

Forum: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Issue #2: Ensuring inclusive education for marginalized and post-conflict children

Student Officer: Ximena Porras

Position: Chair of The United Nations Children's Fund

Introduction

A significant number of children affected by conflict and marginalisation continue to be excluded from education. Despite its essential role in restoring lives, strengthening communities, and securing long-term development. As former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon once stated, "Education promotes peace, democracy, and economic growth." Within the framework of Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is known to uphold the right to free and compulsory education, these disparities highlight a critical gap between international commitments and actual implementation around the globe. Discrimination based on gender, legal status, ethnicity, or ability not only violates human rights but also maintains cycles of inequality and underdevelopment, which we keep falling into while at the same time trying to stop. Girls, in particular, are at high risk of being denied education, as conflicts often intensify pre-existing gender norms, which are increasing the likelihood of early marriage, domestic responsibilities, or exposure to gender-based violence in zones of danger. Likewise, children with disabilities experience various types of exclusion. In several nations, educational institutions lack the essential resources or skilled staff to deliver inclusive schooling for these children. Physical barriers, societal prejudice, and insufficient policy implementation further marginalize children with disabilities from educational settings in their areas. Consequently, millions of children go unnoticed in national education systems and are denied the same opportunities that education can provide for others. "Children with disabilities are among the most excluded from education, often facing multiple intersecting barriers" (World Bank, 2021).



Image Source: UNESCO, 2022

The effects of educational exclusion are an extensive list, humanity does not have the mindset to deal with currently. Lacking educational opportunities, marginalized children face greater risks of exploitation, poverty, and radicalization around the globe. "Education is not only a right in itself, but also an enabling right, helping to lift individuals out of poverty and achieve other human rights" (UNICEF, 2022). A crucial point is that the absence of education also weakens peacebuilding initiatives and restricts a community's capacity for long-term development. To genuinely honor the essence of Article 26, nations and international bodies must guarantee that education is not just available but also accessible, acceptable, and adaptable for every child, particularly those who are most vulnerable (UDHR, 1948).

Definition of Key Terms

Marginalisation: The process through which individuals or groups are pushed to the edges of society, limiting their access to resources, rights, and opportunities such as

education, healthcare, and political representation.

Conflict-affected children: Children who live in or flee from areas impacted by armed conflict or violence. They often face disruptions in education, displacement, trauma, and insecurity.

Article 26 (Universal Declaration of Human Rights): A clause in the UDHR which states that everyone has the right to education. Elementary education must be free and compulsory, and education should promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations and groups.

Inclusive Education: An educational approach that ensures all children, regardless of ability, background, or circumstance, can learn together in mainstream schools with the support they need to succeed.

Educational Exclusion: The condition in which individuals or groups are denied access to quality education due to factors like poverty, gender, disability, legal status, or conflict.

Gender-based Violence (GBV): Violent acts directed at individuals based on their gender. In the context of education, it includes harassment, abuse, or discrimination that prevents girls or boys from safely attending or completing school.

Physical Barriers: Obstacles in the built environment (e.g., lack of ramps or accessible toilets) that prevent individuals, especially those with disabilities, from accessing educational facilities.

Human Rights: Basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person, such as the right to education, freedom of expression, and protection from discrimination.

Radicalisation: A process by which individuals come to adopt extreme political, social, or religious ideologies, sometimes leading to support for violence. Lack of education and opportunities can be contributing factors.

Peacebuilding: Efforts made to create sustainable peace by addressing root causes of conflict, including inequality and lack of education, and by strengthening institutions and relationships in society.

General Overview

Context

When bombs fall, borders shift, or poverty tightens its grip, the first thing most children lose is a classroom and with it, the chance to rebuild their future. Conflict and marginalisation knock roughly 222 million school-aged children off track worldwide, according to UNESCO statistics. For girls, refugees, ethnic minorities, and children with disabilities, the barriers pile up, from damaged schools to lessons in the “wrong” language. Article 26 of the UDHR guarantees free, compulsory primary education, yet in too many crisis zones, that promise exists only on paper.

Inclusive education isn't just about reopening doors for these children; it is about safe learning spaces, trauma-savvy teachers, adaptable curricula, and assistive tech so every learner can thrive. Done right, it keeps kids out of forced labour or early marriage, calms communities, and lays the groundwork for long-term recovery.

Contingent Aid

Donor governments debate whether they should suspend or redirect education funding when recipient states bar girls, minorities, or children with disabilities from school. However, certain advocates of conditionality argue that continuing to bankroll exclusion legitimises discrimination and violates international law. Multiple critics warn that cutting funds can collapse entire school systems, punishing the very children the aid is meant to protect. In common practice, donors often blend these tactics, constantly weighing ethical consistency against children's immediate needs. The debate underscores how education aid is never just a financial transaction it is a strategic, moral, and deeply political act.

Digital Learning and the Equity Gap

The pandemic changed remote education, but it also exposed a stark “connectivity canyon” around the globe. While urban students logged into slick learning apps, many

rural or low-income children stared at blank screens or no screens at all. In low- and middle-income countries, just 1 in 3 households have reliable internet; in sub-Saharan Africa, it drops to 1 in 10. This digital divide is gendered, too: adolescent boys are 43 % more likely than girls to own a smartphone.

Even when devices are available, hidden costs arise. These costs can vary from data packages that can swallow a week's food budget, to unreliable electricity, which can cut classes mid-sentence. Accessibility barriers compound the gap. Most e-learning platforms lack sign-language videos or screen-reader compatibility, sidelining children with disabilities. (UNICEF, 2023)

Financing Mechanisms

Humanitarian aid covers immediate needs, yet multi-year resilience requires predictable funding. Innovative tools which have resulted in financing, Islamic social financing, and debt-for-education swaps, are emerging to stretch scarce resources in areas that need them. Still, education receives less than 3 percent of total humanitarian spending, which is far below sectors like food and shelter, emphasizing the need for stronger political will in areas of conflict.

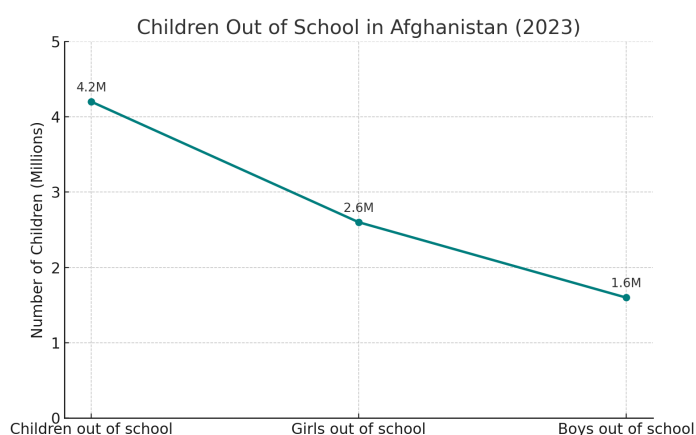
Ultimately, sustainability hinges on national budgets, and post-conflict countries are urged to spend an estimated 20 % of total public expenditure on education (Incheon Framework target), yet many hover around 10–12 %. Civil-society watchdogs track leakages, ghost teachers, inflated construction costs, and try to push Ministries of Finance to ring-fence funds for inclusive measures like assistive tech and female-teacher housing in remote areas. Without these shifts, the rhetoric of "education for all" will remain unfunded and unreachable for the very children who need it most. (Education Cannot Wait. Annual Results Report 2023).

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Afghanistan

Afghanistan remains one of the most challenging contexts for education, particularly for girls. According to UNICEF, as of 2023, an estimated 4.2 million children are out of school in the country, with over 60% of them being girls. Since the Taliban regained control in 2021, access to secondary and tertiary education for girls has been severely

curtailed due to restrictive gender policies. Even before this, decades of conflict, displacement, and poverty had significantly weakened Afghanistan's education infrastructure. Girls in rural areas face heightened obstacles such as long distances to school, a lack of female teachers, child marriage, and safety threats. Despite these challenges, UNICEF and other partners continue to support community-based education models and advocate for the reopening of schools for all Afghan children, especially the most marginalised. (UNICEF, Apr 2023)



Created by ChatGPT using data from UNICEF, Apr. 2023.

Nigeria

Nigeria is experiencing one of the world's most significant education crises, with over 10.5 million children not attending school (UNESCO, 2020). The crisis is driven by a mix of armed conflict, poverty, gender disparity, and ineffective governance. In the northern areas, especially in states impacted by Boko Haram violence, schools have been either demolished or shut down. Numerous families hesitate to send girls to school because of safety issues and cultural traditions. Girls are disproportionately impacted, particularly in rural regions, where early marriage and family duties further restrict their access to education. Despite Nigeria's initiation of policies intended to boost enrolment and diminish disparities, the execution remains irregular, particularly in areas impacted by conflict. If Nigeria does not tackle these systemic issues, it may exacerbate cycles of poverty, insecurity, and marginalization for millions of its young people. (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). "Education in Nigeria").

United States

The United States stands as a major bilateral contributor to education in crisis and conflict situations around the globe, directing resources mainly via the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). American initiatives emphasize both accessibility and educational results for marginalized populations, particularly girls, displaced students, and children with disabilities. USAID's Education in Crisis and Conflict framework funds teacher training in social-emotional learning situations, restores schools to adhere to universal-design standards for the benefit of the future, and implements accelerated learning curricula to help out-of-school youth reintegrate into formal systems. Critics point out that distributions may vary due to changing geopolitical priorities, yet data indicates that U.S. assistance has facilitated the enrollment of millions of students and initiated policy reforms in places such as Nigeria. In 2022, a National Inclusive Education Policy was created with USAID's technical support. In the end, the USA presents inclusive education as a humanitarian necessity and a means for stability, economic advancement, and countering extremism, claiming that educated, empowered young people are less susceptible to radicalization and compelled

India

India is attempting to educate around 200 million children, yet the most challenging to reach are girls, Dalits/Adivasis, children with disabilities, and those in conflict regions such as Kashmir or the Northeast. These children continue to be overlooked. However, the RTE Act (2009) guarantees free primary education and allocates 25% of seats in private Grade 1 classes for underprivileged students. The large umbrella initiative, Samagra Shiksh, funds ramps Braille materials, girls' dormitories, and remedial classes, while on the other hand, NEP 2020 commits to providing preschool-to-Grade 12 access by 2030. Be that as it may, approximately 12 million children, from ages 6-13, remain uneducated. Closures, uncertainty, and a persistent digital gap have reduced the number to a mere 28% of rural girls who had reliable internet during COVID. Which just results in inconsistent attendance. Organizations like Pratham's Read India and the KGBV girls' hostels make an impact, yet India still requires additional teachers in remote regions and stricter enforcement of RTE quotas for true "education for all" to become a reality. (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2021-2022)

Timeline of Events

| Date | Description of Event |
|------|--|
| 1948 | Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26 declares the right to free and compulsory primary education. This sets the global exemplar for education as a fundamental right. (UDHR, United Nations) |
| 1959 | UN Declaration Of The Rights of the Child Expands on child-specific rights, which include protection, education, and development. (UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child, United Nations) |
| 1960 | UNESCO Convention against Discrimination In Education, The convention legally binds states to eliminate exclusion based on race, gender, or economic status. This is still relevant for many marginalised groups today. (UNESCO, Convention Against Discrimination in Education) |
| 1989 | UN Convention On The Rights of the Child, Article 28 affirms every child's right to education; while article 29 outlines goals of education focused on development and peace. (UNCRC, United Nations) |
| 1990 | World Conference On Education For All (Jomtien), The conference introduces the concept of basic learning needs and stresses equity, especially for girls, rural children, and ethnic minorities in areas of conflict. (World Conference on Education for All, UNESCO) |

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| 1994 | Salamanca Statement (UNESCO), marks a turning point for inclusive education and calls for schools to accommodate all children, regardless of physical, intellectual, or social challenges. (Salamanca Statement, UNESCO) |
| 2000 | Dakar Framework For Action reaffirms global commitment to EFA by 2015; and urges a focus on gender equity and vulnerable groups in conflict-affected areas. (Dakar Framework for Action, UNESCO) |
| 2006 | UN CRPD (Convention on the Rights Of Persons With Disabilities), The convention serves as a groundbreaking event with agreed achievements such as; making inclusive education a legal obligation, and not just a goal. (CRPD, United Nations) |
| 2010 | INEE Minimum Standards For Education In Emergencies Provides a practical framework for governments and NGOs to deliver education in crises like war or natural disasters around the globe. |
| 2011 | World Bank Development Report: Conflict, Security & Development, World Bank Development Report: Conflict, Security & Development (INEE, Minimum Standards) The report emphasises education as key to breaking cycles of violence and rebuilding post-conflict societies. (World Bank, 2011) |
| 2012 | UN Global Education First Initiative, Launched by Ban Ki-moon, focused on placing education at the centre of development and peace. (Global Education First Initiative, |

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| | United Nations) |
| 2015 | Quality Education – Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” Targets focus on girls, refugees, disabled children, and those affected by conflict or poverty. (SDG 4, United Nations) |
| 2016 | UNHCR's Refugee Education 2030 Strategy laid out the framework to include refugees in national education systems rather than creating separate, parallel ones. (Refugee Education 2030, UNHCR) |
| 2018 | World Inequality Report – Access To Education, The report stressed education gaps between high- and low-income countries, while highlighting the intergenerational effects of exclusion. (World Inequality Report, 2018) |
| 2019 | Education Cannot Wait: Multi-Year Resilience Programme. The programme provides emergency education support in conflict zones such as Yemen, Syria, South Sudan, etc. (Education Cannot Wait, 2019) |
| 2020 | COVID-19 School Closures. At the peak of the pandemic, over 1.6 billion students were affected. This revealed digital divides, and caused learning loss and increased dropout risks among poor/rural youth across the world. (UNESCO, COVID-19 Education Response) |
| 2021 | UNESCO Report: Futures Of Education – “Reimagining Our Futures Together”, Calls for a transformation of education systems for inclusion, equity, and resilience in the face of growing global challenges. (Futures of Education Report, UNESCO) |

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|------|---|
| 2022 | UNHCR Report – "Staying The Course: The Challenges Facing Refugee Education", highlights that only 6% of refugees attend tertiary education, and spreads the call for urgent change. (UNHCR, 2022) |
| 2023 | Global Education Monitoring Report: Technology In Education, points out that tech-based learning often reinforces inequality unless paired with access and training for marginalised groups. (GEM Report, UNESCO) |
| 2024 | Education Cannot Wait – Annual Results Report, Emphasises that only 3% of humanitarian aid goes to education, despite it being a priority for children in conflict. (Education Cannot Wait, 2024) |

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Global Education Cluster

Led by UNICEF and Save the Children, is a key UN mechanism that responds to education needs in humanitarian crises. Created in 2007, it works during emergencies to coordinate humanitarian actors and ensure that education responses are efficient and well-planned. In conflict zones, this means setting up temporary learning spaces, distributing school supplies, and training emergency teachers. The cluster's work helps avoid gaps and overlaps, making sure children caught in crisis still receive access to learning opportunities (Global Education Cluster).

UN Security Council Resolution 2143

Adopted in 2014, focuses on protecting education from attack during armed conflict. It condemns the military use of schools and the recruitment of child soldiers, urging member states to ensure access to education for all children, especially those in post-conflict reintegration. This resolution highlights the importance of safe education spaces and the role of schools in protecting children from further harm and exploitation

during war.

Global Refugee Forum

Held every four years and co-hosted by UNHCR, the Global Refugee Forum is a key event where member states, civil society, and other stakeholders make concrete pledges to improve refugee rights, including education. During the 2019 Forum, over 100 commitments were made to expand refugee education access globally. These included promises to build schools, train teachers, and integrate refugees into national education systems. The forum helps raise awareness of the urgent needs of displaced children and puts pressure on governments to take action.

(Global Refugee Forum, UNHCR)

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

Adopted in 1979 and monitored by the UN, CEDAW is crucial in defending girls' right to education. In conflict-affected areas, girls often face forced marriage, attacks on schools, and exclusion from classrooms. CEDAW obliges countries to eliminate these barriers, promote equal access, and protect girls' right to learn, making it essential in regions where gender-based exclusion in education is worsened by war.

(CEDAW, United Nations)

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Education Cannot Wait (ECW)

Launched in 2016, Education Cannot Wait was designed to rapidly deliver education in emergencies such as armed conflict or natural disasters. It has supported millions of children across over 30 countries, with programs in Yemen, Syria, and the Sahel region. These interventions provided temporary learning spaces, teacher stipends, and mental health support. However, ECW receives less than 3% of global humanitarian funding. The inconsistency in support limits its ability to ensure long-term, inclusive learning systems. This inconsistency directly contradicts SDG 4.1, which calls for free, quality education for all, and limits peacebuilding efforts outlined in SDG 16.

The Global Pivot to Digital Learning

During the COVID-19 pandemic, countries worldwide turned to online learning to

maintain education continuity and to prevent the spread of the virus. While platforms like Khan Academy or national portals were launched, their effectiveness was highly uneven across the globe. In sub-Saharan Africa, only about 10% of households had reliable internet, and girls were 43% less likely than boys to own smartphones (UNICEF/ITU, 2023). Adding to that, most platforms lack screen readers, subtitles, or sign language, which excludes a large percentage of children with disabilities. This shows how digital learning widened gaps instead of closing them, falling short of SDG 4.a and violating the equity principles of SDG 16.10.

The Salamanca Statement and UN CRPD

The 1994 Salamanca Statement and the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) firmly establish inclusive education as a right, not a privilege. Many countries signed this statement, but implementation remains spotty even after multiple years. Schools across the Global South still lack ramps, assistive devices, or trained inclusive education teachers. This creates a huge gap between children and their different necessities. Even where inclusive education is the law, children with disabilities remain out of school due to stigma or logistical challenges. This undercuts the intention of SDG 4.5, which aims to eliminate disparities in education, and fails to create SDG 16.3-level just and inclusive systems.

Conditionality of Aid

Donors often face whether to condition aid on inclusive education policies in these countries. In several cases, like Myanmar and Afghanistan, funding was redirected or paused when governments restricted girls' education. While this upholds international standards, it sometimes worsens the situation on the ground, shutting down entire systems that served marginalised groups. This approach shows the complexity of aligning SDG 4 with SDG 16.6. It also reveals the tensions between short-term needs and long-term principles in global policymaking.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

SDG 4 – Quality Education

Sustainable Development Goal 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote learning opportunities for all. This goal highlights the importance of providing

universal access to both primary and secondary education, especially for those who are vulnerable and marginalised. Its secondary focus is also improving teacher training, which will help eliminate disparities in education that are caused by outside factors such as poverty, disabilities, or ethnicity. While also ensuring that all learners acquire the skills needed to thrive in society. By targeting the systematic barriers that prevent children from accessing quality education. This SDG plays a crucial role in advancing educational equity and upholding the human right to learn as recognised in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Sustainable Development Goal 16 is focused on promoting peace, justice, and strong institutions, which is deeply connected to the right to quality education, especially in conflict-affected regions. Without stable and accountable systems, education often becomes inaccessible or unsafe for marginalised children. Armed conflict, political instability, and weak legal protections can lead to the destruction of schools, the displacement of students and teachers, and the breakdown of educational infrastructure. SDG 16, pushed for inclusive institutions and access to justice, which are crucial to rebuild trust in public systems and protect the rights of children to learn in safe environments. By strengthening governance and reducing violence, this goal creates the foundation needed for SDG 4, to actually be achieved.

Possible Solutions

Implement Mobile Learning Hubs

Create mobile schools or education buses equipped with trained teachers, solar power, internet access, and materials for inclusive education. These mobile units can travel to post-conflict zones or refugee camps where the infrastructure is absent. Various UN networks could explore how this model could be adapted to certain regions or integrated into national education strategies.

Gender-Responsive School Safety Audits

Encourages member states to conduct safety audits in schools, especially those in conflict-prone zones. This would be led by local women and youth. The audits would assess risks such as GBV, distance, or lack of facilities, and recommend actions like hiring

staff or building safer transport. These audits are up to discussion whether it should be supported by UN agencies or NGOs.

Global Education Conditionality Tracker

Would encourage the development of a transparent international tool that monitors whether nations receiving education aid are complying with inclusive education standards. This tool would not enforce action but would inform donors, activists, and UN bodies. The ethics and practicality of such monitoring are up for debate, and whether it would support or threaten sovereignty.

Social Protection Linked to School Attendance

Suggest conditional cash transfers or school meal programmes tied directly to attendance in inclusive settings. The exploration of whether such models can be adapted locally or could reduce dropout rates among the most vulnerable groups, which include disabled children or young mothers, can be up for debate.

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Appendix

Delegates can use the appendix to further familiarize themselves with the data, articles, details, and statistics relevant to this issue. Additionally, these sources are of great use when looking at how the issue presents itself in particular environments and situations.

[UDHR – Article 26](#)

Source A: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

Article 26 is the legal and moral foundation for the global right to education. It affirms that primary education should be free and compulsory, and that education should aim at the full development of the human personality and promote peace and tolerance. Delegates can reference this when arguing that education is not optional, especially in post-conflict zones. It's a strong preambulatory clause basis or justification for mandates.

[CRC Full Text](#)

Source B: Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) – Articles 28 & 29

The CRC gives legally binding international status to education rights. Article 28 confirms every child's right to education, while Article 29 outlines what education should achieve (e.g., development, peace, cultural understanding). Proposing long-term systems like trauma-informed curricula or peace education can use these articles as international justification for their policies.

[CRPD – Article 24](#)

Source C: UN CRPD – Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities

Article 24 of the CRPD requires governments to shift away from segregated systems and legally commit to inclusive education. This isn't optional, it's a UN-backed obligation. Delegates who are focusing on accessibility, like assistive tech, ramps, or training sign-language teachers, can use this to justify why inclusive measures need legal and financial support in post-conflict recovery efforts.

[CEDAW Overview](#)

Source D: CEDAW – Education Rights for Girls in Conflict Zones

CEDAW is specially relevant for tackling gender-based exclusion in education, particularly in conflict zones where girls face increased risk of early marriage, gender-based violence, or being forced out of school. This treaty can be used to prove those needs are rooted in international commitments.

[Global Refugee Forum](#)

Source E: Global Refugee Forum – Education Pledges & Outcomes

In 2019, countries made over 100 pledges for improving refugee education. This source can be used to check what progress has been made, call out unfulfilled promises, or suggest new regional commitments tied to refugee learning access.

[Education Cluster Website](#)

Source F: Global Education Cluster – Humanitarian Coordination Mechanism

This platform showcases how UN agencies and NGOs work together during emergencies to get education systems back on track. Use this as a model for clauses.

[GEM Report 2023](#)

Source G: GEM Report 2023 – Technology & Inequality in Education

The report critically examines how digital tools, while helpful, often reinforce inequality unless carefully managed. It gives data on the digital divide, especially among rural, disabled, and poor learners. More focused on the debate of ED-Tech, remote learning, or post-COVID Digital strategies.

[EWC Report 2023](#)

Source H: Education Cannot Wait – Annual Results Report (2023)

This is one of the most up-to-date sources on emergency education funding. It includes statistics on children reached, countries funded, and current crises. It can be used for real examples and to propose improvements around the globe.