

Photo: GPE/ Kelley Lynch



# SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S EDUCATION IN EMERGENCY CONTEXTS

*This brief summarizes key findings from the scoping study [Supporting Children's Access and Retention in Education in Emergency, Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts](#), commissioned by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX).*

Based on a review of policy documents, along with interviews and focus group discussions with education stakeholders in 16 GPE partner countries affected by fragility and conflict,<sup>1</sup> this study is unique in drawing out national priorities for supporting out-of-school children and youth (OOSCY) and at-risk learners in these emergency contexts. It presents key challenges, priorities and promising approaches related to three key themes:

- **Re-entry** for OOSCY **and retention** of at-risk learners;
- **Teacher training and support** for work with OOSCY and at-risk children; and
- Supporting the **socio-emotional wellbeing** of OOSCY and at-risk children

Building on existing understandings of the challenges facing these vulnerable learners, it

## KEY TERMS

**Out-of-school children and youth** is an official designation that includes a wide range of children, such as those who are not enrolled, those who were enrolled but dropped out and may return, and those who have dropped out and will likely never return, especially in emergency contexts.

**At-risk learners** are those currently enrolled in school who may be forced to drop out or fail to transition to the next level of schooling.

<sup>1</sup> These countries are from across four KIX regional hubs, which include [Africa 19](#), [Africa 21](#), [Europe, the Middle East and North Africa](#), [Asia and the Pacific](#) (EMAP) and [Latin America and the Caribbean](#) (LAC).

details national and regional nuances about the groups most in need of support. It also outlines research and programming gaps, to guide future interventions.

## CONTEXT

Across the world, some [250 million children](#) are not enrolled in formal education. When they are out of school, they are deprived of opportunities for literacy, numeracy, social interaction and access to structured learning environments facilitated by trained teachers.

Emergency situations are diverse and often overlapping. They are driven by conflict and fragility, health hazards or natural and climate-related disasters, all of which can create or exacerbate conditions that put children at risk of dropping out or inhibit their enrolment and attendance.

## KEY FINDINGS

The study's key findings on the re-entry and retention of vulnerable learners, teacher training and support, and supporting children's socio-emotional wellbeing in emergency contexts shed light on the main **challenges** that face OOSYC and at-risk learners in GPE partner countries. They also highlight some of the interventions and **approaches** being taken to support their

schooling, and outline key areas for **further research and programming**.

## Re-entry for out-of-school children and retention of at-risk learners

### Key challenges

Key informants (KIs) across regions affirmed many of the known barriers that keep children out of school and drive dropout rates. They also provided new insights on how these factors act and intersect in their given context. They highlighted how conflict and other emergencies can lead to schools being destroyed or shut down, or can damage technological infrastructure critical to supporting remote learning. Emergencies create conditions that put stress on education systems and families, often causing them to evaluate the relevance and opportunity costs of sending their children to school.

These and other challenges are particularly acute for certain demographic groups, including girls, children with disabilities and children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Indeed, increasing poverty was highlighted for nearly every country in the study. Zimbabwe is just one example that shows how challenges like poverty, child labour and gender intersect.

## COUNTRY SPOTLIGHT

In **Zimbabwe**, key informants highlighted how long-term instability and poverty have created a climate with high rates of secondary school dropout. Many young people turn to the gold mining industry, which promises a quick economic return. Girls often drop out due to child marriage, adolescent pregnancy and sexual exploitation and abuse.

Photo: GPE/ Carine Durand



## Promising approaches

Many countries across regions are focusing on similar strategies to prepare for or respond to emergencies. These efforts include building safe and resilient infrastructure and including disaster risk reduction (DRR) topics in the curriculum. Some governments are working with partners to develop remote education options, with informants in Somalia and Sudan highlighting the successful use of radio programming to support pastoralist and internally displaced learners. Flexible pathways are another important route for students to return to the classroom after lengthy learning disruptions. Informants in Burkina Faso, Solomon Islands and Pakistan commented on the importance of institutionalizing non-formal accelerated primary curriculum programs to increase access to education.

## Areas for future research and programming

- » Conducting impact studies to assess the effectiveness of different policy-level efforts;
- » Developing DRR strategies and evaluating DRR policies and plans, their impact and areas to strengthen;
- » Evaluating gender equality and social inclusion in policy and programming in emergencies;

- » Scaling up existing non-formal education options; and
- » Examining program relevance for learners in emergencies.

## Teacher training and support for work with OOSCY and at-risk children

### Key challenges

Teachers' ability to provide appropriate programming and support for their students while coping with their own needs in emergencies were key challenges. In Yemen, as children return to school after long absences, teachers struggle to assess their current level of schooling and design appropriate lessons for multiple levels within the same classroom. In South Sudan, informants note a lack of training to provide psychosocial support to traumatized and vulnerable learners.

Teachers' own wellbeing can also be impacted by the same risks that face their learners, as with the gang violence and natural disasters prevalent in Haiti. Moreover, thousands of teachers have been injured or killed in some contexts, including Ethiopia and Nigeria: those who remain often face overcrowded, multi-level classrooms with limited materials and supplies.

## COUNTRY SPOTLIGHT

In **Marshall Islands**, COVID-19, combined with environmental disasters, has left teachers feeling isolated and over-stretched. Responses have included pay rises and mental health and psychosocial support for teachers. Topics related to wellbeing have also been integrated into the teacher-training curriculum.



Photo: Asian Development Bank

KIs also described how teacher management is exacerbated in emergency contexts: systems for recruitment, resource allocation and promotion can be damaged or disregarded, and teachers may receive inconsistent and unequal pay.

### Promising approaches

Key informants highlighted a number of innovative approaches to recruit and support teachers and ensure they are well trained and managed in emergency contexts, where increasing the numbers of teachers available has been an important focus. In Nigeria, a key informant highlighted that a scholarship program that trains women to teach in their home villages has helped in ensuring that girls remain in education. Community teachers are also being trained in Central African Republic, while in Uganda, a shift in government policy ensures that teachers from four neighbouring countries can use their existing credentials to work in refugee camps.

Teacher training efforts have targeted the particular needs of teachers in crisis contexts: in Haiti, teachers are trained in providing remedial support to help learners catch up, while in Timor-Leste, they are supported in recognizing at-risk learners and those with disabilities and health issues. Informants in

other countries also noted teachers are being trained to use distance learning and to provide psychosocial support.

### Areas for future research and programming

- » Scaling and sustaining effective teacher professional development approaches, including those that integrate content related to emergencies, use remote and hybrid training options, and use community teachers; and
- » Strengthening policy efforts to support teaching in emergency settings, including through innovative approaches to financing, credentialling, and offering psychosocial support.

### Supporting the socio-emotional wellbeing of OOSCY and at-risk children

#### Key challenges

Across contexts impacted by fragility, conflict and violence, there is increasing focus on the socio-emotional needs of children and youth. Informants noted that NGOs have long attended to these needs, but there is an increasing need for schools and education ministries to support the mental health and wellbeing of OOSCY and at-risk learners. Children and youth, especially the displaced,

## COUNTRY SPOTLIGHT

In **Haiti**, key informants noted interventions that are helping to normalize discussions around mental health and ensure that everyone – including children, parents, teachers, and school leaders – understands stress and how to cope with it. Webinars that connect mental health professionals with community members provide space for sharing and support.



Photo: GPE/ Chantal Rigaud

have experienced heightened levels of violence in some contexts and have been targeted for exploitation by armed groups or gangs. They also face violence in and around schools, due to dangerous commutes, bullying and the use of corporal punishment. Online violence and cyber-bullying were referenced as an increasing concern in Solomon Islands.

Violence, neglect and other harms are also experienced at home: in Yemen, an informant noted that years of conflict and long-term poverty have led to increased violence and abuse and delayed children's social development. Coping with their own trauma, parents may lack positive strategies for discipline and for supporting their children's socio-emotional development.

Crisis situations have also impacted children's relationships and social networks, creating loneliness and isolation. Those who return to school without basic learning foundations experience embarrassment, as highlighted by an informant from Zimbabwe.

### Promising approaches

Informants found it more difficult to describe efforts and innovations being carried out in their contexts to support children's socio-emotional wellbeing. In several countries, they noted that awareness of these needs is emerging among stakeholders. Fostering more enabling policy environments was seen as one potential approach: some countries have created policies that prohibit corporal punishment, addressed bullying and ensured that adolescent parents are welcomed back to school.

Teachers, school leaders and community members are being trained to recognize and support socio-emotional needs in Burundi and Timor-Leste, while in Marshall Islands, school counselling programs are being enhanced to support learners, parents and the wider community. In Nigeria, peer support approaches have seen female professionals deliver motivational talks to encourage adolescent girls.

### Areas for future research and programming

- » Better understanding the role of government in supporting learners' wellbeing, including by mapping existing capacity for socio-emotional learning (SEL) and using national mechanisms such as data gathering to understand and support the needs of children returning to school;
- » Exploring how to shift attitudes around mental health and wellbeing;
- » Identifying supports needed to improve school-based SEL, including teacher training, integrating SEL into existing curricula, and career counselling.

This brief summarizes findings from one of six studies commissioned by the [Global Partnership for Education \(GPE\) Knowledge and Innovation Exchange \(KIX\)](#) to scope, refine and validate themes that respond to the priorities of GPE partner countries. These studies involved regional and national consultations and a review of relevant literature. Their findings have informed KIX applied research directions.



Other topics in this series include:

- [Data systems and data use;](#)
- [Early childhood care and education;](#)
- [Gender equality and social inclusion;](#)
- [Supporting teachers;](#) and
- [Summary of education priorities in GPE partner countries.](#)