

EU HUMANITARIAN FORUM 2022 POLICY BRIEF

Through a commitment to international humanitarian law, standards and principles the European Union (EU), Member States and the wider international humanitarian community are dedicated to saving lives, building resilient and peaceful communities, promoting good governance and reducing the impact of humanitarian emergencies. As Plan International, we are committed to ensuring that humanitarian action policies and programmes integrate a gender transformative approach, and that mechanisms at all levels monitor the impact of fragile and conflict affected contexts on gender equality and girls' rights.

In March 2022, the first ever EU Humanitarian Forum (EHF) will take place. Plan International welcomes this initiative and calls for a strong age and gender lens to be applied to all discussions. More than half of Plan International's programming countries are considered to be fragile, with five considered extremely fragile. These contexts present the most persistent challenges to realising Plan International's vision. Advancing gender equality and children's rights in fragile and conflict affected contexts cannot be achieved without an effective combination of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding approaches. Moreover, only through ensuring that these complementary efforts centre the needs, rights and priorities of all children and youth, through a gender transformative approach to tackle the root causes of gender inequities, can progress be made towards peaceful and just societies.

The EU and its Member States play a key role in providing humanitarian funding, programming and support. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the creation of a dedicated disaster preparedness budget line and the EC's Communication on the EU's Humanitarian Action underlined the need to increase the range of disaster preparedness and anticipatory action in humanitarian funding.

The EHF will be an opportune moment to gather policy makers, humanitarian partners and other key stakeholders for a more sustained dialogue on humanitarian policy and strategy. The Forum will offer a Team Europe perspective on humanitarian challenges and identify solutions and actions to address the unprecedented level of needs and constraints faced by humanitarian operators and beneficiaries. It will serve as an inclusive platform for strategic and open debates between the EU's political decision-makers and the wider international humanitarian community.

This document sets out Plan International's position and key recommendations for the following areas as covered by the EU Humanitarian Forum 2022:

- Gender Based Violence in Emergencies;
- Education in Emergencies;
- Hunger and Conflict;
- The humanitarian impact of climate change.

Gender Based Violence in Emergencies (GBViE)

Emergencies can exacerbate pre-existing inequalities. Individuals who have less power and lower status in society, especially adolescent girls and women, are more vulnerable to the impacts of acute and protracted crises. Adolescent girls and women during emergencies experience unique unmet needs and are at heightened risk of Sexual Exploitations and Abuse (SEA) and GBV. The population displacement breaks down the regulative protective social norms and mechanisms, exacerbates risk of SEA and GBV and contributes to lack of safe access to basic needs, especially for adolescent girls, women, old people and people with disabilities. However, no single humanitarian actor has comprehensive knowledge, skills, resources and authority to prevent SEA and GBV or to respond to the needs of SEA and GBV survivors alone. Humanitarian projects/actors must act collectively to prevent and mitigate SEA and GBV. In doing so, responses should avoid reinforcing harmful gender norms and stereotypes and promote gender equality without putting people at risk. GBV is a life-threatening, health, human rights and protection issue. It is deeply rooted in gender inequality and is exacerbated in emergencies. Yet, prevention of and response to GBV are still not comprehensively addressed and prioritised from the earliest stages of humanitarian operations. States must ratify and fully implement, without reservations, all regional and international agreements that relate to GBViE.

Recommendations for the EU, governments, donors and other humanitarian actors:

- As a partner of the [Call to Action on Protection from GBViE](#), Plan International believes this is an important issue because it calls on key stakeholders to prevent, mitigate and appropriately respond to Gender-Based Violence. GBV is a particular risk in humanitarian emergencies, thus a more targeted, gender transformative and intersectional approach is needed to address it, such as through this Call to Action, as well as through stronger political and financial commitments to address GBV challenges in emergencies. By doing so, we can ensure that the rights of adolescent girls and young women are protected.
- Leadership/Ownership of GBV as a cross-cutting issue is typically weak within organisations. There is a disconnect between gender equality and GBV, capacity issues and a lack of accountability. The complexity of the issue, the limited means and the obstacles to addressing GBV (such as lack of adequate justice systems) should not prevent humanitarian actors from tackling this problem.
- The 'Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies' aims to ensure that every humanitarian effort, from the earliest phases of a crisis, includes the policies, systems and mechanisms to mitigate GBV risks, and to provide safe and comprehensive services for those affected by GBV.
- Legal protections and accountability for girls who are victims or at risk of violence must be strengthened, and harmful gender norms that condone the use of violence to control girls' sexuality and social norms must be challenged. Significant effort is needed at international, national and community levels to achieve these goals
- States, UN agencies and civil society must collect better data related to GBViE. Data must be disaggregated by relevant factors, such as age, sex, location, ethnicity, religion, disability, economic status, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity and migratory status.

Education in Emergencies (EiE)

Education in Emergencies (EiE) is the provision of quality and relevant formal and non-formal educational opportunities that meet the physical protection, psychosocial, developmental and cognitive needs of children affected by humanitarian crises. EiE is a priority because it enables the continuation of children's learning in emergencies, which provides a safe space for children to be protected from factors such as physical harm, early marriages, child labour and recruitment as child soldiers. Furthermore, EiE is a key vehicle through which children can learn about preventable diseases, nutrition, hygiene and other life-saving topics, and develop skills and values such as peace, tolerance, conflict resolution, democracy, human rights, environmental conservation and disaster risk reduction. Plan International recognises that education in emergency responses should target those disproportionately affected by emergencies, particularly girls and children with disabilities.

Recommendations for the EU, governments, donors and other humanitarian actors:

- Recognize that for adolescent girls in particular, the impacts of attacks on education can be devastating and compound the barriers they already face in accessing education. Attacks often exacerbate pre-existing gender discrimination and harmful practices such as child marriage and early pregnancy, which have lifelong consequences.
- All governments should endorse, implement and support the Safe Schools Declaration, and allocate adequate resources to keeping schools safe. Plan International is calling for the particular needs and experiences of girls and women to be explicitly acknowledged and addressed when developing measures to prevent and respond to attacks on education.
- The International Community, including the UN Security Council, and Governments should demand and pursue accountabilities for all those who target and attack schools, kill and maim students and teachers and abduct girls, ensuring all parties to conflict fulfil their obligations under international law.
- Ensure that girls' education does not suffer. The education of adolescent girls needs to be factored into crisis planning and preparedness. Education systems need to be flexible and respond to girls' needs and circumstances and should include life skills and vocational education. Recruiting female teachers is vital for some communities and teachers and

education officials must be proactive, not just in providing services but also in enabling girls to use them.

- We believe that education is a core humanitarian need. Education in Emergencies interventions must be integrated into all stages of emergency planning and response: through contingency and disaster preparedness planning; early recovery immediately following an emergency; and long-term recovery.
- Plan International believes that the right to education does not stop in emergencies, and that financing education provision is a crucial part of conflict and disaster prevention and response. National governments have a responsibility to finance the continued education of all children during or in the aftermath of disasters or conflict.

Hunger and Conflict

Acute food insecurity is escalating globally because of conflict and insecurity, economic shocks, including the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, and weather extremes resulting from climate change.

Acute hunger is increasing not only in scale but also severity: overall, over 41 million people worldwide are now at risk of falling into famine or famine-like conditions, unless they receive immediate life and livelihood-saving assistance'. As waves of Covid-19 continue to put pressure on public health systems and movement restrictions have negative impacts on global and national economies, remittances slow, and livelihoods and employment are lost. Climate change is increasing weather extremes and natural hazards, increasing flooding and drought and negatively impacting harvests. Conflict continues to escalate, forcing internal and cross-border displacements, disruption to local economics and trade and affecting crop production due to lack of access. Protracted conflict has been identified as the main driver of six out of the 10 worst food crises globally.

While the effects of food insecurity are felt across communities, the impacts on adolescent girls are often unacknowledged. Girls are being exposed to new risks while having their wellbeing and future prospects undermined. Particularly when food is scarce, girls often eat less and eat last. As families increasingly resort to negative coping mechanisms, pre-existing child protection problems become more acute and widespread. Girls are at heightened risk of being removed from school, child, early and forced marriage, early pregnancy and sexual exploitation.

Recommendations for the EU, governments, donors and other humanitarian actors:

- Guarantee access and promote conditions of peace in conflict-affected hotspots. Concerted effort by all relevant actors is needed to ensure the full protection of affected populations and to allow humanitarian workers not only to safely reach those in need, but also to stay and deliver.
- Increase accountability and political costs for those who use starvation as a weapon of war through the intentional destruction of crops, denial of humanitarian access or other methods. The UN Security Council should improve collective, meaningful action to address the use of starvation as a method of warfare in all conflict situations and follow through on their commitments in Security Council Resolution 2417.
- Increase the prioritisation of funding for gender responsive child protection, GBV, ECD (including maternal and child health), SRHR and education interventions integrated into food and nutrition programmes, to ensure that the immediate protection, health and longer-term wellbeing of children, particularly girls, is not undermined in contexts of acute food insecurity.
- Increase funding for critical school feeding programmes and ensure that school feeding is safeguarded and adapted to the COVID-19 context, and wherever possible to school closures due to insecurity. Where necessary, alternative food distribution measures should be identified in the event of school closures, such as school meal collection services, or cash transfers where appropriate to replace school feedings.
- Support governments to reinforce and scale up gender responsive, unconditional, social protection and income support measures for the most affected and vulnerable people and families, including child and female headed households, families with young children, displaced populations, and, where relevant, to create an enabling environment for humanitarian actors to complement the national response. Support the combination of these measures wherever

possible with nutrition, health, hygiene/sanitation, childcare and gender equality information and messaging for families and communities.

The humanitarian impact of climate change

Disasters and conflicts threaten children's rights and prospects and damage the societies they live in. Over 200 million people are affected by disasters caused by natural hazards each year and the effects of climate change are causing increased risks for children.

We are witnessing a human-made climate emergency that will continue to worsen humanitarian crises and gender inequality. Climate change is a social and intergenerational injustice; those who have contributed least are most impacted. The inequality and discrimination experienced by marginalised girls and young women are amplified by climate change. These girls will feel the greatest impacts but often are not provided with the information and resources they need to cope and adapt.

Plan International also believes that children, who are among the most affected by disasters and often the least consulted, have the right to participate in disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation. We take a gender transformative approach to climate solutions, supporting all children in gaining the knowledge and skills they need to keep themselves safe, adapt to climate change, and strengthen their resilience in the face of disasters and climate impacts.

Recommendations for the EU, governments, donors and other humanitarian actors:

- Protecting girls' education: education is crucial in building the knowledge, skills and behaviours girls need to adapt to climate change, in addition to disaster risk resilience, climate activism and future secure livelihoods.
- Supporting girls' leadership: there is an urgent need for more girls and women to take the lead in climate policy and decision-making. This will support investment and action in addressing the specific impacts on and solutions in upholding girls' rights.
- Provide equal economic opportunities: to limit global warming, economies must become carbon-free and sustainable, and the transition is an opportunity to advance equality. Girls and women must be supporting with the knowledge, skills and opportunities to take up roles in this transition so that they will have access to equal opportunities and won't have to face stereotypes around certain jobs not being suitable for women.
- Reduce emissions and keep to below 1.5-degree target.
- Support and finance climate change adaptation which targets the most vulnerable, including children.
- Ensure that children and young people are meaningfully engaged in adaptation decision-making, implementation and monitoring at local and national levels.
- Prioritize gender transformative education as a key focus of climate change adaptation, disaster preparedness and DRR work, as it can play a critical role in strengthening the resilience of children and their communities.