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**Equitable access to quality education  
for internally displaced children**

# KEY MESSAGES

- The exact number of children living in internal displacement worldwide is unknown, but there were estimated to be over 17 million at the end of 2018, as a result of conflict and violence, and millions more due to disasters. Five million youth, aged between 18 and 24, were also living in internal displacement.<sup>1</sup> Too many internally displaced children grow up deprived of an education and the long-term opportunities it affords.
- A lack of capacity, resources and persistent insecurity, social tensions and discrimination are all significant barriers to education in many displacement situations. Internal displacement often places huge strains on already inadequate educational infrastructure, and when displaced children do attend school in many cases it is through parallel systems. These tend not to have qualified teachers or offer certified examinations, and risk having their funding cut at short notice.
- Access to quality inclusive education brings significant economic, social and health benefits to displaced and host communities alike. It helps to foster cohesive societies and is a vital tool in fighting prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination. By improving livelihood opportunities and supporting socioeconomic development for all, it also has the potential to address some of the causes of displacement and prevent future crises.
- Ensuring access to national education systems for internally displaced children is vital, provided it is safe to do so. The reflexive responses of governments to crises, and in many cases the humanitarian actors supporting governments, however, often include offering education outside the formal system. Governments have an obligation to provide equal access to education for internally displaced children, and there is growing consensus that informal schooling is not a sustainable solution.
- Far greater priority needs to be given, and efforts and investment devoted to minimizing the disruption to education that internal displacement causes, while maximizing the potential protection and other vital support that schools provide for their displaced pupils.

<sup>1</sup> IDMC's estimate based on the number of IDPs recorded as of December 31st, 2018, in countries affected by internal displacement in the context of conflict and violence.





## CONTEXT AND CONSIDERATIONS

Internal displacement is a growing phenomenon, the result of wars, instability, human rights violations, disasters and climate change. More than 41 million people were internally displaced as a result of conflict and violence as of the end of 2018, 6.1 million of them in Syria.<sup>2</sup> Disasters such as storms, floods and earthquakes triggered more than 17 million new displacements during the year, with China and the Philippines each accounting for 3.8 million.<sup>3</sup>

Over 17 million children were estimated to be living in internal displacement as a result of conflict and violence as of the end of 2018, among them more than 6.2 million girls and 6.4 million boys of primary or secondary school age. Millions more were thought to be displaced by disasters.

In many countries affected by conflict, internal displacement places huge strains on already inadequate education infrastructure and many displaced children miss out on their schooling.<sup>4</sup> In Iraq, only 32 per cent of internally displaced

children and adolescents had access to some form of education in 2015. In Yemen, only one third of internally displaced school-age children in Lahj governorate were enrolled in school in 2014.<sup>5</sup>

Much of the displacement associated with disasters takes place in the form of pre-emptive evacuations that last a matter of days, but events that cause significant damage and destruction may trigger displacement that lasts for years while communities and infrastructure are rebuilt, disrupting education in process. The potential for disruption is also high in areas prone to repeated or cyclical disasters. In Bangladesh, disasters such as storms and floods damage about 900 schools each year.<sup>6</sup>

When sea-level rise or other slow-onset climate change impacts force families from their homes, their displacement may be permanent, and such phenomena are expected to become one of the main drivers of displacement in

<sup>2</sup> IDMC, Global Report on Internal Displacement 2019, May 2019, available at : [link](#).

<sup>3</sup> IDMC, Global Report on Internal Displacement 2019, May 2019, available at : [link](#).

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR, Policy Paper 26, No More Excuses: Provide Education for all Forcibly Displaced People, 2016, p.6, available at : [link](#).

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR, No More Excuses: Provide Education to All Forcibly Displaced Persons, p.6-7, 2016, available at : [link](#).

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO, Global Education Monitoring Report: Migration, Displacement and Education – Building Bridges, Not Walls, Summary, p.54, 2019, available at: [link](#).

the coming decades.<sup>7</sup> The World Bank estimates that 140 million people will be internally displaced by slow-onset climate change impacts by 2050.<sup>8</sup>

Despite its global scale, internal displacement is largely overshadowed by the current political and public focus on refugees and migrants. Two new UN agreements, the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), recognize education's role and set objectives aligned with the commitment to leave no one behind. While the GCR recognizes the need to take a holistic approach, covering the continuum of forced displacement and calling for action in refugees' countries of origin, neither the GCR nor the GCM explicitly address the concerns of internally displaced people (IDPs), let alone education for internally displaced children. The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement state that everyone has the right to education, but limited resources and national politics tend to impede recognition of the issue and coordination to address it. The multi-stakeholder GP20 Plan of Action for Advancing Prevention, Protection and Solutions for IDPs (2018-2020), marked the 20th anniversary of the Guiding Principles, and seeks to address a wide range of issues, including access to education.

Internally displaced children are largely invisible in global and national data. Lack of disaggregated data on IDPs, and a failure to apply a displacement lens when collecting child-specific data, makes it difficult to understand the scale and impacts of internal displacement on children. This leads to challenges in providing targeted support. Internally displaced children are largely invisible in global and national data. Few countries report on the number of IDPs and only 14 per cent of the countries and territories with data on conflict-related IDPs disaggregate by age. And of these, only 25 per cent do so systematically. When age-disaggregated data on IDPs is collected, the proportion of children amongst internally displaced populations, is often greater than the proportion of children in the national population. The figures presented in this policy brief are estimates based on national-level age distribution, and so are under-estimates.

Out-of-school children are denied not only their educational development but also other important benefits. Interventions such as early childhood education and care are essential for displaced children who otherwise lack stable, nurturing and enriching environments. Going to school can provide a vital source of psychosocial support and a degree of stability and normality in their traumatized lives. It helps to reduce the risk of child recruitment, sexual violence and exploitation, and provides a conduit for life-saving information about issues such as landmines and HIV/AIDS.<sup>9</sup>

Education also plays an important part in encouraging integration. Effective social inclusion is vital not only for internally displaced children, but also for their hosts. Education policies and structures that ensure displaced children's protection and access to learning programmes are likely to improve their ability to adapt and integrate in the face of adversity and trauma.<sup>10</sup> Teaching children from host communities to embrace difference and diversity and foster inclusion from an early age is equally important. Investing in education yields huge economic returns. Each additional year of education is linked to an increase in national GDP per capita of between 13 and 35 per cent, and the World Bank recently reiterated that "providing students with basic cognitive skills could massively boost economic outcomes, especially in developing countries."<sup>11</sup> Better educated people and their children also tend to be healthier, more empowered in their lives and communities, and more tolerant and resolution-seeking.<sup>12</sup>

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7 IDMC, No Matter of Choice, 2019, available at: [link](#).

8 World Bank, Ground Swell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration, 2018, available at: [link](#).

9 Mooney, E. and French, C., Barriers and Bridges: Access to education for internally displaced children, p.1. 2005.

10 United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, Peace Dividends and Beyond – Contributions of Administrative and Social Services to Peacebuilding, p.31-32, 2012, available at: [link](#).

11 See Thomas and Burnett (2013), and Patrinos and Psacharopoulos (2013), cited in (UNICEF (2015, January) The investment case of education and equity, p. 7, available at: [link](#).

12 Ibid.



## OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES

Internally displaced children face significant challenges in exercising their right to education, from infrastructure, capacity and resource constraints to persistent insecurity, social tensions and discrimination. Girls and boys also face their own specific barriers. Girls are often expected to stay at home and support their families by taking care of their siblings, particularly if they are the eldest child, which puts greater pressure on them to drop out of school. Early or forced marriage and pregnancy are also barriers, particularly during humanitarian crises when parents may send their daughters off to be married or cared for by another family. Boys are often obliged to work to supplement their families' income rather than go to school and may also face the risk of forced recruitment.<sup>13</sup>

The availability and quality of education services vary significantly from one displacement situation to another. Some camps, for example, are better resourced to provide schooling for displaced children than others. Camps in the Mogadishu, Bay and Bakool regions in Somalia, have had functioning schools for at least two decades, and these

have drawn IDPs from neighbouring areas with less access to education opportunities.<sup>14</sup> In Nigeria, by contrast, 23 out of 42 displacement camps across six states had no formal or informal education facilities as of June 2015.<sup>15</sup>

Internally displaced children living outside camps tend to have very little access to education. Humanitarian interventions and donor attention tend to focus on camps at the expense of IDPs in other settings, including urban areas where they may face additional financial, administrative and social barriers to schooling.<sup>16</sup> Restricted humanitarian access to insecure rural areas may impede the learning of children displaced there, and sparsely populated rural areas in some countries have no education facilities at all.<sup>17</sup>

13 UNICEF Somalia Country Office; Cooperation International CAR.

14 UNICEF Somalia Country Office, 2018.

15 UNHCR, No More Excuses: Provide Education to All Forcibly Displaced Persons, p.6, 2016, available at: [link](#).

16 ICRC, Displaced in Cities: Experiencing and Responding to Urban Internal Displacement Outside Camps, p.10, 2018, available at: [link](#).

17 UNICEF Somalia Country Office, 2018.



Internally displaced returnees. Afghanistan's displaced population includes returning refugees and undocumented migrants who have gone back "to war instead of peace" and been unable to re-establish their former lives. At least 474,000 undocumented Afghans returned and at least 59,000 refugees were repatriated in 2017. Contrary to expectations, many returnee-IDPs try to rebuild their lives in rural rather than urban areas, and their location plays a significant role in determining their access to education. They also struggle to access documentation and often lack the information they need to make well-informed and dignified choices about their future.<sup>18</sup>

Educational and administrative responses to IDPs' plight often mirror those described for refugees, but many of the challenges they face are distinct.

### Persistent insecurity and protection concerns

Persistent insecurity in areas of conflict and violence prevents many internally displaced children accessing education. This may include recruitment and use by armed groups or armed forces and other violations of the human rights of children and their parents. Those fleeing hostilities may find themselves in new conflict zones as factions and frontlines shift. The proliferation of arms and the emergence of new armed groups has been observed in some humanitarian settings, forcing IDPs into repeated displacement. Schools are also often damaged or destroyed during conflict, or premises and teachers singled out for attack. In the past five years, in total, more than 14,000 attacks on education were reported in the 34 countries with a systematic pattern of attacks on education according to the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA).

An education needs assessment carried out in north-eastern Nigeria in early 2019 found that out of 260 school sites, 28 per cent had been damaged by shells, bullets or shrapnel, 20 per cent had been deliberately set on fire, 32 per cent had been looted and 29 per cent were near

areas where armed groups or the military were based.<sup>19</sup> Many children in Honduras who have to cross a road that demarcates one gang's territory from another's to get to school are unable to attend for fear of being caught in crossfire between them.<sup>20</sup>

Displacement disproportionately affects girls.<sup>21</sup> Gender-based violence and harassment may occur en route to and from school, which keeps many internally displaced girls at home such as in Afghanistan.<sup>22</sup> Girls are also often victims of corporal punishment and other physical and verbal abuse at school.<sup>23</sup> In fact, GCPEA reports that girls and women have been directly targeted, including through bombings of



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girls' schools, abduction, rape, and harassment, in at least 18 countries. More must be done to build the capacity of education personnel to protect children and the opportunities for child victims of sexual and gender-based violence to be referred to medical and psycho-social services.

Education is all too often treated as a secondary need to be addressed once violence has subsided, but conflicts and the emergencies they cause may last for years or even decades, leaving many displaced children to grow up deprived of education and the protection and support schools provide.<sup>24</sup> This also impedes their socioeconomic development, fuelling displacement risk and the potential for future crises. A relationship between low levels of

18 IDMC, Going Home to Displacement, Afghanistan's Returnee IDPs, Thematic Series: The Invisible Majority, 2017, available at: [link](#).

19 UNESCO, Global Education Monitoring Report, Summary, p.26, 2019.

20 UNICEF Honduras Country Office, 2019.

21 UNHCR, Policy Paper 26: No more excuses: Provide education to all forcibly displaced people, p.7, 2016, available at: [link](#).

22 Mooney, E. and French, C., Barriers and Bridges: Access to education for internally displaced children, p.2, 2005.

23 UNGEI and ODI, Evidence review: Mitigating threats to girls' education in conflict-affected contexts: current practice, 2017, available at: [link](#).

24 Mooney, E. and French, C., Barriers and Bridges: Access to education for internally displaced children, p.1, 2005.

education and high levels of internal displacement has already been established, but more research is needed to fully understand it.<sup>25</sup> It is clear, however, that investing in education would help to reduce the risk of future displacement.

Protracted displacement in Yemen. Widespread displacement, damage to schools and general insecurity have left millions of children without reliable access to education in Yemen. More than 1,000 schools have been damaged or destroyed or are being used as shelters, and there are many students and teachers among the country's 2.2 million IDPs. Many displaced children have also suffered serious psychological trauma, which further jeopardizes their schooling. Insecurity and funding shortages mean the education ministry struggles to provide services, including national end-of-year exams.<sup>26</sup>

### Lack of infrastructure, capacity and resources

Governments' reflexive responses to crises often include providing education to internally displaced children outside the formal system, but there is a growing consensus that informal schooling is not a sustainable solution. Such systems often lack qualified teachers, examinations are not certifiable and there is a risk that funding may be cut off at short notice. Governments have an obligation to provide equal access to education for all children, and those internally displaced should have equitable access to the national education system providing it is safe to do so.

Government funding and humanitarian assistance would be better channelled into reinforcing the formal education system and supporting schools in taking on more students. Any such plans would also need to recognize potential barriers for internally displaced children including lack of documents, limited language proficiency, previous interruptions to their education and poverty.

Internal displacement has potentially significant impacts on an education system, but authorities tend not to plan for unexpected and temporary population movements. This means facilities in host areas are unprepared to absorb new students. Nor is it always possible to continue providing education in areas of origin if, as in Somalia, teachers are among those who have fled.<sup>27</sup> This limits the availability and quality of education for displaced and host populations alike. A lack of infrastructure, capacity and resources, including adequately trained teachers and curricula tailored to displaced children's needs, combine to deprive many of learning opportunities.

In many displacement situations, classrooms are unable to accommodate both host and displaced children. In Ouaka in the Central African Republic, there are not enough rooms, teachers or materials to ensure quality education in schools that were already overcrowded before IDPs arrived in the area. The education system is highly fragile and does not have the resources to cope with the influx. Few teachers are permanent, and many posts are filled by "parent-teachers" appointed by the community but who tend not to have received adequate training.<sup>28</sup>

Teacher shortages are a common feature of displacement situations, and equitable and reliable remuneration is important in ensuring their supply, retention and motivation.<sup>29</sup> Governments and humanitarian partners with stretched budgets and short-term funding cycles may, however, have trouble meeting salary costs. Using volunteer teachers, often IDPs, and paying them stipends is common.

Internally displaced teachers often remain under the administrative jurisdiction of their home district, which makes collecting their salary virtually impossible, as in Syria.<sup>30</sup> Those in areas hosting large numbers of IDPs tend to lack experience in over-crowded, multilingual classrooms, but only receive sporadic training and

25 IDMC, Internal displacement and development: a statistical analysis, 2018, available at: [link](#).

26 USAID, Yemen - Education in Emergencies Response, 2018, available at: [link](#).

27 <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2011/aug/25/schools-big-role-somalia-crisis>

28 Cooperation International, Central African Republic (CAR).

29 UNESCO, 2019 Global Education Monitoring Report, Summary, p.27.

30 UNESCO, 2019 Global Education Monitoring Report, Summary, p.31.

support. Nor are they trained in providing psychosocial support for pupils with post-traumatic stress disorder, who make up as much as 75 per cent of the displaced student population in low and middle-income countries.<sup>31</sup>

### Social tensions and discrimination

IDPs frequently suffer discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity, religion or simply being displaced. This also takes place in schools and may lead to segregated education, as in Georgia.<sup>32</sup> Community tensions have also had a significant impact on IDPs' schooling in CAR, where many displaced households avoid sending their children to schools with large numbers of students from "rival" ethnic groups.<sup>33</sup> In some contexts, where internal displacement is linked to ethnic cleansing and other grave human rights violations, national authorities may have no interest in providing internally displaced children with access to education – which is then often provided solely through international humanitarian assistance. A lack of opportunities for constructive engagement between IDPs and their host communities aggravates the problem. Displaced children's parents are also rarely represented on school management committees, but their participation in school governance would help to promote inclusive learning environments.

Investment in IDPs' schooling also contributes to peace building and long-term development. Education plays an important role in helping to reduce the likelihood of conflict and violence, build inclusive and accepting communities and foster tolerance and understanding.<sup>34</sup> Evidence shows that doubling the percentage of young people with secondary education from 30 to 60 per cent would halve the risk of conflict.<sup>35</sup>

### Financial pressures

attending school in Iraq's Baghdad, Basra and Ninewa governorates.<sup>37</sup> The need to work to help their families earn an income was cited as the main reason for displaced boys to be out of school in Afghanistan.<sup>38</sup>

### Adapting education systems to internally displaced children's needs

Displacement disrupts children's education pathways, and many need support to re-enter formal schooling. In this sense, providing access in the form of school places is only the first step toward inclusion. Schools also have to adapt to their new students' needs. Given that displacement affects minorities and indigenous groups disproportionately, many IDPs are unlikely to be able to speak the local language of instruction. Displaced Quechua-speaking children in Peru, for example, were unable to understand or communicate with their Spanish-speaking teachers, resulting in higher levels of non-attendance and illiteracy, particularly among girls.<sup>39</sup>

Those switching to a new language of instruction need bridging programmes with qualified teachers, while those whose education has been interrupted require accelerated learning to help them to catch up. Accelerated learning programmes are flexible, age-appropriate programmes that run in an accelerated timeframe, to support children who have had their education interrupted. Placing displaced children in the same schools as their hosts is an important starting point in building social cohesion, but discrimination and the way lessons are taught may discourage or alienate them.

### Loss of documentation

Many IDPs lose their documents or have them confiscated during their displacement, and without them displaced children may be unable to enrol in school. Getting

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