

Action towards increased quality education for internally displaced children Recommendations for the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement

This written submission is based on Save the Children's report [Action Towards Increased Quality Education for Internally Displaced Children](#) (April 2021)

Internally displaced children's access to quality education remains unrealised

As of 2019, at least at least 13.4 million school-age children (5-17 years old) were internally displaced due to conflict or violence.ⁱ These numbers are likely an underestimate with many internally displaced children unaccounted for due to lack of data. The report only considers IDPs affected by conflict or violence, but there are millions more displaced due to other crises, such as climate change and environmental disasters.ⁱⁱ The periods of internal displacement are becoming longer, with years becoming decades and internally displaced children spending the majority of their school-years displaced. *The majority of these children do not have access to quality, safe and inclusive education due to financial, discrimination and insecurity reasons.*

Education emerged as a key priority for internally displaced children and youth consulted so far by the UN High-level Panel on Internal Displacementⁱⁱⁱ and for many internally displaced parents the success of their integration or settlement is dependent on their children's ability to access education.^{iv} Along with safety, livelihoods, and a stable home environment, education is a critical part of durable solutions to internal displacement, that are sensitive to children's needs but is also vital for their prosperity into adulthood as internal displacement situations tend to be protracted and having a good education means you are more likely to earn a higher income and lead a healthier life.^v Achieving such a durable solution means providing multiple flexible and recognised pathways to include internally displaced children in national education systems where they can receive a quality education with which they re-establish their lives and regain a sense of stability.

The right to education constitutes a fundamental human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948),^{vi} the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and many other international human rights instruments^{vii} and is one of the key principles underpinning the Education 2030 Agenda and SDG4.^{viii} The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement^{ix} in its article 29 establishes the importance for competent national authorities to provide educational services as they have the obligation to prevent any discrimination against IDPs who have returned or resettled in another part of the country and that they shall have equal access to public services.

States are the primary duty-bearers in the provision of education for IDPs^x. As displacement normally occurs during conflict or environmental disasters, provision of education must be fundamentally included in responses alongside other basic needs as it is life-saving and life-sustaining. While solutions should involve the government, they also require meaningful participation and engagement of IDPs, host communities and civil society. They must respond to the specific needs of the most marginalised children, including, girls, children with disabilities and those belonging to ethnic minorities.

The country case studies in the report from Afghanistan, Colombia, Somalia, Syria, and Ukraine highlight the critical need to strengthen national education systems to guarantee that internally displaced children and host communities can access free, high-quality, supportive, inclusive, and safe formal education that contributes to their overall wellbeing.

Local, national, and international efforts to address internal displacement have grown significantly over the past decades. This growth, however, comes alongside increasing numbers of internally displaced persons worldwide, which, as of 2019 is the highest it has ever been.^{xi}

The country case studies demonstrate that adopting legal and policy frameworks is not enough to uphold the right to education for internally displaced children. Challenges to implementing these policies are linked to institutional, financial, political, and cultural factors. While most policies assign government sectors to take a lead role in assisting and protecting IDPs, these bodies are frequently under-resourced and lack clear lines of authority. The need to include internally displaced children in planning and decision-making processes is a common aspect of these policies. However, due to IDPs' lack of representative bodies in many contexts, such involvement does not always materialise. **Most of the policies have generic provisions around age, gender and diversity, resulting in inadequate responses to intersecting vulnerabilities.** States must acknowledge such vulnerabilities and shape their planning and implementation efforts in a crosscutting fashion.

Solutions differ in nature due to the specificities of each context. Colombia and Ukraine's response to internal displacement has proven to be effective in retaining children in the formal education system. Nevertheless, sustainable, long-term solutions require a large amount of human and financial resources to be effective. **Long periods of conflict and lack of resources drastically impact states' capacities to absorb internally displaced children in national schools with complications compounding over time.** As displacement normally occurs during conflict or environmental disasters, the educational needs of IDPs usually compete with other basic, but life-saving priorities, as exemplified in Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria. Still, Afghanistan and Somalia's governments have adopted strong education policies for internally displaced children.

The existence of international standards such as the *Guiding Principles* has accelerated efforts by states to ensure IDPs' rights are not only enshrined in legal policy frameworks but are also practically recognised through their effective inclusion in national services and participation in decision-making. **Nevertheless, while those instruments may speak of a strong political will, wide gaps between policies and practice remain, with numerous internally displaced children left without access to formal education.** International actors that support drafting IDP policies should sustain their support overtime through efforts to ensure states' capacities are strengthened. **Government funding and humanitarian assistance should be channelled into reinforcing the formal education system to guarantee internally displaced children's access to education.**

We call upon the *High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement* to consider and take up these recommendations in its final report to the Secretary General to ensure that the education and wellbeing needs of internally displaced children are urgently acted upon. We will not reach Sustainable Development Goal 4 in 2030 (ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all), unless internally displaced children are included.

- 1- **Education is a right recognised to all children irrespective of their migratory or displacement status, of their gender and sexual orientation, their race or religion. All states have the responsibility to ensure access to education to all displaced children. Education is a durable solution for internally displaced children. It helps to support children's development and wellbeing at a time when they are at their most vulnerable by providing physical, psychosocial and cognitive protection and in the long term, quality education benefits the societies in which forcibly displaced children have sought safety:**
 - Education plays a vital role in securing economic recovery, social stability and peace in the most fragile of contexts. Some studies have shown that where education inequality doubled, so too did the chance of conflict.^{xii}
- 2- **The lack of importance some states and international community has historically accorded to education in internally displaced contexts starkly contrasts with the value that internally displaced children and parents place on it:**
 - Refugee children and young people around the world tell us that education is the key to their futures, their protection, their happiness and their health, and that it cannot be delayed.
- 3- **Sustained government investment and leadership in flexible education programmes and pathways into the formal education system to address the complex needs of internally displaced children is needed:**
 - Many displaced children have been out of school for extended periods, so they may not be ready to enter the national system at the appropriate level. They may require catch up classes and bridging programmes to ensure they can succeed in their education. In such contexts, accredited non-formal education programmes are ideal for preparing students to enter the formal system. In Colombia, government investment in alternative and flexible education programmes that adjust to the specific needs of internally displaced children and drive them through the formal education system has yielded positive results. Their efficacy depends largely on sustained funding and monitoring, particularly during children's transition to the formal system, and on meaningful support to building district-level capacities.
- 4- **Direct and quick inclusion of internally displaced children into the national education system can lead to greater integration with host communities. However, development of legal and policy frameworks does not automatically constitute the fulfilment of the right to education due to issues with implementation and other barriers to education, including poverty:**
 - In Ukraine, internally displaced children's direct inclusion in the national education system yielded positive integration results for IDPs with host communities. This is an important starting point to build social cohesion, but for this to work as a durable solution, education systems need to adapt and respond to IDP needs such as language of instruction, flexibility in enrolment documents requirements and tackle discrimination. While Ukraine introduced relevant laws less than a year into the onset of internal displacement, it took decades for the governments of Afghanistan and Colombia to acknowledge and address this issue. Although not possible to quantify the loss in terms of years of schooling, more timely acknowledgment of internal displacement and adequate responses could have avoided a substantial loss of education for internally displaced children.
 - All case studies show implementation processes are normally affected by a range of institutional, material, political and cultural factors. Governments may have been more proactive on other challenges IDPs face, such as housing, health and livelihoods whereas access to formal and community-based education has not received the same degree of attention. Parallel education systems often develop out of need but end up sustaining out of unclear pathways developed between the parallel and national education system, in-which non-formal (NFE) options are segued into a formal system systematically if possible.
 - All country case studies demonstrate that IDPs household incomes are small and unstable. For many of these families, low incomes will mean that they will not have the money to send their children to school, and some children will need to spend their days on income-generating activities. IDPs highlight ways in which poverty impedes access to formal education.
- 5- **Governments should develop or strengthen regional frameworks to include internally displaced teachers in national education workforces and support all teacher's wellbeing, their professional development and certification.**

- The country case studies illustrate the importance of well supported, trained and certified teaching staff. This is backed up by Save the Children's extensive experience working closely with teachers in some of the most challenging contexts.
 - Afghanistan's policy aims to increase the number of classrooms, expand capacity-building efforts for teachers, prioritise internally displaced teachers in underserved, remote areas, or informal settlements and share information on education services with IDPs. It commits to increasing the number of female teachers and training them to teach displaced children. Yet progressive policies like these require milestones, accountability and investment to ensure they are effectively implemented.
- 6- Increase provision of protection, mental health, and psychosocial support services in alternative education programmes, including early learning and in schools and concerted efforts should be made to target the most marginalised children, including those with intersecting vulnerabilities:**
- Many displaced children and youth require psychosocial support and socio-emotional learning opportunities to help them deal with the stress and trauma they have experienced and to build resilience to help them adapt to their new surroundings. These services should address gender-based violence, stigmatisation and discrimination and support children and their families, as well as promote wellbeing through the use of socioemotional learning activities with links to youth-friendly and fully accessible referral mechanisms.
 - Although aspects concerning the specific needs of girls or children with disabilities are present in most policies, they remain generic in terms of actionable guidelines and a lack of reflection on intersecting vulnerabilities. Age, gender and diversity aspects determine children's experience of displacement and their particular risks and needs. These should be acknowledged and used to shape planning and implementation phases in a crosscutting fashion.
 - Provision of early learning is necessary to promote development, build resilience, and prepare children to succeed in primary education and beyond.
- 7- Civil society organisations and communities can play a critical role in education provision for IDPs when the state is not able to. Community-Based Education (CBE) can be an alternative pathway to delivering quality education to internally displaced children while the states capacity to include IDPs in the national education system is strengthened:**
- National governments have the responsibility to fulfil the right to education for all children, including internally displaced children. However, in contexts where the state's presence is low or the state fails to act, the proximity of civil society actors to IDPs can provide a unique understanding of internally displaced children's situations. Community Education Committees in Somalia act as brokers between IDP communities and decision-makers. The efforts of community actors should be supported and used to inform education policy and planning on durable solutions.
 - Afghanistan's steps towards state-owned education response for IDPs marks a critical move toward inclusion and sustainable learning solutions for internally displaced children. The CBE initiative allows for sufficient time and resources to be oriented to building the state's capacity and strengthening the education system, where international support plays a crucial role. Setting national non-formal education quality standards linked with pathways to access the formal education system is an important part of this process.
- 8- All countries should endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration, the accompanying Guidelines, and take practical action to protect schools, students and staff from attack and military use.**
- In 2019, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan verified 70 incidents affecting access to education, including attacks targeting or incidentally damaging schools, the killing, injury, and abduction of education personnel, and threats against education facilities and personnel.
- 9- While it is recognised that including IDPs in planning and decision-making processes is essential for a quality and accountable response, how this is done and how children are involved varies across contexts and needs to be better systematised:**
- The need to include IDPs in planning and decision-making processes is common across all case studies. Consultations with IDPs in Somalia for the National Development Plan highlighted the need to improve their housing and education situation. The Education Cluster (which is co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children) is a key actor for systematising child participation in needs assessment, planning, decision-making and monitoring processes.
- 10- States rely too heavily on humanitarian agencies to respond to education needs of IDPs long into their displacement. States should work with humanitarian agencies to transition responsibility for education provision to the national education system in a timely way that increase sustainability in the long run:**
- Although states are the primary duty bearers in the provision of education for IDPs, it is traditionally framed within emergencies, thus IDP hosting states heavily relying on humanitarian agencies to deliver education, despite them often receiving their funding on a short-term basis. Non-formal education solutions remain crucial to fill the gaps, but time-bound and project-based interventions risk creating further disruptions to children's learning processes.
- 11- States with IDPs, with support from donors, international agencies, and the private sector, should roll out Open Education Management Information Systems to collect education data for internally displaced children:**
- Accurate data on the education needs and provision for internally displaced children is poor. The majority of internally displaced children are not included in national EMIS data collection. Data is vital for policymaking,

budgeting and implementation of educational services, and to ensure accountability. At a minimum, data must be disaggregated by gender, age and disability. The Education Cluster can advocate for better data and help collect it.

12- Internally displaced children must be included in responses to additional crises, including the current COVID-19 pandemic:

- Decisions made in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic have not always been inclusive of internally displaced people. Quickly designed education solutions have frequently failed to consider the specific education needs of vulnerable children, including IDPs. The pandemic has resulted in additional funding challenges for governments, as they work to meet safe back to school requirements. For countries hosting IDPs, this means more pressure on already overstretched education systems. Overall, if responses to the COVID-19 crisis only prioritise host communities, local integration could be jeopardised, and the rights of internally displaced children unfulfilled.

In order for countries to respond to the ongoing nature of internal displaced and the COVID-19 crisis, states need international support to recover, and build back better, safe and more inclusive education systems. A greater coordinated effort is required from the international community to strengthen the global education architecture and funding.

Recommendations for donors

- The **World Bank** should work with the IMF to strengthen the Debt Service Suspension Initiative to secure a freeze on US\$48 billion of debt service payments during 2021. Faced with an education emergency, rising child poverty, and worsening nutritional conditions, the 73 countries covered by the DSSI should be supported to prioritise domestic spending over debt repayments. Measures must be established to ensure that both public and private creditors participate, including support for countries to negotiate with private creditors and legislation to prevent bondholders from suing for repayment. Innovative solutions to build support for debt relief should be explored, such as the establishment of country-owned child investment funds which would convert debt liabilities into investment in education and wider COVID-19-recovery strategies for children.
- The **World Bank and other international financial institutions** should encourage Governments to effectively include IDPs and returnees in economic stimulus plans, making sure that service delivery is improved and inclusive of these populations. Financing should support policy reforms or be results-based.
- The **World Bank** should provide a supplementary IDA budget of around US\$25 billion over the next two years, with at least US\$10 billion in grant financing for investments for children's learning and wellbeing.
- Increasing **bilateral funding** for education to aid governments who have made significant commitments to include internally displaced children in national education systems but require financial support to obtain these aims.
- Fulfilling **Education Cannot Wait** funding target the remainder of its strategic period up to the end of 2023. ECW requires US\$400 million to its global fund and US\$1 billion in-country to support Multi-Year Resilience Programmes.
- Ensuring the **Global Partnership for Education's** replenishment needs of US\$5 billion for the strategic period 2021–2025 is fully funded to ensure that they have the resources required to support partner countries to recover from COVID-19 and build back better.

ⁱ IDMC (2020). Numbers of IDPs by Age at the end of 2019. <https://www.internal-displacement.org/publications/number-of-idps-by-age-at-the-end-of-2019>

ⁱⁱ IDMC, "Twice Invisible: Accounting for internally displaced children," 2019. www.internal-displacement.org

ⁱⁱⁱ UNICEF/ High-level Panel on Internal Displacement, "Voices of IDP children and young people," 2020.

^{iv} High-level Panel on Internal Displacement, "Summary of Key Trends from Consultations with IDPs and Host Communities," 2020.

^v Save the Children considers that a solution has been achieved when any (refugee, migrant or IDP) child's rights are fully reinstated during and/or after migration or displacement, and when specific vulnerabilities and risks for the child arising from migration or displacement, including discrimination, are meaningfully minimised. Additionally, for a durable solution to be realised, a state has to permanently assume or resume an individual's legal protection or status.

^{vi} Universal Declaration on Human Rights <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

^{vii} UNESCO, Right to Education - Legal Action <http://en.unesco.org/themes/right-to-education/legal-action>

^{viii} UNESCO, Leading SDG 4 - Education 2030 <http://en.unesco.org/education2030-sdg4>

^{ix} Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement <https://www.unhcr.org/43ce1cff2>

^xAs per the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Protocol 1

^{xi} IDMC (2019) <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2019/>

^{xii} Østby, G. and Urdal, H, 2010. Education and civil conflict: a review of the quantitative, empirical literature <http://bit.ly/1VpR7xU>