 19, however, even very young girls are targets.⁴³

Schools, which should be a place of safety can also be place where girls face serious abuse. Of 10 places identified as particularly dangerous for girls to go to school because of risk of attack – Afghanistan, India, Iraq, Mali, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somali, Syria, Uganda and Yemen⁴⁴ – the majority were either in conflict, had pockets of conflict or had a recent history of conflict, this is not a coincidence. For children displaced by conflict, crisis and violence, “girls are particularly vulnerable [. . .] girls are also often subject to abuses based on their sex and therefore to multiple forms of discrimination.”⁴⁵

Quality education is crucial for girl’s well-being and their empowerment, without it girls are at greater risk.

While these traumatic events are not easily addressed, quality education and training in safe schools can play an important part in prevention and also in mitigating the lifelong consequences of violence. Guidelines by UNICEF and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) identify education as a central tool to help child survivors of sexual violence, stressing that children should continue with their normal activities, they should continue to “be children” to play and to go to school.

As well as helping girls recover, education is key to preventing gender based violence against girls, through non-formal education programmes in the community, to strengthening measures in schools, including through pedagogy and curriculum interventions that challenge ideas that violence against girls is acceptable. UN Women also stress that education and training can play a significant role in reducing the harmful stereotypes which can promote violence against women and girls. In comprehensive guidance for addressing school related gender based violence, UNESCO and UN Women, highlight the need for policy change and targeted action plans, to creating and strengthening safe environments through school management and whole school approaches, to the need for stronger, child-sensitive, reporting mechanisms and prevention through curricula and teaching (UNESCO and UN Women 2016).⁴⁶ Education is also one of seven evidenced based strategies identified in 2016 by the World Health Organisation, UNICEF, The World Bank and others, as essential to bringing ending violence against children.⁴⁷

Enabling Learning in Vulnerable Situations

The disruption caused by conflict and violence on children's lives, on their development and well-being, as well as their right to education are well evidenced; the numbers and examples above shine a light on the enormity of the problem. For children living in contexts of violence and conflict the reality is often bleak.

What is also well evidenced is that safe, inclusive and equitable quality education, can mitigate the harm of violence and conflict on children and young people and help disrupt the violence and conflict itself.

While the obstacles on the ground are challenging, they are not impossible to overcome if governments, donors and international community are serious about meeting their obligations and keeping their promises, including those made in 2015 to meet SDG 4 by 2030.

Change for children living in and through conflict and violent contexts is only possible if the political will to take action and if adequate financing is in place.

It is false economy to argue that it is too difficult, too expensive as: the cost of children of experiencing toxic stress and not reaching their full potential; the cost for girls and boys being subjected to violence outside and inside of school with devastating short and long term consequences and no help to heal; the cost of young people in violence-ridden communities learning that to survive they must also turn to violence; is too great. It is simply unacceptable.

If the dreadful impact on the lives of children and young people is not sufficient motivation for leaders to act, then the economic cost may make them take notice. In the last year alone more than \$14 trillion (£8.9 trillion) or 13% of global GDP was spent on international conflict, equivalent of the combined economies of the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Canada, Spain and Brazil.⁴⁸ The cost of school violence to national economies is also significant:

"Youth violence in Brazil alone is estimated to cost nearly \$19 billion every year, of which \$943 million can be linked to violence in schools. The cost to the economy in the United States is estimated to be even higher, at \$7.9 billion per year [. . .] One study has estimated that over a 15-year period, the net accumulation of human capital in Latin America and the Caribbean has been halved by the increase in crime and violence."⁴⁹

The financial cost of conflict and violence are staggering and a huge drain on global and national economic growth and development.

Conversely, figures listed by the Global Partnership of Education show that investing in safe quality education makes sense, for individuals and for their countries, where the benefit for economic growth and conflict reduction is clear:⁵⁰

- One extra year of schooling increases an individual's earnings by up to 10%.
- Each additional year of schooling raises average annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth by 0.37%.
- A dollar invested in an additional year of schooling, particularly for girls, generates earnings and health benefits of US\$10 in low-income countries and nearly US\$4 in lower-middle income countries.
- The cost of 250 million children not learning the basics is equivalent to a loss of US\$129 billion per year.
- Each year of education reduces the risk of conflict by around 20%.

The financial costs are staggering; the cost of conflict and violence on children's lives and their development cannot not be quantified, it is a global emergency.

Ensuring all children are able to learn in safety must be global priority.

Quality education that enables a child to develop to their full potential, promotes human rights and a spirit of understanding, is key to protecting children, to reducing violence and the conflicts of the future. It is every child's right and governments have a legal obligation to make this a reality. Donor and the international community also have responsibility.

The good news is, there has been a marked shift in consciousness globally – we now acknowledge that education in emergencies is a central, vital part of humanitarian and development responses. As such, we now have a number of measures that can protect the global sanctity of children's education. Chief among them – the Sustainable Development Goal on Education, SDG 4 with a promise by 193 governments and donors to ensure "equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all" by 2030. Progress, however, is at risk without targeted action and investment for children living in conflict and contexts of chronic violence. To achieve the targets of SDG 4 action to ensure children living in such vulnerable situations find safety at school is key. Conflict sensitive planning and policy are also needed to ensure that their education provides them with the skills to protect them from possible harm from violence and any future conflicts they may become caught up in.

This requires governments, donors and the international community to take immediate and sustained action. We can help do this by reminding them of this common shared value, that schools are meant to be sacred places, free from violence of any kind and by bringing a collective voice to demand change in line with the following recommendations:

Recommendations

Stronger legal measures to end attacks on schools, teachers and pupils

- All countries should endorse the Safe Schools Declaration and implement its actions
- The United Nations and partners should establish a system of global surveillance to monitor attacks on education.
- Action must be taken against parties listed in the UN Secretary-General's annual report on Children and Armed Conflict to hold them accountable.

More funding for children living in countries affected by conflict and chronic violence

- Government Donors should build on recent increases to the education portion of humanitarian funding, up from 2.7% last year to between 4 and 6% in 2018.
- The Education Cannot Wait fund target of \$383m by 2018 must be met by donors.
- The Global Partnership for Education should be fully funded in its replenishment round in February 2018 as 60% of implementation grants go to countries affected by conflict and fragility.
- Donors must fulfil their promise to get every Syrian refugee child in school and learning.
- The International Financing Facility for Education (IFFEd) should be launched, together with other innovative funding for developing countries that includes support for educating children affected by conflict and chronic violence.

Better policies to support children and young people in vulnerable situations

- All humanitarian response plans should address the needs of children aged 0-5 and prioritise pre-primary education, early cognitive support and the provision of safe spaces for young children and carers.
- Governments should undertake "conflict-sensitive" planning reviews for their education systems - to ensure they are equal and inclusive.
- Introduce ways that teachers can lessen children's trauma and help to create an atmosphere of trust and wellbeing.
- Enhance national, regional and global initiatives to give youth affected by conflict and violence the skills they need to succeed in the 21st century.

Endnotes

1. Quote from Graça Machel Graça Machel and the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children given at the time of the seminal report of children and armed conflict was released.
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