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Lost Opportunity

Education for out-of-school youth
in emergency and protracted crisis settings

Executive Summary

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Lost Opportunity: Education for out-of-school youth in emergency and protracted crisis settings Executive Summary

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About NORCAP

NORCAP's mission is to improve aid to better protect and empower people affected by crises and climate change. We do this by:

- Supporting initiatives that protect and empower people
- Improving impact at the global and local level through joint projects with partners and stakeholders
- Providing expertise and developing capacity that enable partners to meet the needs of people in fragile situations and crises
- Strengthening the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding system by supporting leadership, coordination and policy development
- Building bridges between the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors

NORCAP is part of the Norwegian Refugee Council.

Executive Summary

Access to education in emergency and protracted crisis settings decreases dramatically as a young person's age increases. This research focuses on those who are by far the most affected by this trend: out-of-school youth.

The study examines their educational journeys. The research analysed the literature available on youth and education in emergency and protracted crisis settings, a field known as EiE, and the team also undertook qualitative interviews with 36 leading EiE practitioners, donor agency officials, EiE and youth experts, and youth with expertise in EiE for out-of-school youth. For this study, youth are defined as people aged 12 to 24. The research was supported by NORCAP, part of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

The EiE field generally demonstrates a lack of clarity about who youth are or what (in educational terms) they seek. There is no agreed definition of "youth." Instead, they tend to be shoehorned into the child category, positioned far below the priorities and investments reserved for children or overlooked entirely. With the exception of minimal access to vocational and tertiary education, certified EiE was rarely found to include anyone over 18.

Primary education is unquestionably the EiE field's main area of focus. The research

revealed EiE as an emergency-focused field burdened with responsibility, without a prominent profile or sufficient funds and almost completely absorbed with addressing the urgent educational needs of young children, largely those between the ages of six and 12. EiE professionals interviewed for this study underscored the following dynamic: if post-primary education is compared to (or competes against) primary education, it will always lose out. They also depicted a field concerned about youth but lacking a roadmap for how to address their priorities.

EiE's pronounced focus on girls' education often leaves pressing female youth challenges overlooked. Those who become wives or unmarried mothers generally leave school. Few efforts to support boys' and male youth education appear to exist.

Children and youth who were not in school before an emergency are unlikely to be in educational facilities during one. EiE professionals were found to know little about those not in their schools, youth in particular. The two primary types of certified education available for out-of-school youth in conflict-affected settings were vocational training and accelerated education, mainly for the primary level. With minimal exceptions, the research did not uncover sophisticated programme targeting for subgroups of out-of-school youth.

Conclusions

1. A pronounced orientation toward young children and primary schooling: Providing education to those aged between six and 12 allows emergency educators to reach large numbers of children swiftly and at a somewhat lower unit cost. Primary or basic education is, by far, the centrepiece of EiE work.

2. Absence of clarity on who youth are: The striking underdevelopment of education for youth in the EiE field starts with an elemental finding arising from this research: there is no agreed youth definition for the EiE field. Its absence did not appear to be a matter of particular concern.

3. A disturbingly low priority for youth in the EiE field: A prominent indication of this is the fact that the [IASC Guidelines on Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises](#) have had little influence on the EiE field.

4. Notably limited levels of youth expertise and investment: The response to massive out-of-school youth cohorts in emergency and protracted crisis settings is deficient. Relevant knowledge was rarely demonstrated. The scale of educational response, together with research about youth and EiE, are grossly inadequate.

5. EiE largely is stationary while many youth are mobile: Certified education offerings from EiE agencies tend to concentrate in camps and settlements while large numbers of young people migrate into urban areas. This reportedly is not an EiE area of focus.

6. A narrow approach to girls' education: Efforts appear to focus on younger girls and biases against females generally. The approach to the inevitable life requirements of many female youth is remarkably rigid. The situation is particularly concerning for students who become unmarried mothers or young wives.



Photo: Ingrid Prestetun/NRC

7. A striking imbalance concerning education for boys and male youth education: The often-lower performance of boys does not appear to be a cause of major concern. Unaccompanied boys and male youth are also regularly overlooked in emergency settings. The attention paid to girls in EiE appears to invite unintentional but unfortunate gender-specific fallout for boys and male youth. The same may be the case for youth with LGBTQ+ profiles.

8. An absence of strategic targeting: The non-specific, generic approach of the mostly narrow array of certified education programmes points to little knowledge of the everyday realities that out-of-school youth cohorts face. The type of initiatives and priority issues – such as location, timeframe, duration, mode of delivery and provision of childcare – that might allow particular out-of-school youth subgroups to attend were not found to inform programme provisions.

9. Indications of favoured access to educational programming: One unintended consequence of the supply orientation is that vulnerable and non-elite out-of-school youth subgroups – youth wives and mothers, those who work during the day, those with disabilities, members of excluded ethnic or religious groups, former or current members of armed groups, those dealing with substance and/or alcohol abuse – rarely appear to be identified or specifically targeted for EiE programme interventions.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are bold because they need to be. The existing provisions, know-how and backing are far too insubstantial to propose anything less.

Policy recommendations:

- 1. Recognise the inadequate status quo and commit to reform:** The first recommendation is threefold: (a) Accept that the status quo is coming up short; (b) Take steps toward a strategic response; and (c) Invest in providing substantially more educational opportunity to emergency-affected youth.
- 2. Convene a high-level conference (or series of major gatherings) to galvanise EiE commitment to out-of-school youth:** The starting point should be to help the EiE field appreciate what EiE for youth means and strengthen capacity to address the education priorities of out-of-school youth.
- 3. Dramatically and urgently upgrade expertise on out-of-school, at-risk youth in the EiE field:** This striking deficiency must be addressed with investment in research, personnel, collaboration and appropriate empowering initiatives. Youth expertise and voices should be integrated directly into EiE work via advisory groups and an on-site presence in HQ offices, field operations and education ministries.

4. **Promote learning about education and out-of-school youth:** Regular investments in quality research by researchers (including qualified youth) promises to inform strategic decision-making and effective action. This should include endorsement and support for the second phase of this research – a participatory global study undertaken by youth researchers on the certified and uncertified educational priorities of out-of-school youth.

5. **Target key youth subgroups:** The paucity of informed targeting of education initiatives for out-of-school youth allows comparatively well-positioned youth to dominate access. Reversing this trend promises to help EiE actors act strategically and demonstrate inclusion.

6. **Find out how to deliver education to youth:** Many EiE experts were found to routinely presume that education could only take place in a school setting. Yet school environments may be uninviting, inflexible and potentially even dangerous for many youth. Reaching out-of-school youth and providing them with relevant certified education calls for practitioners to find out and respond to what works for youth. This reset is strategic and necessary.

7. **Transform the donor-driven emphasis on girls' education into strategic, gendered support:** Much more needs to be done to demonstrate inclusion and acceptance in gendered approaches to education (also see programme recommendation 4).



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8. **Maintain regular engagements between EiE stakeholders and education authorities about out-of-school youth challenges:** The need to address the challenges and education priorities of out-of-school youth should be subjects of regular discussion.

9. **Develop an adaptable youth definition for the EiE field:** It is impossible to assist many youth without some agreement on who they are. Guidelines should be devised for establishing who a youth is in particular situations. They should be universal, but their application should be local.

10. **Commit to the disaggregation of data by age, gender, disability and education level:** This is urgently needed to inform effective EiE programming and practice.

11. **Apply the IASC Guidelines on Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises:** The guidelines for education are practical, useful and relevant, and have been endorsed by many of the key UN and NGO stakeholders in the EiE field.

Programme recommendations:

1. **Pilot adaptable, youth-centred approaches to education:** Collaborating with members of key youth subgroups who will become prime targets for an educational activity is essential. Tailoring initiatives to the priorities and requirements of key youth subgroups, and then assessing their impact are strongly endorsed.

2. **Strategically refine and expand the engagement process with youth:** Undertaking trust-based preliminary research and analysis is the first step. It is important to identify which youth subgroups will be targeted first. Next come authentic exchanges with members.

3. **Elevate the quality and relevance of pre-programme assessments:** Start programme planning and design by establishing a comprehensive understanding of young via a field assessment: who they are, the ecosystem in which they exist, and their priorities and needs.

4. **Apply a gender lens to all programmes:** Planning with a gender lens should consider the needs of female and male youth, and those who belong to gender minorities. Collaboration allows youth to stipulate their needs and inform programme planning.

5. **Recruit, train and deploy qualified youth as monitoring and evaluation experts.**

6. **Implement bridging programmes:** These should incorporate knowledge acquisition and an orientation process. Formal counselling and guidance workshops are also likely necessary.

7. **Initiate and support certification task teams:** The teams should: (1) Help youth regain their education documents or gain equivalent recognition; and (2) Cultivate approval for education programmes that are deserving of certification and accreditation.



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