

Education in Emergencies - Urban

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Key points

- Build strong relationships with the Ministry of Education and local education officials.
- Work towards inclusion in national education systems from the start of an emergency.
- Identify barriers to girls' participation in education during assessments and design interventions to support enrolment and retention
- Foster complementarity between the early phase of the education response and child protection
- Consider the educational needs of children and youth of all ages. Include secondary school-aged children and university-aged youth in the education response.

1. Overview

Access to education is a basic right that is also applicable in emergency settings. The Global Compact on Refugees (para. 68) aims to see children and youth return to learning within three months of displacement. One of the first services requested by refugees and IDPs once their basic needs have been met is for children and youth to have the opportunity to continue their education.

Education provides knowledge and skills that support community resilience, facilitate living with dignity and lay the foundation for future access to meaningful work. Going to school also offers emotional and psychological benefits. In emergencies education activities offer opportunities for refugees to receive information about their rights, available services, disease prevention, safety and physical security (including mine risk awareness) and have access to psychological support services (PSS). This entry explains some of the key steps that should be taken at the start of an emergency to ensure that children and youth have long-term access to education.

2. Main guidance

Protection objectives

- Education provides a protective environment where children and young people acquire knowledge and skills, socialize and have access to wrap-around support services (including health screening, nutrition and counselling)
- Education provides a foundation for future economic activity, meaningful work and addressing generational poverty
- Education supports psycho-social wellbeing by offering hope and a focus on the future
- Girls in education are less likely to marry and have children early
- Children and young people in education are less likely to be engaged in child labour or be at risk of recruitment into armed groups

Underlying principles and standards

Terminology:

Non-formal education (NFE) programs are often designed for specific groups of learners such as those who are too old for their grade, whose education has been disrupted or who require additional support to adapt to learning in a new country. Examples include language learning support, catch up classes, and initial literacy and numeracy programs. NFE programs for youth and adults also exist.

Formal education usually makes use of a standard curriculum and typically takes place over 8-12 years. Schools and education institutions are regulated by policies of the Ministry of Education.

Principles:

- Work towards inclusion of displaced children in the national education system from the start of an emergency. This requires close collaboration with and, sometimes, intensive advocacy with national authorities to agree on how best refugee children can receive education that is certified, of high quality and allows refugees to progress from one level of education to the next.
- Support children and youth to return to learning as quickly as possible.
- Consider the educational needs of all age groups, including secondary school age youth and those above 18
- Enhance host community school infrastructure to promote accessibility to those with disabilities
- Ensure there are age-appropriate, sex-segregated WASH facilities, also accessible to children with disabilities
- Support programs (including language learning) that promote enrolment and retention in formal education are an important element of an education in emergencies (EIE) response
- Integrate psychosocial support (PSS) activities in education support programs
- Non-formal education programs should be limited in duration and help children and youth to transition to the formal system or prepare for livelihoods-focused skills programs. Accredited accelerated education programs may be of longer duration and operate

alongside formal education opportunities.

- Specific barriers to education experienced by girls, adolescent girls and boys and those with disabilities should be explicitly addressed

Standards:

- Outside of camps education will most likely be delivered through host community schools. Improvements to existing school infrastructure or new school construction should conform with standards set by the Ministry of Education.
- Centers where non-formal education programs are offered should – as far as possible – conform with guidance on the establishment of safe, accessible temporary learning spaces and age-appropriate WASH facilities as set out in the INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies.

Protection Risks

Lack of access to relevant, quality education opportunities can result in:

- Loss of peer support networks, social isolation, increased need for [mental health and psychosocial support](#) (MHPSS) services
- Increased likelihood of early marriage and pregnancy
- Increased risk of child labour and economic exploitation
- Forced recruitment into armed groups
- Exploitative sexual relationships, transactional/ survival sex and GBV
- Irregular onward movement and trafficking
- Long-term social and economic exclusion of the refugee community and heightened rates of poverty

Other risks

- The absence of education services may lead to large numbers of children and youth being idle which can increase security risks in camps associated with gang membership, GVB and criminality.
- UNHCR may experience reputation risks if it does not ensure that the right to education is realized.

Key decision points

The decisions taken in the early phase of a response can have **long-term implications** for the quality and nature of education provided. Education interventions should be informed by a clear strategy for ensuring **sustained access** to education. Issues such as language of instruction, curriculum, materials, certification and accreditation need to be considered early in a response.

An **education needs assessment** will help to understand the previous education experience of children, the length of disruption to their education, the capacity of local education infrastructure and teacher availability in the refugee community. The Education Cluster's Joint Education Needs Assessment tool can be adapted to refugee contexts. Ensure the education part of the [Needs Assessment for Refugee Emergency \(NARE\)](#) checklist is included in the multi-sector assessment.

Advocacy with government may be necessary if administrative barriers to education must be addressed or significant policy changes are needed.

Key steps

1. Familiarize yourself with the **education policy context** in the country of asylum. The Minimum Preparedness Actions tool provides questions to help understand the policy framework applicable to refugees and the education context of the country of origin. At the same time, learn about the educational context in the country or region from which people have been displaced.
2. Establish a **coordination** structure for the education response. In refugee settings, where possible UNHCR should lead or co-lead this group. Familiarize yourself with the **potential education partners** in country who can support the response - UNICEF and the Education Cluster, where activated, may be able to provide useful information on education actors.
3. Ensure that the education response is well planned, budgeted and **included in inter-agency appeals**.
4. **Meet with district or local education officials** to discuss the response with them and ensure that they are informed about and supportive of efforts to support education access.
5. An education response in urban areas may include (i.) **facilitating access to host community schools** and (ii.) delivering **non-formal education programs** that support transition to or retention in host community schools.
6. Improving school infrastructure (adding classrooms, improving WASH facilities or providing furniture) can support social cohesion
7. Support teachers with practical advice on working with refugee students
8. Distributions of materials (e.g. school kits) should also include host community children and not single out displaced students

9. If children cannot immediately be accommodated in host community schools, establish support programs that focus on teaching the language of instruction used in schools or programs that focus on catching up lost learning time and strengthening core skills. Integrate psychosocial/recreational activities in these programs.

10. Determine whether there are **existing programs** (such as accelerated education programs) or **materials** (books, language learning materials) approved by the national authorities that can be used in the response.

11. Work in close coordination with [child protection](#) actors to ensure that referral pathways exist between education and protection services. In the initial phase of a response similar activities may be carried out by [child protection](#) and education actors – it is important to ensure that any activities supporting learning contribute to the eventual inclusion in national services.

12. Ensure that **refugee and host communities community are well informed** about education services and decisions regarding curricula and inclusion in the national system. Consult community members and respond to any concerns that they express.

13. Establish a **common framework** for the recruitment, remuneration, **conditions of service** and [code of conduct](#) for those working in non-formal education programs.

14. Identify **key indicators** against which all education actors will report. Data on education participation should be disaggregated by age, gender, level of education and disability.

Specific considerations for IDP responses

- In IDP responses the coordination of the education response is usually led by the Education Cluster, where activated.
- Education programs and services established during an emergency should form part of the national education system. As far as is practical, host community schools should be supported to include displaced children and youth, with an emphasis on the continuity of learning.
- Protection monitoring and education assessments should identify any administrative or legal barriers limiting access to education.
- If IDPs speak a different language to that used in local schools, additional language support programs may be needed.

Key management considerations

UNHCR should play a lead role in establishing the strategic framework for the education response that is aligned with the overall [protection and solutions strategy](#). Core elements of the strategy should be agreed with key actors ahead of an influx or as early as possible in the response. The

strategy should also be informed by the work of development actors in the education sector and national priorities. The Regional Bureau and HQ Education team can provide guidance and support as needed.

Once the response is underway, the diversification of education services – including supporting access to higher education – should take place.

Resources and partnerships

Staff

- Emergency Response Teams should include an Education Officer responsible for coordination, liaison with the Ministry of Education and organisations supporting the education response, engagement with other sectors (e.g child protection, WASH, site planning) and strategy development.
- Appoint an Education Officer as soon as possible within the response staffing to ensure continuity of the education function.

Partnerships

- Identify focal points in the Ministry of Education at national and local levels.
- Build strong relationships with UNICEF and establish mechanisms for sharing information on response priorities and joint advocacy
- Be aware of and identify possible synergies with development-focused initiatives in the education sector and key donors to education, including the World Bank and the Global Partnership for Education.

Financial resources

- Ensure that education needs are reflected in inter-agency appeals
- Education Cannot Wait, the global fund for education in emergencies, is an important donor partner

Annexes

[UNHCR Refugee Education 2030, A Strategy for Refugee Education](#)

[ISEEC Report on Improving Coordination, 2020](#)

[UNHCR Cash for Education, Direction and Key Considerations](#)

[UNHCR COVID-19 Refugee Return to Schooling Guidelines, 2020](#)

3. Links

[UNHCR Education Pages Accelerated Education Working Group Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies \(INEE\) Global Education Cluster Education Cannot Wait](#)

4. Main contacts

Contact Senior Education Officers in Regional Bureaus or the Headquarters Education Section (hqeduc@unhcr.org) in the Division of Resilience and Solutions (DRS).