

LmunA 2025

Research report

Forum: UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund

Issue: Ensuring access to equitable education for displaced children affected by war and conflict

Student Officer: Kuno Deelstra

Position: Main chair of UNICEF



LMUNA

Lorentz Lyceum
Model United Nations
Arnhem

Introduction

Conflict and forced displacement have created one of the most pressing challenges for global education today. Millions of children are uprooted from their homes, communities, and schools, facing interruptions to learning that can last months or even years. Beyond academics, education provides structure, stability, and a sense of normalcy, helping children cope with trauma and maintain hope for the future. In many regions affected by conflict, from Sub-Saharan Africa to the Middle East, the sheer scale of displacement has overwhelmed local education systems, highlighting the urgent need for coordinated international support.

LmunA 2025

Despite efforts by international organizations and NGOs, displaced children continue to encounter barriers that prevent them from accessing education. These include damaged or destroyed schools, shortages of trained teachers, and safety concerns that make attending school dangerous. Language and cultural differences further complicate integration into host communities, and long-term crises often leave children without consistent learning opportunities. Addressing these challenges is not only a matter of fulfilling children’s rights but also a critical investment in building resilience, social cohesion, and the foundations for post-conflict recovery.

Definitions of key terms

Equitable education

Education that ensures all children have fair access to quality learning opportunities regardless of background, location, or displacement status. It addresses barriers such as poverty, language, disability, and discrimination, aiming not just for equal resources but for resources tailored to learners’ needs. In the context of displaced children, equitable education means providing the extra support needed to overcome the challenges caused by war and forced migration.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

An international treaty that sets out the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of children, including the right to education. Ratified by nearly every country, it creates a legal and moral obligation for states to provide free and compulsory primary education and to make secondary education accessible to all.

Temporary learning spaces

Transitional facilities, often in refugee camps or disaster zones, designed to provide immediate but short-term access to schooling. They are crucial in preventing long interruptions in education while more permanent solutions are arranged. These spaces may use tents, repurposed buildings, or even shaded outdoor areas and often integrate psychosocial support to help children recover from trauma.

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4)

The UN goal to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning opportunities by 2030. It is part of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015 and serves as a global benchmark for education policy. For displaced children, SDG 4 underscores that education must continue even in emergencies, highlighting the link between education and broader development goals.

LmunA 2025

Non-formal education (NFE)

Organized educational activities outside the formal school system, often used for displaced children where regular schooling is not feasible. This can include community-based classes, accelerated learning programs, and vocational training. NFE is especially important in refugee settings, where children may have missed years of school and need flexible, catch-up pathways to re-enter formal education.

Global Education Cluster (GEC)

The formal UN-led coordination body for education in emergencies, co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children. The GEC works with governments, NGOs, and local actors to plan and deliver education responses during crises, ensuring that resources are used effectively and no affected group is overlooked. It also develops global guidelines, shares best practices, and supports national education clusters to respond to both sudden-onset and protracted emergencies.

General overview

Conflict and forced displacement have harmed the education of millions of children globally, posing one of the most urgent humanitarian challenges. In emergencies, food, shelter, and medicine are typically prioritized, while education is often neglected despite being a basic human right as well as a critical element of durable recovery. Education does not only provide children with knowledge, but also stability, psychosocial support, and protection against exploitation. Granting access to equitable education to displaced children is thus not only a humanitarian necessity but also a valuable investment in peace and development. As of 2024's end, the number of forcibly displaced individuals reached an all-time high 123.2 million, of whom approximately 49 million (40%) were under 18 years [1].

The number reflects an increasingly desperate crisis, with the most displacement ever since World War II in the most numbers. Displacement disrupts the education of millions: among the children and young people of primary and secondary school age in crisis-affected countries, 127 million are not in school, reported UNESCO [2]. Enrolment drops precipitously at higher levels among refugee children: while 63% of the children from a refugee background attend primary school,

LmunA 2025

just 37% get to the secondary level, and only 7% reach the tertiary level [3]. This precipitous drop-off is a sign of how systematically displacement limits access to education. Why Education Matters In Emergencies Education in emergencies has been recognized under the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a human right essential to life [4].

It goes beyond this to play a number of life-saving and life-nourishing functions, though. Schools are havens of safety from dangers of child labor, child marriage, or conscription into combatant forces. Schools provide much-needed routine and normalcy to children who are facing trauma. Besides, education builds the skills children will employ to reconstruct their conflict-affected societies. UNICEF stresses that "without education, children in emergencies risk losing their futures entirely" [5]. Obstacles to Education for Displaced Children

Displaced children face a wide range of challenges that vary according to context but are always critical: Destroyed or damaged infrastructure – In Gaza, nearly 97% of schools and higher learning institutions require major repair or reconstruction post-conflict [6]. In Syria, more than one-third of schools were destroyed, damaged, or repurposed for military or shelter purposes since 2011 [7].

Teacher shortages and overcrowding – Teachers flee violence, and those that remain tend to be under-trained. South Sudan class sizes tend to be in the 100s per classroom, watered-down quality and efficiency [8].

Policy and legal limitations – Some of the host countries restrict refugee access to their national education systems. In Lebanon, which is overwhelmed by hosting well over 1 million Syrian refugees, numerous refugee children cannot access secondary education [9]

Language and curriculum challenges – Refugee children perform poorly when host countries use an instruction language that is not their own. Rohingya refugee kids in Bangladesh, for example, receive no education in their native language, severely hindering learning [10].

Gender discrimination and security concerns – Girls are particularly vulnerable. Early marriage, security concerns, and cultural norms contribute to girls leaving school at higher rates in Sahel and Afghanistan [11].

Economic pressure – Parents who are refugees have no means of paying school fees. Children are pushed into working to support their families, and school admission is reduced even further [12].

The denial of access to learning has immediate and long-term implications. Out-of-school children are more vulnerable to child labor, trafficking, recruitment by armed groups, and other forms of exploitation [5].

LmunA 2025

Psychologically, formal learning deprivation exacerbates trauma, anxiety, and hopelessness.

Economically, the denial of access to education for displaced children prevents them from learning skills that will be necessary for livelihoods in the future, entrenching them in poverty and insecurity. At the level of society, the creation of "lost generations" threatens peacebuilding and sustainable development in post-conflict situations. International and UN Responses

There are several mechanisms to respond to this crisis. The Global Education Cluster (GEC), co-chaired by Save the Children and UNICEF, leads education responses in emergencies, including policy guidance, teacher training, and emergency curricula [13]. The Education Cannot Wait (ECW) fund, launched in 2016, has supported over 8.8 million crisis-affected children with learning [14].

UNHCR supports refugee children's enrollment in national education systems, which supports long-term integration and sustainability [3].

UNESCO supports data collection and system strengthening to close information gaps and promote coordination [2]. All these in place, however, there are still major gaps. Just approximately 3% of the total humanitarian aid was allocated to education during 2023 [15]. This ongoing underfunding means that even the most well-designed programs cannot reach all vulnerable children. In addition, education is often omitted in the very first phase of humanitarian action, and children are excluded from school for months or years. Data gaps—particularly regarding internally displaced children—limit good planning.

And political resistance to bringing refugees into the public school systems in most nations prevents long-term solutions. Conclusion Conflict and war have created an education crisis of a global scale. Destroyed infrastructure, shortages of teachers, overcrowding, punitive policies, and socioeconomic barriers all conspire to prevent millions of children from learning. Learning for displaced children is not simply the transmission of lessons—it is a lifeline, a tool for protection, and a path towards recovery and stability. If no urgent intervention is made to put education in emergencies on the policy and investment agenda, the world risks losing entire generations to poverty traps, trauma, and instability. This is a challenge that needs to be dealt with if the world is to advance children's rights and achieve lasting peace and development.

LmunA 2025

Major parties involved

UNICEF

As the primary UN agency for children, UNICEF has significant global influence, both in funding and implementing education programs. Its authority allows it to set standards, coordinate with governments, and mobilize resources quickly, making it highly relevant for ensuring displaced children receive education.

Global Education Cluster (GEC)

The GEC wields coordination power by uniting UN agencies, NGOs, and local actors under a common strategy for education in emergencies. Its influence lies in shaping global policy, deploying rapid response mechanisms, and standardizing education interventions, which makes it central to effective crisis education management.

European Union (EU)

The EU exerts influence primarily through funding and policy frameworks, providing financial resources and political support for education initiatives in conflict-affected regions. Its ability to incentivize compliance with international standards and support large-scale programs enhances its relevance in sustaining educational access for displaced children.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Global	Education	Cluster	(GEC)	–	2007
---------------	------------------	----------------	--------------	----------	-------------

Established by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the GEC is co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children. It serves as the primary coordination mechanism for education in emergencies, bringing together UN agencies, NGOs, and governments to ensure a unified and effective response to educational needs in crisis situations.

Safe	Schools	Declaration	–	2015
-------------	----------------	--------------------	----------	-------------

LmunA 2025

An inter-governmental political commitment initiated by the governments of Norway and Argentina, the Safe Schools Declaration was opened for endorsement at the First International Conference on Safe Schools in Oslo in May 2015. It outlines a set of commitments to strengthen the protection of education from attack and restrict the military use of schools and universities during armed conflict.

Education Cannot Wait (ECW) – 2016

Launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, ECW is a global fund for education in emergencies and protracted crises. Initiated by the United Nations, it aims to provide multi-year financing to deliver quality education to children and adolescents affected by crises, bridging the gap between humanitarian aid and development efforts. the Education Commission

Possible solutions

1. Reconstruction and Expansion of Education Infrastructure
 - a. Establish international funds and alliances to reconstruct war-damaged schools and set up temporary learning spaces in safe locations until a permanent facility is established.
2. Teacher Training and Support
 - a. Expand emergency teacher training for affected and host-country teachers, including trauma-sensitive instruction and multilingual education, with incentives to keep them in crisis-affected zones.
3. Inclusive and Accessible Learning
 - a. Develop flexible curricula and multilingual learning materials to integrate displaced children into host country education systems, and provide access for girls, disabled children, and other vulnerable children.

Further reading

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_and_Adolescent_Mental_Health
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youth_mental_health_crisis
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_and_Adolescent_Mental_Health_Services

Bibliography

[1] UNHCR. *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2024*. UNHCR, 2024.
<https://www.unhcr.org/publications/global-report-2024>

[2] UNESCO. *Education in Emergencies: Data Highlights*. UNESCO, 2025.
<https://www.unesco.org/en/emergencies/education/data>

LmunA 2025

- [3] UNHCR. *Refugee Education Report 2023/24*. UNHCR, 2024.
<https://www.unhcr.org/education>
- [4] United Nations. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. UN General Assembly, 1989.
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>
- [5] UNICEF. *Education in Emergencies*. UNICEF, 2024.
<https://www.unicef.org/education/emergencies>
- [6] OCHA. *Occupied Palestinian Territory Flash Update*. UN OCHA, 2024.
<https://www.ochaopt.org>
- [7] UNICEF Syria. *Education Factsheet*. UNICEF, 2024. <https://www.unicef.org/syria>
- [8] Save the Children. *South Sudan Education Crisis*. Save the Children, 2023.
<https://www.savethechildren.net>
- [9] Human Rights Watch. *“I Don’t Have Any Rights”: Education Barriers for Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanon*. HRW, 2022. <https://www.hrw.org>
- [10] Human Rights Watch. *“Are We Not Human?” Denial of Education to Rohingya Refugee Children in Bangladesh*. HRW, 2019.
<https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/12/03/are-we-not-human/denial-education-rohingya-refugee-children-bangladesh>
- [11] UNICEF. *Girls’ Education in Emergencies*. UNICEF, 2023.
<https://www.unicef.org/education/girls-in-emergencies>
- [12] UNHCR. *Global Report 2022 – Refugee Livelihoods*. UNHCR, 2022.
<https://www.unhcr.org>
- [13] Global Education Cluster. *What We Do*. GEC, 2024. <https://educationcluster.net>
- [14] Education Cannot Wait. *Annual Results Report 2023*. ECW, 2024.
<https://www.educationcannotwait.org>
- [15] UNESCO. *Education in Emergencies Financing Gap*. UNESCO, 2023.
<https://www.unesco.org>

t

If you've read this research report, please click the link to join the group chat before the conference, see you in October!

LmunA 2025

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/DfEihEFhsoaKC6sTT3afI8>