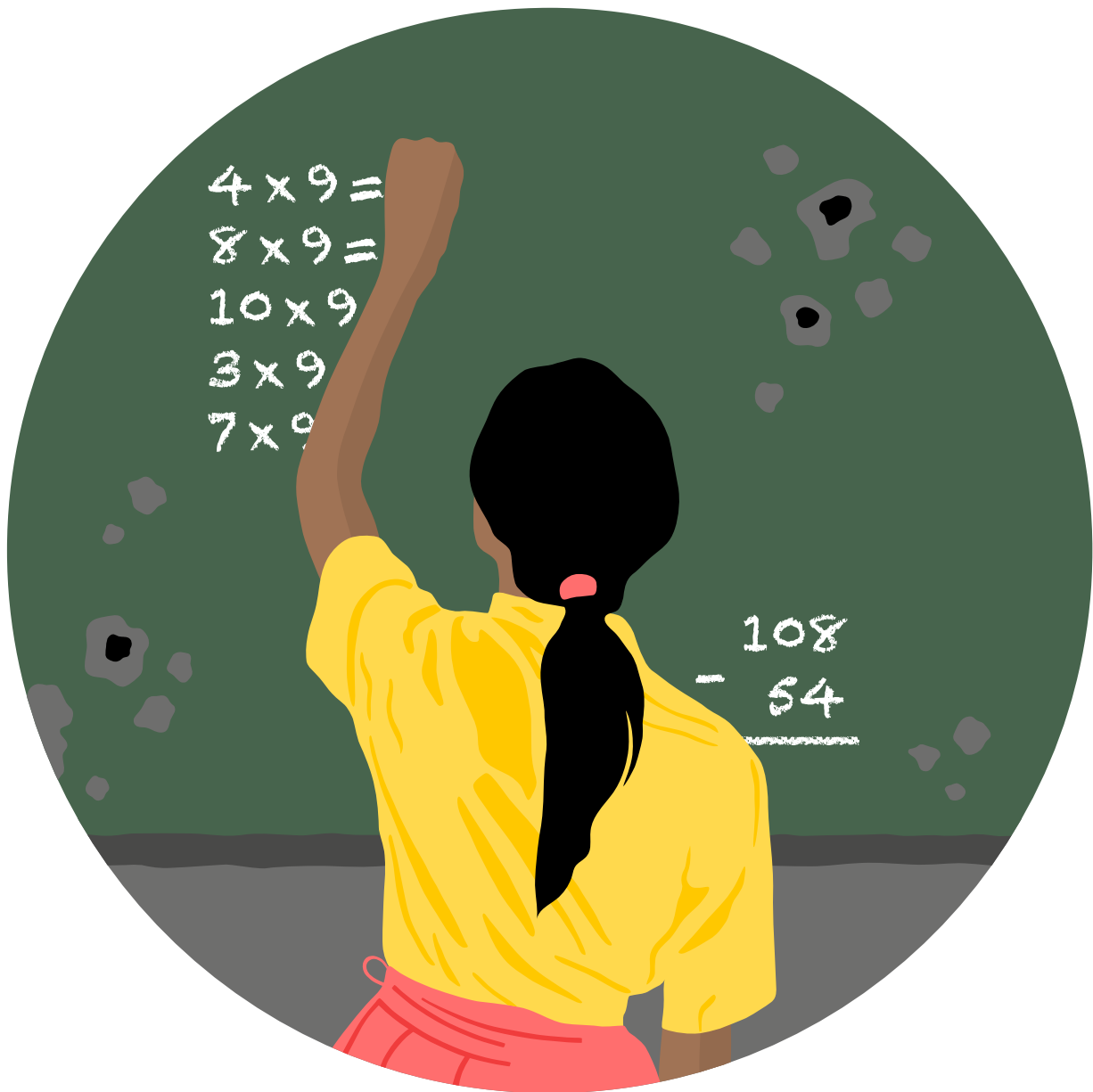


DT INSIGHTS

# Decades of Neglect: Financing for Education in Emergencies



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# Decades of Neglect: Donor financing for Education in Emergencies

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SEEK DEVELOPMENT  
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The growth of protracted conflicts and the increasing prevalence of emergencies globally have impacted the educational opportunities of millions of children. As of early 2019, it was estimated that more than 128 million primary and secondary school-aged children were out of school in crisis-affected countries, including 67 million girls.

Precarious humanitarian situations around the world have been further exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. COVID-19 has resulted in the largest known disruption of education systems globally, putting 1.6 billion learners out of school. The pandemic has worsened existing inequalities in education and its impacts are expected to have disproportionate effects on the most vulnerable. Without a concerted effort by donors to ensure adequate financial assistance for education, this crisis has the potential to offset decades of progress in the sector.

For children living through humanitarian disasters, education is often the only accessible means of social development and protection. In addition to supporting cognitive and social growth, through schools, children are better able to access health and security information that can support their immediate wellbeing. Keeping children in school can instill a sense of normalcy and routine, which can mitigate some of the psychosocial horrors associated with living through emergencies. Safe learning spaces play a fundamental role in safeguarding at-risk groups of children, particularly girls, from social harm and exploitation including abductions, forced marriage, and physical abuse. Furthermore, access to education is essential to post-disaster redevelopment.

Despite its paramount importance, the education sector has for a long time been deprioritized in donors' humanitarian assistance programs. Traditionally, quality education was considered a goal of longer-term development rather than a necessary intervention in the context of emergency humanitarian responses. In recent years, owing in part to the proliferation of political conflicts,

## Emergencies

The term 'emergencies' is used to denote a singular or a series of events that threaten the health, safety, or general wellbeing of a community or a large group of people. This includes political conflicts, forced displacement, natural disasters, and other humanitarian emergencies (both short term and protracted in nature).

education in crises has begun to receive some political traction. In 2010, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted the right to education in emergencies as a resolution, urging member states to implement policies that support the realization of the right to education as an integral element of humanitarian assistance and response measures. In 2011, the UN Global Education First Initiative (GEFI) agreed on the target of spending at least 4% of humanitarian funding on education. In late 2015, the protection of education in emergencies was integrated into the 17 Global Goals for Sustainable Development (the SDGs). In 2016, at the World Humanitarian Summit, international humanitarian and development actors established 'Education Cannot Wait' (ECW), the first global fund aimed at protecting education in emergencies (see Annex for more information).

But are donors dedicating sufficient attention to education in emergencies? This Insights piece will address:

1. How much Official Development Assistance (ODA) do donors currently provide for education?
2. How do donors support education through their humanitarian financing? Who are the largest donors? What do they prioritize? What channels of delivery do they use?
3. What do current funding and policy trends mean for advocates?

## There is no central source of data on education in emergencies

Donors provide funding for education in emergencies both through ODA as well as emergency humanitarian assistance. Currently, there is no central source of data that captures the totality of funding for education in emergencies; therefore, to analyze funding provided towards education in emergencies, this piece relies on figures from the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\) Development Assistance Committee's \(DAC\) Creditor Reporting System \(CRS\)](#) and the [UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' \(OCHA\) Financial Tracking System \(FTS\)](#) database, along with reports from multilateral organizations working in global education.

The CRS is the main source of official data on development assistance, reported by 30 members of the DAC. ODA to education is a component of government-provided funding to low and middle-income countries, designed to support economic development and welfare. ODA to education can cover several sub-sectors of including general education, basic education, secondary education, and vocational training. Some portion of ODA to education in low-income countries may be channeled towards education in emergencies.

The FTS tracks humanitarian funding flows from government donors, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other humanitarian actors. Humanitarian assistance to education is a part of emergency funding or logistical assistance provided to countries affected by humanitarian disasters, both natural and human-made. The type of assistance varies according to the nature and complexity of the situation and commonly includes support for protecting educational institutions, establishing temporary learning facilities, and facilitating the integration of displaced children into educational systems. Almost all humanitarian assistance to education is channeled to sustaining education in crisis settings.

## The share of ODA spent on education has remained stagnant since 2013; at least US\$49.0 billion per year by 2030 is needed to fill the funding gap

OECD data show that while ODA for the education sector has risen in absolute terms, relative funding levels (fund-

ing for education as a percentage of total ODA) have remained stagnant. In 2018, [US\\$14.1 billion in ODA<sup>1</sup>](#) from the 30 OECD DAC donors went to the education sector, which represented 7% of total bilateral ODA by these donors in that year. In absolute terms, this is the most funding that has ever been provided by donors for the education sector; however, the education sector's relative share of ODA has remained steady at around 7% since 2013 (**see Figure 1**).

Currently, ODA to education is not sufficient for achieving SDG4 ("ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all") by 2030, meaning donors need to significantly scale up their funding to education. According to a [2016 report by the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity](#), funding from OECD DAC donors will need to increase to at least US\$49.0 billion per year by 2030 to finance pre-primary, primary, secondary, and post-secondary education in all low- and middle-income countries. Given that this funding gap figure is based on 2015 ODA levels (and quoted in 2014 prices), it seems likely that the current deficit is even larger, especially given the [impacts of COVID-19 on the educational opportunities of the world's most vulnerable populations](#).

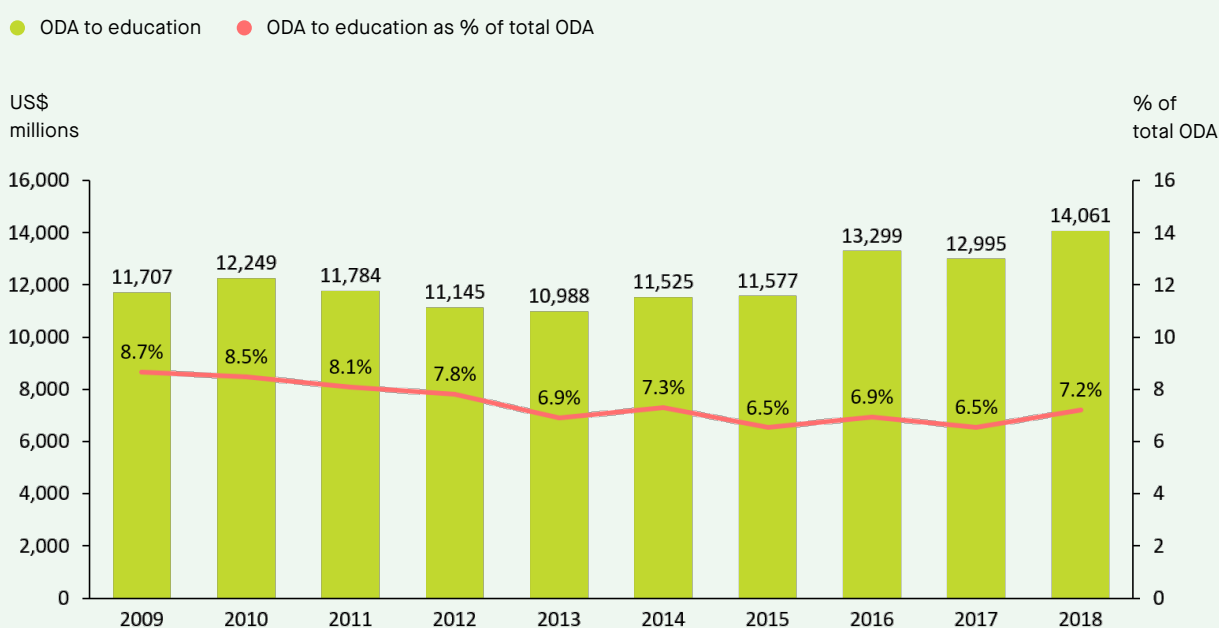
In addition to the large gap in overall funding for the education sector, donors also seem to be shifting their attention away from the [countries and sub-sectors most in need](#). The UN Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) [2020 Global Education Monitoring \(GEM\) Report](#) estimates that in 2018 (the latest year for which sector-level data is available) low- and lower-middle-income countries received [less than half \(47%\)](#) of the total development assistance channeled to basic and secondary education. The remaining ODA was directed to upper-middle or high-income countries or other sub-sectors such as post-secondary education. A [report from the Center for Global Development](#) suggests that vulnerable countries do not always receive the highest share of assistance to education because donor decisions regarding funding allocations are often influenced by national self-interest and commercial considerations rather than being based purely on the needs of countries.

The GEM report estimates that the gap in education financing for primary and secondary education specifically, could be filled if all DAC donors, in addition to other donors including the Middle Eastern states, Brazil, China,

<sup>1</sup> The UN Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) [2020 Global Education Monitoring \(GEM\) Report](#) outlines disbursement of US\$15.6 billion in ODA for education in 2018. The reason for the discrepancy between this amount and the figures used in this piece, is that the GEM report includes a portion of general budget support in their calculation of 'total aid to education'.

**Figure 1: Total ODA to the education sector, 2009-2018**

US\$ millions, includes all official donors



Total ODA = net disbursements, based on cash-flow basis / Source: OECD (2019), OECD CRS. Gross disbursements, in 2018 prices.

India, the Russian Federation, and South Africa allocated 0.7% of their gross national income (GNI) to ODA, and then spend 10% of that ODA on basic education.

### Despite an increase in absolute funding levels in recent years, donor countries only spend around 3% of humanitarian assistance on education

Like ODA, only a fraction of the funding needed to sustain education in emergencies has been channeled through humanitarian assistance measures. It is difficult to accurately calculate the current deficit for education within humanitarian funding flows; however, previous years' financing trends can serve as a basis for estimating the need for more funding for education in emergencies. A 2016 study by ECW reported that annually, an additional US\$8.5 billion in education financing was required to support the needs of 75 million out-of-school children in conflict-affected areas. The number of children in crisis settings has since grown to reach more than 128 million, as of 2019.

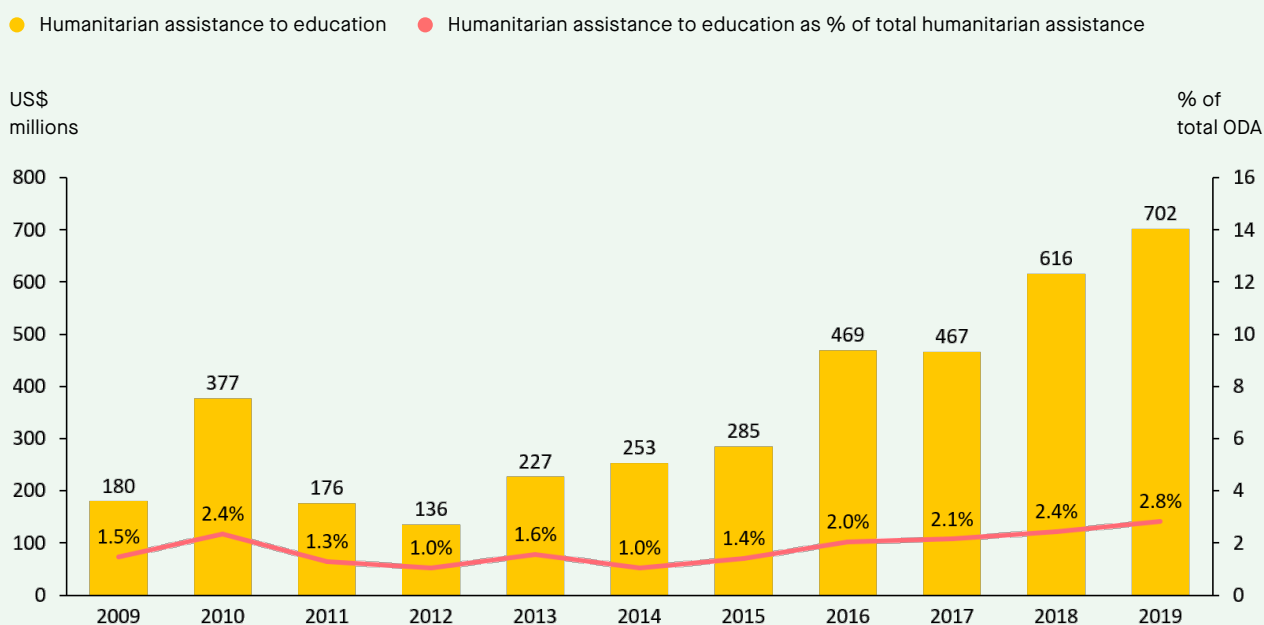
The 4% global goal is another way to assess the gap in financing for education in emergencies: By 2019, eight years after the UN Secretary-General's GEFI suggested

that education should receive at least 4% of short-term humanitarian funding, UNOCHA's FTS data suggests that less than 3% of the total reported humanitarian funding (including funding flows from government donors, international organizations, NGOs, and other humanitarian actors) was allocated to education.

Although funding still falls short of the GEFI goal, in response to the growth of protracted crises around the world in the past decade, humanitarian assistance to education has increased in both absolute and relative terms (see **Figure 2**). In 2009, humanitarian assistance to education totaled US\$180 million, only 1% of total humanitarian funding. In 2010, funding more than doubled to US\$377 million or 2% of total humanitarian assistance. Between 2011 and 2015, humanitarian spending on education fluctuated, remaining below US\$300 million annually, before rising dramatically to US\$469 million in 2016. This increase was most likely in response to the 2016 'migration crisis' when countries across Europe saw a spike in asylum-seekers as a result of humanitarian emergencies, particularly across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA region). Since 2017, funding has been increasing, from US\$467 million (or 2% of overall humanitarian funding) to US\$702 million (or almost 3%) by 2019.

**Figure 2: Total humanitarian assistance to the education sector, 2009-2019**

US\$ millions, Total reported funding\*



\* Total funding reported to FTS includes contributions, commitments, and carry-over / Source: UNOCHA FTS

The education sector is said to be suffering from a “double disadvantage” in terms of the humanitarian funding it receives. The sector has one of the lowest requests for resources in humanitarian response plans (assistance strategies developed at the onset of emergencies to address immediate, short-term needs in countries). In 2019, for instance, less than 3% of the funding requested in humanitarian appeals and response plans through the UNOCHA was directed at education. Furthermore, the sector obtains less than half of the requests that it makes for funding. In 2019, US\$1.1 billion was requested in funding for the education sector but only 43% of this appeal (US\$455 million) was met.

### The UAE, US, Germany, Saudi Arabia, the UK, and Norway are the leading donor countries for education in emergencies

According to a report from the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and Save the Children, between 2015 to 2018, 11 donors (out of the 16 analyzed in the report) listed education as a priority area in their humanitarian and development policies. Eight donors — including Canada, France, Norway, Switzerland, the EU, the UK, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and the US — referred explicitly to

‘education in emergencies’ in their national or foreign policies, up from just four countries in 2015.

Unsurprisingly, many of these donor countries also lead in terms of funding to education in emergencies. The top six donor countries (see Figure 3) accounted for almost half (45%) of the overall humanitarian assistance to education in 2019 and play a central role in pushing the issue of education in emergencies forward on the world stage. The European Union Institutions (EUI), although not pictured in the charts to avoid double-counting, are also an important source of funding and global leadership for education in emergencies.

According to data from the FTS, in 2019, the largest donor country was the UAE (US\$92 million). The UAE’s spending has sharply increased over the last decade (up from US\$710,486 in 2009). In 2019, UAE’s humanitarian assistance to education represented 15% of the country’s total humanitarian assistance, putting its prioritization of education in crisis settings far above other donors (see Figure 4). The UAE frames this funding as an effort to reduce the radicalization of youth in fragile states. In addition to the UAE, other Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia (US\$49 million in humanitarian assistance

to education in 2019 making it the fourth-largest donor) are becoming prominent donors in the humanitarian assistance to education space, particularly in crisis-affected states in their region.

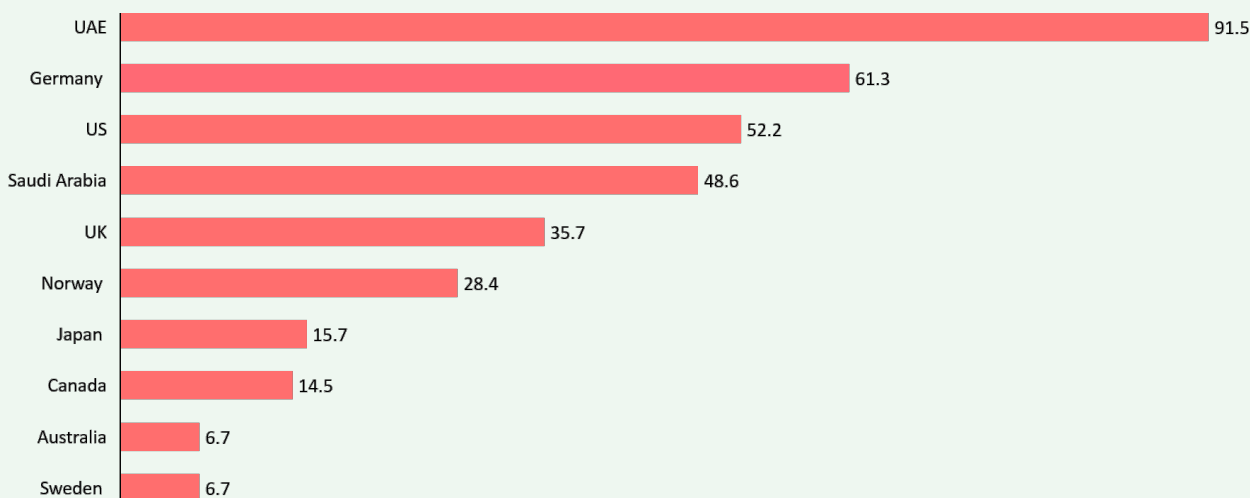
**Germany** is the second-largest donor to humanitarian assistance for education, spending US\$61 million in 2019. This represented more than 2% of its humanitarian assistance overall. Germany places a strong focus on countries affected by fragility and conflict (mainly in the MENA region). Education in these countries has received increasing political attention and funding in recent years, particularly assistance provided to strengthening vocational training systems and thereby the job market in these regions. Germany's policies frame funding for education in these fragile contexts as a mechanism through which it aims to tackle the 'root causes' of migration. Germany is the fourth-largest donor to ECW, having committed US\$65 million between 2017 and 2020. Germany has also increasingly stepped up funding for the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and has pledged US\$141 million for the GPE's 2018 to 2020 replenishment period (see Annex for more information).

The **United States** is the third-largest donor to humanitarian assistance for education, spending US\$52 million in 2019. However, spending on education as a proportion of overall US humanitarian assistance represented only 0.6%. Nonetheless, the US has been a top donor of human-

itarian funds for education since at least 2006. The US is particularly committed to supporting girls' education. In early 2019, President Trump signed a law authorizing USAID to protect girls' access to education in vulnerable settings, to collect better-disaggregated data on girls' education, and to create the position of 'Senior Coordinator of US Basic Education Assistance', who is now responsible for the development, implementation, and coordination of US basic education programs. The US has committed US\$35 million to ECW between 2017 and 2020. For the GPE's 2018 to 2020 replenishment period, the US pledged US\$352 million in funding.

As the fifth-largest donor, the **UK** spent US\$36 million to support humanitarian assistance for education in 2019. This represented just under 2% of the country's overall humanitarian spending. The UK government regards education as an important tool in its efforts to reduce extreme poverty and to support the world's most vulnerable populations. In 2012, the UK government launched 'the Girls' Education Challenge' (GEC), the largest fund devoted to reaching marginalized girls including in emergency settings. Most recently, UK supported the establishment of the International Finance Facility for Education (IFFEd), a new financing mechanism aimed at supporting donors to fund educational needs in LMICs, while maintaining contributions for education in emergencies. The UK is the largest donor to ECW having committed US\$160 million between 2017 and 2020 to support emergency educa-

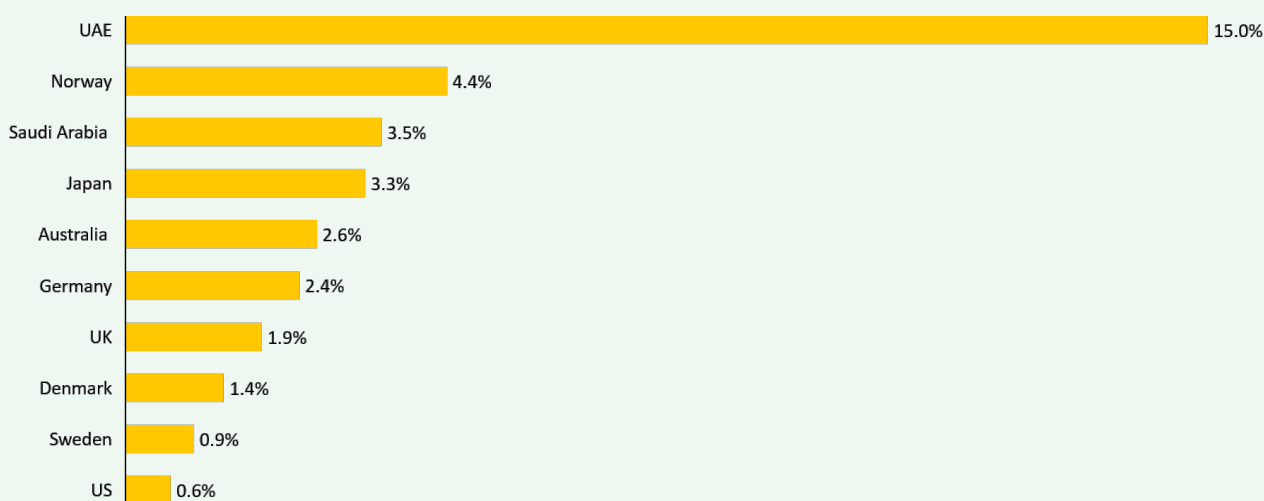
**Figure 3: Top 10 donors of humanitarian assistance to education, 2019**  
US\$ millions



To avoid double-counting, EU Institutions are not included as a donor in ranking charts / Source: UNOCHA FTS

**Figure 4: Top 10 donors of humanitarian assistance to education, 2019**

Humanitarian funding to education as a % of overall humanitarian funding



To avoid double-counting, EU Institutions are not included as a donor in ranking charts / Source: UNOCHA FTS

tion during the COVID-19 crisis. The UK pledged [US\\$239 million](#) to the GPE's 2018 to 2020 replenishment period. Another signal of the UK's commitment to education in emergencies was the announcement to co-host GPE's upcoming replenishment session in 2021.

**Norway** is the sixth-largest donor, disbursing US\$28 million for humanitarian assistance to education in 2019. It was the only donor, other than the UAE, that exceeded the target of spending 4% of overall humanitarian assistance on education. Since 2013, when education became a key development priority for Norway, the country's ODA to the sector has grown significantly. Norway has played a leading role in [mobilizing multilateral investments](#) for education in emergencies including by supporting the creation of ECW and promoting the European Civil Protection Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) aimed at increasing spending for education in humanitarian contexts. In 2015, Norway also led the [development](#) of a declaration on the protection of education in crisis settings. Norway pledged a total of [US\\$80 million](#) to ECW for 2017 to 2020, making it the second-largest contributor. Furthermore, from 2021 to 2025, Norway has set aside an additional US\$57 million for the fund. Norway has also pledged [US\\$2.0 billion](#) to the GPE's 2018 to 2020 replenishment period.

The **EUI** are also an important donor to education in emergencies. The European Commission spent US\$58

million on humanitarian assistance to education in 2019, which accounted for 3% of its overall spending on humanitarian assistance in that year. The EU sees support for education in crises as a key element of its development efforts aimed at reducing displacement and migration and ensuring [long-term sustainable development and security](#) at the global level. Although education in emergencies has been a priority for the EU since 2006, its commitment to the sector ramped up in 2015 when the European Commission adopted a [resolution on education for children in emergencies and protracted crises](#) and then EU Commissioner Christos Stylianides committed to reaching the GEF's global goal, dedicating 4% of humanitarian funding to education (although it has yet to reach the target). Between 2015 and 2018, funding for education in emergencies from the EUI supported almost 7 million children in [55 countries](#). EUI have been among the top 10 donors to ECW, pledging [US\\$25 million](#) between 2017 and 2020. The EUI pledged [US\\$337 million](#) to the GPE's 2018-2020 replenishment period.

### **Current funding levels are insufficient to meet soaring needs; COVID-19 will likely make things worse**

Despite the policy commitments and funding disbursements made by these donors, funding levels in 2019 were still far below the minimum spending targets for educa-

tion in emergencies. With most donors falling short of meeting the 4% global target of minimum spending on education, the humanitarian system is unable to meet the growing needs for education financing in emergencies. Furthermore, funding needs for 2020 and 2021 will likely be exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. Not only has COVID-19 increased the number of children out of school but also the costs of dealing with the pandemic are expected to heavily deplete global humanitarian and development assistance funds. As tax revenues fall and public health needs soar, funding for education is at risk of being cut, both by governments and by multilateral organizations. This has serious implications for the quality and quantity of development assistance for education. Early estimates suggest that in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, funding for education could take at least six years to return to 2018 levels.

As we enter the ‘decade of action’ — the final ten years to achieve the UN SDGs — amid of a global pandemic, prioritizing the educational needs of the world’s most vulnerable children is more important than ever. As the UN points out, safeguarding education funding now is key to preventing the temporary learning crisis from turning into a “generational catastrophe”. Therefore, advocates should consider the following points in their advocacy to donors to strengthen donor support to education in emergencies:

- **Donor countries need to increase overall ODA to fill the education funding gap.** As this analysis shows, OECD donors spent around US\$14.1 billion in ODA on education in 2018. This is still far from the minimum US\$49.0 billion per year by 2030 that the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity says is required to finance education in low- and middle-income countries, including those impacted by crises. To bridge this funding gap in a global development environment characterized by underfunding across all sectors, donor countries first need to consistently meet the UN target of spending at least 0.7% of their GNI on ODA. Only if the overall amount of ODA funding increases sharply, will it be possible to start filling the global education funding gap without cutting funding in other sectors.
- **Donor countries should increase the share of education in total funding, despite crises.** In addition to increasing ODA overall, donors should increase the share of ODA being spent on education from 7% to at least 10% as suggested by the UNESCO GEM report. In addition, all donors need to increase the level of humanitarian assistance for education to at least 4%, in line with the commitment outlined in the UN Secretary-General’s GEFI. In 2019, only two donor countries (Saudi Arabia and Norway) met this target.
- **Donor countries should fully finance existing multilateral education funds that have a focus on education in emergencies.** Donors should consider increasing their commitments to ECW and the GPE, which have played a pivotal role in mobilizing finance for education in emergencies. To reach nine million crisis-affected children and youth by 2021, ECW needs to mobilize US\$1.8 billion in funding. Current commitments only amount to US\$637 million as of August 2020. Similarly, the GPE’s new strategic plan for 2021 to 2025 lays out a transformational strategy for education systems in 87 countries, of which most are low-income, and crisis-affected countries. In order to execute this plan, it needs US\$5.0 billion in donor financing. Its replenishment in 2021 will be a pivotal moment for raising these funds.
- **Beyond funding, donor countries should make education in emergencies a policy priority.** Dedicated policies for education in emergencies are important for ensuring predictable and consistent support for education in crisis settings. Donors should therefore ensure that policy documents explicitly refer to education in emergencies including indicating: 1) The level of prioritization of education in emergencies either by directly including education in humanitarian response policies or by strengthening education policies in response to crises; 2) Clear actionable strategies that can be operationalized during emergencies including theories of change, country-level or global-level response planning, and associated funding levels; 3) Framework for donors’ respective development agencies to coordinate financial and technical support for education in emergencies.
- **Donor countries should invest in better data on education in emergencies.** There is a severe lack of robust and standardized data on education in emergencies. Accurate, transparent, and timely data is imperative for sustaining education in emergencies including for informing evidence-based planning, assessing resource needs, and supporting advocacy efforts for this sector. Donors can support investments in better data on education by politically and financially supporting the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)’s collective call for greater funding for data on the education SDG4 which requires an overall global investment of US\$280 million per year.



## Annex

### **Multilateral organizations play a pivotal role in supporting education in emergencies; UN agencies are important implementing partners**

Multilateral institutions play a pivotal role in sustaining and delivering education during emergencies. Global funds lead the work in mobilizing and coordinating emergency support for education while implementing partners support countries and local actors with technical on-the-ground assistance required for delivering education in emergencies.

#### ***Education Cannot Wait (ECW)***

ECW is a global fund that brings together governments and humanitarian actors to support the educational needs of children and youth in emergencies. It aims to provide all children and youth impacted by crises with educational opportunities by 2030. It does this by through emergency response grants that provide immediate support for programs during the onset or escalation of crises and through 'Multi-Year Resilience Programs', which address the longer-term educational needs of children in protracted crises.

#### ***Global Partnership for Education (GPE)***

GPE is the largest global education fund dedicated to transforming education in lower-income countries. GPE supports education interventions in conflict affected countries by developing operational guidance frameworks for conflict affected states and by providing technical and financial assistance to governments for establishing transitional education planning. GPE also channels funding to multilateral actors such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR) for supporting the inclusion of refugees and displaced children in education support plans. In 2019, more than 76% of its funding went to countries affected by conflict.

### ***United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)***

The UN lead agency for education, supports education in emergencies along the education continuum from primary education to technical and vocational training. UNESCO works closely with Ministries of Education around the world, investing in capacity-building activities within these ministries both prior to and at the onset of crisis. It supports these ministries in the creation of crisis-sensitive curricula, policy, and plans through technical expertise, training, and research. UNESCO also supports policy and cross-border dialogues and works to protect educational institutions from attack, in case of armed conflict.

#### ***United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)***

UNICEF supports the education of children in humanitarian crises, with a particular focus on girls, children with disabilities, refugees, and migrants, as well as internally displaced children. Through UNICEF's in-country education services, it offers safe learning spaces, supplies learning materials, provides teacher trainings, and helps children develop skills to cope with trauma of crisis. UNICEF further supports governments in the implementation of the '[Safe Schools Declaration](#)' and '[Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict](#)'.

#### ***United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)***

The UN Refugee Agency supports the education of refugees across the education spectrum. UNHCR supports education opportunities for all refugee children and adolescents, through a variety of measures, including capacity building for teachers, provision of safe learning spaces, extension of cash grants and vouchers to allow for school enrollment, basic literacy and life skills courses, technical and vocational training, as well as improved quality of education through digital technology.