

# Safe From Harm

## Protecting Girls' Education in Conflicts and Crises

**39 million girls around the world are out of school because of conflict. Some are targeted by armed groups just for being girls; most are at risk of sexual abuse, violence and exploitation.**

**World leaders have a major opportunity to commit to changing the lives of the world's most vulnerable girls at this year's G7 Leaders' Summit. Send My Friend to School is calling for the UK to make schools safe for these girls by supporting a G7 Declaration on Girls' Education and making increased resources available in future budgets to deliver on the commitments within it.**

Schools should be safe and happy places where children can benefit from a quality education. For 246 million children around the world however, this is not the case. That is why this year we are campaign calling on the UK Government to make schools safe for all children.

In January, we launched our flagship annual report, *Safe from harm: Protecting every child and teacher at school*, which identified that 15 life-threatening attacks on education occur every school day. The report looked closely at the impact that conflict has on education, in particular attacks on schools and the military use of schools. It also explored the many threats to safety that children face in school during peacetime, notably the challenges faced by girls, children with disabilities and teachers.

The report called on the UK Government to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration – an intergovernmental initiative to protect education from attack during armed conflict. We are delighted that the British Foreign Secretary recently announced that the UK will endorse the Safe Schools Declaration and we thank the Government for this commitment. Send My Friend to School and its members look forward to working closely with the Government to implement the guidelines in the Declaration and encourage other countries to endorse it too.

This briefing builds on *Safe from harm* by exploring in greater detail the impact that conflict and crises have on girls' education. It pays close attention to the unique safety challenges faced by girls in such unstable settings and sets out recommendations for how the UK Government can make schools safe for girls in crises.

### What are the main threats to girls' education in conflict and crises?

**During conflicts and crises, education is on the front line. Schools are often the first to close but last to reopen. This has devastating consequences for girls.**

Right now, 75 million children and young people are missing out on education because of war, natural disasters and other crises. Worryingly, girls are two and half times more likely to be out of school than boys<sup>1</sup>. Threats to girls' education can either be as a direct result of a crisis, or as an indirect consequence of the destruction and violence that comes with it. Some of the main impacts of conflict and crises on girls' education are:



**Targeted attacks on girls in and around school.** There were three times as many attacks on girls' schools in 2014 than there were on boys' schools<sup>ii</sup>. Well known examples of this include the Taliban's 2012 assassination attempt on Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai and the kidnapping of 276 teenage school girls by Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria in 2014. Both under the belief that girls should not be educated. However, these are not isolated incidents and targeted attacks on girls' education are widespread globally. A ground-breaking report<sup>iii</sup> by the *Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack* recently found that between 2013-17 attacks on education took place in 74 countries. The report noted that girls and women were uniquely targeted because of their gender and there was evidence of this taking place in 18 of the 28 countries profiled. In Afghanistan, evidence was especially concerning. The direct targeting of the education of girls by non-state armed groups has led to gender-based violence, a restricted ability to work and study outside of the home, and limited access to justice. According to a survey cited in the report, in 2017, security concerns and violence were the most commonly cited obstacles to girls' education.

**Exposure to sexual violence, exploitation and modern slavery.** Where schools are still open, sexual violence and harassment on the way to school often prevents girls from attending<sup>iv</sup>. A study in Afghanistan found distance from school to be *the* foremost barrier to girls' education<sup>v</sup>. This is also true in refugee camp contexts - recent evidence from Lebanon, Jordan and Sub-Saharan Africa also highlights sexual violence and harassment on route to school as a key reason for non-attendance<sup>vi</sup>. In protracted conflicts such as in Syria, Nigeria and the DRC, girls have been abducted and used as domestic servants or sex slaves<sup>vii</sup>. The UN has also found that girls face heightened risk of being trafficked or abducted for economic, sexual or military reasons<sup>viii</sup>. It is likewise true that violence within schools can increase during a crisis or conflict situation – school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV)<sup>ix</sup> is often amplified because of the already stressed and / or violent environment within communities<sup>x</sup>.

### Fatima\*, 14, Syria

Tens of thousands of Syrian refugees live in Jordan. Syrian refugees have difficulties finding employment and education opportunities, and most of the Syrian families live in poverty. Refugee girls are particularly vulnerable because of their age and gender. Girls interrupt their studies more often than boys and many have to marry young in order to support their families.

"I only went to school for two years in Syria, and I hadn't learnt to read or write yet. In the Azraq refugee camp, I went to school again. I used a computer properly for the first time and fell in love with computers. One can learn anything with a computer! I dream of becoming a computer expert who teaches others how to use a computer. I also dream of returning to Syria and being surrounded by woods and greenness. It's difficult for me to live in the middle of a desert."

Fatima's case study was taken from interviews in the refugee camp of Azraq and East Amman in Jordan where Plan International is supporting girls and their families who have been affected by the Syrian war

**Increased prevalence of child marriage.** During protracted conflicts, the heightened risk of sexual violence and destruction of livelihoods often forces parents to view marriage as the most secure and stable future for their daughters and therefore girls are taken out of school<sup>xi</sup>. For example, evidence from the conflict in Syria has shown that child marriage has increased alarmingly and, in some cases, has doubled<sup>xii</sup>. Evidence from Girls Not Brides has shown that seven out of the ten countries with the highest child marriage rates are considered conflict or fragile states<sup>xiii</sup>.



**Exclusion and increased vulnerability of girls with disabilities.** According to UNICEF, in times of insecurity, children with disabilities face greater abandonment by families, are at higher risk of abuse and neglect, and are the last to receive emergency relief<sup>xiv</sup>. There is also evidence of gender inequities in school attendance of children with disabilities and drop out during crises. Research by the Women's Refugee Council shows that in all the refugee camp situations they surveyed, more boys with disabilities than girls with disabilities were attending school.

## How to improve access to quality education for girls during conflicts and crises?

**Increasing funding for education during crises.** There is an urgent global funding gap to ensure that each of the 75 million children out of school because of conflict or crises receives a quality education. The most recent analysis suggests a total financing gap of \$8.5 billion. Yet despite this, education during crises remains heavily underfunded, with humanitarian aid donors often not prioritising education and allocating insufficient resources in humanitarian budgets - the share of education in total humanitarian aid was 2.1% in 2017, which is far below the required level<sup>xv</sup>. Domestic governments are also failing to allocate sufficient resources; conflict-affected countries are spending around 3% of national income on education – below the global average of 4% and the recommended target of nearly 6%<sup>xvi</sup>. In addition to implementing the policy changes listed below, governments, donors and multilateral financing institutions should aim to allocate more resources to funding education during crises.

**Making girls feel safe in and around school.** As aforementioned, one of the biggest threats to girls' education during conflict and crises is the journey to and from school. Ensuring girls feel safe on the way to school is central to promoting gender equality in crisis situations.

One way to ensure that more girls are safe at school is by more states signing the Safe Schools Declaration. The Safe Schools Declaration is a political commitment by countries to do more to protect students, teachers, schools and universities during armed conflict, including by endorsing and undertaking to use the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. By endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration, states express their support for the continuation of education during armed conflict, and for the implementation of concrete measures to deter armed personnel from using schools for military purposes. As of May 2018, 75 countries have signed the Declaration – including most recently the UK and Germany.

In addition, policy makers and programme designers should focus on:

- **Reducing the distance to school.** This has delivered positive results in several programmes<sup>xvii</sup>. In Afghanistan, the establishment of alternative schools that were closer to girls' homes led to a 52% increase in enrolment and a significant increase in learning outcomes – the results were even better for girls than boys<sup>xviii</sup>.
- **Making schools physically secure.** Reinforcing school security by building walls or fences has been shown to drastically improve how safe girls feel at school<sup>xix</sup>. In South Sudan, a lack of such infrastructure meant members of the local community would enter school grounds unchecked, sometimes including young men carrying guns<sup>xx</sup>.



- **Increasing WASH and Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM).** For adolescent girls to feel safe and comfortable both at and on the way to school it is critical for them to have access to clean WASH and MHM facilities. While evidence is limited on impact in conflict and crises settings, some research shows that the distribution of kits containing soaps and sanitary equipment has had positive effects on the enrolment of girls.

**Tackling School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV).** Evidence is beginning to demonstrate that programmes which include targeted strategies for tackling school-related gender-based violence can help keep girls in school and learning. Some promising interventions and examples include:

- **Training and employing more female teachers.** Programmes that increase the number of female teachers and teaching assistants have seen increased enrolment and retention of girls in school<sup>xxi</sup>. The IRC's Healing Classrooms project in Sierra Leone employed female classroom assistants to address the problem of male-dominated classrooms and to reduce girls' vulnerability to sexual exploitation in schools. Girls benefitting from the project reported that classrooms felt more comfortable, it was easier to learn and that they were encouraged by the physical presence of a woman<sup>xxii</sup>. The project evaluation also notes that occurrences of sexual exploitation were significantly reduced. In some cases, it has also led to a reduction in incidents of SRGBV<sup>xxiii</sup>.
- **Tackling harmful social norms.** Harmful social norms can manifest in incidents of violence in and around school, making schools unsafe for girls. Changing such norms must however be done in collaboration with communities and with a focus on harmful social norms relating to gender, sex and violence. For example, in South Sudan, to tackle the sexual exploitation of girls by teachers, UNICEF's Communities Care programme partnered with the Ministry of Education to engage communities and address the underlying drivers of GBV<sup>xxiv</sup>. Facilitators worked with community members on issues of violence, codes of conduct and the use of reporting mechanisms, all guided a toolkit manual. While 90% of participants were unaware of the existing codes of conduct and reporting mechanisms ahead of the training, upon completion they were able draft to action plans to prevent and respond to sexual violence in their schools.
- **Creating safe spaces for girls to thrive.** Creating learning environments where girls feel safe to learn and develop, often beyond school-based education, is crucial. In Pakistan, Plan International is providing safe spaces for adolescent girls to access non-formal education in areas previously affected by conflict and disaster. The projects are able to work with married and out-of-school girls to not only provide education, but to support with other critical interventions such as health services, life skills training and the opportunity to discuss issues relating to gender inequality<sup>xxv</sup>.

**Providing alternative forms of education.** Conflict and crises can have a devastating effect on national education systems, often in countries where systems are weak in the first place. Providing alternative forms of education where standard structures are unable to deliver is often necessary, and there are some excellent examples of where this has worked effectively, particularly for marginalised girls.

- **Mobile schools.** In Northern Nigeria, in areas of Borno State affected by the Boko Haram insurgency, Plan International has been working closely with communities under attack to provide roving education services<sup>xxvi</sup>. Teachers are brought in on motorised tricycles to give lessons for up to four hours a day and learning materials are kept in a secure location. In the first two weeks of the new school year, Plan enrolled 620 formerly out-of-school children in the four mobile school units that it established.



- **Accelerated learning programmes.** These flexible education programmes aim to meet the needs of excluded children and youth, or adults who have not attended school. Lessons are provided in an accelerated timeframe. Save the Children's Accelerated Learning Programme has had great success in conflict-affected contexts and has resulted in increased girls' enrolment, retention and learning outcomes<sup>xxvii</sup>.
- **Distance learning and radio-based education.** Sometimes it is simply too unsafe for girls to travel to school or schools just are not open. Radio-based education offers an alternative form of education. Examples of this include the Sierra Leone Ministry of Education launching a radio education programme during the Ebola crisis<sup>xxviii</sup> and the GenPeace programme in the Philippines, which provided literacy education as well as information on gender issues and health for girls and women affected by conflict<sup>xxix</sup>.

**Supporting families to get girls learning.** Conflict and other crises devastate jobs and livelihoods, often hitting the poorest hardest. The direct and indirect costs of schooling can quickly become a burden, and, as outlined previously, it is often the girls in a family who lose out first. Evidence has however shown that supporting families with cash and other forms of in-kind support can get girls back in to school and learning.

- **Vouchers.** Those that cover school costs have been shown to improve school attendance significantly, particularly for girls<sup>xxx</sup>.
- **Fee-free education programmes.** These cover indirect costs such as books and uniforms and can have a significant impact on the enrolment of children, particularly girls, who have previously not attended school<sup>xxxi</sup>.
- **School feeding programmes.** During crises these can increase enrolment, provide nutritional benefits, and assist in retention<sup>xxxii</sup>.

**Promoting girls' voices and community participation.** It is vital to include the voices of those affected by conflict and crises in any response. These voices are central to delivering sustainable education services that keep girls in school<sup>xxxiii</sup>. Evidence has shown that this can be done successfully in several ways.

- **Community-based and community-run schools.** Research shows that these can make education safer for girls by limiting distance to travel and creating safer learning environments. Evidence from schools supported by Save the Children in Afghanistan shows community ownership of schools saw girls' enrolment increase from 30-39% between 2005-9.
- **Parent-teacher-student committees.** These can result in better school management, encourage parents to remain committed to their children's education and can be instrumental in keeping girls in school<sup>xxxiv</sup>.
- **Community-led advocacy campaigns.** Evidence has shown that community advocacy and awareness raising campaigns can encourage parents and other key community figures to send children, especially girls, to school.



## What can the UK Government do to make schools safe for girls during conflict and crises?

The Prime Minister of Canada recently announced that the issue of girls' education, particularly in conflict and crises, will be on the agenda of the Canadian G7 Leader's Summit in June. It is the first time in several years that education has been on the agenda and therefore presents a unique opportunity to secure commitments that make schools safe for girls.

The UK is already a world-leader in supporting the hardest-to-reach girls receive a quality education. As the world's largest donor to girls' education, the second largest donor to basic education, and a vocal advocate of ensuring all girls receive 12 years of quality education, the UK is leading the way. Nevertheless, considering this unique opportunity to demonstrate the UK's continued global leadership:

### The Prime Minister's Office should:

- Support G7 efforts to establish a Declaration on Girls' Education and commit to making increased resources available in future budgets to deliver on the commitments within it

### The Foreign and Commonwealth Office should:

- Work with the Ministry of Defence to fully implement the Safe Schools Declaration
- Encourage other governments to endorse and fully implement the Safe Schools Declaration
- Prioritise girls' education in crises as a core focus of the Foreign Secretary's campaign to ensure all girls receive 12 years of quality education
- Explore the role of the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund in investing in the education and protection of girls during conflict and crises

### The Department for International Development should:

Place greater political, financial and programmatic focus on supporting the right to free, inclusive, quality and gender-responsive education opportunities in times of conflict and crisis. This should include:

- Building on its world-leading commitments to date and continuing to provide sustainable investment in the Education Cannot Wait Fund and supporting the organisation to achieve its targets on gender equality, safe and protective learning environments and learning outcomes
- Increasing the proportion of the DFID humanitarian budget spent on education to ensure that education is prioritised in humanitarian response
- Placing a greater priority on a gender-responsive approach across the continuum of immediate humanitarian response and long-term development programming and commit to addressing the specific barriers faced by the most vulnerable girls in accessing education in line with the activities outlined in this briefing.
- Commission multi-year research to better understand what works to protect girls in education during conflicts and crises, specifically answering how, for whom, where and under what conditions.



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