

NO to child labour YES to safe and quality education in emergencies

The lives of 168 million children worldwide, including 120 million aged between 5 and 14, are affected by child labour. At the same time, 100 million children are impacted by disasters every year, while 230 million children live in conflict areas. In these settings, children's access to education is severely compromised. Emergencies, especially when they occur in communities already afflicted by poverty, can increase child labour and also give rise to new types of harmful work for children during the recovery period, thus preventing their regular attendance at school. Governments, humanitarian and development actors and others must recognise the potentially devastating impact of emergencies on child labour and children's education, and work together to put in place effective prevention and response strategies to fulfil children's right to an education free from child labour.

Child labour is work that is dangerous and harmful to children and deprives them of an education. It includes the worst forms of child labour and work done by children under the national minimum age for admission to employment.

Humanitarian crisis, child labour and education

Education and child labour are closely linked. Child labour is recognised globally as one of the fundamental obstacles to school attendance, whilst the provision of quality education is a key prevention measure against child labour. This is no different during emergencies, where the risk of child labour is heightened when education opportunities are either missing or inadequate.

- Emergencies restrict children's access to school. Destruction of roads and schools, displacement and prevailing insecurity create **physical and distance barriers**. When schools are closed or **policy and practice block attendance** of those children who have missed classes, the likelihood of child labour, child trafficking and

other harmful practices such as early marriage increases.

- Significant **risk factors that increase children's vulnerability** to child labour are magnified by emergencies. During and following a crisis, and in the absence of community awareness of the consequences of child labour, factors such as the social exclusion of vulnerable families, discrimination based on ethnicity, disability and gender, rural-urban migration and household indebtedness may be exacerbated, causing children to be withdrawn from school to financially support their families, take on the burden of survival chores, or move away in search of employment.



Safe education

In situations of conflict or insecurity education is increasingly under attack. Students are harmed and recruited in or on their way to school by armed forces and groups, and school buildings are damaged or occupied by armed opposition groups, government soldiers or those fleeing crisis. Far from being a place of safety many schools are located in dangerous places or where children face hazards on their journeys back and forth; they may use corporal punishment, perpetuate inter-ethnic conflict and tension, or be places where children experience sexual violence.

In these settings, it is vital to make sure school safety is central to any response to child labour. Without safety in schools, child labourers are unlikely to be ready to leave work in favour of education, and may even perceive work or joining gangs to be a safer option than school.

The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack has a wealth of information on initiatives and tools available to make school safe <http://www.protectingeducation.org>. See also Education Cluster, Save the Children, Education above All, 2012, Protecting Education in Countries Affected by Conflict.



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- The **quality of education** is eroded through increased class sizes, temporary and often cramped school accommodation, different teaching languages and fewer qualified teachers. Pre-existing problems such as irrelevant curricula, costs of school attendance and the distance to other essential services are all compounded by emergencies.
- **Child protection concerns** such as family separation, loss of parents or caregivers, children in foster care, physical violence and harmful practices and patterns of migration are all exacerbated by emergencies, and contribute to heightened risks of children entering child labour and reduced attendance at school.

Why is more attention needed?

Prevention is better than cure

During emergencies when schools are not open or accessible and families struggle to survive, it is easy for children to be drawn into child labour; reversing this is difficult and resource intensive in the short term. When emergencies are protracted, sometimes lasting for years, whole generations of children miss out on schooling and work instead. This can set in motion a vicious cycle of uneducated children, unskilled youth, extreme poverty and social problems such as violence, creating long-term, inter-generational problems for communities, which are even more difficult and costly to resolve.

Urgent attention is therefore needed to enable concerned actors to prevent child labour in emergency settings by

ensuring that all children are in safe, free and quality education at all times, in particular those who are below the age of completion of compulsory schooling. Where children are already out of school, they should be identified and supported to return to school or provided with alternative learning opportunities that suit their needs.

Going to school maintains a sense of routine for children affected by emergencies, and occupies their time in a protective environment, which is crucial for their personal safety and the provision of essential psychosocial support. Schools can also act as one of the most effective places for service delivery and for the circulation of information to children and their families on the dangers of child labour, and the importance of children's rights and education.

What can be done?

During and after emergencies, national stakeholders and humanitarian actors must work together to ensure that humanitarian responses take account of and build upon existing efforts to address child labour through education.

Preparedness

Incorporate emergency preparedness into national policies and programmes to eradicate child labour and to guarantee education and learning to children. Build the capacity of key actors to consider the likely child labour issues that will arise in emergencies. Use schools and teachers to deliver messages on child labour during disaster risk reduction activities to build resilience to emergencies.

Prevention

Ensure access to safe and quality education for all children during emergencies. Pay special attention to child labourers, refugee children, internally displaced children, migrant children who were/are managing work and school at the same time and other marginalised groups. Access to mainstream education should be guaranteed as soon as possible, paying equal attention to education and learning for all children, opening primary and secondary schools as soon as possible. Where formal schooling is not possible non-formal education should be provided, and other educational opportunities, such as catch-up classes, or accelerated learning programmes (ALP) for children in the second decade of life. Be flexible and supportive of child labourers' special needs and circumstances. Remove barriers such as the rigid application of policy around missed classes, school fees and costs and the need for certificates (which might have been lost during the emergency), to prevent unnecessary drop-outs. Promote birth registration during preparedness and response activities.

Advocacy and awareness

Schools and teachers can provide vital links to the community to deliver messages as part of or outside of

school curriculum. Use Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) for community outreach. Support schools and PTAs to influence local government to take action against child labour and to promote education for all and child welfare.

Incorporate messages on the importance of education for children, decent work for adolescents, and access to education and learning across all humanitarian activities.

Knowledge and data

Include child labour in education, other sector/inter-sector assessments. Monitor the impact of the emergency on children's roles and child labour. Track the attendance of children in school before, during and after emergencies and monitor parallel trends in child labour, in order to develop an evidence base for the design of effective responses.

Response

Ensure safe, free and quality education for all children in emergency responses. Take special measures to reach current child labourers and to prevent new children dropping out of school and entering the labour market too early or under harmful conditions after an emergency, they will need coordinated but different strategies to increase their attendance. Reach out to marginalised families who are most vulnerable to child labour. Involve children and young people in responses to emergencies through education, peer-to-peer support and messaging, youth groups and mentoring. Where children are withdrawn from child labour, provide them with tailored support including life skills and help to reintegrate into formal school or training programmes. Explicitly consider child labour issues and implications in coordinated responses for education where it is a pre-existing issue affecting children.



Educating Syrian refugees in crisis

Since 2011 conflict has engulfed Syria, spread to Iraq and is threatening the stability of neighbouring countries. A continual stream of refugees has fled fighting, and host countries are struggling to meet their economic and educational needs. Many countries are experiencing unprecedented levels of child labour as a result.

Important progress is being made to secure education for millions of refugee children across the region, and include them in National Action Plans and policies to eliminate child labour. In

Lebanon, a government programme commits to educate more than 400,000 Syrian refugee children and low-income Lebanese children each school year for the next three years. “Double-shift schools” accommodate Syrian children in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq. In Jordan and Lebanon, support to child labourers is being improved through referral to services such as education, economic empowerment, health and psychosocial support, as well as counselling on children’s rights and the risks associated with child labour. Nonetheless, difficulties in the provision of education are undoubtedly contributing to rising levels of child labour. Limited coverage of schools in both urban and rural areas, questionable quality of teaching in “double-shift schools”, problems with the language of instruction, discrimination against children from certain backgrounds, rigid entry requirements and low levels of funding all hinder the delivery of comprehensive child protection and education responses that would prevent child labour.

To overcome these problems, Save the Children Jordan has developed targeted responses for child labourers who are not able to access education, psychosocial support or health care because of the hours they work. In coordination with other key actors, their activities aim both to reduce the risks child labourers face and prevent more children from engaging in harmful work. Drop-in centres operate in key areas where significant numbers of children are working, acting as informal places for children to meet and relax away from work, with flexible activities and schedules that provide children the freedom to choose when to participate. Trained child protection teams talk to children at their work places and let them know about the drop-in centres and activities on offer. After discussing with the children, their parents and their employers, a schedule is devised that best accommodates the children’s needs and interests. Children then attend the centre to learn new skills, access informal education such as life-skills, literacy and numeracy training, participate in sports, access psychosocial support and receive periodic health check-ups, food and water. With the support of centre staff, a major accomplishment has been to establish links with other service-providers, thus enabling children to re-enter formal education or access non-formal educational opportunities. As children spend more time at the centre, the aim is to reduce the time they spend working. Save the Children has found this requires flexible schedules which offer activities that appeal to children and well-trained and motivated staff who can deliver them to a high standard.

Community outreach provides information to children’s caregivers, by means of monthly information sessions. On these occasions, caregivers can discuss their children’s needs and how they can be helped to return to school full-time, and how the family can replace or cope with the reduction in income. Promotional work with the children’s employers allows them to provide feedback on the services offered to children in the centre as well as encouragement to give children time off during the workday to attend the centre.



For more resources go to the “Child Protection Working Group” (CPWG) website (<http://cpwg.net/resource-topics/standard-12-child-labour/>), the “Minimum Standards for Child Protection” in humanitarian action (<http://cpwg.net/minimum-standards/>) or contact the CPWG child labour task force at deconinck@ilo.org.

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