



## PLAN INTERNATIONAL WOMEN DELIVER 2023

# ADVOCACY BRIEF: GIRLS' RIGHTS IN CRISES - TO EDUCATION, PROTECTION, FOOD SECURITY

- Girls living in humanitarian, conflict or climate crisis are at heightened risk of rights violations and yet have reduced access to essential services. Girls face increased risk of child, early and forced marriage and unions, unintended pregnancy, school dropout, child labour, sexual exploitation and abuse, and they often eat less and last in countries facing climate risks, conflict, famine and hunger.
- The world is in the grip of a devastating food crisis which disproportionately impacts girls. They consume less and eat the least nutritious food, heightening risks for pregnant adolescent girls and young women of miscarriage, maternal mortality and passing on the impacts of intergeneration malnutrition. They face heightened risks of gender-based violence, are more likely than boys to be taken out of school, and for those who continue to attend, hunger severely impacts their learning.
- Education in emergencies not only ensures girls continue to access their right to education - but it can strengthen resilience and reduce the risk of violence, as well as child, early and forced marriage and unions. Inclusive, quality, gender-transformative education in emergencies can be life-saving and yet it is drastically under-resourced.
- Armed conflicts cause school closures, the destruction of school facilities, abduction and killing of students and teachers. Attacks and threats on education have immediate and long-term adverse effects on students.

## BACKGROUND

Within the devastating and escalating hunger crisis at least 345 million people across 82 countries are currently facing or are at risk of acute food insecurity, with 49 million people on the brink of starvation<sup>i</sup> and it has been estimated that there could be as many as 150 million more girls and women globally who are food insecure compared to boys and men<sup>ii</sup>. The impacts of food insecurity extend far beyond the direct consequences of undernutrition. Risks of intimate partner violence – most often perpetrated against girls and women - and neglect and violence against children are exacerbated. For adolescent girls, food insecurity often means that their risk of child, early and forced marriage and with it their risk of unintended pregnancy and other sexual and reproductive health and rights concerns increases. Education can be an early casualty in situations of acute food insecurity and for adolescent girls, food insecurity can compound the barriers they already face in accessing education.

A historic, five-season drought, recent and ongoing conflict, and macroeconomic challenges continue to drive high levels of acute food insecurity across the East Africa region and Yemen. In Kenya, it is estimated that around 4.4 million people (27% of the ASAL population) are facing high levels of Acute Food Insecurity. In South Sudan more than 7.8 million people will fall short of their minimum food needs in 2023.<sup>iv</sup> This is a substantial increase from the 6.3 million people who faced food insecurity in 2022.

The number of hungry people in West and Central Africa is at 35 million and is projected to reach an all-time high of **48 million people (including 9 million children)** this year 2023, if urgent and long-lasting solutions to address these crises are not delivered soon<sup>v</sup>.

According to new global estimates, 222 million crisis-affected children and adolescents are in need of urgent education support<sup>iii</sup>, yet educational responses in emergencies and protracted crises remain severely underfunded, and needs are growing.

For adolescent girls - especially those who are refugees, internally displaced or asylum-seeking - the impacts of conflict and crisis compound the barriers they already face in accessing primary and secondary education, exacerbating pre-existing gender discrimination and harmful practices such as child marriage and early pregnancy, which have lifelong consequences.

Education can be a vital component of humanitarian resilience, anticipation and early response through supporting crisis-affected countries to co-develop and implement integrated preparedness and early action plans and endorsement of the revised Comprehensive School Safety Framework. Girls, young people and their networks are already leading efforts to deliver and defend education in emergencies across the world, and their involvement in developing and implementing solutions is crucial for success.

The West and Central Africa region continues to be an epicentre of deteriorating and unprecedented levels of armed violence and insecurity. Violence and conflicts are the main drivers of the humanitarian crises, causing massive displacement of population, school closures, the destruction of school facilities, abduction and killing of students and teachers. The long-term future of many children is being jeopardized as over **13,731 schools** are closed or non-operational in West and Central Africa region<sup>vi</sup> due to violence, with girls the most likely to be removed from school and the least likely to return to it after prolonged interruptions.

### **Calls to action:**

- **Integrated, multi-sectoral programming between humanitarian and development sectors and across education, nutrition, health and protection responses are vital to secure girls' rights during times of crises.** Governments, donors and humanitarian actors must recognise the intrinsic links between education, child, early and forced marriage and unions, food insecurity, early and unintended pregnancy, and other forms of gender-based violence and exploitation.
- **Prioritise gender and age sensitive responses to address the gendered impacts of hunger,** including funding specific programmes that address child protection, gender-based violence, girls' access to education, child, early and forced marriage and unions, and sexual abuse and exploitation in food insecure contexts. This also includes support for efforts to strengthen disaggregation of food security data by sex, age and disability.
- Governments, including ministries and relevant agencies **must eliminate barriers to girls' education through increased financing for free, quality, inclusive and flexible learning opportunities, including accelerated education** for out-of-school children, adolescents and youth in crisis-affected countries to ensure continuous, inclusive quality learning. Governments must invest in agile and innovative ways of reaching girls in emergency situations in order to reach more girls in challenging humanitarian contexts.
- Governments, donors and crisis-affected countries **must prioritise the needs of girls and ensure gender equality is at the heart of education sector plans, emergency response plans, budgets and policies,** identifying and addressing gender disparities and their underlying factors from the early years and beyond, in order to transform harmful gender norms, stereotypes and practices that are often perpetuated in and through education, particularly in crisis contexts.
- Recognising the current global hunger crisis and climate crisis and their disproportionate and devastating impact on girls and their education, **sustainable investments must be made towards social safety nets, such as cash transfers and school meals, which have been proven to increase access, retention and learning outcomes of the most vulnerable girls within crises.**
- Governments and the humanitarian community **must remove the barriers to participation faced by girls in humanitarian settings to ensure systematic and meaningful participation of girls in all phases of humanitarian action.** Girls face a unique set of risks during humanitarian crisis but often their needs fail to be prioritised. As the global hunger crisis escalates, governments and the UN have an obligation to include girls and young women in their preparedness and response and ensure their involvement in decisions that affect them.
- UN agencies and governments must **demand and pursue accountability for all those who target and attack schools, kill and maim students and teachers, and abduct girls,** ensuring that all parties to conflict fulfil their obligations under international law. Governments must **endorse and implement the Safe School Declaration and the UN Security Council Resolution on Children and Armed Conflict to protect Education** in times of conflict.
- Governments must **invest in strengthening the resilience of education systems** to ensure continuous access during crises and disruption, particularly for the most marginalised. This

includes implementation of the Comprehensive School Safety Framework (CSSF) within education policies, to **improve adaptive capacities to climate change**.

- **Support locally-led responses wherever possible.** Local organisations, including young women-led organisations, need direct, flexible and increased funding and to have a central role in decision making about the response.

Further reading includes: Plan International, '[Beyond Hunger: The Gendered Impact of the Global Hunger Crisis](#)', 2023.

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<sup>i</sup> WFP, 'A Global Food Crisis'. 2022: <https://www.wfp.org/global-hunger-crisis>

<sup>ii</sup> Care, 'Food Security and Gender Equality: A synergistic understudied symphony', 2022.

<sup>iii</sup> Education Cannot Wait, 'Global Estimates: Number of Crisis-Affected Children and Adolescents in Need of Education Support', 2022.

<sup>iv</sup>[https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/%20ipcinfo/docs/South\\_Sudan\\_IPC\\_Key\\_Messages\\_FebruaryJuly2022\\_Report.pdf](https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/%20ipcinfo/docs/South_Sudan_IPC_Key_Messages_FebruaryJuly2022_Report.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> FAO, UNICEF and FAO, December 8th, 2022

<sup>vi</sup> UNOCHA , March 2023 : UNPRECEDENTED SCHOOL CLOSURES JEOPARDISE THE FUTURE OF MILLIONS IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA