

World's First International Day of Education Could Not Come Soon Enough

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by José María Faura

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BARCELONA, Jan 23 2019 (IPS) - Children's education is in a state of emergency when it comes to protracted crises. 75 million school-aged children and young people are in desperate need of educational support, are either in danger of or are already missing out on their education in countries facing war and violence (1*).

Yet education has traditionally been the most underfunded area regarding humanitarian aid, coming in at less than 3% of total global funding (2*).



This year not only marks the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but the world's first International Day of Education. As an organization focused on child rights, Educo welcomes this UNESCO marker.

We share the conviction that while education is an end in itself, it is also the ideal means for guaranteeing the exercise of rights, the enjoyment of wellbeing and a life of dignity.

Education in emergencies has historically not been a priority for governments, international institutions or donors. This is despite schooling being what children want the most when faced with a crisis (3*).

On average, conflicts last 20 years. A childhood lasts 18, if a child survives an emergency of course. With little access to education, a child's recovery from a crisis is much more difficult. For generations of children caught up in conflicts, this lack of opportunity all too often leads to a cycle of poverty alongside societal and political instability.

A child's right to quality education regardless of where or who they are is being ignored; this cannot continue. Children out of school are exposed to increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence, violent extremism, forced marriage, early pregnancy, child labor and recruitment by armed groups.



A school is used as an emergency shelter following the Mayon Volcano eruption in the Philippines. Educo has been working in the Philippines since 2005. January 2018. Credit: Educo

Protracted conflicts heighten children's vulnerability and weaken often already under-resourced education systems. Added to this are the increased attacks on educational facilities, making teachers and students vulnerable (4). Overall, we are seeing a growing trend of violent attacks on education for political, military and ideological reasons, among others.

Though governments signed up to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, which include educational targets, there has been little to no tangible progress since. Education must be at the center of humanitarian action otherwise governments today will continue to fail the most vulnerable of children for generations to come.

Educo's humanitarian mandate is to protect, help and assist the most vulnerable people, especially children, in their right to life and security, with dignity and comprehensive coverage of rights and needs in the face of risk situations and of humanitarian crises. Defending the right to education in humanitarian disasters is the backbone to its mandate.

The right to education cannot be put on pause due to emergencies or crises, no matter how challenging.

Almost half of primary school age refugees are not in school. These children, as well as those on the move, should be guaranteed quality education on an equal footing to national children (5).

With funding so low, however, hundreds of thousands more children could miss out on an education because they are unable to be in their home or more usual setting. Providing funding and specific measures for these children to access education, be they migrants or refugees, must be a global priority.

Educo is a global development and humanitarian NGO with over 25 years' experience working to defend children and their rights. As part of ChildFund Alliance, we are working in more than 60 countries around the world.

The Alliance helps over 14 million children and their families to overcome poverty and create sustainable solutions that protect and advance their rights and well-being.

In El Salvador, for example, Educo runs a project in six areas of the country where there is prolonged violence. It aims to protect children from forced displacement due to the protracted crisis there – one that is largely forgotten on the international stage.

The project provides assistance and protection to children and their families, supporting them with housing, food and hygiene as well as psychosocial assistance. All of this work runs alongside the focus of the project, which is to ensure children do not fall out of education and if they have, to re-integrate them.

It is heartening to see some governments and institutions finally recognizing the need to focus on education in emergencies. The EU Commission's aim of improving joint planning, coordination and response is timely.

This collaboration within the Commission, with EU Member States and among other donors and partners is fundamental if we are to reach the millions of children at risk of becoming a lost generation.

Boosting the Commission's allocation of humanitarian assistance to 10% for education in emergencies and protracted crises is also a great step, but as we have seen before, governments fall short of meeting their commitments.

If the countries that agreed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals really want to meet them, and stay on top of the Education 2030 Agenda, pressure on governments is also required.

We cannot have any more children ending up in the emergency room rather than the classroom.

Sources:

1. [ODI Education cannot wait. Proposing a fund for education in emergencies, p. 7](#)
2. [http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/news/Communication on Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crises.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/news/Communication_on_Education_in_Emergencies_and_Protracted_Crises.pdf)
3. <https://www.savethechildren.org/content/dam/global/reports/education-and-child-protection/what-children-want.pdf>
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