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Lost Opportunity

Education for out-of-school youth
in emergency and protracted crisis settings

Marc Sommers
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Lost Opportunity: Education for out-of-school youth in emergency and protracted crisis settings

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NORCAP's mission is to improve aid to better protect and empower people affected by crises and climate change. We do this by:

- Supporting initiatives that protect and empower people
- Improving impact at the global and local level through joint projects with partners and stakeholders
- Providing expertise and developing capacity that enable partners to meet the needs of people in fragile situations and crises
- Strengthening the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding system by supporting leadership, coordination and policy development
- Building bridges between the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors

NORCAP is part of the Norwegian Refugee Council.

This study probes the educational journeys of youth affected by emergencies. The research featured analysis of available literature on youth and education in emergency and protracted crisis settings (a field known as EiE). The research team also undertook qualitative interviews with 36 leading EiE practitioners, donor agency officials, EiE and youth experts, and youth with expertise on EiE for out-of-school youth. For this study, youth are defined as young people as people aged 12 to 24. This research effort is supported by NORCAP, a part of the Norwegian Refugee Council.

The EiE field generally demonstrates a lack of clarity about who youth are or what (in educational terms) they seek. No agreed youth definition informs the EiE field. The [IASC Guidelines on Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises](#) have had little influence on it. With the exception of minimal access to vocational and tertiary education, EiE was rarely found to include anyone over 18.

EiE's pronounced focus on girls' education often overlooks other pressing challenges for female youth. Those who become wives or unmarried mothers generally leave school. Few efforts to support boys' and male youth education appear to exist.

EiE professionals were found to know little about those not in their schools, youth in particular. The two main types of certified education available for out-of-school youth in conflict-affected settings were vocational training and accelerated education (mainly for the primary level). With minimal exceptions, the research did not uncover sophisticated programme targeting for key youth subgroups. It did identify a growing post-primary education emphasis on opportunities, but only for relatively elite youth.

Research analysis revealed a strikingly inadequate educational response to massive out-of-school youth cohorts in emergency and protracted crisis settings. Pre-set programme interventions for minimal proportions of youth cohorts are strongly favoured over strategic responses to the specific educational profiles of particular youth subgroups.

The recommendations are framed by three starting points: accepting that the status quo is inadequate, taking steps toward a strategic response, and providing substantially more support. Additional guidance includes the need to dramatically upgrade expertise about out-of-school youth, instituting youth-centred approaches and applying a gender lens to all programmes.

Acknowledgements

The out-of-school youth issue first surfaced in my work on Education in Emergencies in 1994. The topic then arose in a conversation with Martha Hewison, formerly of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and currently with the Inter-agency Network for Education (INEE), late in 2021. She helped me to organise what became the core team for this study early the following year: Dean Brooks, INEE's director; Martha Hewison, its Accelerated Education Working Group coordinator; Rachel McKinney, its team lead for thematic areas; and my former UNHCR colleague, Alessio Baldaccini.

The team guided the development of the concept note with additional input from Cirenia Chávez Villegas of UNHCR and Oula Abu-Amsha of INEE. Dean Brooks also connected me with Maria Sellevold and Frida Paréus of NORCAP, who have been truly inspirational supporters of this study. Thanks to both of you for believing in this project from the start. I extend my gratitude to copy editor Jeremy Lennard and the designer of this publication, Reet Sahiba Arora, as well.

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Marc Sommers, PhD

Photo: Oda Lykke Jernberg/NORCAP



Author Bios



Marc Sommers

Marc Sommers served as the Team Leader and lead author for this study. He is an award-winning author and an internationally recognised youth and EiE expert. Marc uses trust-based methods to reveal new insights about inequity and exclusion and detail how to cultivate effective policy and programme responses. His work draws deeply from experience in 23 war-affected countries.

Marc's career has blended peacebuilding and diplomacy with field research and training. He has a reputation for innovative research and evaluation methods. He has served as a senior advisor at the U.S. Department of State and the Department of Defense, and in positions supporting USAID. He is a former Associate Research Professor at The Fletcher School (Tufts University) and was a member of the UN Advisory Group of Experts for the Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. Marc has been a Fellow at The Wilson Center, the U.S. Institute of Peace and The Bellagio Center. He has consulted for the World Bank, OSCE, 6 policy institutes, 5 UN agencies and 20+ NGOs.

Marc is the author of 10 books and the recipient of 4 book awards. Five of his books feature out-of-school youth and another trio address EiE challenges. His latest book is: We the Young Fighters: Pop Culture, Terror and War in Sierra Leone. He received his PhD in anthropology from Boston University and currently works as a consultant.



Mai Nasrallah

Mai Nasrallah served as Research Associate for this study, focusing on certified education programming for out-of-school youth. She is an experienced programme management specialist, with over 8 years of experience representing donors, NGOs and research institutes in development and humanitarian settings.

Mai's areas of specialisation are youth-focused programmes, strategic programme design, out-of-school youth and positive youth development. She is a PhD candidate at the University of Auckland School of Education and Social Work and holds a Masters in Human Rights from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

AEP	Accelerated education programme
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CRC	UN Convention of the Rights of the Child
ECD	Early childhood development
ECE	Early childhood education
ECW	Education Cannot Wait
EiE	Education in emergencies
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICT	Information and communication technology
IDP	Internally displaced person
ILO	International Labour Organization
INEE	Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and other identities under the LGBTQ+ umbrella
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OAS	Organization of American States
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PBSO	UN Peace Building Support Office
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEWG	Secondary Education Working Group
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	UN Population Fund
UNGEI	UN Girls' Education Initiative
UNHCR	UN Refugee Agency
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
UQP	UNESCO Qualifications Passport
WHO	World Health Organization
YAG	Youth Advisory Group

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Executive Summary

Access to education in emergency and protracted crisis settings decreases dramatically as a young person's age increases. This research focuses on those who are by far the most affected by this trend: out-of-school youth.

The study examines their educational journeys. The research analysed the literature available on youth and education in emergency and protracted crisis settings, a field known as EiE, and the team also undertook qualitative interviews with 36 leading EiE practitioners, donor agency officials, EiE and youth experts, and youth with expertise in EiE for out-of-school youth. For this study, youth are defined as people aged 12 to 24. The research was supported by NORCAP, part of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

The EiE field generally demonstrates a lack of clarity about who youth are or what (in educational terms) they seek. There is no agreed definition of "youth." Instead, they tend to be shoehorned into the child category, positioned far below the priorities and investments reserved for children or overlooked entirely. With the exception of minimal access to vocational and tertiary education, certified EiE was rarely found to include anyone over 18.

Primary education is unquestionably the EiE field's main area of focus. The research

revealed EiE as an emergency-focused field burdened with responsibility, without a prominent profile or sufficient funds and almost completely absorbed with addressing the urgent educational needs of young children, largely those between the ages of six and 12. EiE professionals interviewed for this study underscored the following dynamic: if post-primary education is compared to (or competes against) primary education, it will always lose out. They also depicted a field concerned about youth but lacking a roadmap for how to address their priorities.

EiE's pronounced focus on girls' education often leaves pressing female youth challenges overlooked. Those who become wives or unmarried mothers generally leave school. Few efforts to support boys' and male youth education appear to exist.

Children and youth who were not in school before an emergency are unlikely to be in educational facilities during one. EiE professionals were found to know little about those not in their schools, youth in particular. The two primary types of certified education available for out-of-school youth in conflict-affected settings were vocational training and accelerated education, mainly for the primary level. With minimal exceptions, the research did not uncover sophisticated programme targeting for subgroups of out-of-school youth.

Conclusions

1. ***A pronounced orientation toward young children and primary schooling:*** Providing education to those aged between six and 12 allows emergency educators to reach large numbers of children swiftly and at a somewhat lower unit cost. Primary or basic education is, by far, the centrepiece of EiE work.
2. ***Absence of clarity on who youth are:*** The striking underdevelopment of education for youth in the EiE field starts with an elemental finding arising from this research: there is no agreed youth definition for the EiE field. Its absence did not appear to be a matter of particular concern.
3. ***A disturbingly low priority for youth in the EiE field:*** A prominent indication of this is the fact that the [IASC Guidelines on Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises](#) have had little influence on the EiE field.
4. ***Notably limited levels of youth expertise and investment:*** The response to massive out-of-school youth cohorts in emergency and protracted crisis settings is deficient. Relevant knowledge was rarely demonstrated. The scale of educational response, together with research about youth and EiE, are grossly inadequate.
5. ***EiE largely is stationary while many youth are mobile:*** Certified education offerings from EiE agencies tend to concentrate in camps and settlements while large numbers of young people migrate into urban areas. This reportedly is not an EiE area of focus.
6. ***A narrow approach to girls' education:*** Efforts appear to focus on younger girls and biases against females generally. The approach to the inevitable life requirements of many female youth is remarkably rigid. The situation is particularly concerning for students who become unmarried mothers or young wives.



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7. ***A striking imbalance concerning education for boys and male youth education:*** The often-lower performance of boys does not appear to be a cause of major concern. Unaccompanied boys and male youth are also regularly overlooked in emergency settings. The attention paid to girls in EiE appears to invite unintentional but unfortunate gender-specific fallout for boys and male youth. The same may be the case for youth with LGBTQ+ profiles.

8. ***An absence of strategic targeting:*** The non-specific, generic approach of the mostly narrow array of certified education programmes points to little knowledge of the everyday realities that out-of-school youth cohorts face. The type of initiatives and priority issues – such as location, timeframe, duration, mode of delivery and provision of childcare – that might allow particular out-of-school youth subgroups to attend were not found to inform programme provisions.

9. ***Indications of favoured access to educational programming:*** One unintended consequence of the supply orientation is that vulnerable and non-elite out-of-school youth subgroups – youth wives and mothers, those who work during the day, those with disabilities, members of excluded ethnic or religious groups, former or current members of armed groups, those dealing with substance and/or alcohol abuse – rarely appear to be identified or specifically targeted for EiE programme interventions.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are bold because they need to be. The existing provisions, know-how and backing are far too insubstantial to propose anything less.

Policy recommendations:

1. ***Recognise the inadequate status quo and commit to reform:*** The first recommendation is threefold: (a) Accept that the status quo is coming up short; (b) Take steps toward a strategic response; and (c) Invest in providing substantially more educational opportunity to emergency-affected youth.

2. ***Convene a high-level conference (or series of major gatherings) to galvanise EiE commitment to out-of-school youth:*** The starting point should be to help the EiE field appreciate what EiE for youth means and strengthen capacity to address the education priorities of out-of-school youth.



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3. ***Dramatically and urgently upgrade expertise on out-of-school, at-risk youth in the EiE field:*** This striking deficiency must be addressed with investment in research, personnel, collaboration and appropriate empowering initiatives. Youth expertise and voices should be integrated directly into EiE work via advisory groups and an on-site presence in HQ offices, field operations and education ministries.
4. ***Promote learning about education and out-of-school youth:*** Regular investments in quality research by researchers (including qualified youth) promises to inform strategic decision-making and effective action. This should include endorsement and support for the second phase of this research – a participatory global study undertaken by youth researchers on the certified and uncertified educational priorities of out-of-school youth.
5. ***Target key youth subgroups:*** The paucity of informed targeting of education initiatives for out-of-school youth allows comparatively well-positioned youth to dominate access. Reversing this trend promises to help EiE actors act strategically and demonstrate inclusion.
6. ***Find out how to deliver education to youth:*** Many EiE experts were found to routinely presume that education could only take place in a school setting. Yet school environments may be uninviting, inflexible and potentially even dangerous for many youth. Reaching out-of-school youth and providing them with relevant certified education calls for practitioners to find out and respond to what works for youth. This reset is strategic and necessary.
7. ***Transform the donor-driven emphasis on girls' education into strategic, gendered support:*** Much more needs to be done to demonstrate inclusion and acceptance in gendered approaches to education (also see programme recommendation 4).
8. ***Maintain regular engagements between EiE stakeholders and education authorities about out-of-school youth challenges:*** The need to address the challenges and education priorities of out-of-school youth should be subjects of regular discussion.
9. ***Develop an adaptable youth definition for the EiE field:*** It is impossible to assist many youth without some agreement on who they are. Guidelines should be devised for establishing who a youth is in particular situations. They should be universal, but their application should be local.



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10. ***Commit to the disaggregation of data by age, gender, disability and education level:*** This is urgently needed to inform effective EiE programming and practice.

11. ***Apply the IASC Guidelines on Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises:*** The guidelines for education are practical, useful and relevant, and have been endorsed by many of the key UN and NGO stakeholders in the EiE field.

Programme recommendations:

1. ***Pilot adaptable, youth-centred approaches to education:*** Collaborating with members of key youth subgroups who will become prime targets for an educational activity is essential. Tailoring initiatives to the priorities and requirements of key youth subgroups, and then assessing their impact are strongly endorsed.
2. ***Strategically refine and expand the engagement process with youth:*** Undertaking trust-based preliminary research and analysis is the first step. It is important to identify which youth subgroups will be targeted first. Next come authentic exchanges with members.
3. ***Elevate the quality and relevance of pre-programme assessments:*** Start programme planning and design by establishing a comprehensive understanding of young via a field assessment: who they are, the ecosystem in which they exist, and their priorities and needs.
4. ***Apply a gender lens to all programmes:*** Planning with a gender lens should consider the needs of female and male youth, and those who belong to gender minorities. Collaboration allows youth to stipulate their needs and inform programme planning.
5. ***Recruit, train and deploy qualified youth as monitoring and evaluation experts.***
6. ***Implement bridging programmes:*** These should incorporate knowledge acquisition and an orientation process. Formal counselling and guidance workshops are also likely necessary.
7. ***Initiate and support certification task teams:*** The teams should: (1) Help youth regain their education documents or gain equivalent recognition; and (2) Cultivate approval for education programmes that are deserving of certification and accreditation.



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I. Introduction

Despite the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all,”¹ nearly half of the global out-of-school population are children and youth living in crisis-affected countries.² These young people “are more than twice as likely to be out of school as their peers who live in safe and stable environments.”³ The persistence of the situation is particularly troubling. The chances that young people will remain out of school as a result of crises are high and increasing. The average period of displacement ranges currently between 10 and 25 years,⁴ a figure that has trebled over the last three decades.⁵

“The out-of-school rates of young people living in conflict increase with education levels” as a result.⁶ This is demonstrated in the following analysis of school-age refugees, a substantial subset of emergency-affected young people. While primary school gross enrolment globally was 102 per cent as of 2020, the figure for refugee children for 2020-2021 was 68 per cent. That 34-point difference grew to 40 for secondary school, with figures of 77 and 37 per cent, respectively. The declining rate collapses for tertiary education, with figures of 66 and six per cent, respectively. The latter figure has doubled in two years.⁷ The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) notes that “in some countries the secondary enrolment rate for refugees is in single digits.”⁸ It is also aware that while youth form a majority of its “persons of concern” they remain “invisible.”⁹

The trend toward substantial and often overlooked out-of-school youth cohorts is reflected in a host of studies. One examined youth in four conflict-affected countries – Myanmar, Pakistan, South Africa and Uganda – and uncovered “low rates of participation of youth in later primary and secondary education.”¹⁰ A second revealed that youth in Latin America ended up on delinquent trajectories

¹ Sustainable Development Goal 4: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>

² Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), *20 Years of INEE: Achievements and Challenges in Education in Emergencies*, INEE, 2020, p. 5. Education Cannot Wait provides statistical details about the alarming situation: “Out of the 224 million crisis-affected children and adolescents of school age, about 72 million (32%) are out of school. Of these 72 million out-of-school, 53% are girls, 17% have functional difficulties, and 21% (about 15 million) have been forcibly displaced.” Valenza, Matteo and Stoff, Christian. 2023. *Crisis-Affected Children and Adolescents in Need of Education Support: New Global Estimates and Thematic Deep Dives*. Education Cannot Wait (June), p. 3.

³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). 2022. *Leave No Child Behind: Global Report on Boys' Disengagement from Education*, UNESCO, Paris, p. 65.

⁴ There are 48 million IDPs and 26.4 million refugees in the world. These populations have more than doubled over the past decade (as of the end of 2020). United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Global Humanitarian Overview 2022*, OCHA, p. 40.

⁵ Sarah Dryden-Peterson, cited in *Event report: Refugees, Education and Conflict*, World Refugee & Migration Council, 2021 (March 5).

⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). 2022. *Leave No Child Behind: Global Report on Boys' Disengagement from Education*, UNESCO, Paris, p. 65.

⁷ Sources for refugee statistics: UNHCR. 2022. *UNHCR Education Report 2022 - All Inclusive: The Campaign for Refugee Education*, p. 6. Sources for global statistics: World Bank: For the tertiary gross enrollment rate (global): <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR>; For the secondary gross enrollment rate (global): <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.SEC.ENRR>; For the primary gross enrollment rate (global): <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.ENRR>

⁸ UNHCR, *Staying the Course: The Challenges Facing Refugee Education*, UNHCR, 2021, p. 6.

⁹ *UNHCR's Engagement with Displaced Youth: A Global Review*, R. Evans, C. Lo Forte, E. M. Fraser, UNHCR, 2013, p. 9.

¹⁰ Lopes Cardozo, Mieke T.A., Higgins, Sean, Le Mat, Marielle L.J. 2016. *Youth Agency and Peacebuilding: An Analysis of the Role of Formal and Non-Formal Education: Synthesis Report on Findings from Myanmar, Pakistan, South Africa and Uganda*. Research Consortium Education and Peacebuilding, University of Amsterdam, p. 54.

largely because they had been “pushed out” of school “by a vicious cycle of stigmatization, segregation, punishment, and exclusion.”¹¹

Despite these trends, the conventional and steadfast response in the field known as Education in Emergencies (EiE, which also incorporates education efforts in protracted crisis contexts) is to focus on providing primary schooling.

Providing access to primary school in the midst of emergencies enables large numbers of vulnerable children to be engaged swiftly and effectively. It is a sensible and appropriate first step. At the same time, “an over-emphasis on access to primary education” in the EiE field also has been highlighted.¹² Secondary education generally retains a low educational priority due in part to perceptions of a much higher unit cost and limited reach. This is reflected in many situations where education systems responding during crises consist of little more than a network of primary schools, even when crisis conditions extend over many years.

Programmes that do exist for youth in emergency and protracted crisis settings are largely non-formal and short-term. Their utility also is questionable. One recent assessment found that non-formal education “in crisis and conflict settings currently varies widely in its content, delivery modalities, educational quality, the certification provided upon completion of the programme (or lack thereof), and target populations.”¹³

The unintended result of these collective efforts and priorities is that, as emergency-affected children enter puberty and adolescence, and as the potential dangers they face increase, their prospects for accessing the opportunity and protection that education provides narrows, withers, or expires. The final primary school year routinely concludes the educational careers of many young people. As UNHCR explains, “For many refugees, becoming a teenager is also the moment where the educational journey comes to an end.”¹⁴



Photo: Khalil I/Pexels

¹¹ Cirenía Chavez Villegas and Elena Butti, 2020, “‘If you don’t have an education, you are no one’: Understanding the School Experiences of Youth Involved in Drug-Related Crime in Ciudad Juárez and Medellín,” *Journal on Education in Emergencies* 6(1), No. 1 (October), pp. 148-174.

¹² Christopher Talbot, *Education in Conflict Emergencies in Light of the Post-2015 MDGs and EFA Agendas*, Network for International Policies and Cooperation in Education and Training (NORRAG), Working Paper #3, 2013 (April), p. 10.

¹³ Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), 2020, *Non-formal Education for Adolescents and Youth in Crisis and Conflict Contexts: a Proposed Taxonomy and Background Paper*, New York, NY, p. 7.

¹⁴ UNHCR, 2019, *Stepping Up: Refugee Education in Crisis*, p. 25.

II. Purpose

This study will examine the unsettled educational journeys of emergency-affected youth and end with a set of conclusions and recommended next steps for addressing the massive out-of-school youth challenge in emergency and protracted crisis settings much more effectively. The study is designed to: (1) Generate reflection, discussion and action; and (2) Lay the groundwork for a more extensive research effort expected to follow (envisioned as a global survey of the educational needs and preferences of out-of-school youth in emergency-affected contexts).¹⁵

This research effort is supported by NORCAP, a part of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). NORCAP is a global provider of expertise that helps to resolve challenges in the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors. One of its strategic objectives is to "invest in local and national capacity and enhance participation of people at risk."¹⁶ It recognises that humanitarian responses are not sufficiently adapted to the various and specific needs of young people and that youth often have to navigate the transition from childhood to adulthood by themselves, without adequate support or protection. Despite their wide-ranging capacities and unique needs, they often get lost between programming for children and adults. NORCAP aims to increase humanitarian and development stakeholders' participation and engagement with youth.¹⁷



¹⁵ The proposed follow-up research effort features participatory research with out-of-school youth in an array of emergency-affected contexts globally about what kind of education they seek (if they do). The featured researchers would be youth, who would be trained to conduct the field research.

¹⁶ NORCAP Strategy 2022-25

¹⁷ For more information, please refer to: <https://www.nrc.no/who-we-are/about-us/>

III. Methodology

Three decisions

Before undertaking this research, three decisions had to be made. The first concerns the definition of youth. As detailed in section IV, age ranges merely approximate youth as the period of transition from childhood to adulthood, and they vary widely. Some span 20 years or more, while others simply transform youth into older children. Both extremes make it easy to overlook huge numbers of out-of-school youth. The cohort either is so large and varied that inclusion in education programming is unusually difficult, or it is seen as a sub-category of children, and as such may not require specialised attention.

Accordingly, and for the purposes of practicality, the starting point for this study will be the one definition with reasonably broad acceptance: the UN age range of 15 to 24.¹⁸ In an effort to incorporate the issues of adolescence, puberty and protection, however, the starting age of 12, which arose as a significant marker in the EiE field during interviews for this study, was chosen. The 12-year-old starting point aims to approximate the beginning of adolescence and puberty. For the purposes of this study, an adolescent girl or boy will also be considered a female or male youth.

Second, it was decided that only education which is certified or provides a path to certification would be examined. The approach facilitates a focus on recognised forms of education that promise to have practical utility, such as helping youth advance in formal education or training, or compete for jobs. It increases the chances of youth education remaining centred in the education sectors of governments, donor institutions and practitioners, and it ensures that the discussion remains within the education sector and in this case the EiE field, and not youth-related training fields positioned outside it such as workforce development.

The question of whether an education institution or programme is certified is a subject of debate in emergency and protracted crisis settings. This is because the sources of certification may be contested (such as when civil wars separate students from their governments) or unrecognised (such as when new certifications are unfamiliar and not accepted locally). Both of these issues currently are in play in northeast Syria, for example.¹⁹

¹⁸ UNESCO (no date), "[By youth, with youth, for youth.](#)"

¹⁹ Conflict and Coherence, p. 20.

Taking these concerns into account, this study will employ the following set of definitions and qualifications:

- *Certified education* will refer to education that is recognised by national education authorities or the equivalent, for example other institutions cooperating with national or sub-national education authorities.
- *Certified post-primary education* will concern educational, learning, training and apprenticeship opportunities that are:
 - Offered after the primary education level
 - Certified by national education authorities or the equivalent, for example other institutions cooperating with national or sub-national education authorities.
- *Accredited education* will refer to the provision of official recognition or endorsement of an education programme, most likely by an education ministry.²⁰

Third, it is important to clarify the meaning of ‘out-of-school youth.’ For this study, the term will represent:

- Those youth who are not students in formal schools, such as a primary and secondary facilities, which are part of a system of schools, colleges, universities and other educational institutions, in addition to vocational schools or centres that are certified by national education authorities or equivalent.

Desk research

The desk research and analysis for this study covers three dimensions of the youth and EiE challenge:

1. The placement and role of youth in the EiE field
2. Existing certified education programmes for portions of out-of-school youth populations in emergency and protracted crisis settings
3. The situation of out-of-school youth in emergency and protracted crisis settings

The desk research also includes a selection of certified education programmes for out-of-school youth in emergency and protracted crisis settings (see annex 3).

²⁰ Leonora MacEwen. 2009. *Certification counts: Recognizing the learning attainments of displaced and refugee students*, IIEP Policy Brief (No. 1), IIEP-UNESCO, p. 2.

Qualitative Interviews

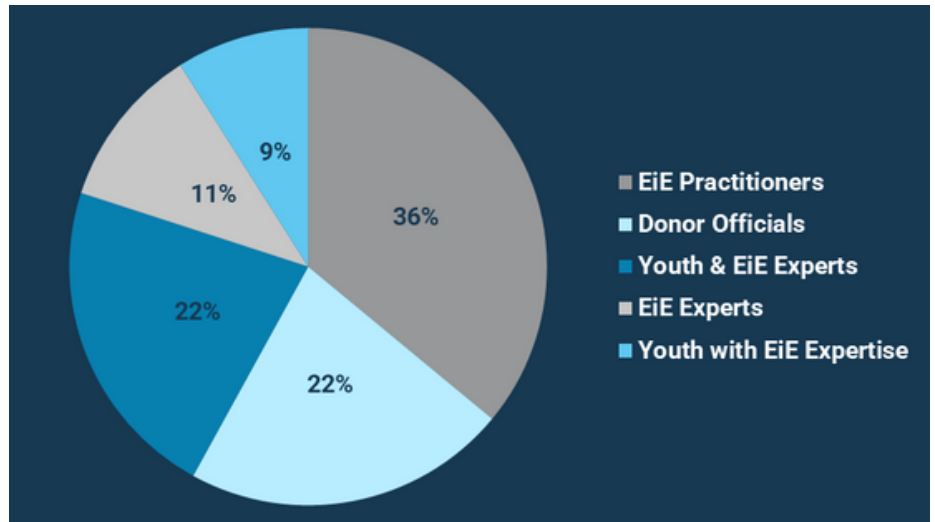
One finding for this research is that documentation on youth and EiE is limited both in terms of breadth and depth. A great deal of important information has yet to be written down. Given the marginal position of youth in the EiE field, it thus was essential to interview professionals about out-of-school youth and education in emergency and protracted crisis contexts. In this way, it was possible to probe key issues and uncover underlying realities.

Drawing on recommendations from prominent EiE and youth experts, the research team approached more than 75 experts to request confidential, voluntary, qualitative interviews. In the end, the team conducted 34 interviews with 36 practitioners, officials, experts and youth:

- 13 leading EiE practitioners working for international NGOs and UN agencies
- Eight officials of multilateral and bilateral donor agencies with experience in funding EiE initiatives
- Eight practitioners with expertise on youth and EiE issues
- Four EiE experts, particularly researchers of aspects of the EiE field
- Three youth with deep knowledge of EiE for out-of-school youth

The interviews were conducted online. Each lasted about an hour, and followed a set of ethical protocols detailed in annex 1. The interviewees' names and organisations are not referenced.

The interview questionnaire also is found in annex 1. The open-ended questions examined trends in the EiE field, education operations in humanitarian settings, donor priorities, youth definitions, gender concerns, the situation of out-of-school female and male youth, child protection, and certified education programmes for youth. The interview data was coded for key trends and correlations.





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IV. The uneasy fit: Youth and the EiE field

Who is a youth?

The EiE field is generally unclear about who youth are or what (in educational terms) they seek. There is no agreed definition of “youth.” In its absence, EiE efforts and orientation focus overwhelmingly on younger children and primary school.

The most elemental challenge facing engagement with and support for youth is the remarkable lack of agreement on exactly who they are. Even efforts to clarify terms by the United Nations invite confusion, as the table below indicates:²¹

Category and age range	Entity/instrument/ organisation
Child: 0-17	UNICEF/UN Convention on Rights of the Child
Adolescent: 10-19 Youth: 15-24 Young people: 10-24	UNICEF/WHO/UNFPA
Youth: 15-24	UN Secretariat/UNESCO/ILO
Youth: 15-32	UN Habitat (Youth Fund)

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines for Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises wrestle with the absence of agreement on youth definitions by incorporating the UN age ranges for children, adolescents and young people, selecting one of the UN definitions for youth (ages 15-24) – and adding two other age-based concepts: younger adolescents (ages 10–14) and older adolescents (ages 15–19).²² According to the various definitions from UN entities and IASC, a person between the age of 15 and 17 is a child, an adolescent, an older adolescent, a young person and a youth – all at the same time.²³

²¹ United Nations Youth, n.d., [Definition of Youth](#), p. 2.

²² Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). 2020. *With Us & for Us: Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises*, UNICEF and NRC (for the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, November), p. 21.

²³ INEE draws from UN definitions for the concepts of youth, adolescent and young person: “Youth are people between 15 and 24 years and adolescents are people between the ages of 10 and 19. Together they form the largest category of young people, those aged between 10 and 24 years.” Source: <https://inee.org/eie-glossary/youth-and-adolescents>

Adding to the confusion is the fact that these many sets of definitions still do not reflect or include how age definitions for youth routinely are even broader than the UN Habitat definition (ages 15-32). The African Union, for example, uses the age range of 15-35.²⁴ So does the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).²⁵ The Organization of American States (OAS) refuses to identify a single definition because “We try to respect the [different youth] definitions of the member states.”²⁶ In terms of envisioning youth as an age range, there is no agreed definition. An immediate outgrowth of this is the insufficient disaggregation of data according to education level or age category (as well as gender and disability) in the EiE field. Having an agreed youth definition likely would enhance prospects for the collection, analysis and application of relevant disaggregated data.

In many cultures, being a youth is not tied to an age range. Instead, it refers to the period of social transformation in a person’s life when they gain recognition as adults, which frequently is marked by marriage in a formal setting. While “Definitions vary from one context to another depending on socio-cultural, institutional, economic and political factors,”²⁷ youth in emergency settings are among those who often find it difficult to leave youthhood and enter adulthood. Lacking the ability to marry formally and gain adulthood, many instead remain in a humiliating state of “waithood,” where they await the status of recognised adulthood.²⁸ In many cultures, a female or male youth cannot be considered an adult woman or man unless they are married. Since it is increasingly difficult for many youth to get married, across the world “the youth identity is increasingly difficult to escape.”²⁹ Even in the absence of their recognition as adults, many young people carry out adult responsibilities, such as caring for children and younger siblings and providing for their families.

What is EiE, and who is it for?

INEE describes EiE as follows:

“Education in emergencies refers to the quality, inclusive learning opportunities for all ages in situations of crisis, including early childhood development, primary, secondary, non-formal, technical, vocational, higher and adult education. Education in emergencies provides physical, psychosocial, and cognitive protection that saves and sustains lives. Common situations of crisis in which education in emergencies is essential include conflicts, protracted crises, situations of violence, forced displacement, disasters, and public health emergencies. Education in emergencies is a wider concept than 'emergency education response' which is an essential part of it.”³⁰

²⁴ African Union, 2006, [African Youth Charter](#), p. 11.

²⁵ ASEAN, 2022, [The 2nd ASEAN Youth Development Index](#).

²⁶ OAS, n.d., [OAS: More Rights for More People](#).

²⁷ Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), [INEE Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery](#), INEE, 2010 (2nd edition), p. 123.

²⁸ Alcinda Honwana, [Youth, Waithood, and Protest Movements in Africa](#), African Arguments, 2013 (August).

²⁹ Marc Sommers, 2015, [The Outcast Majority: War, Development, and Youth in Africa](#). Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, p. 12.

³⁰ Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), 2019, [INEE Strategic Framework 2018-2023](#), INEE, p. 4.

Although the INEE definition refers to many forms of education and covers many ages, a second INEE publication notes: “All children have the right to education.”³¹ There is no corollary reference to youth. Among seminal stakeholders in the EiE field, the emphasis on children and primary education is often emphatic:

- The Global Partnership for Education (GPE), a foundational donor organisation for education, issued an operational framework for effective support for fragile and conflict-affected states in 2022. The document states: “Strengthening resilience and mitigating the systemic impacts of crisis continue to be critical to GPE’s mission.” It also makes clear that children’s best interests are of paramount concern, and adds: “Ensuring the protection of children’s rights, as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, is the first consideration in all engagements.” Children are mentioned 14 times in the document, while youth are mentioned just once.³²
- The 2022 annual results report of Education Cannot Wait (ECW), another foundational donor organisation, reveals that primary education “continues to receive the majority share of funding allocated,” which amounts to “71.5 per cent of total programme investment.” Secondary education received 17.4 per cent of ECW’s annual budget, which represented “an increase over prior years.”³³
- A “rigorous literature review” of education in crisis settings found that “very few studies (...) focused explicitly on youth.” The authors also found that “research on access to secondary school and vocational training for youth is extremely limited.”³⁴
- Education systems emerging from humanitarian crises start largely as a network of primary schools and may scarcely expand beyond primary schooling during periods of protracted crisis. Many years of civil war and ongoing crisis in Yemen, for example, has left the country’s education comprised of “primary schooling and little else.” Indeed, “Humanitarian conditions have shrunk the education system’s reach. With the exception of small numbers of secondary and other post-primary schools, and some support to the university level, Yemen’s education system focuses almost exclusively on primary school, and primary school-aged children.”³⁵



Photo: Jyotirmoy Gupta/Unsplash

³¹ Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), 2009, Education in Emergencies: Including Everyone INEE Pocket Guide to Inclusive Education, INEE (February), p. 7.

³² Global Partnership for Education, 2022, Operational Framework for Effective Support in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts (June), pp. 2, 5.

³³ Education Cannot Wait. 2022. We Have Promises to Keep: And Miles to Go Before We Sleep (August), p. 17.

³⁴ Dana Burde, Ozen Guven, Jo Kelcey, Heddy Lahmann and Khaled Al-Abbadi. 2015. What Works to Promote Children’s Educational Access, Quality of Learning, and Wellbeing in Crisis-Affected Contexts: Education Rigorous Literature Review, Department for International Development (DfID).

³⁵ Marc Sommers, Holly-Jane Howell and Obai Ezzi. 2022. Conflict and Coherence: Investigating Humanitarian-Development Coherence for Education in the Middle East and North Africa Region: Case Studies of Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen (July), pp. 37, 29.

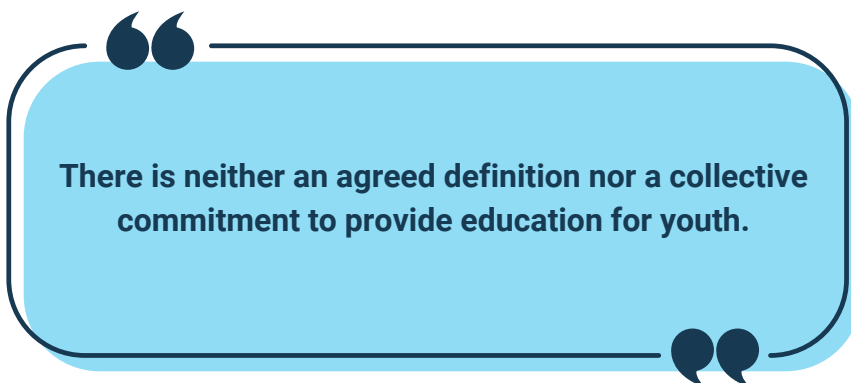
The modest position of youth in the EiE field is intimated in a number of ways, including in the following examples of definitions that transform youth into a subgroup of children:

- In one review of the EiE literature, youth are referred to only as an undefined component of the child category: “Although it is recognised that ‘children’ and ‘youth’ have been distinguished in some research literature, for the duration of this report, the term ‘children’ encompasses youth.”³⁶
- In one ECW publication, boys and girls are defined as being between the ages of six and 13, and youth between 14 and 18.³⁷
- In a second ECW publication, the age range for boys and girls is five to 13 and for youth 10 to 15.³⁸

The EiE field tends to shoehorn youth into the child category, positioned far below the priorities and investments reserved for children or overlooked entirely. There is neither an agreed definition nor a collective commitment to provide education for youth. The low profile of youth may also be intentional, given that although “inclusive education efforts are often documented,” practitioners “are often understandably reluctant to record whom they fail to reach.”³⁹ In emergency and protracted crisis settings, youth stand as a vast cohort that may not be reached and is sometimes unrecognised.

These findings are broadly reflected in the interview data. The most consistent finding was that the EiE field only works with young people up to the age of 18 (either topping out at 18 or ending on a person’s 18th birthday). As an experienced official with an NGO observed,

“Youth aged 18 and above: they aren’t mentioned [in the EiE field] because I don’t think there’s much available for them, to be honest. Maybe there are more vocational training opportunities. But other than that, I haven’t come across certified education for youth.”



There is neither an agreed definition nor a collective commitment to provide education for youth.

³⁶ Pina Tarricone, Kemran Mestan and Ian Teo. 2021. [Building Resilient Education Systems: A Rapid Review of the Education in Emergencies Literature](#) (August), fn. 1, p. 7.

³⁷ Education Cannot Wait. 2019. [Education Cannot Wait Facilitated: Multi-Year Resilience Program: Puntland 2019-2022](#), p. 25.

³⁸ Education Cannot Wait. 2019. [Education Cannot Wait \(ECW\): Facilitate Multi-Year Resilience Programme: Somaliland 2019-2021](#), p. 20.

³⁹ Helen Pinnock and Marian Hodgkin. 2010. “[Education Access for All](#),” *Forced Migration Review* (Vol. 35), p. 35.



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Many interviewees emphasized that agencies in the EiE field do not work with anyone over age 18. A UN official stated this plainly, “Our mandate is really age 18 and below.” “The ages being addressed are up to 18 years old,” added a donor official. A practitioner for a major NGO in the EiE field explained that, for his organization, “Typically, the primary [school] age is 6 to 11 or 6 to 12. Then for the secondary age, it’s typically [ages] 13 to 17 or so. And then early childhood education is for [children] ages 3 to 6.” The common end point of age 18 often transforms youth in the EiE field as those at the uppermost end of the field’s age scale. As a veteran NGO official stated emphatically,

“Youth in EiE are those up to age 18. They don’t go beyond age 18. If we want adolescents, it’s ages 10 to 15. Then youth become ages 15 to 18.”

The contortions around youth in EiE (or not) reportedly are tied to the origins of the field. An expert noted that the tendency to focus on children (and not youth) has important roots in EiE’s history:

“If we think back to the start of EiE, the focus was on both education and protection. Not those under age five – that is, pre-primary – and not those above age 12 or 13. EiE has been focused on the ages of five to 12 or 13.”

Given this history, statements about limits on who is a youth – or whether youth should be identified and included – gain clarity. One common conception is that a youth only refers to those who qualify for tertiary education – an exceptionally small proportion of all emergency-affected youth cohorts globally. As a UN official explained, “Who is a youth? That’s a very good question. It’s ages 18 to 24. That’s for tertiary education.” One donor official explained how this works at his agency:

“We cover ages three to 18. Children and adolescents are up to age 18. We don’t talk about youth. That’s our current strategic plan, and that’s our plan now. Why don’t we talk about youth? It was very hard to decide on. It was due to priorities. We don’t have unlimited resources. We decided to do primary and secondary school up to age 18 and not tertiary education. We’ve [recently] tried to focus on adolescents who are ages 12 to 18. That’s our definition of adolescents.”

To be sure, some EiE experts consider vocational training to be an option for youth – that is, people over 18 – in addition to university studies. Both options have exceptionally high unit costs, an issue that will surface later in this report.

The absence of clarity over the definition and role of youth in the EiE field is echoed in conflicting reporting about the approach of the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) to both. The agency is arguably the most influential institution in the EiE field globally, given its extensive network of country offices, direct engagement in emergency and protracted crisis settings, and prominent positions in a host of important EiE-related initiatives and institutions, including the Global Education Cluster,⁴⁰ the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies and ECW. UNICEF is also the co-lead usually with Save the Children for education clusters on the ground in 29 countries, regions and territories.⁴¹

UNICEF’s EiE work focuses largely on children, with some mention of adolescents, reflecting its traditional orientation toward children.⁴² Its connection to adolescents, and much less youth, is more recent. After recognising that “UNICEF had paid inadequate attention to adolescent children,” it founded the Adolescent Development and Participation Unit (ADAP) in 2001.⁴³ On the homepage of its website, ADAP mentions youth, adolescents, young people and young women, in addition to an emphasis on girls.⁴⁴

More recently, it has established a Voices of Youth initiative. The education page on the Voices of Youth website mentions youth and young people, but not adolescents.⁴⁵ An EiE expert also noted that the Generation Unlimited programme, of which UNICEF was a founding partner, had been “launched with much emphasis in 2018” but had been “slowly de-prioritized.”⁴⁶

UNICEF was regularly mentioned in interviews with EiE experts, donor officials and members of practitioner institutions. Their impression of its approach to youth in the EiE field was uncertain. One official said: “UNICEF doesn’t talk about youth.” At the same time, although “there’s a focus on younger children in EiE,” there are simultaneously “increasing programmes for youth ages 15 to 24.” Another official said the agency tried “to avoid the word ‘youth’” for two reasons: because “there are different definitions of youth” and “the UN definition of youth doesn’t include all adolescents.” For UNICEF, “‘children’ are ages 0-18, ‘young people’ are ages 10-24, and ‘adolescents’ are ages 12-18,” the same official said. As such, the UN’s youth definition does not include adolescents between the ages of 12 and 14.

One donor official also observed that during the tenure of UNICEF’s executive director Henrietta Fore from January 2018 to July 2021, adolescents and youth “were a key priority” but that the institutional emphasis “had changed after her exit.”

⁴⁰ An INEE report explained that the highly influential Global Education Cluster is “co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children under the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Cluster System, [and] coordinates education for settings with internally displaced persons (IDPs) and local emergency response.” Education Clusters in emergency settings routinely are co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children. Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). 2021. Humanitarian-Development Coherence in Education: Working together in crisis contexts, INEE, New York, NY., p. 21.

⁴¹ Source: <https://www.educationcluster.net/where-we-work>

⁴² See, for example, its website on education in emergencies (<https://www.unicef.org/education/emergencies>) and “Goal Area 2: Every child learns” chapter in its Global Annual Results Report 2021: Humanitarian Action (June 2022, pp. 51-54).

⁴³ Dana Peebles, 2010, Final Report: Evaluation of UNICEF’s Programme and Work in Relation to Adolescents and the Participation of Children and Young People, Kartini International (July), p. v.

⁴⁴ Source: <https://www.unicef.org/mena/adolescent-development-and-participation-adap>

⁴⁵ Source: <https://www.voicesofyouth.org/topic/education>

⁴⁶ For more information, see: <https://www.generationunlimited.org/>



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Three final observations sum up the quandary surrounding the position of youth in the EiE field. As one official who coordinates EiE action put it: “We haven’t defined youth anywhere (...) We don’t have clarity on it.” A veteran EiE practitioner and former UN official said he had “never seen two organisations working in EiE that have the same understanding of who youth are (...) UNHCR would tell you one definition, UNICEF would say something else and UNESCO another altogether.” As for the reason for the confusion, he said: “I was never able to find the reason why.”

One donor official described how their agency took advantage of the uncertain position of youth in their education work: “If we only mention ‘children’, it will come across as only primary.” That is, that the agency only funds primary schooling. “That’s the reason we mention youth: to signal that we also support secondary education. We throw in ‘young people’ or ‘youth’ every now and again” to send that signal. We do this because the world is so focused on primary school as the focus of public investment.”



Photo: Ingrid Prestetun/NRC

V. The dominance of primary education

Four reasons

In stark contrast to the wide variance over who is a youth and whether they are an EiE target group or responsibility, there was overwhelming agreement about the centrality of children and primary schooling in the EiE field. Comments about the position of primary schooling, particularly the earliest grades, as the foundational EiE component were widespread: “EiE largely focuses on primary education,” one veteran EiE practitioner said. “EiE traditionally is strong in primary education,” a long-time EiE agency official remarked. The big providers of EiE in the field “are only targeting primary schools,” a third practitioner explained. Primary education is “the low hanging fruit,” a fourth official said.

The four main reasons that interviewees gave for this priority were all fundamental. The first is practical. Primary schools are relatively uncomplicated to set up. “It’s easy,” one EiE expert said. “There’s no harm, and it’s not that difficult to provide education to young children.” An EiE educator explained: “It’s easier to start from scratch with primary school instead of addressing gaps for older students.” That is in part because it is relatively easy to find teachers. “There are more people who can help teach primary school in refugee and [internally displaced] communities,” one youth leader said.

Primary schooling also is seen as the starting point for everything that follows. “We need to focus on primary education, because without a strong primary school setup, [children] will never get to secondary school,” an EiE expert working in refugee settings said.

There also appears to be an inherent practicality that informs the focus on primary education. One international NGO official working at the regional level said that because “parents need to work, do household chores, and so on, it’s best to send younger children to school.” The same official also underscored an underlying reality in many EiE settings, that primary schooling is all there is: “Parents send their older children to work, and daughters get married at 10, 11 or 12 (...) For most youth, after primary school, education is, like, done.”

A second foundational reason for the emphasis on primary education is its inherent connection to child protection. Here, it is important to note two points. One is that protection via education is not necessarily connected to a formal primary school. Instead, it is often linked to basic education, envisioned as the starting place for learning. Although basic education can refer to primary schooling, it is sometimes equated with nonformal education that focuses on literacy and numeracy.⁴⁷

The other is that the vision of protection via education largely concerns the safety of learning environments, such as primary schools and child-friendly spaces. Taken together, the emphasis is often on “a safe and protected learning environment,” according to one EiE practitioner. Sometimes there is more focus on protection than education, particularly in the early stages of an emergency. One veteran protection expert said that although child-friendly spaces were expected to “combine non-formal education and psychosocial support,” there was frequently “a lack of coordination regarding child-friendly spaces and formal schools.” One EiE practitioner said that in the schools she managed child protection was a basic policy that applied to all beneficiaries. The concept of protection via education or learning largely refers to children of primary school age when they are in school or a child-friendly space.



Photo: Maria Sellevold/NORCAP

⁴⁷ INEE defines basic education in broad terms: “Basic education refers to formal, non-formal, and informal public and private activities intended to meet the basic learning needs of people of all ages. It includes instruction at the first or foundation level, on which subsequent learning can be based, encompassing early childhood and primary (or elementary) education for children, as well as education in literacy, general knowledge, and life skills for youth and adults. Basic Education may extend into secondary education in some countries.” Source: <https://inee.org/eie-glossary/basic-education>

A third important reason for the pronounced EiE emphasis on primary education is its alignment with host nation priorities. As one veteran EiE practitioner put it: “Ministry of Education officials and systems focus on primary schools.” This is not always the case – Uganda, for example, instituted its universal secondary education policy to considerable fanfare in 2007⁴⁸ – but another EiE practitioner said: “If you look at the national statistics in West and Central Africa, you see that most of the national budgets [for education] mostly focus on primary education.”

There appears to be a youth dimension in this emphasis. One EiE expert said: “Governments know that unemployed youth are dangerous. But what if jobs aren’t there? The cost-benefit is: invest in primary school.” This statement contains bias against youth – in this case, the unproven assumption that unemployed youth are inherently troublesome – that will be addressed later in this report. It also describes a logic for primary school investment. A common government aim is to ensure the availability of primary education.

The favoured position of primary schools in education ministries also supports the priorities of other stakeholders, among them large international organisations active in education during humanitarian emergencies and protracted crises.⁴⁹ As an official of one such organisation said: “The bigger EiE actors see their role as supporting the governments.” Just like the large international agencies, “the governments also prioritise primary education.” The same official highlighted the primacy of UNICEF in this setup:

“The biggest actor [in EiE] is UNICEF. UNICEF aligns with the government. So, the focus is on supporting the government education system. The focus is on the basic education system.”

A second EiE official with significant field experience with UN agencies including UNICEF, also discussed this issue:

“Organisations like UNICEF, who are the big providers in EiE, are only targeting primary schools. Maybe because that’s where they can show achievements in numbers. It is about showing what EiE can achieve in a country; a strategic decision to increase budgets and fundraising. Demonstrating results and attracting funding.”

⁴⁸ See, for example, Kristen J. Molyneaux, 2011, “[Uganda's Universal Secondary Education Policy and its Effect on 'Empowered' Women: How Reduced Income and Moonlighting Activities Differentially Impact Male and Female Teachers](#),” *Research in Comparative and International Education*, Vol. 6(1): 62-78.

⁴⁹ State-implementing agency linkages also are manifest in the Global Compact on Refugees, which calls for governments of nations hosting refugees, together with relevant stakeholders (such as UNHCR), to “contribute resources and expertise to expand and enhance the quality and inclusiveness of national education systems to facilitate access by refugee and host community children (both boys and girls), adolescents and youth to primary, secondary and tertiary education.” An overarching goal is for refugee boys and girls to (re-)gain access to education within three months of arrival in a country of asylum. United Nations, 2018, [Global Compact on Refugees](#), New York, p. 26.

Children, as opposed to youth, were also noted as natural sources for garnering support. One EiE expert said they were “better fundraisers than youth: their faces and their cause.” A second veteran EiE expert said: “The picture of a child in school is easy to generate support for.”

The reference to funding and the promotion of good works connects to the fourth main reason for the dominance of primary education that emerged from the interview data: donor agency preferences and tendencies. Interviewees registered the collective view that most donors for EiE strongly favoured support for primary education. The motivations for this trend, however, were varied. A common aside was that delivering funding for primary education in EiE settings is a well-established practice. “Donors prefer to fund primary-level learning and education-looking activities, like educational materials and teacher training,” one veteran EiE expert said. “They’re just funding what they’ve always been funding.” A youth and EiE expert added: “Donors prefer to fund elementary school learning and getting primary-age kids back into school.”

This traditional funding stream also produces the sort of numbers that many donors require for their reporting. “Many donors want to see results immediately,” one EiE practitioner said. “Donors care about numbers and ask for numbers.” A veteran child protection official provided his take on the compelling pull of donor agencies toward children in primary school:

“Donors love supporting young children. We all love supporting primary school. The donor officials can take back to their agencies photographs of young children in school. That’s what they want: it’s powerful and compelling. It also appeals to politicians who support donor agencies.”

A light blue rounded rectangular box with a dark blue border and two dark blue speech bubble icons at the top left and bottom right corners. The text inside is centered and bold.

Delivering funding for primary education in EiE settings is a well-established practice.

While all of this may be the case, the motivations are much the same for practitioners. Many interviewees noted that supporting and working in primary schools was a shared donor-practitioner priority. “When you look at [education data] figures, you see huge cohorts at the primary level, as it is easier to capture them than secondary [school-aged students]. These figures push donors and actors [on the ground] to work at the primary level,” one donor official said. Another provided a somewhat different perspective. In their view, donors fund primary schooling so heavily in part because it is the main option they are provided. “As donors, when we offer funding, I don’t think it’s only for primary school,” the official explained. “But most of the focus of practitioners is on primary school. It’s easier to provide primary education than post-primary education.”



Photo: Ayesha/NRC

Two outcomes

Primary education is unquestionably the EiE field’s main area of specialisation. There are two significant outcomes:

First, it has cultivated additional interest in and support for providing education to very young children. Many interviewees said early childhood education (ECE), sometimes referred to by the broader practice area of early childhood development (ECD) was on the rise in EiE. One donor official noted: “ECD is a new consideration for education.” A veteran EiE practitioner said: “There’s been a great shift to early childhood education,” adding that it was “a great development.” Given limited funding for EiE, and indications of a kind of zero-sum game framework for ECE vs educational support for youth, one EiE expert said: “ECE is growing up faster in EiE, and is seen as more valuable than education for youth. This is a new focus area.” A second EiE practitioner speculated that ECE was a component of the field’s efforts to pare down its area of specialisation:

“We don’t focus on upper primary [that is, the latter years of primary school]. That’s where children learn more critical thinking and problem-solving skills. But we shy away from trying to address complicated issues in the education field. I think that’s why we favor lower primary and ECE.”

A second outcome relates to the consequence of focusing so much on getting primary schools up and running. Concern over EiE’s sustainability on the ground, including its connection to and support of education systems, was the predominant issue that interviewees raised in response to the question: “What does EiE not do as well?” The humanitarian orientation of EiE was one point highlighted. “EiE responds to immediate needs well,” one veteran UN official said. “Although they aren’t sustainable.” An EiE expert said the community was essentially humanitarian in its orientation, and that as a result “we don’t need to focus on anything except meeting immediate needs. We’re reinforcing our own silos.” A second EiE expert suggested a reason for this: “In crisis settings, programmes are designed for the convenience of funding and not on-the-ground needs (...) Is this an EiE problem or a funding mechanism problem?”

Therein lay a kind of uneasy trap for the EiE field. Many interviewees pointed to the short-term nature of funding, and the limits it imposes on those running initiatives on the ground. It is one factor in the widely noted EiE inclination toward immediate, and often temporary, results. But interviewees said it was not the only one. The fact that education system support was not yet an EiE speciality was highlighted as a much more significant trend. “I still think we’re not that good at bridging [from] emergency to sustainability and continuity in the education cycle,” one long-time UN official with extended EiE experience said. An EiE expert went further:

“EiE has not done well in thinking through how to shift the [emergency] education sector towards system-strengthening and linking to development work. EiE is still focused on learner-level resilience and school-level resilience – but not system-level resilience. If you look at EiE minimum standards, they are about learners and schools, not systems. And because EiE has been so reactive to crises, there hasn’t been a sufficient enough ability to see and learn from what they’ve done in the past. The EiE community has distanced itself from the development community and systems work.”

Whatever the cause of the separation between EiE activities and formal systems, the low status of EiE in humanitarian work persists. Some interviewees called attention to the frustration this can cause. One donor official shrugged: “We can’t influence the education system.” A second said: “EiE can be siloed away from the formal system,” and an EiE expert stated: “EiE struggles for legitimacy even in protracted crises. It hasn’t tackled that legitimacy problem.” Taken together, the interview data evoked the image of an emergency-focused field burdened with responsibility, lacking a prominent profile or sufficient funds, and almost completely absorbed with addressing the urgent educational needs of young children.



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VI. Gender dynamics: Implications of the focus on girls

Overview

A recent study uncovered “no gender difference in the overall incidence of childhood violence.”⁵⁰ A second observed: “In many countries, girls are disproportionately excluded and disadvantaged in education; in others, boys underperform and drop out at higher rates than girls.”⁵¹ There are sound arguments for getting both boys and girls, and female and male youth, into school, particularly during the instability and risks inherent in emergency and protracted crisis settings.

Girls are “routinely targeted during violent conflict simply for attempting to go to school.” They also may be at risk of “early and forced marriage, trafficking, early pregnancy, and gender-based violence.”⁵² Girls are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than boys in conflict settings,⁵³ and they are particularly at risk of sexual violence and harassment, including on the way to and from school. They are also more likely to experience psychological bullying, including over their physical appearance, both in-person and online.⁵⁴

Boys are much more likely than girls to be involved in physical fights, experience physical bullying and be subjected to harsh discipline.⁵⁵ Most are unlikely to attain traditional manhood expectations in emergency settings, which may drive some boys, and male youth and men into crime and violence.⁵⁶ Adolescent boys are twice as likely as to take their own lives than adolescent girls,⁵⁷ and they are less likely to report sexual abuse. Given “widely held myths that boys and men cannot become victims of assault or abuse, especially of a sexual nature,” they may not seek help “under the assumption that they will not be believed.”⁵⁸ In some countries, such as Burundi and Timor-Leste, boys are more likely to be out of school because of recruitment into armed forces or pressure to undertake paid employment.⁵⁹

⁵⁰ David K. Evans, Susannah Hares, Peter Holland, and Amina Mendez Acosta, *Adolescent Girls’ Safety In and Out of School: Evidence on Physical and Sexual Violence from across Sub-Saharan Africa*, Center for Global Development, Working Paper 597, 2021 (December), p. 8.

⁵¹ Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). 2019. *INEE Guidance Note on Gender*. New York, NY., p. 21.

⁵² Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), *Guidance Note: Gender: Gender Equality in and through Education*, INEE, 2019, p. 12.

⁵³ United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI), Education Cannot Wait (ECW), Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), *EiE-GenKit*, 2021, p. 20.

⁵⁴ Safe to Learn, *Gender Technical Note: Annex to the Safe to Learn strategy and result framework 2021-2024*, 2021, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁵ Safe to Learn, *Gender Technical Note, (Annex to the Safe to Learn strategy and result framework 2021-24)*, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁶ Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), *Guidance Note: Gender: Gender Equality in and through Education*, INEE, 2019, p. 12.

⁵⁷ The rates are 10.5 per 100,000 for boys and 4.1 per 100,000 for girls. Danuta Wasserman, Qi Cheng and Guo-Xin Jiang, “Global suicide rates among young people aged 15-19,” *World Psychiatry* 2005 4(2): 114–120.

⁵⁸ Henny Slegh, Warren Spielberg, and Cody Ragonese, *Masculinities and Male Trauma: Making the Connections*, Promundo, 2021, p. 7.

⁵⁹ United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI), Education Cannot Wait (ECW), Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), *EiE-GenKit*, 2021, p. 20.

Despite the presence of dual sets of risks and challenges that limit the ability of young females and males to secure an education, there is a pronounced focus in the EiE field on the promotion of girls' education. The rationale is made clear by the UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI). Under a headline that reads "Gender in education in emergencies," the organisation's website states: "At a time of record levels of displacement, protracted conflict and climate emergency, never has the need been greater to ensure girls get the education they need to rebuild their lives and shape their communities."⁶⁰ A second example surfaces in UNICEF's global annual results report series. Their Every Child Learns publication twice highlights the significance of girls in its work by positioning them next to all marginalised children. Boys, in contrast, are consistently referred to as less disadvantaged.⁶¹

Three observations

The seriousness of protection and education-related risks that young females and males face in emergencies and protracted settings prompts three observations.

First, research reveals that there are implicit meanings for "gender" and "youth" in the worlds of international development and security. Instead of both terms referring to males as well as females, they have quietly been distorted. In the development world, they "generally delineate separate population groups. Comments from officials and experts (...) attest to this perverse construction of reality." One donor official, for example, said that in practice there was no overlap between the two. "Gender" generally refers to women and girls, while "youth" largely refers to boys and young men. These implicit meanings were found to be common.

Youth are also normally "positioned behind or beneath gender." In both notions, female youth are "mostly forgotten."⁶² The frequent "conflation between gender equality and the needs of women and girls" overshadows the gender challenges that their male counterparts face and rarely highlights the specific difficulties that female youth confront.⁶³



Photo: NRC

⁶⁰ United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI). n.d. *Gender-Responsive Education in Crisis & Conflict: Putting Gender Equality at the Heart of Education in Emergencies*.

⁶¹ The same sentence is stated twice: "UNICEF, in collaboration with UNESCO and the World Bank, continued monitoring national education responses to the pandemic and the status of school reopening, including monitoring the strategies countries applied to support marginalized children and girls." In UNICEF, 2022, *Global Annual Results Report 2021: Goal Area 2: Every Child Learns* (June), pp. 4, 13.

⁶² Marc Sommers, 2015, *The Outcast Majority: War, Development, and Youth in Africa*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, p. 157. Interviews of experts in the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) field revealed virtually the same set of perceptions: "many of the CVE experts interviewed for this paper reported that 'youth' contains a common unspoken reference to male youth" while "the primary inherent meaning of 'gender' is women." Marc Sommers, 2019, *Youth and the Field of Countering Violent Extremism*, Promundo-US (Equimundo), p. 17.

⁶³ Delphine Brun. 2017. *Man and Boys in Displacement: Assistance and Protection Challenges for Unaccompanied Boys and Men in Refugee Contexts*. CARE and Promundo, p. 14.

Alongside the virtual invisibility of female youth are negative perceptions of male youth. The stability of countries with demographic profiles that feature large youth cohorts, known as youth bulges – including virtually every country in the Africa and the Middle East – is perceived to be threatened by the presence of large male youth populations. This has helped to cultivate distorted perceptions of “male youth exclusively as perpetrators of violence,” and “women as inherently peaceful, and young women [or female youth], by virtue of their idealized innocence, as inherently the most peaceful.”⁶⁴ Youth programmes may focus mainly on male youth in an attempt to address the threat they are seen to embody.⁶⁵

Second, the spotlight on girls’ education often fails to highlight the fact that they encounter growing risks on reaching puberty and becoming female youth, when the prospect of becoming a child bride and facing sexual threats and violence significantly increase. This is underscored in the extreme by the behaviour of the Taliban in Afghanistan, who “threatened girls to stop attending school past puberty” and “threw battery acid in the faces of adolescent schoolgirls.”⁶⁶ Referring to young females of this age simply as girls masks the particular severity of risks that female youth in emergencies and protracted settings must often confront.

“Extensive evidence of girls’ disadvantages in accessing learning and education,” including that “unstable environments and social instability increase the likelihood that girls experiencing displacement will drop out of school,” highlights the significance of ensuring that their education receives attention and a concerted response.⁶⁷

A recent pair of studies reflect the EiE field’s prominent emphasis on girls’ education. INEE’s first two Mind the Gap reports spotlight the dire educational challenges that girls face during emergencies and protracted crises. Boys’ challenges are not highlighted. However, the reports indicate that in some ways girls outperform boys, such as in secondary school completion rates and, in many crisis-affected countries, access to vocational training.⁶⁸

Alongside the virtual invisibility of female youth are negative perceptions of male youth.

⁶⁴ Mieke Lopes Cardozo, Sean Higgins, Elizabeth Maber, Cyril O. Brandt, Nebil Kusmallah and Marielle Le Mat. 2015. *Literature Review: Youth Agency, Peacebuilding and Education*, Research Consortium Education and Peacebuilding, University of Amsterdam.

⁶⁵ Marc Sommers, 2015, *The Outcast Majority: War, Development, and Youth in Africa*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, pp. 157-8.

⁶⁶ Bill Van Esveld and Elin Martínez. 2016. *Lost Years: Secondary Education for Children in Emergencies*, Human Rights Watch (first published in Open Democracy).

⁶⁷ Nicole Dulieu, Silvia Arlini, Mya Gordon, and Allyson Krupar. “Girls’ and Boys’ Voices on the Gendered Experience of Learning During COVID-19 in Countries Affected by Displacement,” *Journal on Education in Emergencies*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (June), pp. 73-110, p. 78.

⁶⁸ Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). 2021. *Mind the gap: The state of girls’ education in crisis and conflict*, New York, NY, p. 13.

Encouragingly, one of the educational approaches highlighted in “Mind the Gap 2” is distance education. Initiatives tied to the too-often severe impact of gender-based violence in schools (also in the “Mind the Gap 2” study) further communicate a sequence of data revealing school-based threats affecting boys as well as girls. Yet in both sections of the report, the focus steadfastly remains on girl students. The reports also make no explicit mention of the increase in protection risks once girls reach puberty and become female youth (or adolescent girls).⁶⁹

The third observation concerns how the emphatic focus on educational access for girls tends to overshadow two sets of serious risks that boys and male youth face. The first concerns overlooked challenges. As UNESCO has noted: “While forced migration greatly increases the vulnerability of girls to exclusion from education, gender-based violence and early marriage, displaced boys, particularly those who are unaccompanied, face hardships that are often ignored.” These may include being “viewed as a threat, placed separately from women and families, and restricted mobility.” The second concerns educational performance: “Boys in many countries are at greater risk than girls of repeating grades, failing to complete different education levels and having poorer learning outcomes in school. No less than 132 million boys of primary and secondary school age are out of school [globally].”⁷⁰

Boys in many countries are at greater risk than girls of repeating grades, failing to complete different education levels and having poorer learning outcomes in school. No less than 132 million boys of primary and secondary school age are out of school [globally].

The precarious situation of male youth, and particularly those who are single, in humanitarian settings surfaces as an especially overlooked concern. “The myths that surround and shape humanitarian interventions, such as the belief that men are strong enough to cope without support, that women and girls are always and in all circumstances the most vulnerable, or that they are victims while men are consigned to the role of perpetrators, prevent a proper analysis of the situation (...) The situation of unaccompanied boys and single men [male youth are clearly included in this category] is too rarely understood and considered (...) Single males, in particular those above the age of 18, when given the chance of expressing their views to humanitarian organisations, express the sense of always being the last served.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). 2022. *Mind the Gap 2: Seeking safe and sustainable solutions for girls’ education in crises*. INEE. New York, NY.

⁷⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). 2022. *Leave No Child Behind: Global Report on Boys’ Disengagement from Education*, UNESCO, Paris, pp. 66, 3.

⁷¹ Delphine Brun. 2017. *Man and Boys in Displacement: Assistance and Protection Challenges for Unaccompanied Boys and Men in Refugee Contexts*. CARE and Promundo, pp. 20, 18.

The importance of promoting educational access for girls in emergencies and protracted crises is unassailable. However, the EiE field’s pronounced emphasis on it does not necessarily benefit female youth. As opposed to younger schoolgirls, female youth are likely will require sanitary products to attend school during menstruation and face significantly heightened risk of sexual threats and violence. Risks at, or during commutes to and from school may be so great that female youth and their parents, partners, husbands or guardians may be forced to choose between education and protection – particularly if attending school is the only way for them to access learning. Some female youth may also marry, become pregnant or both, or feel significant pressure to work or attend to household duties during school hours.

In these and perhaps other ways, highlighting the different protection risks and pressures that female youth may face compared with younger girls promises a more nuanced response by EiE practitioners and donors. At the same time, the focus on girls’ education may also make it more difficult for EiE stakeholders to address the significant protection and education-related issues that many boys and male youth face.

The gender take in interviews

Discussions of during interviews revealed a subtle appreciation of the gender-specific challenges that girls and boys and female and male youth face during emergencies and protracted crises. They also communicated a strong sense that EiE programming largely takes place in schools that have inflexible policies. As the combination appears to be a poor match with the needs and priorities of most youth in emergencies and protracted crises, the result is almost predictable: most are not in school in part because institutions are not set up to accommodate them.



A conspicuous example of this tendency is the inadequate response to the rather obvious requirements that would help keep female youth in school. Particularly notable was the lack of sanitary towels for female youth in many if not most schools. One refugee youth leader, for example, explained that “female youth have specific needs that boys don’t have.” The most prominent was biological: “female youth get [menstrual] periods.” This may cause them to “miss class for four days in a month.” As a result, female youth “can’t get to the best level in the class because they are not consistently in school.” An EiE expert concurred. “Schools are seen as unsafe places for female youth,” he related. “Once girls start having their periods, their numbers in school dwindle fast.”

A small number of interviewees said some female youth may receive “dignity kits” or “menstrual kits,” but there was no indication from the interview data that most EiE programmes – including those that stress girls’ education – routinely provide sanitary towels for their female youth students.

As the needs of female youth grow, interviewees said that the response was either limited or non-existent. “Girls’ education programmes often don’t take into account menstruation, sexual threat or motherhood,” a veteran youth expert and EiE practitioner observed. These are precisely the sorts of concerns that are specific to female youth and not younger girls. Young mothers “are not included” for two reasons. Providing them with support “would take more effort,” and “a mother who is a youth is considered a mother [and no longer a youth].” The message to female youth who become mothers is evidently that their educational careers are finished. Reflecting on the general situation, the same interviewee said:

“Few have really thought about how to reach youth where they are today. We’ve talked about [the need for] childcare. A lot of female youth are mothers. Everyone’s vulnerable. If you get married, you’re expected to have a kid in a year. And once you’re married, most education opportunities go out the window.”

Other interviewees also highlighted the inflexibility of educators and schools toward female youth and the consequent inability of many to continue as students. Pregnancy and marriage were two persistent themes that arose from interviews. If either happen, they are highly unlikely to remain in school, many interviewees said.

This situation exists in parallel with the prominence of girls’ education in the EiE field. The pressure on practitioners was noted. “Gender equality is very important to our donors,” one official with a

donor partnership organisation said. “But they spin it as girls’ education.” A youth expert said: “There is a focus on making sure girls are safe. It’s very important to recognise their needs.” Two themes arising from the focus on girls surfaced as significant. The first arose in the form of pressure (if not coercion) on girls and their families to avoid motherhood and marriage.

One EiE practitioner first said: “We need to pay attention to gender.” Then, the practitioner focused in on young females. “Girls need childcare if they’re mothers,” she related, adding that there was a need to “work to prevent them from getting pregnant (...) Community sensitisation is needed to get parents to understand the significance of education.” Implied in this take is that young mothers are unlikely to attend school. A second practitioner similarly said: “The adolescent girls: we don’t want them to get married.” Such positions do not account for contexts where girls waiting to get married may face uncertain marriage prospects.

Girls themselves may also choose not to go to school because of protection concerns. Some interviewees said parents and guardians also saw child marriage as a protection strategy borne of desperation. As one donor official with extensive experience in EiE settings said: “Fear of sexual exploitation” may be “so high that parents will say: ‘I would rather marry off my daughter because she’ll be safer’” than as a student in school. Going to school, however, is often the only way to secure an education. Citing the case of Burkina Faso, another donor official said “schools are dangerous, yet the only way to learn is to go to school and sit in a classroom. That’s the idea there.” Such situations are likely to force many at-risk youth to drop out of school entirely.

Preventing or minimising marriage and pregnancy among adolescent girls and female youth may be a widely shared goal among EiE practitioners and their donors. But many officials and experts said that doing so in emergency and protracted crisis settings was difficult to achieve. In the view of one veteran practitioner, EiE’s girls’ education efforts boiled down to this: “Overall, girls are always considered in need of more support to keep them in school.” When major events such as becoming a wife or mother or both upend a female youth’s life, however, efforts to keep them in school or deliver education to them outside school evidently collapse. Girls’ education work appears to aim far more on preventing pregnancy and marriage for students under 18 than accommodating the emergence of unmarried mothers and young wives in their midst.

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An additional prominent theme concerned the impact of girls' education, a point of emphasis that one veteran EiE practitioner described in the following way. "Donors are very sensitive to girls' education and girls' empowerment (...) They think girls are always the most vulnerable, most exposed and least likely to receive support."⁷² One donor official said this assessment was not always accurate. In Jordan, the official explained:

"Girls are doing much better than the boys. The quality of education is definitely better for the girls than for the boys. Girls tend to be more conditioned to listen and be less rebellious. In boys' schools, you can feel the agitation. There's more violence and bullying [and] there's not a lot of motivation or eagerness for learning. Exam rates are far higher for girls."

The official concluded: "We need a more gendered approach."

Some interviewees highlighted unintended gender-specific impacts of girls' education efforts. One concerned the inadvertent messages they communicate to boys. As one youth expert observed: "Young women and young girls may have more opportunities for education than young boys. Young boys may be more mobile. If donors are investing in girls and supporting their access, the boys will see that and move on [from education]."

A second EiE practitioner expressed a similar sentiment: "We're trying to attract out-of-school children and youth – those of secondary school age – to come back to school, but in the programmes, there are only girls. Where are the boys? We are not able to attract them."

Another impact to emerge was the limited attention paid to boys and male youth in the EiE field. A coordinator for an EiE organisation with dozens of institutional members said: "No one in our membership talks about the boys." There were indications that the fixation on girls' education in emergency and protracted crisis settings could lead to distorting understandings of the actual risks that male and female youth face in schools. As one experienced EiE specialist commented: "There are traditional views that girls generally are much more vulnerable and more at risk of violence and abuse, and have been excluded from educational opportunities. Having said that, what needs to be highlighted is that boys are equally victimised."

An EiE official with a major NGO added: "Maybe we should focus on boys. We don't do that well. Educating boys: it's not what we do."

⁷² The following declaration from Education Cannot Wait reflects this orientation: "Education Cannot Wait (ECW) has committed to placing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, in and through education in emergencies and protracted crises, at the forefront of its investment and advocacy efforts." [ECW Launches New Gender Equality Policy and Implementation Guide, 2023 \(March\)](#).

VII. Post-primary education challenges

This section concerns the bevy of obstacles, barriers and unknowns arising from post-primary education that challenge the EiE world. Most of the information is drawn from analysis of the qualitative interviews conducted for this report.

The too-high unit cost

There was a widespread contention that engaging in post-primary education is inherently impractical. Confined by established systems, timelines, priorities and procedures, together with limited funding and expertise, anything post-primary struck many in the EiE field, including their donors, as a bridge way too far. Many in EiE are evidently unsure how to reach out-of-school youth via certified education, and equally unsure if it is even worthwhile.



Photo: Mads Terkelsen/Pexels

There are many reported reasons not to work in the post-primary education field. The most common is unit cost. Funding primary school is much cheaper. The rationale for funding primary rather than post-primary schooling education struck many as an open-and-shut case. As one expert EiE practitioner put it: “Regarding the unit cost favouring primary school: it’s so much lower for primary school [and] because of this, that’s what we’ll see and continue to see in the future.” A second long-time practitioner said: “I always think the biggest limit [to post-primary education for youth] is the cost. You can stretch a dollar a lot further for primary. Teachers are less numerous and not subject-specific. You just need one or two teachers per grade.” A highly experienced education cluster official offered a comprehensive explanation:

“[EiE] is primary only, and it’s focused on the beginning of primary: the first grades. In my experience, I’ve never really seen [post-primary education] except as an auxiliary of primary education. The emphasis on primary school is to focus on the most efficient use of resources, in terms of the size of the caseload. You need to focus on children who may lose their access to education, whereas youth in secondary education already have [had] eight years of education.

The cost of education for one year per child for primary school is \$95 a year. The cost rises exponentially for secondary education. So, if you focus on primary education, you’ll be able to reach far more people. A high-quality TVET [technical and vocational education and training] programme is \$1,200 to \$1,400 per youth per year. That’s [equivalent to the cost of] 15 primary school-age children. It all comes down to the unit cost.”

It is important to note that the unit costs mentioned above are substantially more dramatic than global surveys suggest. The differences that statistical analyses provide are not particularly significant.⁷³ The unit cost differentials detailed by the Education Cluster official thus are context-specific and not reflective of wider trends. Nonetheless, the sort of perspective shared by the Education Cluster official, which asserts that unit cost disparities between primary and secondary schools are great, seems to have driven stolid opposition to earmarking precious EiE funds to anything post-primary. The gathered impression seems to be: if post-primary education is compared to (or competes against) primary education, it will always lose out.

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Secondary school challenges

A second prominent reason for avoiding post-primary education are severe limitations within national education systems. One common factor is that secondary schools – the most common certified post-primary option – may be hard to find. “We know that secondary education is kind of limited,” an EiE practitioner admitted. “For example, in West Africa, it’s not even in the national education sector plans. Most of the budgets from governments in the region go to primary schools.”

A donor official also noted that many places where EiE initiatives take place “don’t even have secondary schools.” A dramatic example has emerged in Somalia. There, the official continued, “We

⁷³ Drawing on analysis from a 2016 study of 35 conflict-affected and fragile countries by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), ECW estimated annual unit costs for primary, lower secondary and upper secondary school as \$150, \$162.50 and \$175 respectively. A second study found somewhat higher differences between primary and secondary schooling for refugee students regardless of location, but neither analysis revealed unit cost ratios that were even 2:1 higher for secondary education. World Bank and UNHCR. 2021. *The Global Cost of Inclusive Refugee Education*. Washington, DC: World Bank, pp. 23, 37.



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have 10,000 accelerated education learners [studying for primary level certificates]. We don't know if they can access secondary school or a TVET. There's no space for all those students, and it's not clear if the Ministry of Education wants more people to access post-primary education."

The subtext of the dynamics involving secondary education are complex. To begin with, the orientation of many national governments toward primary education was validated and strengthened by the 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). MDG 2 was the global achievement of universal primary education by 2015. It galvanised national and international efforts, focus and investment in primary schooling. The results were impressive. There was "an increase in the primary school net enrolment in the developing world from 83 per cent in 2000 to 91 per cent in 2015," and a concurrent decrease of almost 50 per cent "in the number of out-of-school children of primary school age globally, from 100 million in 2000 to around 57 million in 2015."⁷⁴

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 upped the pressure on governments significantly in 2015. The new focus extends far beyond the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) 2 drive to increase enrolment in primary schools. Instead, all governments are expected to "ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes" by 2030.⁷⁵ Progress has been slow. The UN Department of Social and Economic Affairs has noted: "If no additional measures are taken, only one in six countries will meet SDG 4 and achieve universal access to quality education by 2030 (...) An estimated 84 million children and young people will still be out of school and an estimated 300 million students will still not have the basic numeracy and literacy skills they need to succeed in life."⁷⁶

It is also apparent that the "global education crisis has worsened due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which has seriously disrupted children and youth's schooling and exacerbated education inequalities." Despite this crisis, "humanitarian funding for EiE has increased year-on-year over the last decade, reaching \$807 million in 2021,"⁷⁷ but even though EiE expenditure on secondary education has generally increased, one expert in the field noted that "the demand for post-primary ed keeps growing every year." While the EiE sector finds it difficult to keep up, the secondary school situation on the ground is deteriorating:

"Access to secondary education in crisis-affected areas is alarmingly inadequate, with approximately one-third of children in the lower secondary school age group being out of school. Additionally, nearly half of the children in the upper secondary school age group who are affected by crises are unable to access education."⁷⁸

⁷⁴ MDG Monitor. 2017. "[MDG 2: Achieve universal primary education.](#)"

⁷⁵ SDG Tracker. n.d. "[Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.](#)"

⁷⁶ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Sustainable Development. 2023. "[Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all: Progress and Info.](#)"

⁷⁷ Damian Lilly and Margot Thierry. 2022. *Education in Emergencies Financing in the Wake of COVID-19: Time to Reinvest to Meet Growing Needs*. Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies (EiE Hub), p. 7.

⁷⁸ Valenza, Matteo and Stoff, Christian. 2023. *Crisis-Affected Children and Adolescents in Need of Education Support: New Global Estimates and Thematic Deep Dives*. Education Cannot Wait (June), p. 4.

The interview data also suggests that most EiE stakeholders, particularly in humanitarian emergency situations, simply do not do post-primary. As one EiE practitioner explained, “The majority of [education] actors who come to the table to coordinate are all doing primary school education.” Officials from two practitioner agencies both stated plainly that, as one explained, “Certified education for youth was not prioritized in the cluster.” The other official noted that he was “not aware that education clusters had an official policy on certified education for out-of-school youth.”

A more profound theme emerged around the many institutional disincentives relating to secondary education (when the option exists). “There’s a big dropout rate in secondary education,” a frustrated donor official observed. “And for the graduates of secondary education, it doesn’t lead to anything: not a job or a university [education]. They end up with a degree they can’t use.” A second donor official sketched a dire state of affairs:

“The situation is getting worse and worse. When you start to address secondary and vocational education, you have to engage much more with the education system. So, it’s more work. You don’t look as good on paper because post-primary requires more time and more money, and the funding is not necessarily there.”

Unlike primary and tertiary, the arguments against supporting secondary education are considerable. As one EiE expert put it:

“The problem is that we have a soggy bottom in the middle between primary and tertiary education. There are barriers to entry and it’s only for a few. Since [there are] so many barriers, what’s the incentive of going for secondary education?”

The barriers to entering secondary school are considered “complex, multiple, and well known” and include “the gap in qualified teachers to meet the demand for secondary education.” Students affected by emergencies may “lack the required documents to enrol in school.” Secondary schools also need to offer “more technical subjects” than primary schools, and so must supply the requisite teaching expertise and materials, which “are costly and demand significant investment.”⁷⁹ A study in conflict-affected countries also found that enrolment in upper secondary schools was lower than in lower secondary schools.⁸⁰

The interview data suggests that most EiE stakeholders, particularly in humanitarian emergency situations, simply do not do post-primary.

⁷⁹ Secondary Education Working Group (SEWG). 2022. *Six Key Messages on Secondary Education*. SEWG c/o United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, pp. 2, 3.

⁸⁰ Elisabeth King, Emily Dunlop, Jo Kelcey and Caroline Ndirangu. 2019. *Secondary Education for Youth Affected by Humanitarian Emergencies and Protracted Crises*. Background Paper. Mastercard Foundation.

Regardless of the degree or variance of barriers to secondary education depending on context, the subject of post-primary education in the EiE field nonetheless came across in interviews with EiE experts, donors and practitioners mainly as a lost cause, with little support, specialization or advocates, resulting in exceedingly limited opportunities available to young people. The next step is to examine another uncomfortable dimension of this formidable challenge: huge and unwieldy out-of-school youth populations.

The CRC and the too-challenging cohort

One startling finding in the interview data was how few interviewees mentioned the IASC Guidelines on Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises. The guidelines were mentioned in 2 of the 34 interviews (6%). The guidelines for education are detailed, thought provoking and potentially useful.⁸¹ As a UN official observed, the guidelines have “steps on how to engage youth and adolescents.” Implementing those steps, however, first would imply earnest interest in engaging with them.

Few interviewees mentioned the IASC Guidelines on Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises.

Hard evidence of engagement with youth surfaced in research for this study. Much more common were expressions of interest regarding the need to connect with out-of-school youth. The research for this report identified a multitude of reasons why such engagement rarely occurs. One of the most formidable is a second framework, the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), which dwarfs the influence of the IASC guidelines very significantly. Adopted in 1989, the CRC retains exceptional influence over EiE. It was a groundbreaking document when it was ratified, given that it recognised the agency of children, defined as everyone under age 18; ensured their protection from neglect, abuse, and exploitation; and stipulated a series of inherent rights, including the right to education. It has become “the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history and has helped transform children’s lives around the world.”⁸² Article 28 states that primary education must be “compulsory and available free to all” – while “the development of different forms of secondary education” should be encouraged (not mandated) and “higher education” should be made while making “accessible to all on the basis of capacity.”⁸³

⁸¹ The IASC Guidelines on Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises will be examined later in this document.

⁸² UNICEF. n.d. “[Convention on the Rights of the Child: For every child, every right.](#)”

⁸³ Source: INEE, [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), p. 13 of: [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), New York, 20 November 1989.

EiE appears to have carefully followed and implemented this hierarchy of CRC mandates. As determined by this research, primary school is the field’s magnetic centre. The bar of expectation for “different forms of secondary education” is also overshadowed by rising support for tertiary education. As one EiE expert put it: “The priority is placed on primary because of the international focus on the CRC.” As a result of this emphasis, secondary education has become “optional.”⁸⁴ The same expert added that “the CRC is old: we need something else, because for young people it’s pretty intense, as suicide rates soar.”

The CRC’s protection dimensions also help to focus educators on children of primary school age. A youth expert characterized the situation in blunt terms: youth aged 18 and above “don’t have any protection” because they are seen as “adults in the legal system.” Others saw the starting point for reduced (or no) protection at an earlier age. One long-time EiE practitioner explained: “When you become a teenager, you are left by yourself.” Another corroborated this view, stating that “in EiE specifically, the focus [for protection] is approximately primary school ages,” which range from “five or six until around age 14.” One outcome, as reported by a third EiE practitioner, is that some emergency-affected youth join gangs, which are “a protection support for young people” and “a reflection of the inadequacy of the provision they receive.”

The reference to gangs underscores an important related finding: that diverse and outsized youth populations in emergency and protracted crisis settings leave many EiE professionals uncertain about how they should respond. The following are comments from nearly 40 per cent of those interviewed about the reported marginalisation of youth in education sectors:

From youth experts and a youth leader

- “For adolescents and young people, EiE doesn’t work. The current approach doesn’t understand young people or their situation. The EiE sector doesn’t have a unified narrative for what to do. So, it’s hard for donors to know what to fund.” – Youth expert
- “A lot of youth are using drugs and alcohol. They feel they have no future. The question is: what made them think they don’t deserve to get education? What the reason? We have to find out.” – Youth leader
- “Youth tend to be the ones disenfranchised from services and don’t go back to school.” – Youth expert

⁸⁴ While this perception may apply to many emergency contexts, it is also the case that SDG 4 aims to achieve free quality secondary (as well as primary) for all.

From practitioners

- “For youth, what’s the entry point? What can we do in a way that doesn’t terrify us? What’s the magic door for youth? We had youth advisors and we let them go, because we don’t have funding for youth, since all of the funding is for primary or ECD.” – EiE practitioner
- “Youth are still overlooked. There’s a strong focus on primary-age children. The response is less effective for youth, and what youth and adolescents want.” – EiE practitioner
- “Societal demonisation of teenagers and young people: they are risk-takers, they act out, they challenge authority. They are not worth the trouble, that’s the view.” – Protection expert
- “There is no role for certified education for out-of-school youth.” – Education cluster official
- “We don’t understand what [youth] want and we also don’t know if it’s feasible.” – EiE practitioner

From donor officials

- “You’re making me think about youth. Nobody really has answers for them.” – EiE donor
- “Youth who are out of school for an extended period of time are not addressed by EiE well enough and it’s because it is more complicated, and we are not always sure what the pathways are and should be.” – EiE donor
- “We are extremely sensitive to the fact that our figures are skewed to the primary level.” – EiE donor
- “The challenge with youth is that there is a large number of them where formal schooling is no longer the appropriate response.” – EiE donor
- “The solutions we know are necessary are not accepted as mainstream solutions.” – EiE donor
- “At this stage, there’s no functioning system for youth.” – EiE donor

These stark comments portray a concerned field that is well aware of a major deficiency but has no roadmap for addressing it.

Certifying education: A complex but necessary undertaking

The need to certify education garnered a more specific set of practical responses from interviewees. Encouragingly, this particular aspect of education for youth is, at least in principle, solvable. Comments from five interviewees depict two different dimensions of this important challenge:

1. Certifying prior education

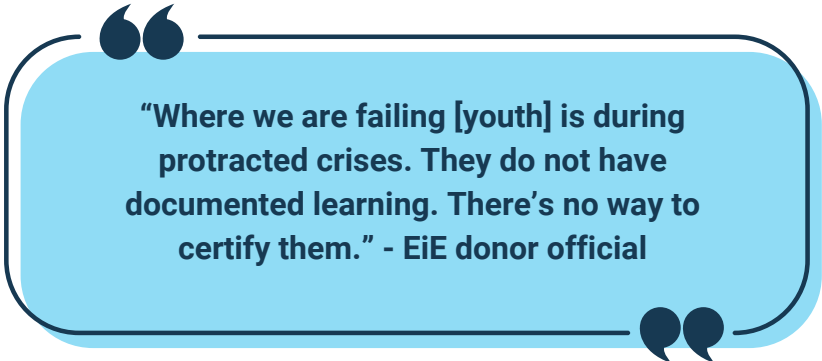
“A youth who is 15 to 16 years old, their education certifications [from another country] are not recognised. They are traumatised, and they have no way to get their education recognised. One of the deepest pieces sticking with [young] people is that they [have] missed schooling and are being put back a year or two. And we have no record of their education.”

“Where we are failing [youth] is during protracted crises. They do not have documented learning. There’s no way to certify them.”

“Certification is not portable, really. [But] a core of education in all countries is not that different. If that’s true, then it should be possible to establish certification.” – EiE donor official

“There’s pressure from [host] governments requiring documents for equivalency [for refugees]. You need evidence of a diploma. It must be legal. You must have a residency permit. A good number of refugees don’t have their education papers with them.” – Youth leader

This longstanding issue can seriously deflate (or extinguish) the educational ambitions of young people who lack documentation that can certify their prior educational experiences in their place of origin. Tackling two challenges are required in order to address this set of concerns: Finding a way to certify or accredit past educational achievements; and promoting acceptance of those achievements by authorities, which are often education ministries, in the new locality. Each challenge is difficult and can be highly context-specific. At the same time, the twin tasks tend to be clear and familiar.

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“Where we are failing [youth] is during protracted crises. They do not have documented learning. There’s no way to certify them.” - EiE donor official

2. Certifying current education

“The Ministry of Education can play a role in recognising certified education for programmes for youth. Certification and accreditation, that’s what they’re supposed to do. [However] if there’s not a unified framework or curriculum in the country, like for accelerated education, then the ad hoc interventions provided by different [EiE] organisations create confusion. So, it becomes hard to accredit a lot of learners. This is a huge moral, practical and philosophical question.” – EiE practitioner

“The struggles of getting education programmes certified is a massive challenge. It’s difficult to achieve, especially when funding is only six months to one year. Implementors struggle because there’s too much immediate need to focus on.” – EiE donor official

A second challenge concerns securing certification for education initiatives from the education authorities. As one EiE expert observed, this may prove difficult in part because “many organisations working in the EiE space do not engage sufficiently with national or local authorities before implementing their programmes.” But gaining certification may be vital for some students. One youth expert noted that “People still want an academic or certified, accredited education. That professional accreditation is what young people want.” While this claim is context-specific and does not apply to all youth, accredited, certified education is likely to improve prospects for those seeking to secure a job or advance in formal education.

Education for all? Tertiary education and the question of elite access

Demonstrating inclusion is a fundamental peacebuilding principle and is promoted as a central value of EiE. As noted in the INEE Pocket Guide to Inclusive Education, “Inclusive education ensures the presence, participation and achievement of all students in schooling.”⁸⁵ The educational reality on the ground underscores the limits of this admirable ambition: Education for All has an expiration date.



Photo: Ingrid Prestetun/NRC

⁸⁵ Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), 2009, [Education in Emergencies: Including Everyone INEE Pocket Guide to Inclusive Education](#), INEE (February), p. 7.

After the initial years of primary schooling, access to certified education tends to recede and eventually may exist only for tiny proportions of vast youth cohorts. Once younger children become youth or older adolescents, most move out of an education system born of an emergency or protracted crisis forever. The interview data for this research makes it clear that the EiE field is not set up to provide certified education to many youth. Such an effort would require sufficient support as well as youth-centred acumen, together with a rationale that might convince enough practitioners and donors to dedicate significant efforts and funding to female and male youth.

Numerous experts, practitioner and donor officials collectively painted a picture of receding educational opportunity for most youth as a result of particular orientations and priorities. Drawing largely on interview data, three dimensions of this reality are discussed in this section. The first reflects on restricted access to youth initiatives, the second examines why secondary education tends to be underfunded and underemphasised, and the third concerns the effective support of elite youth to access post-primary education, including tertiary.

In response to one question,⁸⁶ one in five interviewees pointed to access skewed in favour of comparatively well-off youth:

The EiE field is not set up to provide certified education to many youth.

- “Typically, the ones that are better resourced are more able to navigate the system.” – EiE expert
- “For sure, the wealthy, educated, urban and active youth are the ones who get into programmes. For sure, the ones that don’t get in are the poorer, excluded and unaccepted subgroups, the under educated. These are the ones we don’t reach and need to reach.” – EiE expert
- “The youth who get into certified education programmes are those who were [or reached the age of a] youth before they became refugees.” – Youth leader
- “Those who go to school have parents who are able to support them [in most cases].” – EiE practitioner
- “It’s the same youth who have access to pre-primary and primary education. It’s the same cohort of children who gain access to certified education for youth, while a big number of youth remain with access to nothing. They are completely lost. We are dealing with the same children, which is unfair.” – EiE practitioner
- “Programmes are actually targeted at those who completed secondary education. Not out-of-school youth.” – EiE practitioner

⁸⁶ The question is 11A in the questionnaire (see Annex 2). It is: “In your experience, which youth get into these programmes [that is, certified education programmes available to out-of-school youth during emergencies and protracted crisis settings] – and – which youth do not?”

- “My experience is that the [youth] who get in are able-bodied. Those able to communicate. Not child soldiers, the poorest of the poor, or the marginalised. NGOs typically don’t know how to reach them.” – Child protection expert

Prior research suggests that restricted access to youth programming may have an unstated, class-specific objective. Confidential interviews with donor officials and practitioners connected to youth programming in development and conflict-affected settings revealed how some practitioners quietly fill their programmes with well-adjusted and comparatively well-educated and sometimes elite youth, but do not declare it. Keeping huge youth populations undifferentiated can allow “program officials and their local colleagues to pluck well-adjusted (and mostly male) youth from the masses for their programs without mentioning it.” This is a response to donor pressure and expectations that funded initiatives produce upbeat outputs, sometimes as early as the first quarter of a programme. It also may indicate “knowing acquiescence to nepotistic practices by local officials.”⁸⁷

In this way, better-performing youth may become programme participants, while many at-risk, out-of-school youth may effectively be excluded, and programmes may unintentionally increase inequality within youth cohorts. Programme practices do not always “favour elite or better-off youth,” but the “reports of intentional favouritism” were notable and may be a significant factor in who gains access to youth programmes.⁸⁸

Research for this study broadly confirmed these findings. One practitioner highlighted a programme with a top-down structure featuring elite refugee youth who were presumed to have credibility with nonelites:

“These refugee youth [in the programme] have completed secondary and tertiary education, or at least secondary education (although one hasn’t been to school since age seven). The leaders receiving funding are bridging between donors, [the implementing agency], and young people with secondary education. These young people connect to those [refugee youth] with less opportunities. Reaching them where they are.”



Photo: Esteban Castle/Unsplash

⁸⁷ Marc Sommers. 2015. *The Outcast Majority: War, Development, and Youth in Africa*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, pp. 164-165.

⁸⁸ Marc Sommers, *The Outcast Majority: War, Development, and Youth in Africa*, p. 165.

The supposition that elite and non-elite youth connect with, much less run in the same social circles, is questionable. However, the setup of this initiative, which links programme and donor officials to elite young people, is unexceptional.

The interview data identified three sources of elite favouritism and inequality (inadvertent or not) that end up benefitting a small subset of emergency-affected youth populations. One emerged from the reliance of much EiE work on host nation governments and their education ministries. National education systems for post-primary education are not necessarily inclusive and may intentionally favour elite youth while excluding the most marginalised. As one donor put it: “By and large, education systems are regressive. A lot goes in at the bottom. Those who finish invariably come from the wealthiest part of society.”⁸⁹ An EiE expert made a related point: “Secondary education is really focused on meritocracy, weeding out people as a form of social Darwinism.” An EiE practitioner offered their view of the situation in Ethiopia:

“In Ethiopia, people do not want Education for All. They want secondary education to create an elite. They purposefully limit the number of youth who can go to secondary education. The idea of ‘education for everyone’ is not something people believe in. It’s more ‘education for the elite’. It’s not to allow upward mobility into secondary education, because secondary education would create an elite who would get jobs in the government. There are policies in place that exclude opportunities to upward mobility.”

Proponents for elite access also arise from within the humanitarian and development fields, including EiE actors. A youth expert (with extensive EiE experience) detailed an inability to sidestep elite access:

“I don’t see the aid sector able to negotiate the complex needs of youth. If there is a secondary school, then only youth with privileged status can access it. Marginalised youth aren’t going to be in school. If we just do the [education] system approach, we will not reach the 70 per cent or so of youth not in secondary school (where secondary school does exist). When it comes to young people, to educated people, we focus on potential leaders.”

An EiE practitioner voiced similar themes. “There’s a real risk that certified Education in Emergencies [initiatives] lead to an educational elite. It’s a small group of youth who have capacities that are valued in certified education.”

⁸⁹ This analysis aligns with the following general definition for regressive (as opposed to progressive) financing systems. While it addresses financing health services, the same concepts apply to financing education systems: “In a progressive financing system, poorer households contribute a smaller proportion of their ATP [that is, ability to pay] to finance health services compared to richer households. A system is regressive when the poor contribute proportionately more.” John E Ataguba, Augustine D Asante, Supon Limwattananon, and Virginia Wiseman, 2018, “[How to do \(or not to do\) ... a health financing incidence analysis](#),” *Health Policy and Planning* 33(3): 436–444, p. 436.

Donor organizations that fund EiE initiatives arose as a significant chorus of support for elite access to post-primary opportunities. One EiE expert stated that “Donors see higher education as an area to support. So, there’s support for primary school and some tertiary from donors, especially in Africa. But there’s often much less for secondary.” An EiE expert expressed a somewhat separate post-primary direction for some donors. Instead of focusing on tertiary, “There’s a growing set of donors that have been trying to opt out of secondary education and TVET to focus on digital education instead. Digitally-supported and digitally-powered education programmes, including digital skills and language skills, is the new focus.” Despite this commentary, the interview data pointed to a far stronger donor emphasis on tertiary over secondary education (in addition to TVET and digital alternatives). A veteran donor official stated this plainly. “Secondary education falls out of all the boats,” the official said. “There’s much more attention on tertiary. Tertiary [education] stays on the radar of donors. But secondary? In the context of emergency and development contexts, it’s forgotten.”

The education strategy of UNHCR reflects a notable (and fairly new) emphasis on tertiary education in the EiE field. The agency’s efforts in secondary education (together with primary and pre-primary education) aim to align with the policies of national governments that host refugees.⁹⁰ As previously mentioned in this report, this approach tends to advance access to primary education and, by comparison, limit access to secondary education (particularly for senior secondary). However, for those youth who can complete secondary education as a refugee (or who enter the refugee education arena after completing their secondary education), there is a separate context. The potential opportunities for this subset of refugee youth are impressive and – for those who qualify for tertiary education – unprecedented:

“The goal for 2030 is to achieve enrolment of 15 per cent of college-eligible refugees in tertiary or connected higher education programmes in host and third countries (...) Raising the level of refugee participation in higher education from 3 per cent to 15 per cent over the next ten years represents an ambitious but feasible goal. Given the array of options through which to expand access to tertiary education including in TVET, connected and traditional degree and diploma programmes, third country scholarships, education pathways and national inclusion – increases in each, along with the continued engagement and commitment of partners and host countries, will make achieving 15 per cent access possible.”⁹¹

⁹⁰ As UNHCR’s 2030 strategy notes, “Pre-primary, primary and secondary education enrolment targets for 2030 will be measured at country level against the official net enrolment reported for host communities.” UNHCR, 2019, *Refugee Education 2030: A Strategy for Refugee Inclusion*, p. 12.

⁹¹ UNHCR, 2019, *Refugee Education 2030: A Strategy for Refugee Inclusion*, p. 13.

One donor official had a favourable view of this preferential position for tertiary. “There is no clear understanding in emergencies of the role of higher education,” the official maintained. “We keep the emphasis of financing higher education as regressive financing focused on the better and well-off. I think in emergencies there is a rationale to do it.”

Three interviewees voiced concern about this trend. A youth expert contended that access to “university or tertiary education” is “very often only for the elite. It’s really the cream of the crop who get to go. Even if you do have peace, it’s the elites who will now run the country and perpetuate inequality. It’s not open to other youth.” An EiE expert focused on UNHCR’s pronounced emphasis on tertiary education. “I have significant reservations and concerns about supporting tertiary education for refugee youth,” said the expert. “It’s a UNHCR-led effort. Tertiary focuses on scholarships. It’s more [focused] on training a developmental elite.” An EiE practitioner voiced similar views:

“If we were to focus on tertiary education in fragile settings, that would fuel inequalities because the ones already going to tertiary schools are already in the top wealth quintiles. So, our support to tertiary could fuel this inequality.”

Tertiary education is an essential component of post-primary education. The expansion of access for emergency-affected youth is encouraging and exciting. The concerns raised by some EiE professionals, however, suggest inequities over who gains entry and who does not. Intentionally or not, the policies and funding priorities that uphold and drive the EiE field run the risk of supporting two-tiered social arrangements, with masses of emergency-affected youngsters receiving literacy, numeracy and protection while a select segment gain entrance to tertiary education, with the social, economic and even political stature and benefits that it promises to provide.

The policies and funding priorities that uphold and drive the EiE field run the risk of supporting two-tiered social arrangements, with masses of emergency-affected youngsters receiving literacy, numeracy and protection while a select segment gain entrance to tertiary education.



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VIII. Youth and certified education during emergencies and protracted crises

This section sketches the landscape of certified and accredited education programmes that are made available to emergency-affected out-of-school youth populations. The 15 case studies in annex 3 feature programmes implemented in Colombia, Jordan, Libya, Peru, South Sudan, Uganda and elsewhere. There was no available evidence of accredited education for out-of-school youth from many significant and well-known humanitarian crisis areas, including Yemen, which has the youngest population in the Middle East and North Africa.⁹²

Document analysis identified two primary types of certified education programmes for out-of-school youth in conflict-affected settings:

1. Vocational training, with a “learning-to-earning” focus
2. Accelerated education, with a focus on preparing participants to transition into formal education

Of the 15 programmes studied, seven offer vocational training and eight accelerated education. One of the accelerated education programmes (AEPs) – number 13 in the annex – is accessible via a digital platform, and another – number 11 in the annex – features a digital platform for different kinds of certified online education, including vocational education.

Given the significance of vocational and accelerated education as the two main certified programme options for out-of-school youth in emergency and protracted crisis settings, they require some background commentary.

Vocational training is part of the education category TVET, which is intended to “help individuals enter the world of work by developing their knowledge and skills at varying levels of complexity.” These “economically oriented interventions” are considered to lie “at the heart of (international) development assistance directed towards youth.” In one survey of youth, respondents “expressed the need for educational content that is relevant for entering the labour markets relevant to them.”⁹³ The application of this option in emergency and protracted settings is important. One critique of TVET offerings for refugee youth is that “some are pushed into [TVET] after failing to have their existing academic or professional qualifications from their home countries recognised.”⁹⁴

⁹² 67 per cent of Yemen’s population is under 29 years of age, which is the largest youth cohort in the Middle East and North Africa region. OECD. 2022. “Youth at the Centre of Government Action: A Review of the Middle East and North Africa: 1. Young people in MENA: Coming of age in a context of structural challenges and global trends.” OECD Library.

⁹³ Mieke T.A. Lopes Cardozo and Giovanni Scotto. 2017. *Youth, Peacebuilding & the Role of Education*. INEE Thematic Paper (December), p. 25.

⁹⁴ Turner, F., Dhillon, P., Gladwell, C. and Hollow, D. 2019. *Voices of Refugee Youth: The Impact of Post-Primary Education in Emergencies: Literature review*. Jigsaw Consult and Refugee Support Network (March), p. 20.

AEPs are “flexible, age-appropriate programme[s], run in an accelerated timeframe, which aims to provide access to education for disadvantaged, over-age, out-of-school children and youth. This may include those who missed out on, or had their education interrupted.”⁹⁵ Although there are many different rates of acceleration, the objective of all AEPs is to allow learners to cover various grades in a shorter timeframe, while allowing learners to complete a certified, equivalent level of education.

The three hoped-for options for those youth who complete an AEP programme are: (1) Transitioning into the formal schooling system to continue their education; (2) Entering a TVET programme; or (3) Moving “directly into the workforce with certified literacy and numeracy skills in place.”⁹⁶ Research for this study indicates that AEP programmes for primary education in emergency and protracted crisis settings are common while AEPs for secondary education are limited.

Analysis of the fifteen programme case studies surfaced three major findings:

1. There is no agreed definition of youth. In fact, no two are the same. Ages for youth range from the older children’s categories of 12-15, 12-17 and 10-18 to a slightly higher endpoint of 12-20. One programme set age range at 16-30, and another did not separate youth from adults, giving an age range of 15-59. The other programmes did not provide a definition of youth.
2. AEPs that target out-of-school youth were the only set of accredited programmes designed exclusively for that population. The vocational programmes were accessible to out-of-school youth but were not designed with them specifically in mind. The implication is that despite their availability, these programmes may neither be acceptable nor responsive to the priorities or needs out-of-school youth. Their relevance is difficult to assess.
3. The majority of accelerated education offerings for out-of-school youth do not go beyond the age of 18. The older someone is and the longer they have been out of school, the less likely they are to find an AEP they can join. This means that once an out-of-school youth no longer fits the definition for a child, the majority of accredited programmes they are able to access are likely to be those with an employment focus.



Photo: MG Shotz/Pexels

⁹⁵ Accelerated Education Working Group, [Key Programme Definitions](#).

⁹⁶ INEE. n.d. [Accelerated Education](#).

While Annex 3 serves as a sample of available programming, it is worth noting two key issues that this research was *not* able to identify:

1. Sophisticated targeting of out-of-school youth: None of the programmes included information on targeting or outreach beyond general indicators such as being young, displaced and not in school. The only exception among the case studies was number 15 in the annex, an AEP in South Sudan that targets young women and offers on-site day care facilities for young mothers.
2. Young people who were out of school were often treated as a single homogenous group: When vulnerable groups such as orphans, single mothers or former combatants were mentioned, there was no indication of how the programmes would reach or serve them. The only targeting that looks at young people not as a homogenous group was that of gender, again reflected in programme number 15 in the annex.

The interviews for this report largely reflect the trends identified from the case study programmes. In response to a question on the sort of certified programmes available to out-of-school youth during emergencies and protracted crises, vocational education and accelerated education were each mentioned ten times.⁹⁷ There were three mentions of secondary education (although it was not clear how out-of-school youth would access it) and single mentions of certified religious and digital education, respectfully.

Interviewees raised significant concerns about vocational (or TVET) and accelerated education. Frustration coloured much of the commentary. Serious questions were raised about TVET programmes, even as they were being implemented and supported. For example, an education cluster expert forcefully argued that TVET programmes “are a complete waste of money. They’re low-end but high revenue training [initiatives]” he asserted. Then he added, “They’re an absolute waste of time.” A veteran EiE practitioner shared a similar view of TVET programmes. “I don’t think formal TVET makes sense,” the practitioner related. “It has such a high cost, with low returns. It contributes to saturated [labour] markets and it’s often not market-relevant.”

Many more interviewees commented on the state of accelerated education. One issue was whether education authorities approved and supported AEPs. Government support for AEPs is crucial, because programmes must be aligned and supported by education ministries, and they must be approved to be certified. As one EiE practitioner put it, such initiatives exist “only where there’s very strong buy-in by the government.” One concern for authorities is that accelerated education may

⁹⁷ Question 11 in part C of Annex 2 is: “What certified education programmes are available to out-of-school youth during emergencies and protracted crisis settings?”

prove to be more popular and be deemed of higher quality than primary education, which tends to be a predominant ministerial priority.

At the same time, perceptions of higher educational quality in accelerated programmes may be a draw for those who are out of school, some of whom “may prefer accelerated education as a better opportunity than formal education.” While this is a common challenge, AEPs are not designed to replace formal education. If implemented properly, they should only be accessible to those who have never entered formal education or are over-age for it.

Several interviewees viewed accelerated learning as the most pervasive certified education offering for out-of-school youth. To some, it seemed logical and appropriate. As one donor official said: “For any system with large numbers of out-of-school children and youth, you need accelerated education as an option.” An experienced EiE official agreed: “For accredited learning pathways for out-of-school youth, there is accelerated education programming.”

Others questioned this rising trend in EiE. “All I hear about regarding education for out-of-school youth is accelerated learning,” said a practitioner with significant field experience. This “default” option “drives me crazy,” the official said, describing it as a one-size-fits-all approach. “It doesn’t matter what the problem is with youth: our solution is always accelerated learning” even if “it’s obviously not fit for purpose” because “it’s not addressing the profiles of youth.”

It is worth noting that research shows that out-of-school youth may see other benefits to AEPs beyond certification and transitioning to formal education. One case study in Jordan revealed that youth may decide to join AEPs for the “attainment of basic literacy and numeracy skills, and/or a protection and life-skills-focused intervention to enable young people to find a sense of agency and purpose in life.”⁹⁸

This assessment aligns with a broader finding in this research: that certified educational programming for out-of-school youth emerges largely from within the constraints of established education systems and their traditional provisions (namely, TVET and accelerated education).



Photo: Annie Spratt/Unsplash

⁹⁸ Shah, Ritesh and Kayla Boisvert. [Accelerating Change for Children’s and Youths’ Education through Systems Strengthening: A reflection on key findings from Phase 1](#). University of Auckland and Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG), 2022

A related finding is the pronounced absence of strategic targeting for subgroups of out-of-school youth in the EiE field. As one official related, “We don’t tailor our programmes” for youth. “What are we talking about? Youth in gangs, or not?” Instead of targeting such subgroups, “Our solutions are generic.” A youth expert’s take supported this assessment. “Every youth programme is supply-side driven,” the expert related. “Hardly anyone is talking about youth and including the views of youth” in programme design and implementation. A refugee education expert shared a similar reflection:

There is a pronounced absence of strategic targeting for subgroups of out-of-school youth in the EiE field.

“When you sit in a refugee camp, the level of boredom and idleness is tangible. It’s really shocking. The out-of-school children and youth are not included. We can try to provide connected education online and TVET and ICT centres. Some are certified. But there, you’ll find the usual suspects: those [who already have] access to education.”

Fortunately, adapting certified education programming to particular youth subgroups is possible. A veteran EiE practitioner shared the following promising example:

“In Dadaab [the location of a set of refugee camps for Somali refugees in Kenya], we had an accelerated education programme. We realised that quite a number could not transition to secondary education, due to early marriage, household chores and work. But some of them could go in the afternoons, from 1 to 5 pm. Quite a number of child wives came over to [the AEP] because we had childcare. So, child wives and young [unmarried] mothers could study. Childcare enabled some child mothers to continue their education.”

Childcare has the potential to open up opportunities for out-of-school female youth who otherwise would not be able to access an education programme. Three overlapping approaches collectively refer to flexible, adaptive education options have notable and broader potential:

- *Distance education*: “An umbrella term encompassing a variety of education approaches that is applied when teachers and learners are separated by space and time, or both.”⁹⁹

⁹⁹ INEE. n.d. “[Glossary Term: Distance Education.](#)”

- *Remote learning*: “A system of education in which students study at home and communicate with their teachers over the internet.”¹⁰⁰
- *Blended learning*: “A way of studying a subject that combines being taught in class with the use of different technologies, including learning over the internet.”¹⁰¹

The emerging category of digital education is a fourth option. A digital education expert interviewed for this research outlined an approach for out-of-school youth that is certified and “customised to enable success at the country level.” The approaches are country-specific and are set up with engagement (and approval) from national governments. Currently, all of these initiatives require access to the internet. For those in emergency and protracted settings who can access the internet, digital education can be “a big game changer.” At the same time, “the most marginalised cannot access” digital education programming. The initiative thus is “working on an offline model” that promises to “deliver digital learning without the internet.”

Few out-of-school youth have internet access as it is often limited or non-existent. Indeed, in a great many emergency contexts, prospects for students to access the internet may be limited or non-existent. In such cases, remote and blended learning approaches may not be viable. In addition to the offline digital education model mentioned just above, a distance education approach featuring reliance on printed educational materials also may be relevant and appropriate.

The promise of such approaches for at-risk, emergency-affected youth appears to be substantial for at least two reasons:

- It may be too dangerous and/or impractical to commute to formal schools or TVET sites.
- At-risk, emergency-affected and out-of-school youth may not prioritise TVET and accelerated education, which are the two options generally available to them.

Although some donors and practitioners who were interviewed declared that digital education was increasingly popular among donors and offers an efficient means of reaching large numbers of out-of-school youth, significant caution should be applied. The reason is that evidence of the effectiveness of distance education/remote learning/blended/digital education approaches thus far is insubstantial. In addition, there are indications that such programmes designed for out-of-school youth frustrate many participants and can have poor rates of programme completion.¹⁰² Many youth who are out of school may seek and value direct interactions with teachers and other students.

¹⁰⁰ Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries. n.d. “[Remote Learning](#).”

¹⁰¹ Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries. n.d. “[Blended Learning](#).”

¹⁰² See, for example, Mai Ibrahim Nasrallah. 2022. *Opportunities and challenges to support out-of-school children and youth through Accelerated Education Programmes: Case Study of Jordan*. University of Auckland and Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG).



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IX. Out of school and on the move: Youth during emergencies and protracted crises

Out of school, out of mind?

A penetrating finding from the interview data arose in the form of impassioned commentary about severely limited access to EiE opportunities. A selection of these stated concerns is shared here. For some, the field's orientation steadfastly sticks to children (and not youth). Even with that population, the following finding surfaced: if you were out of school prior to an emergency, you are unlikely to be in school afterward. An EiE expert explained this phenomenon. "The reality is that if you're already out of school when a crisis starts, you're a lesser concern than those in school. The focus is on protecting education for those children [already] in school." One youth expert remarked that "EiE is set up for children growing up within the education system." Then the expert asked a question: "What can EiE do for those who have not grown up within the education system?" A donor official chimed in. "There's very, very little focus on children as well as youth who are not in school." Together, "they are nothing more than a footnote. They are not a central concern."

An EiE practitioner with extensive field experience noted: "Children out of school usually are not the primary focus" of activities. Only "those in primary school have a pathway that is set." Even for them, the pathway is unstable and may not be present. The educational situation is worsening, and swiftly. An ECW report published June 2023 found: "The number of crisis-affected children of school age has increased by 25 million over a single year, a staggering 12.5 per cent yearly increase."¹⁰³

The absence of a set educational pathway of any kind for youth (in addition to out-of-school children) emerged as a particular concern in several interviews:

- "There are structural inequities, which means that already-marginalised young people are already not in school. EiE is weaker at getting adolescents and youth back into school." – EiE practitioner
- "Youth are not supported. They're seen as a longer-term concern, as part of reconstruction." – Youth expert

Two interviewees commented on specific subgroups of at-risk, out-of-school youth:

¹⁰³ Valenza, Matteo and Stoff, Christian. 2023. *Crisis-Affected Children and Adolescents in Need of Education Support: New Global Estimates and Thematic Deep Dives*. Education Cannot Wait (June), p. 3.

- “When adolescents get married or have to work, these are factors that can lead them to be out of school. We’re not addressing this.” – Youth and EiE expert
- “For youth with learning disabilities: they’re not recognised. Neither are physical impairments. If they’re blind or deaf, they face even more limited options.” – EiE practitioner

The distance between most out-of-school youth and EiE opportunities of any kind appears to be significant. Several interviewees spotlighted an elemental deficit: EiE professionals know very little about those not in their schools, particularly those who are youth. As one youth expert noted, “EiE doesn’t understand young people.” The expert reasoned that “The expertise is missing” in the EiE field. “I don’t see anything on youth anymore.” Others shared similar views. “We don’t understand youth,” an EiE donor official summed up. “We don’t know the youth target group. We don’t talk to the youth target group,” an EiE practitioner added. An EiE expert provided analysis on why this occurs. “Delivering aid to primary schools is easier while interacting with youth is complex,” the expert explained. “We have a problem seeing youth: where they are and who they are.” Reflecting on the EiE field, a longtime EiE practitioner went still further:



“We don’t know the youth target group. We don’t talk to the youth target group.”

“We’re not putting on the youth lens. [A youth lens] forces you to focus on the purpose of education. The international community doesn’t know how to do that. Thinking about youth brings to the forefront all the issues that we’re not doing in education. It’s a Pandora’s Box, so we shut that door.”

All these troublemakers?

An unsurprising outcome of the observed resistance to engaging with out-of-school youth issues, together with suggestions of limited or no knowledge about them, were indications of negative bias toward youth. Before turning to some examples, it is first important to make clear that the overwhelming majority of youth do not fit common stereotypes that depict them as dangerous. Most youth are peaceful, even when enduring substantial hardships and despite the recruitment efforts of gangs, militias and violent extremist groups. As a major UN study on youth globally found:

“Young people who join violent or extremist groups constitute only a minute fraction of the youth population. The vast majority of young people, even in the face of legitimate social, political and economic grievances, remain peaceful, and resist any urge to become involved in violent conflict.”

Significantly, the UN study also found that “Throughout all our research, young people spoke about their fear of the police and the violence they face at the hands of law enforcement personnel.”¹⁰⁴ In addition, states with demographically large youth populations (known as a youth bulges) “are more repressive than other states.” The gathered research suggests that governments with large numbers of youth in their midst proactively repress youthful citizens.¹⁰⁵

Evidence of bias against youth was notable in the contributions of several interviewees. Reflecting on the large number of out-of-school youth among Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, one donor official characterised them as “a ticking timebomb.” “The youth are disaffected, and at one point, they will explode.” A second donor official said that if youth “have no future, they’re very susceptible to career paths that don’t contribute to societal stability.” As one youth expert put it, youth are routinely “branded as ‘all these troublemakers’.”

Negative assumptions about youth also surfaced among EiE professionals who work with them. One youth expert said: “Children ages 4 to 12 are not actively engaged in terrorism – yet. Those at secondary and university levels are easily radicalised.” And an EiE practitioner with deep experience working on education programming connected the lack of access to education directly to instability and violence. “For youth not able to continue their education,” the practitioner asserted, “they experience survival sex for prostitution, they abuse drugs, get involved in criminality, get recruited into gangs or military groups, or get conscripted into violent extremist groups. All because they have not had access to education.”

Most youth are peaceful, even when enduring substantial hardships and despite the recruitment efforts of gangs, militias and violent extremist groups.

¹⁰⁴ Graeme Simpson (lead author). 2018. *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*. UNFPA and PBSO, pp. 25, 26.

¹⁰⁵ Ragnhild Nordås and Christian Davenport. 2013. “Fight the Youth: Youth Bulges and State Repression,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 57(4): 926-940, p. 926.

Such a broad assertion is grossly exaggerated. Most youth in emergency-affected settings are not only out of school. They also lack any access to educational opportunity. Despite this, there is no evidence that their absence from formal education has led them directly into the sorts of violence claimed. Indeed, the opposite perspective has gathered increasing global recognition over the years. UN Security Council resolution 2250 of 2015 on youth, peace and security underscores the move away from perceiving youth as largely violent disrupters and towards accurately viewing them as playing “an important and positive role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security.”¹⁰⁶

Realities on the ground

In response to extensive comments from interviewees that point to severely limited knowledge about the circumstances and challenges that emergency-affected, out-of-school youth face, the following overview section is provided. The aim is to briefly consider some of the more serious challenges that they confront.

Social class: One of the most significant yet generally overlooked factors in the lives and opportunities of emergency-affected youth are class differences. As noted in section VII, comparatively elite and better educated youth, often in more stable living conditions, tend to gain access to the educational initiatives available. One benefit may be the ability to learn a European language. Such an advantage can be decisive in awarding them favourable access to further educational opportunities and influential international agency officials. In some cases, the advantages are pronounced, such as the South Sudanese refugee youth cohort in East Africa.

“One of the most significant yet generally overlooked factors in the lives and opportunities of emergency-affected youth are class differences.”

South Sudan has one of the youngest and most undereducated populations globally. Nearly two-thirds of the population are under 25 and the median age is 18.6. Only one in three are literate, and only 1.5 per cent of GDP is invested in education.¹⁰⁷ In refugee camps and settlements in Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia, 12 per cent of refugee youth of secondary school age had gained access to secondary school as of 2019. This educated youth subgroup also dominated access to non-formal education programming. Members of the 88 per cent of the youth cohort who were not in school found it relatively difficult to access formal and non-formal education opportunities.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Youth4Peace. n.d. “UNSCR 2250 | Introduction.”

¹⁰⁷ “South Sudan,” *The World Factbook (2022 Archive)*, Central Intelligence Agency, 2022.

¹⁰⁸ Drawn from UNHCR statistical documentation for South Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda, 2019.

Issues related to the apparent advantages that educated youth in emergency and protracted crisis settings secure are underexamined. One method for minimising the significance of social class is to homogenise youth cohorts. Keeping huge populations undifferentiated invites assumptions that helping at least some youth is all that matters because youth are, in essence, pretty much the same. One study urging refugee access to higher education opportunities – a vitally important yet narrowly available dimension of EiE – standardises urban refugees, implying that they collectively have difficulty accessing information about tertiary education opportunities.¹⁰⁹ Left undiscussed is how the refugee youth subgroup seeking access to universities tends to be tiny.

Most emergency-affected youth face a more encompassing educational reality. One study found “low rates of participation of youth in later primary and secondary education” in the countries under review. The low rates were connected to a number of important factors, including:

- “Poverty and financial family pressures” that can force youth to leave school to support their families economically
- Discrimination against youth from minority or ethnic groups
- Hidden costs for attending school, which some youth are unable to afford
- Curricular content that is not relevant to the “daily realities and needs of youth, especially in relation to getting work, increasing political participation, serving sexual health, expressing cultural identity or voicing critical thinking”



Photo: Images of Empowerment

¹⁰⁹ Gladwell, C., Hollow, D., Robinson, A., Norman, B., Bowerman, E., Mitchell, J., Floremont, F., and Hutchinson, P. 2016. Higher Education for Refugees in Low-Resource Environments: Research Study. Jigsaw Consult, United Kingdom, p. 4.

The authors termed the situation “systemic exclusion” and found that “female youth invariably suffered more than male youth.” They also highlighted “the differential capacity of elites to access education at all levels.” As a result, “formal education systems continue to create social divisions and reproduce the hierarchies and inequalities that have been drivers of conflict and youth alienation.”¹¹⁰

Urban refugee youth: “Over 60 percent of the world’s 26.4 million refugees and around half of the world’s 48 million IDPs [that is, internally displaced persons] live in urban areas, mostly in low- and middle-income countries.” This is as of 2021. Although “urban areas offer economic opportunity, the promise of self-reliance, and the ability to exercise choice as to where and how to live,” refugees in particular may encounter “difficulty accessing services [including education services] due to prejudice or an inability to pay fees or bribes, and they may face harassment in public spaces and be vulnerable to abuse from landlords and the police.”¹¹¹

Urban settings tend to mix opportunity with exceptional challenges for emergency-affected youth. Many manage to demonstrate their resilience and adaptability by securing reasonably stable and sometimes advantageous situations in cities. However, others are not so fortunate. Urban refugees and IDPs tend to be among the urban poor, and the areas they live in have been identified as “a significant factor in predicting lower secondary [school] enrolment and completion.” Education opportunities generally may be unusually difficult to access.¹¹²

A veteran EiE practitioner also pointed out that EiE activities largely are not available in urban areas. “There’s a bias to [refugee and IDP] camp-based programming,” the practitioner explained. The main reasons for this bias were that “it’s easier to deliver [in camps] and it’s a more donor-controlled environment.” At the same time, “education programmes are very expensive.” They nonetheless continue, in the practitioner’s view, because “many NGOs don’t want to downgrade their programmes to the lower national education level.” The recommended approach was “to ask which system is required to respond to out-of-school youth” – especially those in urban areas, where “programming for urban IDPs” in particular “is a black hole.” The lack of education tends to push some youth “towards entering the illicit economy, engagement with delinquent behaviour, and gang membership.”¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Lopes Cardozo, Mieke T.A., Higgins, Sean, Le Mat, Marielle L.J. 2016. *Youth Agency and Peacebuilding: An Analysis of the Role of Formal and Non-Formal Education: Synthesis Report on Findings from Myanmar, Pakistan, South Africa and Uganda*. Research Consortium Education and Peacebuilding, University of Amsterdam, pp. 54-55.

¹¹¹ Anneleen Vos and Helen Dempster. 2021. “[Most Refugees Live in Cities, Not Camps. Our Response Needs to Shift.](#)” Center for Global Development (28 October).

¹¹² One publication usefully provides guidelines to provide an educational response to urban refugee children and youth: Mary Mendenhall, Susan Garnett Russell, Elizabeth Buckner. 2017. *Urban Refugee Education Guidelines and Practical Strategies for Strengthening Support to Improve Educational Quality for All*. Teachers College, Columbia University (February).

¹¹³ Jovana Carapic and Mieke Lopes Cardozo. 2016. *Education, Urban Violence, and Youth: Exploring Pathways or Roadblocks for ‘Peace’ in the City*. Network for International Policies and Cooperation in Education and Training (NORRAG), Working Paper #10 (March), p. 15.

Trauma, substance abuse and gangs: The cascade of difficulties and risks that many emergency-affected, out-of-school youth face may not receive the degree of attention they require. There are at least three reasons for this:

1. Because most youth are neither in school nor other educational programmes, professionals do not have easy opportunities to identify and support young people in need.
2. Young people may withdraw from or seek to avoid community-centred gatherings. Whether they are not welcomed or do not feel welcomed, the result is the same: they are simply not present or represented. This is a significant weakness in commonly used community approaches. Community work only tends to work with those who are comfortable being seen.
3. Connecting with many if not most emergency-affected youth may be challenging unless it is intentional. This is because many youth decline invitations or opportunities to engage, sense they are unwanted or are risk averse. Disengagement and avoidance can also become practiced behaviour for young people caught up in activities they would prefer to hide.

These trends and tendencies can become even more pronounced as a result of psychological trauma and social pressures. A refugee youth leader shared a particularly challenging scenario for male youth:

“For many [male] youth, your father is not there. There’s so much pressure on you. It’s very challenging. It’s the younger male youth who can go to school [while] the father’s responsibility is on the shoulders of the older male youth.

For many, it’s too much to bear. So, they will do anything in order to survive. They have a responsibility that they’ve never had before. Your mother will pressure you to be a man. Because of that pressure, many will get involved in drinking.”

A study of Somali refugees in urban Kenya found that refugee youth lacking resources or family connections “left the youth with no physical protection as well as shelter and food.” Youth in such situations were drawn to two activities: substance abuse and gang affiliation. Reliance on drugs can “serve as an immediate reliever of psychological pains and anxiety.” This can temporarily help young people “deal with haunting memories of past traumas and current afflictions.” Substance abuse became a coping strategy for a life without “proper social protection for those in vulnerable situations and devastated community and family support systems.”

The combination of vulnerability, trauma, and the protection and connection void ultimately led some youth to form or join “a gang of peers,” which was “one of the few options for these vulnerable youth.”¹¹⁴ This appears to be a widespread response to vulnerability, disconnection and dislocation, particularly for male youth. Gangs also emerge as a response to limited institutional reach. In Cairo, “self-declared gangs” formed by Sudanese refugee youth have “reshaped existing concepts of social systems and challenged refugee advocates and assistance providers.” In situations where “disenfranchisement has become entrenched and intractable” and many refugees “lose faith in the ability of institutions to affect their circumstances positively,” gang membership represent “an assertion of control and pride.”¹¹⁵



Photo: Tehmasip Khan/Pexels

Formerly abducted youth: Trauma is a common outcome of emergency conditions and forced displacement. However, some populations are substantially more affected than others, former child members of combatant groups among them. One study revealed “significant group differences of trauma exposure” between young people who had been abducted into fighting forces and those who had not. The research identified “higher levels of PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] and potential depression in former child soldiers than in war-affected youth who were never conscripted” into military units. The researchers identified “the need to put psychological support structures in place,” especially for significantly traumatised young people such former abductees. Education can be an important source of such support.¹¹⁶

Sexual threats and child marriage: Many emergency-affected girls, female youth and women face elemental protection risks in their daily lives. A case in point is the Za’atari camp for Syrian refugees in Jordan, where girls, female youth and women “live in fear of sexual violence and sexual harassment.” A simple nighttime trip to the toilet can be perilous. The level of danger is so high that women in the camp suffer from increased rates of urinary tract inflammation “due to abstaining from using bathrooms for long periods of time.” Those subjected to sexual harassment and violence tend to respond “by keeping silent for fear of making their situation worse by provoking conflict within their families.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Hyojin Im and Nicole George. 2022. “It Hurts So Much to Live for Nothing’: Lived Experiences of Substance Use Among Refugee Youth in Displacement.” *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction* (20): 1671-1686, pp. 1678, 1682.

¹¹⁵ Themba Lewis. 2009. “Sudanese Refugee Youth ‘Gangs’ in Cairo.” *Forced Migration Review* (33): 52-53, pp. 52, 53.

¹¹⁶ Nina Winkler, Martina Ruf-Leuschner, Verena Ertl, Anett Pfeiffer, Inga Schalinski, Emilio Ovuga, Frank Neuner and Thomas Elbert. 2015. “From War to Classroom: PTSD and Depression in Formerly Abducted Youth in Uganda.” *Frontiers in Psychiatry* (6): 1-10, pp. 7, 8.

¹¹⁷ Mohammed Abdel Karim Al-Hourani, Abdel Baset Azzam, and Addison J. Mott. 2019. “Sexual Harassment of Syrian Female Youth in Jordanian Refugee Camps.” *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies* 10(4.1): 24-43, pp. 29, 37.

Child marriage may further increase the risks that female youth face. It is not clear whether conflicts and humanitarian crises affect child marriage rates globally. One study found that while “adolescents impacted by conflict and other humanitarian emergencies are some of the most vulnerable” to child marriage, “the extent to which these contexts affect rates and drivers of underage marriage is not known.”¹¹⁸ A second study was similarly unable to conclude that “humanitarian crises are associated with universal increases in child marriage rates.”¹¹⁹ Notwithstanding the uncertain global dynamics, the specific case of Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazaar in Bangladesh indicates that the practice increased following displacement from Myanmar. Child marriage is considered a reflection of the practice of *purdah*, which bans girls “from venturing outside their homes unaccompanied when they reach puberty.” Research also found that 11 per cent of married girls had experienced gender-based violence, compared with 4.5 per cent of unmarried girls. Beatings from husbands are also commonly reported.¹²⁰

As this brief illustrative review demonstrates, the array of difficulties and challenges that vulnerable, emergency-affected and out-of-school youth regularly face is substantial. It is very far from comprehensive. Among the subgroups not mentioned are unmarried mothers, orphans, those with disabilities, and those from marginalised ethnic or religious groups. It nonetheless demonstrates the need to expand the coverage of education initiatives for out-of-school youth, while at same time signalling the need to learn about how to strategically target particular subgroups and work hard to gain their trust.



Photo: Safari Consoler/Pexels

¹¹⁸ Matthew MacFarlane and Janna Metzler. 2022. *Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings: Synthesis report on Findings from Ethiopia, Lebanon, and Myanmar*. New York, NY: Women’s Refugee Commission.

¹¹⁹ Shatha Elnakib, Ligia Paina, Bothaina Attal, Rumana Akter, Ghada Khoury, Loqman Karim, Hemeda Houssein Barkat, Anand Tamang, G. Yenokyan, Janna Metzler, and Courtland Robinson. 2023. “Incidence of child marriage among refugees and internally displaced persons in the Middle East and South Asia: evidence from six cross-sectional surveys.” *BMJ Open*.

¹²⁰ Silvia Guglielmi, Khadija Mitu and Jennifer Seager. 2021. “‘I Just Keep Quiet’: Addressing the Challenges of Married Rohingya Girls and Creating Opportunities for Change.” *European Journal of Development Research* 33: 1232–1251, pp. 1241, 1242, 1243.

X. Conclusions

The provision of education in many emergency and protracted crisis settings provides illuminating perspectives of the EiE field. Typically faced with challenging and uncertain conditions, and often limited funds, the field's pronounced area of specialisation – education for young children – is routinely the focal activity and priority. Efforts to achieve SDG 4, to provide inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, are well under way.¹²¹

Exiting an EiE location, however, a separate vista arises: a landscape filled with female and male youth with limited connection to education. In many emergency settings, out-of-school youth seem to be everywhere (particularly during primary school hours). They may be working or caring for children (or both). They may be strolling along with no particular destination.

Much more is unseen. Many youth are parents. Some must operate on their own. Their knowledge of underlying social dynamics very likely is refined yet overlooked. And while EiE provisions regularly are found settlements and camps, many emergency-affected youth are not even there. They're in cities.

With an eye on the EiE field, this study has focused on the uncertain educational journeys of emergency-affected youth. The main conclusions are:

1. ***A pronounced orientation toward young children and primary schooling:*** Primary or basic education is by far the EiE centrepiece. Nothing else comes close. There are many reasons for this. Setting up a primary school is widely viewed as the main education and protection priority during emergencies and protracted crises. It also tends to be the top educational preference of major donor institutions and host nations' education ministries. Providing education to children between the ages of six and 12 also allows emergency educators to reach large numbers of children swiftly and at a somewhat lower unit cost. Doing so is the convention and the sectoral heartland. More than anything else, primary school is what emergency educators do.

¹²¹ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>

2. **Absence of clarity on who youth are:** The striking underdevelopment of education for youth in the EiE field has many dimensions. It starts with an elemental finding arising from this research: there is no agreed youth definition for the EiE field. Related to this was the absence of indications that this deficit was a matter of particular concern. Many definitions clash, and some appear only to have emerged out of convenience, such as those that keep youth in the child category, that is below the age of 18. “Youth” sometimes appears to be an add-on word, situated after “children” but with no suggestion of its particular significance. It is difficult to provide education interventions for youth if it is not clear who they are.

3. **A disturbingly low priority for youth in the EiE field:** As noted above, EiE’s main orientation unmistakably is primary schooling. It has yet to build out substantially from that logical and essential starting point.

One indication of this that the [IASC Guidelines on Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises](#) have barely influenced the field. In 94 per cent of interviews conducted for this study, the guidelines never came up. Given that they were prepared by UNICEF and NRC; that they emerged from a task team for the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, which has a membership of more than 60 major NGOs and UN agencies, and were released with much fanfare in 2020, this was not anticipated.

4. **Notably limited levels of youth expertise and investment:** Research for this study indicates that the general response to huge cohorts of out-of-school youth in emergency and protracted crisis settings is deficient. Knowledge of this group, such as the challenges they face and their educational priorities, was rarely demonstrated. Many EiE professionals interviewed expressed uncertainty about how to respond. The interview data also revealed indications of negative biases toward out-of-school youth. The scale of research about youth and EiE and the subsequent educational response are clearly inadequate.

5. **EiE largely is stationary while many youth are mobile:** An important disconnect separating many out-of-school youth from the EiE mainstream is location. While certified education offerings from EiE agencies tend to concentrate in camps and settlements, large numbers of young people migrate into urban areas. This appears to be neither an EiE strength nor an area of focus.

6. A narrow approach to girls' education: Girls' education in EiE work is notable and undeniably important. However, key factors hamper youth inclusion. The area of expertise is reflected in the name itself: the collective efforts on girls' education appear to focus far more on younger girls, and social and cultural biases against girls and women generally, than the priorities of female youth. The approach to the inevitable life requirements of many if not most female youth is remarkably rigid. The interview data strongly suggested that even the provision of sanitary towels was not a standard component of girls' education work.

The situation is even more concerning for students who become unmarried mothers or young wives. Preventing these two female youth outcomes is a prime girls' education motivation (and is difficult to achieve). However, once girls become mothers and/or wives, traditional school settings often no longer respond to their education needs. This can make going to school at best unappealing or humiliating and at worst no longer feasible. To attend school or an education programme, female youth may require quality childcare and/or alternative hours. Educational settings available to youth should be customised to meet the needs of youth wives and mothers.

7. A striking imbalance concerning education for boys and male youth: The commonly featured and laudable efforts involving girls and education in EiE initiatives are not balanced with endeavours that address the education-related challenges and risks that many boys and male youth face. Compared to their female counterparts, the often-lower performance of boy students should be a cause of major concern, but it does not appear to be. Unaccompanied boys and male youth, moreover, have been found to be regularly overlooked in emergency settings. In addition, the attention paid to girls in EiE appears to invite unfortunate if unintentional gender-specific fallout for boys and male youth. The same may be true for youth with LGBTQ+ profiles.

8. An absence of strategic targeting: Research revealed a narrow array of certified education programmes for youth in emergency and protracted crisis settings. The available programmes also overwhelmingly favour a supply orientation; that is, they are available to out-of-school youth generally. This non-specific approach points to little knowledge of the everyday realities that out-of-school youth cohorts face. As a result, the type of initiatives and priority issues – such as location, timeframe, duration, mode of delivery and provision of childcare – that might allow particular out-of-school youth subgroups to attend were not found to inform programme provisions.

In the absence of strategic targeting or customised interventions, programme participants appear to be self-selecting. There also appears to be a lack of information on what that profile is, and which youth are not in programmes. This trend is reflected in this study’s review of accredited AEPs, the most common certified education provision, which identified two dominant trends: that programme providers identify out-of-school youth as a single group and deliver initiatives whose type has been decided in advance.

9. Indications of favoured access to educational programming: One unintended consequence of the supply orientation is that vulnerable non-elite, out-of-school youth subgroups, including youth wives and mothers, those who work during the day, those with disabilities, members of excluded ethnic or religious groups, former or current members of armed groups and those dealing with substance and/or alcohol abuse, appear rarely to be identified or specifically targeted for EiE interventions.

A second concern is who gets in. Youth with family and/or monetary support, who are able to attend school even during normal work hours, are likely to gain access to educational opportunities. The generic provision of programming for any youth who can attend thus runs the risk of inadvertently promoting inequality within youth cohorts.



Photo: Safari Consoler/Pexels

XI. Recommendations

The well-known youth gap

Providing education under emergency and protracted crisis conditions is exceptionally difficult. Faced with compressed timeframes, limited funding, protection concerns and extreme need, emergency educators and their donors largely stick to what they know: providing education for children between the ages of six and 12. It is important work. Progress has been made to expand access to junior secondary school and to provide education for children under six. But not, for the most part, to youth.

Interviews with 36 experts who know this terrain well revealed broad agreement on the state of education for youth in emergency and protracted crisis settings. It is bleak. Most cannot access programmes because none are available or there is no room for them. Even if an opportunity arises, any number of factors may hold youth back. Making sacrifices to attend would also require the need for the available programme to have relevance to their lives and priorities. That may not be the case. For many emergency-affected youth, education may seem like a walled-off world that is not meant for them.

Engaging and including many out-of-school youth in relevant, certified educational programming cannot succeed without sustained effort and a substantial ramping up of expertise, strategic targeting and investment. Some of those interviewed expressed support for using this research endeavour to address the well-known youth gap. “I think it’s important for people to respond to this research,” a veteran EiE practitioner stated. “I’m very happy that this research is being done,” added a donor official. “You are right in doing this work,” a second donor official noted. “It is needed.”

The following recommendations are bold because they need to be. The existing provisions, know-how and backing are far too insubstantial to propose anything less. The focus is on certified education opportunities and the truly vast populations of emergency-affected youth who are not in school. Finding out what youth actually want in educational terms – whether it is certified or otherwise – will be the focus of the recommended second research phase.

Policy recommendations:

1. **Recognise the inadequate status quo and commit to reform:** The dearth of practitioner expertise and youth-centred initiatives are familiar weaknesses in the EiE field. Programmers largely advance conservative, timeworn certified education efforts for out-of-school youth. Similarly, many education authorities appear to rely on institutional traditions that are an unlikely fit for the huge post-primary education challenges they face in emergency and protracted crisis settings. For the most part, neither set of stakeholders are guided by the needs and priorities of their target groups. Such guidance is not viewed as necessary. Donors, in turn, appear frustrated over what to fund. Strategic responses are hard to identify. Meanwhile, vast populations of youth are unable to access educational opportunity.

Throwing up one's hands in the face of this seems all too common. It is not a way forward. The first recommendation thus is threefold: (a) Accept that the status quo is coming up short; (b) Take steps toward a strategic response; and (c) Invest in providing substantially more educational opportunity to emergency-affected youth.

Rationales for such a changed approach are necessary. Peacebuilding and stable recovery cannot advance without the demonstration of inclusion. That is not in play as things stand. In fact, most emergency-affected youth experience the opposite. Separation from sizable youth populations is unlikely to contribute to secure, upbeat futures for communities, states and regions. Outreach and support are required. This report, and the recommendations that follow, provide a process for productive engagement via certified education programming.

2. **Convene a high-level conference (or series of major gatherings) to galvanise EiE commitment to out-of-school youth:** The need for such an undertaking is clear. Out-of-school youth are an enormous population that the EiE community is barely reaching and about whom its members know very little. A high-level gathering or gatherings would throw a spotlight on youth as a vast but somehow discounted priority group and serve as a platform for learning about how to address their educational needs.

A significant challenge that needs to be discussed are the educational priorities of key youth subgroups. They cannot be adequately addressed without qualified youth and youth experts in the room (indications strongly suggest that authentic, relevant, out-of-school youth expertise is

exceedingly limited in the EiE ecosystem). Some of the other recommendations in this section, such as those concerning a definition of youth, the overlooked IASC Guidelines on Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises, and the collection and use of data disaggregated by gender and age, could also be featured.

The starting point for any conference(s), however, should be helping the EiE world come to grips with what EiE for youth means, how it connects with the development of relevant resources and materials, and strengthening capacity to address the educational priorities of out-of-school youth.



Photo: Al Azik maulana Koentjoro/Pexels

3. Dramatically and urgently upgrade expertise on out-of-school, at-risk youth in the EiE field: The research did not uncover substantive expertise in the EiE field about youth populations: their educational priorities, where they are situated, who is out of school (and why), what the key vulnerable subgroups are, the key issues they face, and their sources of resilience. It is a striking deficiency that must be addressed with investments in research, personnel, collaboration, and appropriate, empowering initiatives. A significant upgrade in knowledge and guidance is urgently required.

One way to do this is by integrating youth expertise and voices directly into EiE work via advisory groups and an onsite presence in HQ offices, field operations, and education ministries. The experts should combine female and male youth who have requisite experience and knowledge, together with adults who have a solid grasp of EiE as well as the realities of out-of-school youth. It is important for these experts to appreciate out-of-school youth dynamics and the key subgroups; including those relating to gender, age, responsibility, protection, disability and other vulnerabilities, and opportunities.

Translation may be required to secure such expertise. Many of the most knowledgeable youth on the ground may not know a European language. Youth-informed EiE action also needs to be connected to other sectors, because youth firmly belong in the protection, health and livelihood sectors, as well.

4. *Promote learning about education and out-of-school youth:* Regular investment in quality research, including by qualified youth, has the potential to inform strategic decision making and effective action. Including urban youth as a priority research population is important, even if emergency educators are not yet operating in urban areas. It would help to ground knowledge about youth dynamics and identify opportunities for facilitating their access to educational programming.

Endorsement and support for the second phase of this research – a global participatory study undertaken by youth researchers on the certified and uncertified educational priorities of out-of-school youth – is strongly advised.

5. *Target key youth subgroups:* Support for tertiary education is an essential element of educational programming for youth. At the same time, immediate steps should be taken to address the dominance of relatively well-positioned youth in accessing certified education opportunities. Doing so will require practitioners to learn about youth subgroups and customise programming with their input. It also requires donors to accept that the sheen of upbeat indicators may take a hit, if only for a while. They must give practitioners and themselves a learning runway. Patience in reaching new populations is also required. Youth do not care about programme outputs and should not have to.

6. *Find out how to deliver education to youth:* Many EiE experts were found to routinely presume that education could only take place in a school setting. Yet school environments may be uninviting, inflexible and potentially even dangerous for many youth. Reaching out-of-school youth and providing them with relevant certified education calls for practitioners to find out and respond to what works for youth. This reset is strategic and necessary.

7. *Transform the donor-driven emphasis on girls' education into strategic, gendered support:* It is commendable that the EiE community is concerned about education for girls. But much more needs to be done to demonstrate inclusion and acceptance in gendered approaches to emergency education. Elemental female youth requirements should be sufficiently provided, the specific education-related deficits and risks of male youth and boys should be addressed and LGBTQ+ youth should be included. See programme recommendation no. 4 for specific guidance.

8. Maintain regular engagements between EiE stakeholders and education authorities about out-of-school youth challenges: The challenge and necessity of addressing the education priorities of out-of-school youth, including via new approaches, should be a regular subject of policy and programme exchange.

9. Develop an adaptable definition of youth for the EiE field: It is impossible to assist many youth without some agreement on who they are. Who is a youth is so unclear, and the commitment to supporting them generally so weak, that some EiE stakeholders invent youth definitions for the sake of convenience or set them aside entirely.

The challenge is that fashioning a universal age range for youth is impractical and unworkable. The CRC may have determined that everyone under 18 is a child. But the same cannot be done for youth. The reason is simultaneously simple and complex. Youth is the stage of life that sits between childhood and adulthood. Yet representing this transition as an age range inevitably invites confusion because definitions vary by country and institution, sometimes significantly. How can we know when a boy or girl becomes a male or female youth? How can we identify the point when a youth becomes an adult woman or man? How does all of this apply to young people with LGBTQ+ profiles? Simply put, critical life transitions can have specific, undefined or evolving markers.

How, then, should the EiE field define youth? It should come up with agreed guidelines for establishing who is a youth in a particular context. The guidelines should be universal, but their application should be local. The most important one concerns how to map the youth category against levels and pathways of education. Local, national or regional definitions or age ranges may also apply. This might simplify the process. Even so, the process of finding out who is a youth in a programme area demands that EiE professionals begin to learn about local youth populations, and who within them should be the focus of their efforts.

10. Commit to the disaggregation of data in the EiE field: Regardless of how youth are defined locally, reliable and accurate data is essential for developing profiles on who is accessing educational programming and who is not. The use of data disaggregated by age, gender, disability and education level has the potential to inform more effective EiE programming and practice.¹²²

¹²² The IASC Guidelines on Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises has highlighted the need to “Collect data on needs, priorities and capabilities, and analyse these data disaggregated by sex, age and disability, to understand differing educational needs of young people before and after the crisis.” Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). 2020. *With Us & for Us: Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises*, UNICEF and NRC (for the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, November), p. 114.

11. **Apply the IASC Guidelines on Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises:** The specific guidelines on education, on pages 113-116, are an excellent resource. They are practical, useful and relevant, and have been endorsed by many of the key UN and NGO stakeholders in the EiE field. Steps to incorporate them into EiE practice should be taken immediately.

Programme recommendations:

1. **Pilot adaptable, youth-centred approaches to education:** The array of youth requirements and priorities outlined above create opportunities for customising certified and uncertified educational programming for them. Collaborating with members of key youth subgroups who will become prime targets for an activity is a necessity. Their direct engagement would help programming teams devise relevant and responsive initiatives.

Practitioners and donors should not automatically assume that digital education, distance education, remote learning and/or blended learning are solutions for out-of-school youth. The reason is that available evidence of their effectiveness and relevance remains thin, and some efforts have proven, at best, to underwhelm target groups. Such options, tailored to the priorities and requirements of key youth subgroups, should be explored, invested in, piloted and assessed.

2. **Strategically refine and expand the engagement process with youth:** To do this, it is first important to learn about out-of-school youth populations and understand the dynamics they face and the dimensions of the lives of prominent subgroups. Which will be priority target groups? What do they seek from an educational initiative, and what adjustments will facilitate their participation? Many important youth subgroups are elusive and difficult to reach and engage without trust-based outreach.

When authentic engagement begins, it will be important to allow participants to indicate their educational priorities in terms of content, location, timeframe and, if relevant, childcare. Some may seek a role in fashioning appropriate certified educational opportunities if that is possible. These steps are necessary to demonstrate inclusion and empowerment for young people who may be alienated, suspicious and busy. At the same time, exchanges with youth are important. All educational initiatives have constraints within which they must operate. These issues should be a featured part of conversations.

3. Elevate the quality and relevance of pre-programme assessments: Current assessments of educational needs and gaps tend not to consider the wider world of young people and to group them and children together. Programme planning and design should begin by establishing a comprehensive understanding of young people via a field assessment to determine who they are, the ecosystem in which they exist and their priorities and needs.

4. Apply a gender lens to the design and implementation of all programmes: The current approach to gender must be reinvented to respond to the priorities and challenges of female youth, male youth and those who belong to a gender minority or are still to settle on a gender identity.

Planning programmes with a gender lens calls for programme design teams to talk to youth about their priorities and requirements. This collaboration allows youth to stipulate their needs and inform programme planning. It may result in the inclusion of childcare, monthly stipends, menstrual products, customized locations and timeframes, or other key requirements in programme design and implementation.

5. Train and deploy qualified youth as monitoring and evaluation experts: Incorporating the strategic and technical expertise, ideas and insights of youth is a viable and highly useful means of ensuring programme relevance and impact. Qualified youth should be recruited and trained to become professional monitoring and evaluation specialists. As a precaution against unintended exclusion, such work should include investigation of the impact of effective programmes on those who cannot access them and explore reasonable remedies.

6. Implement bridging programmes: Among the challenges that some emergency-affected youth face is the difficulty of transitioning between primary and secondary school and between secondary school and university. The content and structure of bridging programmes should be flexible and adaptable enough to align with the specific curricular requirements of a country's education system.

Effective bridging programmes benefit many out-of-school youth because they address the prolonged hiatuses in their education. They have the potential to enhance educational motivation and reduce dropout rates.

In designing such programmes, it is vital to incorporate the two fundamental components of knowledge acquisition and orientation. The knowledge component should focus on relevant linguistic sciences, including digital literacy. Simultaneously, the orientation aspect should encompass workshops that prepare students for secondary or tertiary education, emphasising the development of life skills appropriate to their educational environment. The workshops should aim to foster the healthy and positive integration of young people, raise their awareness of the educational resources available in their communities and provide strategies for accessing them.



Photo: Yusuf Sinan/Pexels

The introduction of bridging programmes also aligns with recommendations nos. 3-5 in relation to expanding effective outreach to targeted youth subgroups. This involves gaining a comprehensive understanding of the attributes of out-of-school youth who may enter a bridging programme, and then establishing a strong connection with them so that their priorities and the content of the bridging programme are linked. Bridging programmes also can strengthen peer support networks by connecting youth who have successfully advanced to the next education level to those entering the programmes. Formal counselling and guidance workshops are likely to be necessary components of bridging efforts.

7. Initiate and support certification task teams: Wherever possible, these teams should aim to create systems to address two sets of pressing certification challenges:

- Help youth regain documents, or equivalent recognition, that facilitate the acceptance of their prior educational achievements. Exploring and perhaps collaborating with the UNESCO qualifications passport (UQP) initiative is advised. UQP “aims to create a globally standardized tool to recognise refugees’ prior academic, professional, and vocational qualifications when there is insufficient documentation.”¹²³
- Cultivate acknowledgement and approval for education programmes that are deserving of certification and accreditation.

Neither of these highly context-specific tasks are straightforward. They are, however, both necessary and require effective negotiation even to approach a modicum of success.

¹²³ UNESCO. n.d. “UNESCO Qualifications Passport for Refugees and Vulnerable Migrants.”



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Annex 1: Interview protocol and draft questionnaire

A. Invitation to be interviewed

Email Subject: Interview Invitation: Research on Out-of-School Youth & Education in Emergencies

Dear [Name of person being invited for an interview]

[NAME] recommended that I contact you. I'm reaching out to request an interview with you.

I'm the _____ for a new research project on education for out-of-school youth in emergency & protracted crisis settings. It's global in scope. A description is provided just below.

Do you have time for a 60-minute interview? If so, please take a look at my calendar [link inserted], and select a day and time that works for you (I'm based in _____). You should get a Zoom invitation immediately.

Once we've set a day and time for the interview, I will:

- Email you a consent form in advance of the interview, and invite you to review, sign and return to me (it's very straightforward).

If you have any questions or concerns about the interview process, please let me know.

Many thanks in advance for considering this invitation. I really look forward to hearing from you.

All the best,

[Name and Title of Researcher]

B. Qualitative interview consent form

Please note: Before each interview, this interview consent form will be emailed to the prospective interviewee. Each person we seek to interview is free to decide if they wish to participate in the interview (or if they prefer to decline the invitation). All interviews will be confidential as well as voluntary.



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Script:

Hello. My name is _____. I currently am _____ for this study on education for out-of-school youth in emergency and protracted crisis settings. The summary of this research effort is posted at the end of this form.

1. I invite you participate in this study. It will be conducted via Zoom. Your participation will not include any information that would connect you to your responses. It will be confidential: you will not be identified by name in the study. However, you may be identified as “a practitioner,” “donor official,” “youth expert,” or a similar general title.

If you do not want to be identified by your function or role, we can refer to you as ‘an interviewee’ instead.

Please state your preference:

[Participant to tick one option]

A. Check if you agree to being referred to by your role (in general terms)

OR

B. Check here if you agree to being referred to as an interviewee only

2. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you start the interview and wish to stop at any time, or if you don’t want to answer certain questions, you are free to do so. This interview is expected to last about 60 minutes.

Please confirm that you agree to participate in this study:

C. Check if you agree to participate in this interview

Signature

Date

Education for Out-of-School Youth in Emergency and Protracted Crisis Settings

Marc Sommers (team leader) and Mai Nasrallah (research associate)

This study will address education for out-of-school youth in emergency and protracted crisis settings. The starting point is the decrease in access to education as a child's age increases. The effort focuses on those young people most impacted by this trend: out-of-school youth.

The setting is the field of Education in Emergencies (EiE), with an emphasis on certified education. This refers to education that is recognised (or accredited) by the relevant national educational authorities (or the equivalent).

The research will investigate the focus on primary school in the EiE field and assess the implications for emergency-affected youth. It will consider the place of female and male youth in the EiE field, probe certified EiE programming for out-of-school youth, and sketch of the situation of out-of-school youth in emergency and protracted crisis contexts. It will end with recommended next steps for addressing the out-of-school youth challenge more effectively.

This study is supported by NORCAP, a part of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

C. Qualitative interview questionnaire

Opening:

This study is about out-of-school youth and education in emergencies and protracted crisis settings – known as Education in Emergencies, or EiE. The Norwegian Refugee Council is supporting this research. We expect our report to be published later this year.

This study focuses on certified education for youth. The reason is to ensure that the subject of education remains within the EiE system – and not other sectors, such as workforce development.

For this study, certified education is defined in the following way:

- Education that is recognised – or accredited – by the relevant national educational authorities or the equivalent; such as:
 - Any other institution working in co-operation with the national or sub-national educational authorities.
 - It can be a secondary school or university or an accredited vocational training center.
 - It also includes accelerated education programmes that prepare students to return to formal education.



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AA. Do you have any questions or comments on any of this?

(Write down their comments or questions, and do your best to answer them.)

[Pause]

OK: LET'S START WITH THE EiE SYSTEM:

1. What is EiE?
2. What does EiE do best? (Please explain)
3. What does EiE not do as well? (Please explain)
4. In the EiE system, what is the position of:
 - 4A. Primary school?
 - 4B. Secondary school?
 - 4C. University or tertiary education?
5. Our research indicates that the EiE system is strongly centered on primary school.
 - What *factors* might: Explain the focus on primary school – and – What *factors* might limit post-primary education?
 - 5A. What do you think is the impact of the focus on primary school – for youth? In other words: What do you think is current state of certified education for out-of-school youth in the EiE system?
6. Let's talk about Education Clusters in humanitarian crisis settings:
 - What are their priorities – and – What are not their priorities?
 - 6A. In the work of Education Clusters:
 - What is the role of certified education for out-of-school youth?
7. I want to ask you about donor agencies. For the EiE system:

What do donors prefer to fund – and – What do they prefer not to fund?

 - 7A. Do donor priorities influence the focus on primary school in the EiE system? Please explain.

[PLEASE NOTE: There's no need to ask 7B if they've already answered it.]



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NOW: LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUTH, GENDER, AND PROTECTION:

8. Who is a 'youth' in the EiE system, and what is the difference between:

- Boys and male youth, on one hand – *and* –
- Girls and female youth, on the other? (Please describe)¹²⁴

9. What is the situation of out-of-school *female* and *male* youth in emergency and protracted crisis settings? Please comment on both female and male youth.

[PLEASE NOTE: There's no need to ask #9 if they've already answered it.]

10. Let's talk about youth and protection during emergencies and protracted crisis settings:

What is child protection – and – Who is it for?

- 10A. What protection do female and male youth have – *and* –
Does the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) impact youth older than age 17?
(Please explain)

OK: LET'S TALK ABOUT PROGRAMMES

11. What certified education programmes are available to out-of-school youth during emergencies and protracted crisis settings?

- 11A. In your experience, which youth get into these programmes – *and* –
Which youth do not? *Why?* (Please explain.)
- 11B. What do you think is the *appropriate response* to the out-of-school youth challenge in emergency and protracted crisis settings?

BEFORE WE END OUR INTERVIEW, WE WOULD LOVE TO GET YOUR ADVICE

12. Do have any final reflections, questions or recommendations for us?

- Is there anyone else you think we should interview,
– or programme documents we should try to obtain?

If so: *Please share their contact details.*

Thank you!

¹²⁴ Try to walk them through both parts of the question.

Annex 2: Selection criteria and membership responsibilities for the Youth Advisory Group (YAG)

A. Selection criteria for membership

Recommendations were sought for membership from the networks of the research team regarding two categories of Youth Advisory Group (YAG) members:

Youth leaders with substantial relevant experience (3-4):

Leaders will be invited who:

- Have exceptional expertise about youth in emergency or protracted crisis contexts, particularly at-risk, female and male, out-of-school youth conditions, challenges and subgroups in these settings;
- Have had direct, first-hand experience of living in emergency or protracted crisis contexts (and may be living in such conditions currently);
- Have a degree of experience in EiE initiatives;
- Are fluent in English; and
- Commit to attending the relevant meetings, reviewing a report draft and contributing advice, ideas, comments and recommendations for the research team and to the report.

Experts with notable experience with youth and youth-centred initiatives (3-4):

Experts will be invited who:

- Have exceptional expertise about EiE systems and the role of youth in key EiE organizations, policies and practices;
- Field experience in EiE settings;
- Have expertise (or at least some experience) concerning youth in emergency or protracted crisis contexts, particularly at-risk, female and male, out-of-school youth conditions, challenges and subgroups in these settings;
- Are fluent in English; and
- Commit to attending the relevant meetings, reviewing a report draft and contributing advice, ideas, comments and recommendations for the research team and to the report.

A reasonably representative balance of YAG members will be sought, in terms of gender and geography.



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B. Membership responsibilities

Purpose: The general purpose is to provide advice and guidance for the researchers of the (anticipated) larger study.

Timeframe: The Youth Advisory Group (YAG) will regularly convene. The current estimate will be three meetings:

- One at the outset;
- One when preparations for the first draft of the report are underway; and
- One when preparations for the final report are underway.

Specific Responsibilities: YAG members will be invited/expected to:

1. Attend and contribute to all meetings;
2. Review one research report draft and provide comments to the research team;
3. Accept the research team's invitations to contribute advice, ideas, comments and – especially – detailed, practical recommendations to the research effort (and the final report version).

Compensation: A reasonable honorarium to recognise YAG member contributions will be proposed.

Annex 3: Certified education programming for out-of-school youth

Entry #	1	Country	Jordan: Zatari and Azraq Syrian refugee camps		
Age group	16-30	Organisation	Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)		
Criteria	No information on criteria beyond age				
Type	<input type="checkbox"/> Online	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Vocational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Language	<input type="checkbox"/> Accelerated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ICT
Accreditation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is clear		<input type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is not clear		
Programme description					
<p>NRC has youth centres targeting 16 to 30-year-olds in the Azraq and Zatari refugee camps. The centres offer three-month vocational training courses that are fully accredited by the national authorities. They are also accredited by Qualify, an international accreditation authority. The courses also offer youth an income generation opportunity as young people are able to sell products or join projects through NRC. To graduate from a course, learners must complete training in life skills, using the Passport to Success curriculum accredited by the International Youth Foundation.</p> <p>The youth centres also offer digital skills accredited by ICDL and English language training accredited by Arizona State University. They offer childcare facilities to support facilitators and learners, available to those with children aged between two and five.</p> <p>The programme is not designed for out-of-school youth, but is accessible to them.</p>					
Reach	About 800 learners a year				
Youth profile	No literacy requirements for vocational training, making the programme accessible to out-of-school youth. A literacy assessment is conducted at intake and appropriate support offered.				
Outreach	Mass outreach and word of mouth via hubs that young people can visit to learn about the programme, such as other NGOs' youth clubs, youth working groups and community youth gatherings.				
Source	UNESCO, 2022, NRC Youth Programme, Jordan (link)				

Entry #	2	Country	For Ukrainians inside and outside Ukraine	
Age group	N/A	Organisation	European Training Foundation (ETF)	
Criteria	No information on criteria beyond being Ukrainian			
Type	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Online	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Vocational	<input type="checkbox"/> Accelerated	<input type="checkbox"/> ICT
Accreditation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is clear		<input type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is not clear	
Programme description				
<p>ETF's 'UA Re-Emerge(ncy): e-learning and skills development to rebuild Ukraine' initiative offers digital skills and vocational e-learning courses to Ukrainians inside and outside Ukraine. The offering includes courses in energy efficiency, construction and restoration, and green energy. The programme is offered fully online, and is accredited by Ministry of Education and Science in Ukraine.</p> <p>The programme model collects and adapts existing professional e-learning courses from EU and neighbouring countries and ensures accessibility to Ukrainians for reskilling and upskilling.</p> <p>A call for the submission of relevant e-learning courses was launched on 27 July 2022, but implementation has not yet started.</p> <p>The programme is not designed for out-of-school youth, but information about it indicates that it is accessible to them.</p>				
Reach	N/A			
Outreach	N/A			
Source	European Training Foundation, 2022, UA Re-Emerge(ncy) (link)			

Entry #	3	Country	Uganda	
Age group	Young people - N/A	Organisation	Finn Church Aid (FCA)	
Criteria	Refugees			
Type	<input type="checkbox"/> Online	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Vocational	<input type="checkbox"/> Accelerated	<input type="checkbox"/> ICT
Accreditation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is clear		<input type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is not clear	
Programme description				
<p>The programme is the result of a memorandum of understanding between FCA) and Uganda’s Ministry of Education (MoE). Implemented in Rwamwanja, a settlement hosting mostly Congolese refugees, it offers young people six-month vocational training courses accredited by the MoE. No information on the age group is provided online. After completing the course students have access to internships and career counselling. The programme has been operating since 2015, with a reported 73 per cent of programme graduates finding employment or starting their own business.</p> <p>When demand for the programme outnumbers supply, students are selected based on applications and interviews. Previous study is not a prerequisite for enrolment and young people with interrupted studies or who are out of school may enrol. The programme targets young people who are orphans, drinkers or gamblers.</p> <p>The programme is not designed for out-of-school youth, but is accessible to them.</p>				
Reach	Target 900 for years 2015-2018.			
Outreach	Camp-based			
Source	<p>FCA, 2021, Education and livelihoods for youth also support elderly refugees (link)</p> <p>FCA, 2018, World, hold on! Education motivates refugee youth in Uganda – 73 per cent of the graduates at Rwamwanja find jobs (link)</p> <p>Relief Web, 2015, FCA to organise education for refugees in Uganda for three years (link)</p>			

Entry #	4	Country	South Sudan	
Age group	Young people - N/A	Organisation	FCA	
Criteria	Ugandan Refugees			
Type	<input type="checkbox"/> Online	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Vocational	<input type="checkbox"/> Accelerated	<input type="checkbox"/> ICT
Accreditation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is clear		<input type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is not clear	
Programme description				
<p>The Promoting Youth Employability through Enterprise and Skills Development' (PROYES) project is implemented by FCA with GIZ-Enable funding. It offers vocational training opportunities to Ugandan refugee youth in Palorinya settlement.</p> <p>The programme is the outcome of a partnership with South Sudan's Ministry of Education. It developed the country's first vocational education curriculum. Training offers include hairdressing, tailoring and construction. Mentorship in business start-up is also available.</p> <p>Fifty-three per cent of those enrolled are female. Female learners can join one of six vocational training offerings, customised career guidance and life skills. FCA offers child day care centres to enable accessibility for young mothers.</p> <p>Of 512 young people trained, 153, of whom 67 were females, were reported to be employed in the private sector or self-employed. The programme operated between October 2019 and May 2021. It is unclear if it still operates, or if not why it stopped.</p> <p>The programme is not designed for out-of-school youth, but information about it indicates that it is accessible to them.</p>				
Reach	512 between October 2019 and May 2021			
Outreach	Camp-based			
Source	FCA, 2021, Ugandan youths and refugees trained in Business and Vocational Skills (link)			
	FCA, n.d., South Sudan (link)			

Entry #	5	Country	Libya	
Age group	Young people - N/A	Organisation	UNDP/ Ministry of Labour and Rehabilitation	
Criteria	N/A			
Type	<input type="checkbox"/> Online	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Vocational	<input type="checkbox"/> Accelerated	<input type="checkbox"/> ICT
Accreditation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is clear		<input type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is not clear	
Programme description				
<p>The Libyan Korean Centre (LKC) is a vocational training centre in Tripoli funded by the Korean Development Fund. It is operated by Libya’s Ministry of Labour and Rehabilitation and the UN Development Programme (UNDP). It was established in 2008 and is accredited by the ministry.</p> <p>With a focus on IDPs, LKC offers young people 14 vocational training courses. Those who enrol have access to career counselling and grants for small business development. Vocational offerings include mobile phone repair, construction, welding, food processing and textiles. The centre has increasingly focused on green job opportunities in recent years.</p> <p>It provides young people with diverse training opportunities, targeting graduates of professional technical institutions, university graduates and first-time job seekers, and unskilled professionals.</p> <p>The programme is not designed for out-of-school youth, but information about it indicates that it is accessible to them.</p>				
Reach	N/A			
Outreach	N/A			
Source	UNDP, 2022, Republic of Korea has pledged an additional US\$ 400,000 to boost job opportunities in Libya (link)			

Entry #	6	Country	Jordan	
Age group	12-20	Organisation	Ministry of Education/Questscope	
Criteria	Out-of-school youth who have been out of formal education for at least a year			
Type	<input type="checkbox"/> Online	<input type="checkbox"/> Vocational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accelerated	<input type="checkbox"/> ICT
Accreditation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is clear		<input type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is not clear	
Programme description				
<p>The Drop Out programme was established by Questscope in 2003, and is now run by Jordan's Ministry of Education (MoE). It is an accelerated education programme designed for people aged 12 to 20 who have been out of formal education for at least one academic year. Around 50 per cent of those who enrol are refugees. The programme is accredited by the MoE and offers pathways for reintegration back into formal or vocational education. It is implemented in public school buildings.</p> <p>The programme was previously funded by USAID, UNICEF and others, and was previously implemented by Questscope, Mercy Corps, Relief International, Plan International and others.</p> <p>There are no literacy requirements for enrolment. Learners can enrol without any proof of prior education. To facilitate access, young people are provided with transport and snacks. All refugee nationalities who speak Arabic are eligible to enrol.</p> <p>The programme is designed for out-of-school youth.</p>				
Reach	4,500 learners annually			
Outreach	Community outreach officers and formal education referral system			
Source	<p>Questscope, 2021, Freire's time: unlocking energy and options for out-of-school youth in Jordan (link)</p> <p>Nasrallah, Mai Ibrahim. Opportunities and challenges to support out-of-school children and youth through Accelerated Education Programmes: Case Study of Jordan. University of Auckland and Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG), 2022 (link or link)</p>			

Entry #	7	Country	Colombia	
Age group	12-17	Organisation	Various	
Criteria	Out-of-school and over-age for primary school			
Type	<input type="checkbox"/> Online	<input type="checkbox"/> Vocational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accelerated	<input type="checkbox"/> ICT
Accreditation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is clear		<input type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is not clear	
Programme description				
<p>Flexible education models (FEMs) are accelerated education pathways offered nationally in Colombia. They are a set of alternative education metamodels that can be delivered to out-of-school youth. FEMs may be used for acceleration, multigrade classrooms, and distance/self-learning at both the primary and secondary levels. They are a formal education model, and need Ministry of Education approval to have the authority to certify primary or secondary studies.</p> <p>FEMs are flexible in curriculum and assessment, meaning that at the local-level implementers and teachers are able to design models that fit local needs best. Those between the ages of 12 and 17 who have either never entered formal education or have missed significant amounts of their education can enrol.</p> <p>FEMs are implemented by a range of stakeholders, including private organisations, local and international NGOs, community associations, and public and private schools. They are unable to meet the needs of out-of-school youth of secondary age as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Venezuelan migrants' crisis. Implementers reach a small proportion of out-of-school youth. Of those who enrol, 73.7 per cent do so in primary FEM models. Only 21.8 per cent enrol in lower and upper secondary options.</p> <p>The programme is designed for out-of-school youth.</p>				
Reach	No disaggregated data is publicly available			
Outreach	N/A			
Source	Restrepo-Sáenz, Ana María and Daniel Agudelo-Navarro. Opportunities and challenges to support out-of-school children and youth through Flexible Education Models: Case Study of Colombia. University of Auckland and Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG), 2022 (link)			

Entry #	8	Country	Colombia	
Age group	15 to 59	Organisation	Foundation for Social Development Transformemos	
Criteria	Out of school			
Type	<input type="checkbox"/> Online	<input type="checkbox"/> Vocational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accelerated	<input type="checkbox"/> ICT
Accreditation	<input type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is clear		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is not clear (see below)	
Programme description				
<p>Transformemos is a programme implemented by Foundation for Social Development Transformemos in partnership with Colombia's Ministry of Education and private funders, and is also funded by UNESCO. The programme targets youth and adults who are illiterate, have low levels of literacy, low levels of schooling, or those out of school. It seeks to increase education opportunities for vulnerable groups. Opportunities to integrate learners into formal education are also supported.</p> <p>The programme targets people between the ages of 15 and 59 who are not in the formal education system as a result of having either dropped out or never been enrolled. Specific targeting of youth and adults from vulnerable groups includes IDPs, former combatants, ethnic minorities, female heads of households and African-Colombians.</p> <p>Sixty-seven per cent of those enrolled are female and aged between 20 and 45. The majority are employed in informal jobs or agriculture and make less than \$200 per household.</p> <p>The programme is designed for out-of-school youth. It offers accreditation, but it is not exclusively an AEP.</p>				
Reach	300,000 since 2006			
Outreach	Community outreach officers and formal education referral system			
Source	UNESCO, 2012, Sistema Interactivo Transformemos Educando, Colombia (link)			

Entry #	9	Country	Peru	
Age group	Children and adolescents	Organisation	RET Americas	
Criteria	Venezuelan and out of school			
Type	<input type="checkbox"/> Online	<input type="checkbox"/> Vocational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accelerated	<input type="checkbox"/> ICT
Accreditation	<input type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is clear		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is not clear	
Programme description				
<p>RET Americas offers non-formal education services focused on meeting the needs of out-of-school Venezuelan children and adolescents in Peru. The programme is funded by ECW and sub-granted to UNESCO, UNICEF and Plan International. Activities are implemented in the southern districts of metropolitan Lima, Chorrillos, San Juan de Miraflores, Villa El Salvador y Villa María del Triunfo.</p> <p>The programme provides out-of-school adolescents with programmes that strengthen the competencies and skills they need to access formal education. It offers literacy and numeracy, catch-up courses, and host community and language training. RET works with the Ministry of Education to strengthen capacity on integrating out-of-school refugees and migrants into formal education systems. The programme has been operating since 2018. RET has a focus on accredited education programmes, but it is unclear if or how this intervention is accredited.</p> <p>The programme is designed for out-of-school youth.</p>				
Reach	N/A			
Outreach	N/A			
Source	RET Americas, 2019, RET's response to the Venezuelan crisis in Peru (link) RET Americas, n.d., Education (link)			

Entry #	10	Country	South Sudan		
Age group		Organisation	NRC, ACROSS, BBC Media, FCA, Nile Hope, and Vocational Skills Development Organisation		
Criteria					
Type	<input type="checkbox"/> Online	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Vocational	<input type="checkbox"/> Language	<input type="checkbox"/> Accelerated	<input type="checkbox"/> ICT
Accreditation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is clear		<input type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is not clear		
Programme description					
<p>The EMPOWER project is a vocational training programme funded by the EU. It offers young people vocational training in fields such as agriculture, construction, hospitality, tailoring, dressmaking, solar power systems, vehicle mechanics, and beautician skills. The programmes are designed to equip youth with the necessary knowledge and skills to secure employment. The project also plans to offer 2,000 apprenticeships, allowing participants to gain hands-on experience in their chosen fields.</p> <p>The project is accredited by the national Vocational Skills Development Organisation.</p> <p>This programme is not designed for out-of-school youth, but appears to be accessible to them.</p>					
Reach	4,400 young people (duration unclear)				
Youth Profile	N/A				
Outreach	N/A				
Source	BBC Media Action, FCA, NRC, 2018, South Sudan youth employment targeted to rise through EMPOWER project (link) EMPOWER, Facebook page (link)				

Entry #	11	Country	31 countries including Costa Rica, Egypt, Laos, Mexico, Poland, Nigeria, Sudan and Zimbabwe; another 25+ countries are in various stages of the deployment process.		
Age group	N/A	Organisation	UNICEF		
Criteria	N/A				
Type	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Online	<input type="checkbox"/> Vocational	<input type="checkbox"/> Language	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accelerated	<input type="checkbox"/> ICT
Accreditation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is clear		<input type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is not clear		
Programme description					
<p>The Learning Passport has been developed with the aim of narrowing the gap in learning poverty. It is a technology platform accessible online, through mobile devices and offline, and enables flexible learning opportunities. The platform delivers locally relevant content along with global supplementary resources to support learners and enhance their educational achievements.</p> <p>UNICEF is also gathering a collection of open educational resources and contributions from prominent private companies. These resources offer a diverse range of supplementary content that can be localised and used by implementing offices.</p> <p>The Learning Passport serves as an educational model for various stages of education, including ECE, primary and secondary education, adolescent skills development and TVET. It is tailored to meet the needs of children and youth who are either out of school or require support to ensure the quality of education they receive. Each user has a personalised record of their learning history, which is unique to them and can be carried across physical and digital boundaries.</p> <p>The programme is implemented once a UNICEF country office or government officially expresses interest. It is designed for out-of-school youth.</p>					
Reach	N/A				
Youth profile	N/A				
Outreach	N/A				
Source	Learning passport website (link)				

Entry #	12	Country	Nigeria		
Age group	10-18	Organisation	Plan International with EU funding		
Criteria	Out of school and overage				
Type	<input type="checkbox"/> Online	<input type="checkbox"/> Vocational	<input type="checkbox"/> Language	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accelerated	<input type="checkbox"/> ICT
Accreditation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is clear		<input type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is not clear		
Programme description					
<p>Millions of adolescents and youth are out of school in Nigeria. The Accelerated Basic Education Programme (ABEP) is available to people aged 10–18 who are unable to access formal education and are over-age for their grade. It is approved and supported by the National Council on Education.</p> <p>The maximum duration of the programme is three years, and learners enter at the level that is most suited to their skills. It is designed for out-of-school youth.</p>					
Reach	Nationwide, but it only reaches around 0.5 per cent of the out-of-school population				
Youth profile	Those aged 10-18 affected by poverty, conflict, cultural norms, early marriage and pregnancies and displacement				
Outreach	N/A				
Source	INEE, AEWG, 2023, Strengthening Accelerated Basic Education Programs in Nigeria (link) Egbujuo, Chima Jonas, 2022, Opportunities and challenges to support out-of-school children and youth through accelerated education programmes: Case Study of Nigeria. University of Auckland and Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG) (link)				

Entry #	13	Country	Philippines	
Age group	N/A	Organisation	Plan International	
Criteria	Out of school learners			
Type	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Online	<input type="checkbox"/> Vocational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accelerated	<input type="checkbox"/> ICT
Accreditation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is clear		<input type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is not clear	
Programme description				
<p>The Alternative Learning System (ALS) is “a parallel learning system which allows Filipinos who cannot access formal education to continue their education through modular and flexible means.” The programme is implemented by the Department of Education and facilitated by trained ALS teachers.</p> <p>Out-of-school youth can use ALS to engage with learning that is flexible, modular and adaptable. There is no time or space restriction for engaging with the learning material. Learners do, however, need a digital device.</p> <p>At the end of the programme, learners must complete an accreditation and equivalency test. Passing the exam successfully is equivalent to completing primary and secondary education.</p> <p>The programme is designed for out-of-school youth.</p>				
Reach	N/A			
Youth profile	The programme targets young people who face barriers to attending school, which may include working, home care responsibilities, being mothers, financial restrictions, disability or living in rural areas with no access to schools			
Outreach	N/A			
Source	Plan International 2021, Learning at my own pace: From out-of-school youth to future teacher (link)			

Entry #	14	Country	Ethiopia		
Age group	N/A	Organisation	NRC		
Criteria	Out-of-school youth who have been out of formal education for at least a year				
Type	<input type="checkbox"/> Online	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Vocational	<input type="checkbox"/> Language	<input type="checkbox"/> Accelerated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ICT
Accreditation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is clear		<input type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is not clear		
Programme description					
<p>NRC offers vocational training certified by the government in three refugee camps in Assosa. So far more than 1,200 youth have received certificates with a target of 3,800 to be provided by the end of 2023.</p> <p>To ensure the success of these programmes, NRC has engaged with local government TVET agencies. This collaboration involves adapting the curriculum to offer flexible courses, providing trainers and offering mentoring in the camps. The government's refugee agency is also in the process of facilitating permission for youth to travel outside their camps to seek formal employment by using their vocational training certificates.</p> <p>As part of the project, NRC is also incorporating blended online learning through the Microsoft Community Training platform. These courses provide information and communications technology (ICT) training that goes beyond the government curriculum. After completion of the courses, trainees undergo government ICT assessments and are subsequently awarded accredited certificates.</p> <p>The programme is not designed for out-of-school youth, but appears to be accessible to them.</p>					
Reach	3800				
Youth profile	N/A				
Outreach	N/A				
Source	Communication with NRC staff				

Entry #	15	Country	South Sudan		
Age group	Completed primary school	Organisation	African Education Trust (AET)		
Criteria	Young women who have completed primary school but have been out of school for at least two years				
Type	<input type="checkbox"/> Online	<input type="checkbox"/> Vocational	<input type="checkbox"/> Language	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accelerated	<input type="checkbox"/> ICT
Accreditation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is clear		<input type="checkbox"/> Accreditation is not clear		
Programme description					
<p>Accelerated Secondary Education for Women (ASEW), part of Street Child, is a programme in Yambio that targets young women who have not had the chance to enrol in or complete secondary education. It is implemented by AET and runs for two and half years.</p> <p>The programme specifically aims to reach young women who have not attended secondary school as a result of poverty, conflict or early pregnancy, noting that South Sudan has one of the lowest rates for girls' enrolment and completion of secondary school globally.</p> <p>Given that most learners continue to engage in livelihoods and home-care responsibilities during the programme, it provides childcare centres on site.</p> <p>The programme is designed for out-of-school youth.</p>					
Reach	50 female learners enrolled in 2018				
Youth profile	Young women who have not attended secondary school as a result of conflict, poverty or early pregnancy				
Outreach	N/A				
Source	<p>Accelerated Education Secondary Education, 2018, ASEW: Accelerated Secondary Education for Women (link)</p> <p>Street Child, South Sudan (link)</p> <p>INEE, AEWG, Accelerated Education in the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda, 2022 (link)</p>				



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