

Forum: Health & Youth Commission (HYC)

Issue: Measures to reduce the impact of armed conflict on children's education

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Introduction

Children- defined by the UNCRC as every human being under the age of 18 years- are among the most vulnerable populations in conflict situations, bearing the brunt of physical, emotional, and psychological harm. An estimated 258 million school-aged children's education has been disrupted by conflict, displacement, or crisis conditions as of June 2026 ("Education Cannot Wait, 2026"). The issue of armed conflict does not solely involve the endangerment of children's immediate safety; it can dismantle the systems through which they access education. Schools may be destroyed, occupied for military purposes, become inaccessible due to displacement and insecurity, or abandoned due to repeated disruption.

Education is a human right, described by UNICEF as a "lifeline for children in crises". It states that the need for education spans far beyond the right to learn; the right for education in emergencies ought to provide children with physical and psychological protection, food, water and safety supplies, and socioemotional support, giving children the structure and stability required to cope with the trauma they experience daily.

In 2025, 1680 attacks on schools globally were verified by the United Nations, a 33% increase from 2024 (Protecting Education From Attack, 2026). Although history has proven that armed conflict is ubiquitous and unavoidable, it is imperative that its impact on education be reduced urgently to ensure educational access and continuity for children who are involuntarily deprived of schooling worldwide.

Definition of Key Terms

Armed conflict

A situation of sustained hostilities between states or between governments and organised armed groups, governed by international humanitarian law regardless of whether a formal declaration of war has been made. This includes both international and non-international conflicts in which violence disrupts civilian life and access to essential services such as education.

Education in Emergencies

Education provided during humanitarian crises, including armed conflict, displacement, and other emergencies, to maintain children's access to learning and

protective services. Framing schools and learning spaces as areas that protect, structure, and stabilise children emphasises the need for investment in the education sector, showing how it receives less than 3% of humanitarian aid on average (Education Cannot Wait, 2023).

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized border (Children and Armed Conflict | OHCHR, 2025).

Background Information

How armed conflict disrupts education

Conflict can displace teachers and students, interrupt transport routes, restrict access to learning materials, and redirect public expenditure towards security and humanitarian needs.

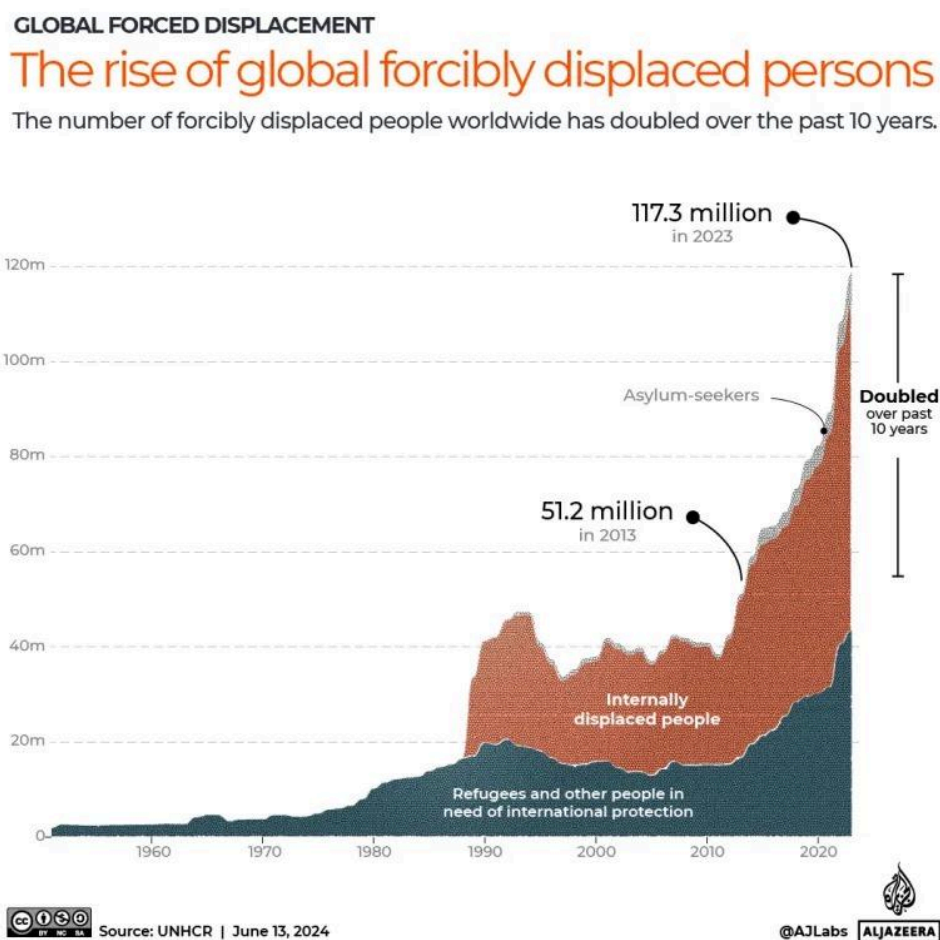


Figure 1: Forcibly displaced population doubles to 120 million over the past 10 years

Schools can also become directly affected by conflict. In Haiti itself, 284 schools were destroyed during 2024, followed by 47 schools destroyed in the capital during January 2025 alone (UNICEF, 2026).

Why interruption of education matters

Prolonged disruption can produce learning losses that compound over time, weaken children's ability to progress through subsequent levels of education and increase the likelihood of permanent dropout. Education also provides institutional functions that become particularly important during conflict: schools can provide predictable routines, psychosocial support, protection and access to other essential services. UNESCO identifies these functions as particularly significant during emergencies, where maintaining learning can provide children with stability amid displacement and insecurity. The interruption is also unequal: Children who are already displaced or marginalised are disproportionately affected because they face additional barriers to re-entry. In the latest global estimates, 74% of refugee children, 52% of internally displaced children and 45% of children with disabilities in crisis settings are out of school (Education Cannot Wait, 2023). This creates a feedback mechanism in which conflict first damages education access, while the resulting educational exclusion makes vulnerable groups less able to recover after violence subsides.

Scale of the current problem

In 2025, UNESCO recorded 93 million children entirely out of school due to crises worldwide. Nearly 80% of crisis-affected children who are out of school live in only 20 countries experiencing the most severe crises, demonstrating that educational disruption is highly concentrated rather than evenly distributed globally (Impact of Escalating Conflict on Education Systems in the Arab States, 2026). The Middle East and North Africa (MENA region) illustrates this particularly clearly: UNICEF estimated in 2025 that at least 30 million children were out of school across 12 countries in the region, equivalent to at least one in three children. Countries such as Ukraine, although not in the MENA region, have experienced a recent sharp increase in attacks as well, with over 3300 schools and preschools destroyed since February 2022. UNESCO reported that humanitarian funding requests for education were reduced by one-third in 2025, leaving more than 33 million people in need outside aid planning. Consequently, the challenge facing the international community is maintaining education systems while conflict persists, protecting educational infrastructure and personnel, and preventing temporary disruption from becoming permanent educational exclusion.

Organisations and Major Countries Involved

UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund)

UNICEF has supported the reduction of the impacts on children's education caused

by armed conflict through direct humanitarian intervention, government support, and skill development to foster sustainable practices in the case of future conflict. Global partnerships such as the “SafeSchools Declaration” safeguard learning for each child. The Declaration, launched in May 2015 at an international conference in Oslo, has been endorsed by over 120 nations.

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation)

A specialised agency of the UN aimed at promoting world peace through international cooperation in education, arts, sciences and culture. In April 2026, UNESCO developed the Preventative Plan of Action to Protect Education from Attack, approved in April 2026, to safeguard schools, teachers, and learners from targeted attacks.

Education Cannot Wait (ECW)

Global fund for education in emergencies and protracted crises in the United Nations, supporting holistic learning outcomes. ECW works in close partnership with governments and multiple organisations to increase efficiencies and end siloed responses (Education Cannot Wait, 2023).

UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)

A UN agency mandated to aid and protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people, and to assist in their voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement to a third country. Their work includes ratifying, endorsing, and implementing the international legal framework to prevent and address violations of children’s rights in armed conflict (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2026).

GCPEA (Global Coalition to Protect Education From Attack)

An inter-agency coalition established in 2010 that provides evidence, technical guidance, and advocacy. GCPEA helps governments, international organizations, and local actors implement measures to safeguard education and uphold children’s right to learn, even during crises (Global Coalition to Protect Education From Attack, 2026)

(ICRC) International Committee of the Red Cross

The ICRC operates under a mandate derived from international humanitarian law (IHL) to protect children affected by armed conflict, including their access to education. In 2021, the ICRC launched a strategy for 2021–2026 with three objectives: changing the behavior of parties that disrupt education systems through dialogue with militaries and armed groups; ensuring access to quality education for specific vulnerable groups (including detained adolescents, children associated with armed forces, children with disabilities, and displaced children); and building regional and global commitment to protecting education (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2026).

Possible Solutions

Modifying the current application of the SafeSchools' Declaration

Although the Safe Schools Declaration has been endorsed by 123 states, attacks on education still remain extremely high. In the Democratic Republic of Congo alone, 587 schools were attacked between March 2025 and February 2026, affecting an estimated 285000 children, more than triple the previous year's figure (Global Coalition to Protect Education From Attack, 2026), revealing that endorsement alone is insufficient. States should be required to create national implementation plans incorporating the SafeSchools Declaration with annual reporting on implementation. Evidence that Somalia has integrated the principles of the SafeSchools Declaration into military training, while the Central African Republic criminalised attacks and military occupation of schools, supports the likelihood of this solution's success (Global Coalition to Protect Education From Attack, 2026). Rather than reinventing an existing solution, this builds on what has already worked while addressing its limitations.

Implementation of integrated education cash transfer frameworks

Cash transfers are delivered primarily as independent programmes that help families afford schooling, such as UNICEF's Cash Plus programme in Uganda (2025-2028), which provides conditional transfers to cover school fees for 5000 adolescent girls across seven districts (Beneficiaries of Cash Plus Programme in Northern Uganda Get Second Chance to Stay in School., 2025). However, cash transfers are effective only when children actually have somewhere safe to attend. Lebanon's Min Ila programme increased attendance, but did not impact enrolment because schools lacked sufficient capacity. UNICEF therefore aimed to make education cash transfers conditional on parallel investment in school places, transport, learning materials and teacher capacity. Türkiye reveals how the programme reduced both the direct cost of schooling and the opportunity cost of losing a child's potential income. An evaluation from the 2024 Journal of Development Economics found the Emergency Social Safety Net reduced the share of refugee children aged 6–17 who were out of school from 36.2% to 13.7%, while child labour fell from 14.0% to 1.6% (Al-Eissa, Youssef A., 1995). An ideal framework therefore finances both sides simultaneously so households can afford education, while allowing education systems the capacity to absorb them.

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