What is education in emergencies?

Education is a fundamental right for all children in all situations. Yet in the world today, about 58 million primary school aged children are denied their right to education and half of them live in conflict and crisis affected areas (UNESCO, 2015). Traditionally education has been seen as part of longer-term development work rather than a “life-saving” emergency response intervention. However, growing evidence on education’s life-saving and life-sustaining role has resulted in education now being included in the planning and response to an emergency. The importance of education, specifically as part of an emergency response, and the severe need for it in an L3 emergency necessitate prioritization of education needs in Iraq. Education directly impacts the economic prosperity of a country, maximises potential for individual contribution, increases protection and psychosocial well-being for children, and furthers peace in the society.

What is the situation in Iraq?

In the context of three decades of conflict and instability, the latest round of crisis in Iraq – sparked by the takeover of large parts of Anbar in January 2014 – has left over three million people displaced to date. In 2014 alone 2.2 million people fled from their homes; the highest rate of internal displacement in the world that year. As a consequence of the crisis over three million children are being denied their right to quality education, with this expected to rise to 3.6 million by the end of this year. Among the displaced are approximately 1.3 million Iraqi children many of whom have witnessed violence and disruption to their lives (and a further 970,000 are in areas not under government control). Of the 900,000 school-aged IDP children, only 32% had access to any form of education when the academic year ended in July, nearly 76% have lost almost an entire year of school and more than 70% of displaced children currently remain without access to education. Additionally, out of the nearly a quarter of a million Syrian refugees who have fled to Iraq to escape the four year long conflict in their country, approximately 60,000 Syrian refugee children have also had their education disrupted and have experienced similar violence and distress. The arrival of large numbers of IDPs and refugees across large areas of Iraq including the Kurdistan Region of Iraq has placed pressure on host community schools and children impacting their education and psychosocial well-being. With the escalation of displacements the number of children requiring access to education across the whole country will increase, especially in non-camp settings, requiring additional learning support. When available, most schools are full, overcrowded and cannot accommodate all displaced students. High pupil to teacher ratios, inadequate number of qualified teachers, and a limited number of teachers with training either on psychosocial care and support or special needs categorise these schools. There is a lack of resources and funding within the education sector. Schools lack the necessary desks, books and additional school material to ensure the basic quality of education and displaced families lack the ability to support their children to attend school and provide for expenses for learning materials and transportation. Syrian children face an additional language barrier as all schooling in Syria is done in Arabic but Arabic language schools in the KRI are limited. The Kurdish dialect in Kurdistan is significantly different from the dialect used by Syrian Kurds preventing Syrian refugee children from accessing Kurdish language schools. Syrian refugee children, especially those outside camps, find it hard to access schooling in the appropriate language. Having potentially witnessed or been exposed to violence, children need additional support in the classroom to help them deal with their experiences and to improve their ability to concentrate and to learn. It is therefore essential that children not only have access to education but also that relevant psychosocial support services are available including through trained teachers. Children need support to get their futures back on track and to develop the right cognitive and social skills to become agents of peace.
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Why is Education in Emergencies so important for children in Iraq?

Children displaced in crisis are more vulnerable to potential exploitation and abuse if they are not in school. Children who are out of education are more likely to engage in child labour, early marriage, or fall in the hands of armed groups. According to recent UNICEF and Save the Children reports, children in Iraq are engaged in many forms of harmful child labour, and nearly 77% of refugee children from Syria reported that they are working to support their families. Moreover, a child labour assessment in the KRI found that 30% of Syrian children interviewed had been approached for recruitment. Last year, the UN verified the recruitment of 67 boys – often forcibly recruited in armed groups – in nine incidents, and there is evidence that the real numbers are likely to be higher.

Education in emergencies offers a number of positive outcomes for children who have been affected by conflict and crises including:

- **Protective environment** - Being in school offers children physical safety in a protective environment where they are less likely to fall vulnerable to exploitation or abuse. Activities that improve psychosocial wellbeing of children can be easily combined with other education-related activities. Such psychosocial support and stability help children to overcome their experiences of suffering that reduce their learning abilities, and enable them to better engage with their schooling and education.

- **Social cohesion** - Schools offer a positive, supportive environment to build community cohesion and social harmony which is essential in a society with strong ethnic lines and which is facing a potentially protracted crisis such as Iraq. Large influxes of displaced people can fuel community tension by putting pressure on limited resources. Children's perspective towards one another is influenced by the broader dynamics of tension that they witness on a daily basis. Schools provide a unique opportunity for fostering ties between different communities through a positive educational environment for children from the host community alongside children from displaced families.

- **Economic prosperity** - Quality education helps to improve children's future economic potential. Studies have shown that each additional year of education can bring with it a 10% increase in income. Even a single year of additional schooling for girls increases both their earning power and the likelihood that they will send their own children to school. Education of the large number of children in displacement and host communities in Iraq is directly related to the long term stability of the country and the region. The large number of children that are currently at risk of being left uneducated present a significant untapped potential for Iraq's future prosperity. In the absence of education, children can grow up to be a further burden on the forever diminishing resources in Iraq, or with quality education, they can become agents of prosperity for the country's future.

- **Peace** - Studies show that higher levels of education in a country lead to greater possibility of peace and lower chances of conflict, and that in some cases, education inequality doubled so too did the chance of conflict. Given Iraq's history of decades of conflict, a well-educated generation of Iraqi children is more likely to build and sustain a stable and peaceful society.

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