

This document forms part of the 4th edition of the UNHCR Emergency Handbook and was generated from the digital Emergency Handbook system.

Education in emergencies

Key points

Inclusion in national systems

- Prioritize the inclusion of refugee and displaced children in national education systems as soon as possible.
- Where they cannot yet join national systems legally, align their education as closely as possible with the national system and adopt the national curriculum.
- Address the learning needs of refugees. To help them join and remain in national school systems, give particular attention to language needs and accelerated education.

Protection

- Make education a primary objective. Young refugees who attend a good quality education programme benefit from peer and mentor relationships and for up to 12 years are protected from many of the risks that face refugees without access to education.
- Do not underestimate the importance of secondary school. Most of the protection benefits attributed to education are associated with completion of secondary education.

Programme

- Ensure partners collect and report sex-disaggregated as well as attendance data and that their education projects address issues associated with gaps in attendance.
- From the emergency stage onwards, promote certified education programmes delivered by qualified teachers. Programmes should be ability-, age-, and gender-appropriate.
- From the emergency stage onwards, promote harmonization of accelerated, catch-up and bridging programmes.

Teachers

- From the start of a response, harmonize policies for teacher recruitment and incentives. When establishing operation-wide incentive scales, remember that the cost of losing teachers is extremely high, both financially and in terms of protection.
- Provide sound basic teacher training and in-service support to unqualified refugee teachers.

1. Overview

Access to education is a basic human right and is linked to better lives for children and youth. Education in emergencies provides immediate physical and psychosocial protection, as well as life-saving knowledge and skills (for example, with respect to disease prevention, self-protection and awareness of rights). If children and youth receive safe education of good quality during and after an emergency, they will be exposed less frequently to activities that put them at risk. They will also acquire knowledge and mental resources that increase their resilience and help them to protect themselves. Inclusion in national education systems enhances these protection benefits.

For young refugees whose education was interrupted by displacement, participation in educational programmes can provide a sense of continuity when everything else is in flux. For all children and youth, whether or not they attended school before displacement, education during an emergency can provide a stable, safe and supervised routine that is attentive to their academic and psychosocial needs and that develops their life skills. School can also prepare young people for further education: it can create conditions for long term solutions and at the same time protect them from both immediate and long term risks.

Education provides children and youth with the opportunity to think about the future and to imagine what is possible. It gives youth opportunities to participate in society and a better quality of life: in these ways, it is protective of both individuals and society.

Practical Steps

Liaise with Ministries of Education and other education authorities from the outset of an emergency to ensure that refugee and displaced children can join the national education system from the beginning.

In the first phase of an emergency

Establish child friendly spaces in association with the refugee community. These spaces should be inclusive and physically safe. Ensure that trained members of the community, teachers and child protection staff create a participatory, supportive environment for children and youth. Use child friendly spaces to identify children with specific needs who require follow up. More generally, develop multi-sectoral approaches to protection and to monitoring and meeting health and nutrition needs. Even temporary reception facilities can run learning activities in basic literacy and numeracy, and life skills in health, safety and security. Basic literacy activities require literacy materials in appropriate languages, and can be led by teachers, parents or youth. Life skills training in relevant protection areas should be planned with child protection and health sector staff.

In the transitional phase of an emergency

Interventions begin to shift from non-formal to formal education. Whenever possible, align activities with the national education system. Refugee children need access to formal primary and secondary education or to context-appropriate preparatory or accelerated education of good quality. UNHCR should encourage governments and partners to enable refugee children and youth to join national education systems and programmes on similar conditions to local children. The importance of secondary school programmes cannot be underestimated: the majority of the protection benefits attributed to education are linked to completion of secondary school. When refugee learners join national education systems, it may be necessary to meet certain specific needs, especially language acquisition and, for those who have been out of school for long periods, accelerated education. During this phase, children and youth should be included in formal primary and secondary educational

programmes, and context-appropriate school preparation programmes, for as long as possible. Engage with refugee parents and leaders, host communities and all partners to ensure that learning environments are appropriate for the context, secure and safe, and promote the protection and psychosocial wellbeing of learners, teachers and other education personnel. Teacher incentives, recruitment policies and conditions of work across all operational contexts should be harmonized and clearly defined from the start of a response.

The longer children remain out of school, the less likely they are to return. Continuity in education increases the likelihood that a child will complete his or her full education cycle, preparing him or her for a healthy, productive future.

Explore accelerated education programmes or catch-up classes to enable children who have been out of school to return to school successfully.

2. Protection objectives

Formal and non-formal educational programmes should:

- Be of certified quality and delivered by qualified teachers (or at minimum trained facilitators) from the emergency phase onwards. Programmes should be ability-, age- and gender-appropriate.
- Occur in safe learning environments.
- Foster respectful and healthy relationships between teachers and learners and within families and communities.
- Promote peace building and social cohesion.

3. Underlying principles and standards

The right to education for refugees is set out in the following documents:

- 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (Article 22).
- UN Human Rights Council, resolution 64/290, 2010.
- UN Human Rights Council, Draft resolution on the right to education for refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, 2011.

The following international documents and policy statements are also relevant.

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) affirms that compulsory primary education is a universal entitlement.
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) prohibits discrimination against women in educational provision.
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) affirms the right of all children, regardless of status, to free and compulsory primary education, to available and accessible secondary education, and to higher education on the basis of capacity.

- UNHCR, Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) Policy (2011), explains the objective, rationale, and core commitments of the age, gender, and diversity (AGD) approach, and defines diversity and the main elements of mainstreaming it.
- The International Network for Emergency Education, Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery (2009), sets out minimum standards of education in emergencies, in terms of quality and access.

4. Protection Risks

Protection Risks

Parents or caregivers who have been traumatized and must attend to the basic needs of their families may be unable to fully supervise their children and may not be aware of all the protection risks children and youth face in a new environment.

Focus group discussions reveal that many refugees lack hope and have lost their sense of agency. When refugees are unable to complete their education, it removes their peer connections and mentor support, and undermines social cohesion, participation in civil society, and opportunities for durable solutions. The most common protection risks associated with non-participation in education are:

- Loss of peer-support and resilience.
- Loss of meaningful activity and engagement.
- Sexual and gender based violence (SGBV).
- Child labour, including transactional sex.
- Early marriage and pregnancy.
- Economic exploitation.
- Forced recruitment into armed groups.
- Perpetuation of poverty.

5. Other risks

UNHCR incurs reputational risks if it fails to ensure that refugee children and youth receive an education of good quality delivered in safe conditions.

6. Key decision points

It is UNHCR policy to make education available to refugee children and youth through national education systems wherever possible. UNHCR does not have the operational capacity to provide education services directly over extended periods of time. In all cases, where it is possible for refugee children to attend the host country's public education system, UNHCR should work with expert partners (especially UNICEF's emergency and national programmes) to enable national systems to welcome refugees and offer them ability-, age- and gender-appropriate educational programmes taught by

qualified teachers or trained facilitators.

UNHCR supports long-term access to education, recognizing that it can provide protective benefits, including social cohesion in both camp and non-camp settings. It is vital to establish appropriate curricula at the start of a response, when partners are looking for direction and emergency education funding is available. UNHCR policy does not preclude teaching a curriculum from refugees' country of origin, if this will permit students to take graduation exams; however, it discourages extending home curricula into the stabilization stage, especially when the host government's education policies do not exclude refugees. UNHCR should additionally ensure that all education-related assessments are conducted jointly with UNICEF, Ministries of Education, and competent education partners.

Though UNHCR does not implement programmes directly, it should take an active role in the coordination of emergency and national education during and after the emergency phase, to ensure that programmes fulfil the long term needs and rights of refugees. To achieve this, country operations are advised to adapt the 2012-2016 UNHCR *Education Strategy* to their contexts, assisted by the Headquarters' Education Unit and guided by relevant policy documents.

7. Key steps

- Assume leadership or co-leadership of coordination of the refugee education sector.
- Establish relations with national education officers responsible for the regions in which refugees live, and make sure they are included in planning, assessment and evaluation processes.
- Ensure that UNHCR colleagues in Programme, Protection and Community-Based Protection are familiar with the objectives and good practices set out in UNHCR's Education Strategy 2012-2016, and that partner proposals and actions comply with UNHCR's education policy.
- In collaboration with UNICEF, map the capacity of partners implementing education programmes.
- When preparing education budgets for the emergency phase, prioritize the use of temporary or semi-permanent rather than permanent structures.
- During the joint emergency education assessment, determine:
 - Whether accelerated host education curricula or acceptable regional curricula are available.
 - The education profile of the refugee population and what percentage of the school-age population will require accelerated or dedicated language education. It is important to ensure that local or specialized systems are not flooded with first-time students ill-prepared for success, and that classrooms are ability-, age- and gender-appropriate.
 - The extent to which host community schools can accommodate additional students.
 - What training in the language of instruction displaced students and refugee teachers need.
 - Whether education programmes meet UNHCR's age, gender and diversity policy. In particular, make sure that girls are encouraged to participate in educational programmes from the beginning of the emergency response.

- Whether qualified teachers are available. If unqualified refugee teachers must be recruited, identify technical partners and create a budget to provide initial training and in-service support. A full training pack with adjustable modules can be found at <http://www.ineesite.org/en/training-pack-for-primary-school-teachers-in-crisis-contexts>
- That all partners implementing education programmes are applying the same policies with respect to teacher recruitment, compensation and management.
- Which students are to join formal school programmes immediately and which will receive alternative programming until they can enrol in an education programme appropriate for their age. This is important when some children cannot immediately join formal school programmes because of age and language, and when enrolments in lower primary grades are overcrowded,
- How child friendly spaces and staff can be used to support preparatory learning during the transition to formal schooling.
- How referral systems can be linked to all locations where education programmes are delivered.

8. Key management considerations

With rare exceptions, funding for a response peaks during the emergency phase. Decisions on educational programming during this phase are crucial; it should be presumed that any crisis is likely to be extended.

UNHCR managers should assist emergency education partners to fund and plan long term and sustainable education programmes. Evidence indicates that the best strategy is to enable refugees to join host country schooling delivered by qualified teachers. This provides full-cycle access to education and its protection benefits. However, the inclusion of refugees in national public school systems needs to be handled skilfully to ensure that host schools are not overwhelmed and that refugee students can succeed rather than become discouraged and drop out.

Language is one of the most important considerations. It is important to address the teaching of both mother tongues and languages of instruction, and to provide accelerated learning programmes for over-aged children and young adults. Sufficient resources, adequate staff, and appropriate technical expertise need to be in place to meet UNHCR emergency education standards and make good use of peak funding in an extended emergency.

Close collaboration with Ministries of Education and UNICEF emergency and national programmes are critical to the sustainability, quality and social benefits of programmes that integrate refugees in national schools. UNHCR advocacy can assist host governments to obtain additional funds from development partners to strengthen national systems in regions where refugees live. UNHCR staff and partners who lack knowledge of education or refugee education should be trained to evaluate education plans and proposals, and implement and monitor education programmes. Training should cover UNHCR education policy and the cognitive and social protection needs of refugee children and youth.

9. Resources and partnerships

Staff

Staff needs may be met through emergency deployment or secondment.

Appoint a dedicated education officer. Ideally, create an international post as well as one or more national posts; the international post can be discontinued once national officers are able to oversee the programme.

Financial resources

Set aside adequate financial resources to plan and implement the services, programmes, and interventions that are required.

Partnerships

Build relations with national and district Ministry of Education officials, UNICEF emergency and national programmes, and national and international NGOs with educational expertise. Create sectoral support for the inclusion of refugees in national education sector planning and in emergency programme appeals.

10. Links

Education and Protection: Out of School Children

Education and Protection: Curriculum Choices

Education and Protection: Refugee Teacher Management

Education and Protection: Mainstreaming in National Systems

Global Education Cluster

International Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)

Need help?

CONTACT CONTACT initially the UNHCR Deputy Representative (Protection), the UNHCR Assistant Representative (Protection), or the Senior Protection Officer in the country; or the UNHCR Regional Assistant/Deputy Representative (Protection) or the Senior Regional Protection Officer in the regional office (if applicable); or the Senior Regional Legal Advisor in the relevant UNHCR regional bureau, who will liaise as required with the Education Unit in UNHCR's Division of International Protection (DIP).

Annexes

- UNHCR Refugee Education Strategy 2012 - 2016
- INEE Minimum Standards for Education Handbook
- UNHCR, Refugee Teacher Management - Quick Guide

- Global Education Cluster - Short Guide to Rapid Joint Education Needs Assessment
- UNHCR, Refugee Coordination Model

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