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Preventing a lost generation
The role of education in crisis situations

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Access to education is often more difficult in crisis situations. However, it is precisely during crises that children and young people need to go to school, thereby preventing the emergence of a lost generation and improving the prospects for development in the countries affected.

Violent conflicts as barriers to education

In 2016, 226 violent conflicts were counted around the world, 18 of which were classified as wars[1] and all of which are being waged in less developed countries. It is not only the combatants who suffer, but also civilians, primarily children. Violent conflicts bring suffering, hunger and destruction and negatively impact the young people's prospects for the future because in many countries affected directly or indirectly by conflicts, children and young people barely have access to education. This reduces the

likelihood that they will be able to shape their own futures and achieve a decent standard of living.

Most military conflicts and civil wars take place in Africa and the Middle East. In 2015, around 13 million children did not attend school in nine countries alone in these two world regions that were affected, either directly or indirectly, by armed conflict.[2]

Violent conflicts endanger the educational goals set by the United Nations within the *Sustainable Development Goals* which aim for all school-age boys and girls around the world to attend a primary and secondary school by 2030.

Lack of teachers, destroyed schools

The negative impacts of violent conflicts on the education sector are clearly evident, for example, in **Syria**: the number of out-of-school children and young people has more than

doubled since the outbreak of the war. In the 2011/2012 school year, i.e. at the beginning of the civil war, they numbered under a million. This figure increased to two million by 2015.[3] Every fourth school in Syria has been damaged, destroyed or repurposed since the start of the war. There is also a shortage of teachers who could keep the remaining schools up and running. Since the outbreak of the violent conflict, around one quarter of teachers have left their jobs.[4]

The situation in **Yemen** is even more critical where a civil war has been underway since 2013. The number of school-age children without access to education more than doubled between 2014 and 2015 from 1.6 to 3.4 million.[5] This means that almost half of all Yemeni children and young

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[1] Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (2017): Conflict Barometer 2016. Heidelberg, HIIK.

[2] UNICEF (2015): Education under fire. How conflict in the Middle East is depriving children of their schooling. Amman, UNICEF Regional Office.

[3] UNICEF (2016): Syria Crisis Education. Fact Sheet - Five Years of Crisis and Conflict. Amman, UNICEF Regional Office.
[4] See footnote 2.
[5] UNICEF (2014): Yemen Country Report on Out-of-School Children. Sana'a, UNICEF Yemen Country Office.

people have no access to education.[6] In places where classes are still being held, the quality of education is usually low. Teachers are often not sufficiently knowledgeable about educational methods or subject matter content.[7]

Fleeing a conflict zone is no guarantee of education

Wars not only adversely affect educational opportunities in the countries of origin, but also in the main countries hosting the 33 million refugee children around the world. Most find refuge in neighbouring countries, which often cannot even supply their own populations with enough teachers, school buildings and classroom materials.[8] Typical consequences can be seen, for example, in **Lebanon** where the influx of Syrian refugee children is intensifying pressure on the domestic education system. In 2015, the number of Lebanese children of primary school age without access to education rose to 88,000. This means that the number has almost tripled since the war started in Syria in 2011.[9,10]

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According to the UN, more than half of all refugee children who do not attend school live in just seven countries: Ethiopia, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Pakistan and Turkey. Accurate and up-to-date data on how many children of which age do not have access to education in these countries is not available.[11]

The situation of Syrian refugee children in Lebanon, on the other hand, is particularly difficult. Around 40 % of them, in total around 150,000, do not go to school in Lebanon. The education system is also stretched to the limit in **Jordan** where 15 % of children

Lost potential
Many children and young people do not attend school in war zones.

Number of out-of-school children (in millions) by age group in different countries at war
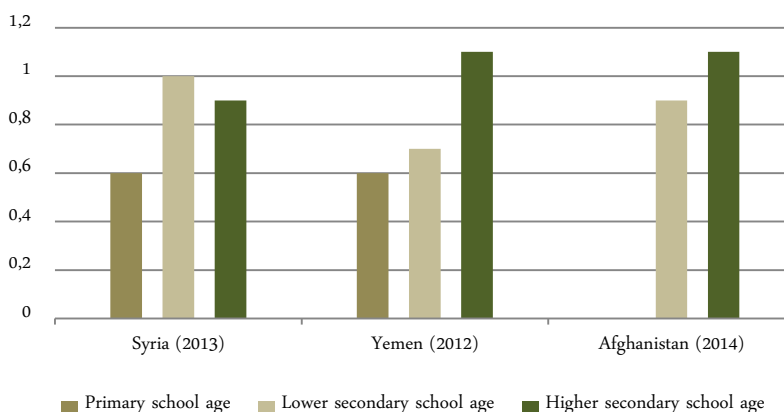
Data source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

and young people from Syria do not go to school.[12]

On a global average, the situation of refugees is even more critical. According to estimates by the United Nations, just half of school-age refugee children attend a primary school and just under one fifth a higher-level school. The percentage of university-level refugee students is only 1 %, an infinitesimally low figure.[13]

Repercussions of poor education

The longer a violent conflict lasts, the more probable it is that an entire generation emerges that has either never gone to school or only attended school for a short time. This has very direct personal repercussions for the children affected. Everyday school life also offers a bit of stability and normality in a chaotic and dangerous environment.[14] In the long term, insufficient access to education means poor opportunities in the future. A lower level of education decreases the odds of children and young people finding a job later on and earning an appropriate income.

In the case of Syria, the international community is afraid of the emergence of a *lost generation* that barely has the knowledge necessary to rebuild

the country after the war and stabilise it economically in the long run.[15]

When children and young people do not go to school or drop out before they finish, human capital is lost for the countries affected by violent conflicts. According to a UNICEF study, the economic cost of this loss in Syria had already reached an estimated total of USD 10.7 billion one year after the outbreak of the war. This represents around 18 % of the gross domestic product at the time.[16] Five years on, the costs have probably risen enormously.

What needs to be done in acute crisis situations

Education is a human right which also applies in environments shaped by violent conflicts. The challenges in this case, however, are special and require specific measures.

The aim initially is to improve temporary access to education and prevent a *lost generation*. To this end, government and non-government actors as well as international development agencies must make a systematic contribution to maintaining the education infrastructure that still exists (teachers, transport, access to rooms).

[6] UNICEF (2016): Yemen. Fragile to failed? The Impact of Violence and Conflict on Yemen and its Children. Amman, UNICEF Regional Office.
[7] See footnote 2.
[8] UNHCR (2016): UNHCR Global Trends 2015. Geneva.
[9] UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2016): Data Center. Montreal, www.uis.unesco.org.
[10] It is unclear as to what extent this figure already partially includes refugee school children from Syria.
[11] UNHCR (2016): Missing out. Refugee Education in Crisis. Geneva.

[12] See footnote 3.
[13] See footnote 13.
[14] See footnote 5.

[15] UNICEF (2014): No lost generation. Protecting the futures of children affected by the crisis in Syria. New York.
[16] UNICEF (2015): Economic Loss from School Dropout due to the Syria Crisis. A Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Impact of the Syria Crisis on the Education Sector. Amman, UNICEF Middle East and North Africa.

In general, education in crisis situations lacks funding around the world. In 2013, only 2 % of global funds for disaster aid were spent on education.[17] Additional funding is urgently needed and must be used to

- provide classrooms, materials and personnel in the regions affected

- support non-governmental organisations in guaranteeing access to education if state structures are lacking

- enable alternatives to formal educational access to be provided in a fragile setting. *Non-formal education* and *accelerated education programmes* make it possible to tailor teaching content to meet the needs of children and young people with flexible curricula[18]

- provide psychological care and education for the victims of war and violence

- implement the "Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies" developed by the INEE (International Network for Education in Emergencies) in over 20 languages. The INEE initiative is supported by many bilateral and multilateral donors and NGOs and can benefit from more than ten years of experience.

How education prevents violent conflicts

Violent conflicts are not the only situations where guaranteed access to education is important. This also applies to countries where no armed conflicts are currently being waged, but where ongoing tensions exist. In Ethiopia, for example, the Oromo, an ethnic group, has been calling for its own state territory for many decades. This has led to regular protests, some also involving armed violence.[19]

All children have a right to education. This is embedded in Article 13 of the UN's International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which has been signed by most partner countries of German development cooperation. It stipulates that primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all and secondary education shall be accessible to all.[20]

The deeper cause of tensions of this kind is often – with all its complexity – the unequal distribution of scarce resources. Which is why it is hardly surprising that conflicts mainly occur in countries with high population growth. This makes it difficult particularly for less developed countries to provide even limited access to education, health care and paid work. Food and water shortages and the impacts of climate change also often aggravate the problems in these countries and make it even more difficult to fulfil the education mandate.[21]

In many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa today, less than one third of the adult population has completed primary school.[22] In 2014, more than 93 million children and young people of primary or secondary school age did not attend school in this part of Africa.[23] A better-educated population would be an important step in these countries to prevent conflicts and wars in the future because education has many positive effects that can reduce conflicts overall. Four aspects are identified here:

First, education improves the cognitive skills of every individual. Educated people do not just live healthier lives with more awareness of risks as

a result, they are also more able to improve their own living situation [24]

Second, a rise in education levels increases the chances of success of every individual on the job market and the prospect for higher income. On a global average, personal income increases by around 10 % for every year of education completed.[25] In addition, greater human capital in the population boosts a country's economic performance because educated people are on average more productive and innovative.[26] Increased prosperity and better living conditions help reduce the potential for conflict.

Third, education positively affects democratisation processes. It fosters more open and tolerant attitudes when dealing with others and encourages more involvement in political activities.[27] A higher level of education – particularly among women – also contributes to significantly lowering birth rates in less developed countries – by 50 % and more.[28]

As a result, education is *fourth* an important prerequisite for slowing high, non-sustainable population growth which makes any other development more difficult.

Creating access to education, preventing violent conflicts

Both in crisis and tension regions, access to education must be ensured across the board. This is the only way to deal with existing conflicts or prevent them in the first place. The following aspects should be considered when deciding on measures:

- All boys and girls around the world must have access to good schooling which lasts at least ten years. Scholarship programmes and

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[17] See footnote 2.
[18] See footnote 13.
[19] See footnote 1.

[20] OHCHR (no date): International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Geneva, www.ohchr.org.
[21] Berlin Institute for Population and Development (2011): Afrikas demografische Herausforderung. Wie eine junge Bevölkerung Entwicklung ermöglichen kann. ("Africa's Demographic Challenge. How a Young Population Can Bring About Development"). Berlin, www.berlin-institut.org.
[22] UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2016): Data Center. Montreal, www.uis.unesco.org.
[23] UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2016): Leaving no one behind: How far on the way to universal primary and secondary education? Policy Paper 27. Fact Sheet 37. Montreal, UIS.

[24] Klingholz, R. and W. Lutz (2016): Wer überlebt? Bildung entscheidet über die Zukunft der Menschheit. ("Who Survives? Education Determines The Future of Humanity.") Frankfurt, Campus Verlag.
[25] Montenegro, C.E. and Patrinos, H.A. (2014): Comparable Estimates of Returns to Schooling around the World. The World Bank Group. Policy Research Working Paper.
[26] Woessmann, L. (2016): The economic case for education. Education Economics 24 (1), p. 3-32.
[27] Glaeser, E. L. et al. (2007): Why does democracy need education? Journal of Economic Growth 12, p. 77–99.
[28] Canning, D. et al. (2015): Africa's Demographic Transition. Dividend or Disaster? Washington DC, World Bank and Agence Française de Développement.
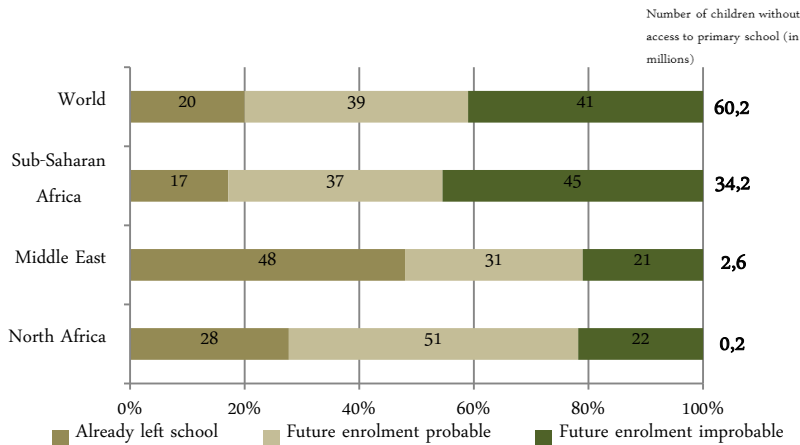
A life without education
Many children who are not attending school today will also not get any education in the future

Primary school children with no access to education (in millions) by world region, proportionally by probability of future school attendance (in %)

Number of children without access to primary school (in millions)

Region	Already left school	Future enrolment probable	Future enrolment improbable	Number of children without access to primary school (in millions)
World	20	39	41	60,2
Sub-Saharan Africa	17	37	45	34,2
Middle East	48	31	21	2,6
North Africa	28	51	22	0,2

Legend: Already left school · Future enrolment probable · Future enrolment improbable

Data source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

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cash grants earmarked for a specific purpose can help improve enrolment rates.

- Success in education depends on the actual learning outcomes. Modern curricula, qualified teachers and a good school infrastructure are required to achieve this goal. Education must focus on the needs of the labour market in the process.

- If the education infrastructure is inadequate, modern, Internet-based methods can support access to education.

- Education around the world is still underfunded. From 1999 to 2012, government spending on education amounted to an average of between 13 and 14 % of national budgets across the world.[29] Only 2-4 % of international funds from development cooperation were used to provide basic education. The aim is to reach the recommended UNESCO target to raise government spending on education to between 15 and 20 % of the national budget or to between 4 and 6 % of the gross domestic product.[30]

- All assistance and financial aid in crisis and tension regions must have a conflict-sensitive structure in line with the "do no harm" approach. Education projects may therefore not contribute to exacerbating conflicts, e.g. by favouring certain population groups. To prevent unintentional effects like this one, it is important that projects are monitored on an ongoing basis and involve all those affected.

Where education hits its limits

Education alone, however, does not offer a viable solution for the complex problems in actual or potential crisis countries, particularly because its positive effects take time. It is just as important to establish the political and economic conditions and create jobs so that a better-educated population can also realise its potential. Education also has to be practically relevant and focus on the needs of the labour market. Only if these efforts are successful situations like the one in Egypt or other countries in the Middle East, where generally better educated young people have difficulties finding a job, can be prevented.[31] Furthermore, education programmes must be conflict-sensitive and take the relevant social context into account to make the biggest possible contribution to peace.[32]

[29] World DataBank (2016): World Development Indicators. Washington DC, http://www.databank.worldbank.org/data .

[30] UNESCO (2015): Education for All 2000-2015: Achievement and Challenges. Paris.

[31] Berlin Institute for Population and Development (2016): Krisenregion Mena. Wie demografische Veränderungen die Entwicklung im Nahen Osten und Nordafrika beeinflussen und was das für Europa bedeutet. ("The MENA Crisis Region. How Demographic Changes Influence Development in the Middle East and North Africa and What This Means For Europe.") Berlin, www.berlin-institut.org.

[32] Haider, H. (2014). Conflict sensitivity in education, the private sector and infrastructure development. GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1136. GSDRC, Birmingham.