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Global Development Strategy: Education

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Approved by: Marit Glad, Global Programme Director

Owner: Constantijn Wouters, Global Education Lead

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Cover photo: Tom Peyre-Costa/NRC

Rayowa writing on her chalkboard during a second-grade lesson as part of the Better Learning Programme (BLP) in Niger.

NRC NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL

Education

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) will continue to play a leading role in the Education in Emergencies sector by ensuring that all displacement-affected children and youth enjoy quality, safe and inclusive learning opportunities relevant to their psychosocial, emotional and cognitive development and needs. Our strength lies in supporting children and youth on their journey across different learning pathways, including immediate first-line education response, structured and longer-term learning through non-formal education provision (with a focus on out-of-school children), and support to formal education systems to ensure sustainability of our programming and support durable solutions. Moreover, in addition to learning opportunities, we provide youth with a pathway to employment and livelihood opportunities and support them in becoming active and engaged members of their communities. By the end of 2025:

- We will become even better at ensuring that the most vulnerable displacement-affected children and youth, especially girls and children with disabilities, access quality learning.
- We will improve transition to, and retention in, formal learning, in cooperation with national authorities.
- We will provide access to basic psychosocial support services by integrating our Better Learning Programme across all our education programmes.
- We will cooperate closely with those who we serve, including children, youth and their communities.
- We will address the impact of climate change through our education programming.

To get to this point, the global education development strategy will focus on the priorities below. Click on each heading to go to the respective section.

| 1 Scale up first-line education response |
| 2 Increase flexible non-formal education opportunities |
| 3 Improve transition to and retention in formal education |
| 4 Contribute to improved youth wellbeing |
| 5 Improve adherence to Safe and Inclusive Programming (SIP) |
| 6 Institutionalise continuous teacher professional development |
| 7 Strengthen education advocacy to change policy and practice |
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| 10 Improve collaboration and exchange of expertise with local actors |
| 11 Explore how to address the impact of climate change through education |

Introduction

What is the purpose of the development strategy? It shows where NRC will focus global programme development and innovation efforts, and towards what areas we will channel internal resources and global fundraising efforts in relation to the core competency (CC). The strategy covers NRC's global portfolio, therefore countries and regions will find workstreams that are more or less relevant for their particular context.

Who is the audience? The strategy is primarily intended for the core competency technical line and other relevant staff at country, regional and global level, but can also be shared externally.

Who will implement it? The global core competency leads are responsible for leading the implementation of the strategy. They will engage with regional and country colleagues, primarily through the technical line, to get input, exchange experiences, share work, conduct pilots, develop trainings and guidance, fundraise etc. This will be done both remotely and through face-to-face workshops and seminars at country, regional or global level. Global technical guidance and tools will be developed to support the implementation. The strategy is ambitious and will require successful fundraising if we are to achieve our goals.

What is expected from countries and regions? Except for prioritised workstreams (see below), country and regional offices can select the workstreams that are most relevant for them. The response policy provides a framework for the activities and themes falling within the scope of each core competency, and countries can implement any activities within that scope that are relevant in their context. Contributions to the core competency development strategies should be factored into the annual workplans and balanced scorecards of the core competency team. As guidance becomes available for new areas of work, countries and regions are expected to follow this. Please reach out to the global lead if your country/region is planning to do, or already doing, work or pilots in line with a workstream.

What does it mean if a workstream is prioritised? All country and regional offices implementing the core competency are expected to contribute to or implement elements of this workstream within the current strategy period 2022–2025. Prioritised workstreams are marked with orange in the overview on page 3 and with a grey flag (▶) after the heading.

How did we arrive at these workstreams? The strategy was developed through a participatory process across the organisation. The process identified areas of work needed to: 1) address quality issues discovered through monitoring, evaluations and risk monitoring to ensure we comply with the NRC Response Policy and the quality standards we adhere to; 2) stay relevant by responding to global trends in the sector and beyond; and 3) deliver on the NRC Global Strategy.

What does the strategy not do? It does not: 1) set boundaries for what NRC does and does not do within a core competency (see NRC Response Policy); 2) provide technical guidance on how NRC will implement certain activities (see framing papers, handbooks, guidance notes); 3) promote NRC's activities and approaches (see capacity statements, value propositions and programme presentations).

What is the duration of the strategy? The strategy reflects the duration of the NRC Global Strategy 2022–2025, and includes a mid-term review.

Please note: NRC has clear ambitions to make all our programmes more people-centric and improve how we design and implement responses as one – both across core competencies, and between programmes and advocacy. How we will go about this is still not decided. These two elements will therefore be strengthened across the core competency development strategies as part of the mid-term review.

A temporary learning space in Um Rakuba Camp, Sudan. In the space of a week, the team erected school structures that can host 700 children in two shifts. The teachers are themselves refugees that can now teach again. Photo: Ingebjørg Kårstad/NRC

1 Scale up first-line education response

Strategic outcome:

As soon as possible in an emergency response, children and youth are provided with protective education that prepares them for transition into longer-term learning pathways.

Too often, education is not included in emergency response. Nevertheless, it is life-saving, strengthens recovery and resilience, and moreover is prioritised by the communities we work with. Actively engaging the community, especially children and youth, from the first phase of an emergency offers them the opportunity to effectively participate in and contribute to the provision of humanitarian assistance and social cohesion in their communities.

By the end of 2025, NRC will provide children and youth with physical and emotional safety, through establishing safe and inclusive learning environments from the onset of an emergency. We will provide children and youth with the opportunity to interact with peers, teachers and the community, thus re-establishing routines and a sense of belonging. We will support them to recover and build a bridge to longer-term learning pathways by offering access to a range of critical (life-)skills, including basic language skills, and necessary information through relevant, age-appropriate and flexible education. Finally, we will provide basic psychosocial support from the start of our response. Where possible, we will do this through the Better Learning Programme (BLP), NRC's flagship classroom-based psychosocial support intervention. It is a holistic approach supporting recovery from trauma and stress experienced during conflict and war.

Building on existing NRC guidance, lessons learned and good practices from NRC country offices, global initiatives will include the development of a concrete response package and simple tools, including for a youth-led response, to support and facilitate a rapid quality education response when needed. We will continue to advocate for education to be included in any first-line emergency response, including as part of Rapid Response Mechanisms (RRM).

Students in the temporary learning spaces in Um Rakuba camp, Sudan, received notebooks, pens and erasers. Photo: Ingebjørg Kårstad/NRC

2 Increase flexible non-formal education opportunities

Strategic outcome:

Out-of-school children and youth benefit from flexible and preferably accredited non-formal education opportunities.

Many children and youth in crisis contexts are unable to enter formal education due to a number of barriers. They have often missed significant periods of schooling, resulting in them being over-age for enrolment in lower primary grades, or unable to keep up in formal classrooms. Seven out of 10 children aged 10 in middle- and low-income countries are unable to read and understand a simple text. In some cases, they may never have had an opportunity to go to school at all. In such cases, NRC provides non-formal education classes.

By the end of 2025, we will meet the diverse needs of displacement-affected children and youth who are either out of school or have had their education interrupted, through designing and implementing a wide range of non-formal education programmes, such as catch-up, bridging and accelerated education classes. Moreover, by building the capacity of staff and teachers in how to develop and use competency-based summative and formative assessment, we will improve classroom instruction and curriculum content, eventually leading to better learning outcomes. We will do this in partnership with ministries of education and at inter-agency level where applicable. Finally, providing basic psychosocial support in all our non-formal education programming will further improve the learning environment for children and youth.

Global initiatives included in this strategic period will focus on rolling out NRC's approach to measuring learning outcomes, integrating BLP in all our non-formal education programming, and continuing to provide active support to the INEE Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG). When possible and appropriate, we will use innovative approaches and technology to enhance the quality and reach of our programming.

Children participate in an education programme for out-of-school children in Damascus, Syria. The programme helps the children prepare for formal education. It also rehabilitates schools, equips them with desks and teaching materials, and provides training, coaching and mentoring to teachers. Photo: Tareq Mnadili/NRC

3 Improve transition to and retention in formal education

> **Strategic outcome:**
>
> Children and youth (re)enrol, stay and progress through formal public education, resulting in accredited learning.

Too often, displacement-affected children and youth drop out of school shortly after they enrol or transition from non-formal programmes into the formal system. Completing an accredited formal education, if possible, is an essential step on the pathway to further learning, livelihoods and job security. Our responsibility as NRC therefore continues beyond the point of enrolment and transition.

We will continue to support immediate (re)enrolment into the formal education system and facilitate transition into the system through our non-formal education programming. By the end of 2025, we will also provide support after enrolment to ensure retention in and progression through the formal system. We will do this through increased engagement with affected communities and caregivers, teacher professional development, and provision of tailored learning support, including remedial classes. Moreover, we will provide learning materials and financial support through cash and voucher assistance where it adds value to our programming. Shelter and Settlements and WASH teams will support in creating a conducive learning environment at school and at home, thus contributing to better learning outcomes. In cooperation with the ICLA core competency, we will support students in obtaining identity and civil documentation, and will advocate for the removal of legal barriers to accessing formal learning.

Global initiatives will focus on developing global guidance and direction on how to provide holistic support to the formal education system, with a strong emphasis on supporting transition and retention. We will measure and analyse how (integrated) education programming contributes to improved learning outcomes.
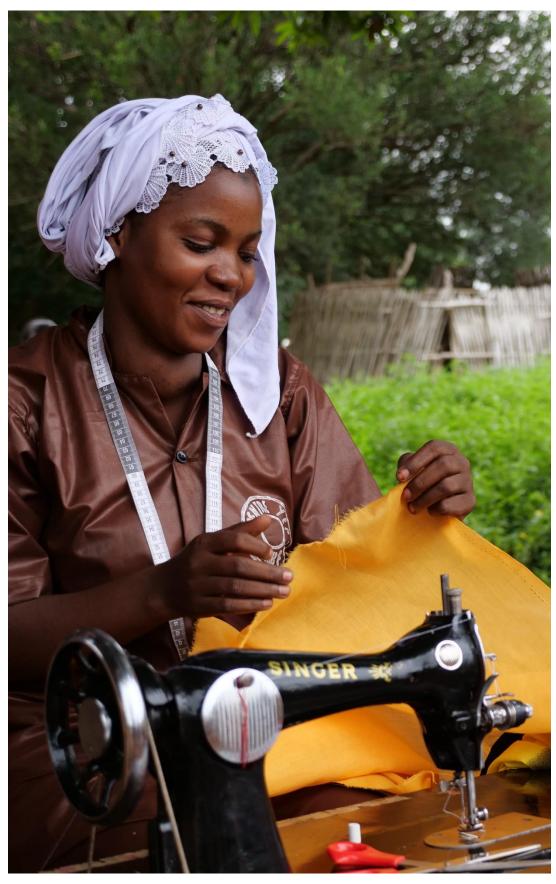
4 Contribute to improved youth wellbeing

Strategic outcome:

Youth become active and engaged members of their community and are supported to choose their transition into education pathways or livelihood opportunities, improving their overall wellbeing.

Conflict and displacement disrupt young people's education and employment opportunities, their sense of belonging to their communities, and their social connectedness. This forces them to take on adult roles prematurely, making their needs different from those of younger children and adults. They suffer trauma, fear, depression and loss of hope for the future. Young women and girls are disproportionately affected, facing sexual and reproductive health challenges such as early pregnancy and gender-based violence. Some 225 million youth in the developing world are not in employment, education or training (NEET), and the majority are young women.

By the end of 2025, through a holistic approach, we aim to reverse the negative cycle youth find themselves in. By providing youth with access to continued learning opportunities relevant to their needs and aspirations, preparing them for the world of work and helping them become active and engaged members of their communities, we will improve their personal wellbeing and the wellbeing of their communities. Moreover, we want youth to become a partner in our humanitarian response through meaningful participation and engagement in the NRC project cycle.

Under the umbrella of the NRC youth wellbeing framework, global initiatives will focus on consolidating the "learning pathway" for youth, through standardising our approaches to life skills, technical and vocational education and training, and blended learning. In collaboration with the LFS team, we will ensure that skills are relevant, marketable and appropriate, based on gender-sensitive market analysis. And together with the ICLA team, we will identify which employment laws and procedures are applicable to youth in order to facilitate access to livelihood and job opportunities. Finally, we will invest in improving meaningful youth participation and engagement within NRC and the wider sector.

Assania Ali works her sewing machine expertly during a Youth Education Programme (YEP) workshop in Mbrés, Central African Republic. Photo: Itunu Kuku/NRC

5 Improve adherence to Safe and Inclusive Programming (SIP) ⚑

Strategic outcome:

Children and youth are able to participate in NRC education and youth programmes, irrespective of their background, gender and abilities, and are physically and emotionally safe, so they can learn and thrive.

Children and youth in emergencies have experienced violence, life-threatening situations, loss of family members and friends, and traumatic and major life stress associated with life in conflict zones and forced displacement. They may also be facing a range of ongoing protection risks connected with these stressful conditions. Youth are often subject to specific protection risks such as police harassment and detention, association with armed groups, and gender-based violence. Education offers a safe space for them to begin the recovery process in a predictable, secure environment where they can make friends, play, relax and begin learning again.

By the end of 2025, all education staff, including teachers, will be trained in child safeguarding and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, to ensure that children and youth under NRC's care are free from harm. We will create safe and inclusive learning environments by conducting teacher training in inclusive education and psychosocial support and by addressing specific barriers to education for girls and young women, and children and youth with disabilities. Together with WASH and Shelter and Settlements teams, we will ensure that our learning centres and schools are physically safe and accessible for all.

Global initiatives will include developing a face-to-face child safeguarding training for teachers. We will develop child-friendly community feedback mechanism (CFM) systems and provide guidance on how to analyse and respond to feedback. We will scale and integrate BLP in all NRC country offices, including for youth, and will make BLP available to the wider sector. Moreover, we will analyse our practices and enhance NRC guidance, building on existing guidance within the sector, to ensure appropriate programming for the most vulnerable, especially girls and children and youth with disabilities.

Safe and Inclusive Programming (SIP):

SIP ensures the mainstreaming of protection, age, gender and diversity in NRC programmes. Our SIP Minimum Standards describe a number of actions, in a suggested hierarchy of urgency, that guide NRC country offices to ensure that our programming is safe, accessible, accountable and participatory.

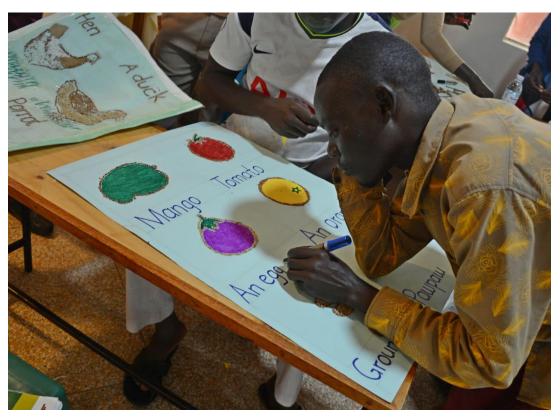# 6 Institutionalise continuous teacher professional development ⚑

Strategic outcome:

Teachers are equipped with the skills, knowledge and attitudes to be effective facilitators of learning through continuous teacher professional development, using qualified teacher trainers, peer learning and mentorship.

Teachers working in crisis contexts play a critical part in supporting the learning and wellbeing of conflict-affected students. Many teachers in these contexts are unqualified or under-trained and lack the skills required to meet the specific needs of conflict-affected students. Moreover, teachers have gone through the same stress and trauma that many of their students experienced. Research shows that when teachers wellbeing is ensured and they are provided with ongoing professional development opportunities, they are able to make changes in their teaching practice and ultimately provide better quality and more inclusive education opportunities for children and youth.

By the end of 2025, NRC aims to provide longer-term ongoing professional development by engaging teachers as active learners rather than passive receivers of information, by providing a variety of opportunities for both individual and group reflection, and by utilising curricula that are relevant to the context. Through improving classroom instruction and pedagogy, we aim to improve both learning outcomes and student wellbeing. When teachers are adequately trained in relevant education in emergencies topics such as child safeguarding, psychosocial support, and positive discipline, they are better positioned to create safe and inclusive learning environments.

Global initiatives will include developing guidance on teacher professional development, including on how to conduct teacher capacity and needs assessments. We will continue rolling out and enhancing the Learning Assessment Toolkit, and will scale up teacher training on, among others, the Teachers in Crisis Context (TiCC) pack, conflict-sensitive education, and the Better Learning Programme. Finally, we will continue to advocate for fair teacher compensation and for considering teachers' wellbeing as a prerequisite for quality teaching.

Teachers in Karamoja in north-eastern Uganda are getting training in preparing learning materials for children ahead of the new school year. Photo: Karl Schembri/NRC

David Dapal has been trained in specialised techniques that help his fourth-grade students work through stress and trauma, as part of NRC's Better Learning Programme (BLP) in Kenya. Photo: Kristine Kolstad/NRC

7 Strengthen education advocacy to change policy and practice ▶

> ### Strategic outcome:
> Local, national and international policies, strategic priorities and actual practices are inclusive of and meet the needs of displacement-affected children and youth,

Over 100 million people are currently displaced, of which half are children and youth. More than one out of three displaced children do not attend primary school, and a staggering three out of four do not attend secondary school. On top of this crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in the largest disruption of education in history, with over 1.5 billion children and youth affected in more than 190 countries.

By the end of 2025, we aim to influence both policy and practice in the following ways: (1) by engaging with (local) authorities such as ministries of education, youth and labour, (2) through inter-agency coordination, such as through the Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE), the Global Education Cluster, and the Global Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, and (3) through external engagement with a diverse range of education actors, such as universities, donors and the private sector. Engagement typically takes place at different levels, from the local to the global, and aims to bring together children and youth themselves, their teachers and caregivers, education practitioners, authorities, policymakers, donors and researchers.

Global initiatives will include developing guidance on how to influence policy and practice at country level and a consolidated global advocacy strategy. We will continue to actively engage in INEE working groups, be an active member of the Strategic Advisory Group to the Global Education Cluster and engage with relevant donors and the private sector. We will continue our collaboration with the University of Tromsø and other universities, and develop our global learning agenda to expand our evidence base. Finally, we will empower children and youth to speak and advocate for themselves on topics they prioritise.

8 Improve teaching and learning through digital technologies (Ed-Tech)

Strategic outcome:

Children and youth are prepared to access and use affordable digital technology to learn, engage and earn as equals with their peers around the world.

Countries affected by conflict and displacement have limited or no access to digital devices, and connectivity remains poor, especially in hard-to-reach areas. Nonetheless, information and communications technology (ICT) continues to play an important role in addressing educational challenges and needs. The significant gains from the forced transition to remote and blended learning during the Covid-19 pandemic have provided us with learning on how to digitalise education services within NRC-specific contexts. We therefore want to scale up responsibly and use tools relevant to the maturity of each context we work in, in order to help narrow the digital divide.

By the end of 2025, we will increase the affordability of education service provision and improve on rapid scalability through the use of digital technologies in education programming. Digital technologies can provide variety, flexibility, and an ability to respond quickly to the new needs of individual learners in both formal and non-formal education programmes, by being applied to infrastructure, access and digital capacity, capabilities and curriculum.

Global initiatives will focus on providing access to innovative digital and non-digital approaches based on five pillars: (1) design an ecosystem of tools and resources that improve foundational skills, including digital literacy, (2) build the digital capabilities required to develop education expertise, integrate technology in the classroom, and facilitate online and blended learning, (3) increase our ability to provide digital access to psychosocial support services, (4) develop equity and inclusion programmes that address issues around digital access, affordability and participation, and (5) equip adolescents and youth with digital capabilities that prepare them for income-generating activities in the future and build their social engagement skills.

9 Scale up cash and voucher assistance (CVA)

> **Strategic outcome:**
>
> Where feasible, relevant and appropriate to the context, needs and market conditions, NRC education programmes include cash and voucher components.

One of the main barriers to accessing education is the high enrolment costs that parents and caregivers have to meet, even if education is supposed to be free and fees are covered. Parents and caregivers simply cannot afford costs such as stationery, uniforms and transportation, or even the opportunity cost of lost child labour. Similarly, formal schools are sometimes unable to enrol large numbers of displacement-affected children and youth due to the investment they would have to make to create additional space, purchase extra resources and pay teacher salaries.

NRC will therefore continue to explore where and when cash and voucher assistance can complement our education programming. By the end of 2025 we will use cash and voucher assistance where it is appropriate to the context, needs and market conditions, and does not increase risk. Cash and voucher assistance should only be one part of a broader programme, which also includes soft components defined by the context and needs.

Global initiatives will include assessing what is needed for the Education core competency to better integrate cash and voucher assistance components in our programming, whenever they add value and are relevant to the context. We will increase support to country offices in adopting existing global guidance on cash and voucher assistance in education, in using NRC's modality decision tool, and through piloting existing inter-agency tools, such as the training on cash assistance developed by the Global Education Cluster and good practices on funding youth-led action.

10 Improve collaboration and exchange of expertise with local actors

Strategic outcome:

By collaborating with local actors, we improve the relevance, sustainability, efficiency and reach of our education programming, especially during our first phase education response.

NRC recognises that local actors are the main responders in any crisis and we already collaborate with different types of local actors in the countries in which we work. However, we want to do much better and significantly increase our collaboration and exchange of expertise with local actors.

There are a multitude of local actors that are relevant to NRC's education work, but in this strategic period we will prioritise ministries of education and community-led structures, such as parent-teacher associations, school committees, women's groups and child and youth clubs. This because we see them as particularly relevant for the implementation of our education programme and we need to prioritise our efforts. By the end of 2025, our programming will be informed and shaped through meaningful engagement with authorities and the community through improved cooperation and exchange of expertise at global, regional and local levels.

Global initiatives will include developing global guidance on how to collaborate and exchange ideas and knowledge with national authorities, especially ministries of education, building on best practices and existing experience and expertise at the country office level. We will specifically look at ensuring continuity of services through working with ministries in the event of a possible NRC exit. Moreover, we will develop global guidance based on good practices, to enable communities, specifically children, youth and their caregivers, to engage and influence each stage of the project cycle through decision-making structures, such as parent-teacher associations, school management committees, women's groups, and child and youth clubs. Whenever possible and relevant we will provide seed funding for community- and youth-led initiatives so that they can deliver relevant and sustainable education solutions in their own communities.

11 Explore how to address the impact of climate change through education

Strategic outcome:

By addressing climate change through our education programmes, we will limit the potential impact it has on the lives of displacement-affected children and youth.

Climate change impacts our ability to ensure all displacement-affected children and youth have access to quality learning opportunities. Extreme weather events can result in the destruction of learning facilities, cause extreme heat or cold inside learning spaces, and reduce both water availability and food security for children, youth and their families. While girls might be expected to help collecting water and firewood further away from home, boys might be expected to work to increase food security for the household. Both scenarios increase absenteeism, leading to drop-out and increasing protection risks. Moreover, teachers might be hesitant to work in flood or heat-prone locations, thereby reducing the quality of education in often remote locations even further.

Children and youth are not just victims of climate change. They are also the solution, as they take the lead in climate action. By the end of 2025, we will reduce the impact climate change has on NRC's ability to provide quality education programmes, while at the same time empowering children and youth to be agents of change and leaders in addressing the impact of climate change on their own lives and communities.

In close collaboration with WASH, Shelter and Settlements and LFS teams, global initiatives will include exploring ways in which we can address the impact climate change has on our own education facilities and programmes, building on available global guidance and good practices around school construction, clean energy and school gardening/feeding. Moreover, we will create awareness on climate change among children, youth and their communities, and encourage and empower them to lead action on climate change at both local and global level.