



# EDUCATION



WOMEN'S  
REFUGEE  
COMMISSION

# EDUCATION AT A GLANCE

## ||| The Issue

- At least 22 million children and young people are currently displaced by armed conflict and human rights abuses.
- Many are not in school and may never have been to school; education has traditionally been seen as a long-term development activity, not a priority in humanitarian emergencies. Yet many refugee children will be displaced for their entire childhood.
- An educated population is essential for long-term peace building and economic development.

## ||| Our Response

- Released our 2004 landmark study, *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies*, which increased international attention and support for quality education during an emergency.
- Produced and distributed *Right to Education during Displacement: A resource for organizations working with refugees and internally displaced persons* to provide humanitarian workers with an important tool for advocacy.
- Co-led a coalition of partners to develop the first-ever guidance on teacher compensation and now pushing for adequate, consistent funding for teacher salaries.

## ||| Next Steps

- Participate in global effort to increase funding and support for quality, appropriate education in emergencies, including post-primary school for young people.
- Identify and promote critical components and effective models for non-formal education for adolescents and older youth.
- Promote use of international guidelines developed to ensure that teachers are paid regular, fair salaries in crisis and post-crisis situations.
- Co-lead efforts to strengthen language relating to young people in the 2010 update of the Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards on Education in Emergencies.

“ No new schools are opened, the old ones are closed. Parents don't have the money to send their children. Children have nothing to do, they learn nothing. ”

Young people, Haiti



# EDUCATION: A refugee child's right



## Background

Nearly 45 million people are currently displaced by armed conflict and human rights abuses. At least 22 million are children and young people under the age of 24. They are either refugees, who have fled to another country, or internally displaced people, displaced within their own countries. The majority of refugees are in long-term situations that last an average of 17 years. This means that many displaced children and young people spend their entire childhood and youth in refugee camps or urban shanty towns.

Many displaced children and young people are not in school and may never have been to school. The situation is worse for girls than boys and the number of children in school decreases significantly as they get older.

Providing education in emergencies not only ensures that children realize their guaranteed right to education; it provides them with a sense of hope and

normalcy, promotes their well-being and cognitive development, and reduces the risk that they will be involved in dangerous activities. Education helps lay a foundation for peace and development.

In protracted refugee situations, entire generations are denied schooling, literacy and the potential to gain the knowledge necessary to be able to contribute to the eventual rebuilding of their countries. Yet long-term peacebuilding and economic development demand an educated population.

## Raising Awareness of the Need for Education

Our 2004 landmark study, *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies*, increased international attention and support for quality education during an emergency. The study reported that more than 27 million children and young people affected by armed conflict were not in school; the vast majority were internally displaced within their own country. While girls attend kindergarten and first grade in almost equal numbers to boys, their attendance decreases steadily after that, as they are taken out of school to help with household chores and to look after younger siblings, or because their parents fear they are not safe in school. Only six percent of refugees who go to school are in secondary school.

The right to education is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international agreements. In 2006, we published *Right to Education during Displacement: A resource for organizations working with refugees and internally*





**“We used to send our boys to school, but now we know the benefits of education and will send our girls to school, too.”**

Participant in women's health educator program.  
Aweil Town, Southern Sudan

*displaced persons*, which was widely distributed to field staff working with displaced communities. It encourages local, regional and international agencies to develop education programs and donors to fund them. Our innovative book, *Your Right to Education: A handbook for refugees and displaced communities*, published in 2007 and distributed to almost 1,000 refugees around the world, uses pictures and illustrations to make displaced people aware that they and their children are entitled to education.

One barrier to education is that teachers in refugee camps and other displacement settings are often underpaid, paid irregularly or not paid at all. If children and young people are to receive a quality education, teachers must be paid consistently and fairly, or they will abandon their posts to find more lucrative employment. The Women's Refugee Commission has played a significant role in the international effort, led by the Inter-Agency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE), to address this challenge.

### Next Steps

There is still much to do to ensure that all displaced children and young people have access to high-quality, relevant education. The Women's Refugee Commission will:

- participate in global efforts, led by INEE, to increase funding and support for quality, appropriate education in emergencies, including post-primary school and vocational training for young people;
- promote use of international guidance developed to ensure that teachers are paid regular, fair salaries in crisis and post-crisis situations;
- disseminate findings from joint research conducted with the Population Council to provide evidence of how education can increase the protection and well-being of children in conflict, looking specifically at the situation in Darfur;
- co-lead efforts to strengthen language relating to adolescents and young people in the 2010 update of the INEE's *Minimum Standards on Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction*.

Learn more about education in emergencies and download reports and resources at:  
[womensrefugeecommission.org/education](http://womensrefugeecommission.org/education)



**OUR MISSION:** Since 1989, the Women's Refugee Commission has advocated vigorously for laws, policies and programs to improve the lives and protect the rights of refugee and displaced women, children and young people—bringing about lasting, measurable change.

**OUR VISION:** We envision a world in which refugee, internally displaced, returnee and asylum-seeking women, children and young people are safe, healthy and self-reliant and participating in the decisions that affect their lives.

**HOW WE WORK:** Through research and fact-finding field missions, we assess and identify best practices and find solutions on critical issues that include lifesaving reproductive health care, dignified livelihoods for refugees and, in the U.S., fair treatment of women, children and families seeking asylum. On Capitol Hill, at the United Nations and with humanitarian organizations and governments, we push for improvements in refugee policy and practice until measurable, long-term change is realized.

**GET INVOLVED:** Learn about the ways you can help ensure that our far-reaching, life-saving advocacy for women, children and young people continues. To sign up for our action alerts and to make a tax-deductible donation, please go to:

[womensrefugeecommission.org](http://womensrefugeecommission.org)

2009



**Photo Credits**

Cover: IRC/Gerald Martone

Jocelyn Cunningham, IRC/Gerald Martone, Women's Commission staff.



122 East 42nd Street  
New York, NY 10168-1289  
212.551.3115 | [info@wrcommission.org](mailto:info@wrcommission.org)  
[womensrefugeecommission.org](http://womensrefugeecommission.org)