



Data Collection and Evidence Building to Support Education in Emergencies

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NORRAG Special issue (NSI) is an open-source periodical. It seeks to give prominence to authors from different countries and with diverse perspectives. Each issue is dedicated to a special topic of global education policy and international cooperation in education. NSI includes a number of concise articles from diverse perspectives and actors with the aim to bridge the gap between theory and practice as well as advocacy and policy in international education development.

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NORRAG is an associate programme of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva

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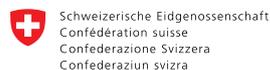
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Data and Evidence on Education in Emergencies: Linking Global Concerns with Local Issues

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Summary

This article discusses how the global education community is still missing a global approach to foster access, production, and dissemination of data and evidence in EiE. Despite early warnings about the critical lack of data and evidence in EiE and against unprecedented trends of violence and natural disaster occurrences many of the issues highlighted in the past remain very much valid today.

Keywords

Global Governance
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Data and Evidence in Education and Emergencies: A Recurrently Pressing Issue

At the beginning of this decade, the critical lack and poor quality of data in conflict-affected areas was identified as one of the main failures of the global education community, adding to the four other failures recognized by the Education for All Global Monitoring Report: protection, provision, reconstruction, and peacebuilding (Montjourides, 2013; UNESCO, 2011). This echoed broader concerns emerging from the academic community about the scarcity of research in education in emergency (EiE) settings. At the time, the state of affairs was clear: specific geographic regions were under-studied, so were specific crisis contexts (e.g. the long-term impact of natural disasters and chronic emergencies on education), and vulnerable groups were left behind. One notable example was the case of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), who, although more numerous than refugees, were significantly under-studied and dramatically absent from the global education statistical picture (Conflict and Education Research Group at Oxford University & Teachers College International Education Group, 2010; Montjourides, 2013). The question is, eight years down the road (the typical duration of a lower secondary education cycle), has this changed? Have we made progress while violence reached an all-time high in 2016 and remains at unprecedented levels (Dupuy & Rustad, 2018)? How are we faring against the surge of weather-related disasters that have increased by almost 50% since 2007 (Hawkes, 2017)? Has the commitment of the global education community matched these dramatic trends? It would take more than the space allocated for this short piece to answer these questions but our assessment suggests that the answer lies in the realm of “probably not enough” progress has been made. There have been new developments, yet some of the issues raised yesterday remain valid today. The prerequisite of available and accessible data and evidence has not been met yet and continues to undermine efforts of the global education community to tackle the challenge of providing quality education opportunities to children in emergency settings.

What We Know is That We Do Not Know

A few key facts highlight the continuing urgency of the situation. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are 69 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, 40 million of whom are IDPs and 25 million refugees. Between 2005 and 2014, there were more than 3,500 disasters; 80% were extreme climate events that affected a total of 1.7 billion people (Guha-Sapir & Hoyois, 2015). Nearly half of the world's refugees are below 18 years of age and disasters predominantly affect the most vulnerable populations, notably children. In more than 80% of cases, the duration of conflict is longer than a typical upper secondary education cycle (12 years) and it was estimated that 75 million children were in need of support as the result of crisis situations in 2015 (ODI, 2016).

While these numbers provide important reference points, what is also critical to acknowledge in this global picture is an issue that is well-known to cause headaches for statisticians: missing data. Besides the obvious issue of timeliness of data collection, which is recurrent in emergency situations, there are additional examples of the poor quality of data in these settings, most notably the gaps in existing data. For instance, the most recent UNHCR report about refugee education provides only a few global statistics on enrollment and out-of-school children (UNHCR, 2018a). The report does not provide any global numbers on learning, early childhood, gender parity, or even teachers. This almost seems to be a step back from what was possible under UNHCR's previous monitoring system—the Standards and Indicators—which made it possible to look at gender disparities and pupil-teacher ratios (Montjourides, 2013; UNESCO, 2011). It is notable that within its strategic priorities, UNHCR assesses the educational situation of children in its countries of operation solely based on the share of children enrolled in primary education (UNHCR, 2018b). This assessment approach is a far cry from the list of targets and indicators against which all countries will have to demonstrate progress and report on as part of their commitment to achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 (United Nations, 2015). At the global level, there is not enough consistent data collection to produce a robust and credible number of out-of-school children in conflict-affected countries and crisis situations. Recent attempts by the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics stopped in 2016 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics & Global Education Monitoring Report, 2016), and even the 2019 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report on migration and displacement was not able to produce global figures on the educational situation of children forcibly displaced by crises (UNESCO, 2018). Again, this is worlds apart from the list of 46 SDG indicators that ought to be reported for each of the 200+ countries in the statistical tables of the GEM report.

Addressing Data and Evidence Issues: Making Existing Resources Available and Accessible

Data are only one part of the story. NORRAG is working together with the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), including members of the Data and Evidence Collaborative and the INEE Education Policy Working Group (INEE, n.d.) to address some of the key issues raised by members of the INEE network, namely: the absence of systematic mechanisms to make existing data and evidence in EiE available to a wider base of users, and the absence of tools and methodologies to collect and disseminate education-related data and evidence in EiE. As part of this collaboration, NORRAG analyzed survey data from 290 respondents (all INEE members) about two potentially critical resources for stakeholders involved with EiE: the INEE Academic Space and Data and Statistics webpages (INEE, n.d.). Respondents described the two resources as limited in terms of providing up-to-date research and data in general, as well as lacking materials about ongoing crises and emergencies and local and smaller scale programmes. Local and smaller scale programmes, in particular, are the norm rather than the exception in emergency settings with dozens of institutional actors often involved in emergency responses. For example, the Syrian regional response includes more than 130 stakeholders in education (United Nations, 2019). Yet, there are a critical lack of data and evidence collection mechanisms that would enable education actors to take advantage of the wealth of programmatic evidence being produced on the ground. Other needs expressed by members of the INEE network include the need for more impact evaluations and qualitative empirical research, and the need to produce and curate methodologies and tools to support education interventions and analysis in emergency situations. Additionally, almost half of all respondents highlighted the issues of inclusive education and conflict sensitive education as thematic areas where more data and evidence are needed.

Towards an EiE Knowledge Hub?

While these results reflect only the needs of a small portion of the education community they tend, together with the current quality of the global education statistical picture, to validate the idea that much more is needed to appropriately address building an evidence-based picture of the educational situation of children in emergency situations. The absence of a central and structured repository of data and compendium of evidence in EiE generates high transaction costs for those who seek to rapidly produce a situational analysis or design an intervention based on existing best practices. It also means that the balance of power remains tilted in favor of stakeholders from the Global North who have better access to scarce but existing data and research on EiE through their knowledge management infrastructures, and are thus better equipped to respond to calls for proposals, which increasingly demand evidence-based approaches. More than two-thirds of all respondents to the INEE survey are based in

the Global South, showing the importance of soliciting feedback and integrating inputs from all actors as we seek to improve the production, collection, and dissemination of data and evidence in EiE. Additionally, the production of global evidence is undermined by difficulties related to collecting and harmonizing existing data from multiple actors and often produced under severe time and resource constraints. Under these settings, business-as-usual approaches of piecemeal funding and sporadic estimations of a few global figures will continue to generate a sub-optimal response to a dire global need. It is thus important that the global education community comes up with a sustainable solution that fosters not only evidence-based approaches for and by all but also addresses the issue of uncoordinated data and evidence production in an environment characterized by a multiplicity of actors, issues, processes, and

funding sources. In the absence of such a response, any future prospect to produce sound global numbers will be undermined, thus perpetuating the exclusion of children in emergency settings from the global education picture, weak Education Sector Plans, insufficient and misallocated funding, and inefficient policy interventions. It is hoped that the current momentum around the production of global public goods and the increase in resources and focus on EiE will enable global education actors to produce a viable and sustainable platform, which can serve as the reference knowledge hub on EiE and contribute to substantial improvements in the quality of analysis, research, funding allocation, and advocacy in education in emergency situations.

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