

# FROM CRISIS TO CLASSROOM

## UNDERSTANDING THE EFFECTS OF DISASTERS ON GIRLS' ACCESS TO EDUCATION



## Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian authors of this report acknowledge and pay our respects to Elders past and present. We recognise sovereignty was never ceded and that this land always was and always will be First Nations land. We recognise their ongoing connection to land, waters and community, and we commit to ongoing learning, deep and active listening, and taking action in solidarity.

We recognise the ongoing fight for First Nations justice and the long and continuing history of discrimination and disenfranchisement of First Nations people in Australia. First Nations people have been fighting for the right to vote, Treaty and Truth-telling since invasion. First Nations people were not allowed to vote until 1962, and were not recognised as citizens until 1967. The fight for self-determination for First Nations people continues, with calls for Voice, Treaty and Truth, as expressed in the Uluru Statement from the Heart. At the time of this report, the Australian Government has committed to implementing the calls of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, starting with a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament. However, First Nations justice will only be achieved with both a Voice and Treaty. We stand in solidarity with First Nations people to address injustice, self-determination and First Nations leadership.

We also thank all Indigenous girls, young women and gender diverse people from around the world who have been at the forefront of movements for change and have participated in initiatives such as the [Wiyi Yani U Thangani Report](#).

**Cover Image:** 18-year-old Hibbaq and Juweriyah's education has been impacted by the unrelenting drought in Toghdeer,

## INTRODUCTION

• **Right now, around the world there are 222 million children and young people – more than half of these girls – who are affected by the horrors of war, disaster and displacement.**

Education is a fundamental right, yet in times of conflict and disaster it is often significantly disrupted, denying millions of children the opportunity to have a quality, safe education. In many emergencies, schools are either damaged or closed, occupied by armed groups, or used as evacuation shelters, making education impossible. Today, there are as many as 78.2 million children out of school globally.

COVID-19, conflict, and climate change have made these challenges even more difficult to overcome.

For adolescent girls in particular, the impacts of conflict and crisis are devastating and compound the barriers they already face in accessing primary and secondary education, exacerbating pre-existing gender discrimination and harmful practices such as early marriage and early pregnancy, which have lifelong consequences. Adolescent girls in conflict zones are 90% more likely than their peers in non-conflict settings to be out of school.

This report aims to highlight the impact of emergencies and protracted crises on children and young people's education, with a focus on the Pacific.



Girls learning in a classroom in West Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

## RECENT EMERGENCIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON EDUCATION

Recent emergencies such as the hunger crisis in the Horn of Africa, the conflict in Ukraine, and the Türkiye and Syria earthquakes highlight the growing need for funding educational responses in emergencies and protracted crises, which remain severely underfunded.

- In the **Horn of Africa** (Somalia, Ethiopia, and Kenya), food insecurity disproportionately affects girls' education, with the current hunger crisis causing immense damage to education opportunities. As families now face mounting food insecurity pressure, girls are increasingly called upon to care for younger siblings so parents can work or seek food, forcing them to miss or drop out of school. In Somalia, 2.4 million school-aged children are affected by drought and of these, 1.7 million have dropped out of school. At least 720,000 children who were enrolled in school in 2021/22 are now at risk of not returning to class.
- In **Ukraine**, the education of over 70% of children has been impacted since the escalation of the conflict in February 2022. Across Ukraine, access to uninterrupted education, whether face-to-face or online, is becoming increasingly challenging due to ongoing security threats, significant landmine contamination, and rolling water, power and internet outages. In the last 3 months of 2022, Plan International partners estimate that at least half of all online classes were cancelled. By the end of January 2023, 2,631 education facilities had been damaged and 420 destroyed. Significant reductions in learning outcomes are expected for Ukrainian students and children of all aged groups are facing challenges caused by a lack of structured education.
- In **Syria and Türkiye**, as a result of the two devastating earthquakes that struck north-west Syria and south-eastern Türkiye in February 2023, schools are closed and are providing shelter to those who have lost their homes, leaving children without their usual support frameworks, including education. In Syria, 2,143 schools in Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Idlib, Lattakia and Tartous sustained damage and of those remaining, 99 are now being used as shelters for those who have lost their homes. As a result, more than 535,000 children are not able to continue their education.
- In Southern Africa, tropical cyclone Freddy ripped through central **Mozambique and Malawi** in March 2023. Some 230 schools which withstood the cyclone are now being used as temporary accommodation, meaning almost 500,000 primary and secondary school aged children are currently not receiving an education.

## THE IMPACT OF EMERGENCIES ON EDUCATION IN THE PACIFIC

Closer to home, in the Pacific, 3.8 million school aged children (5-19 years) - which includes 1.85 million girls - are at risk of natural disasters that threaten their access to education and learning. The Pacific is at the epicentre of climate change, and with tropical cyclones becoming more severe and intense, children, especially girls, are at risk of losing access to their education.

- In April 2020, Tropical Cyclone Harold disrupted the education of 47,500 children across four Pacific Island countries.
- Natural disasters expose the vulnerability of school infrastructure. Tropical Cyclone Gita in 2018 damaged 109 out of the 150 schools (72% of all schools) on the main island of Tongatapu, Tonga compared to 30% of residential buildings.
- With sea levels predicted to rise at alarming rates in the Pacific over the next thirty years, climate change-related migration and the inundation of schools located in low-lying coastal regions is a very real threat. In Vanuatu, 64% of the population live within 1km of the coast, in the Solomon Islands it is 65% of the population.
- Past natural disasters in the Pacific have destroyed and damaged school buildings, teacher resources and learning materials. The World Bank estimates that natural disasters cost the Tongan education sector on average US\$7.38 million per year, the equivalent of 1.5% of Tonga's GDP.
- With high rates of adolescent pregnancy and low secondary school completion rates in the Pacific, natural disasters pose a significant risk to girls' education.

19-year-old Lina lives in Juba, South Sudan



## THE IMPACT ON GIRLS IF THEY DON'T RETURN TO SCHOOL AFTER AN EMERGENCY

Humanitarian emergencies can change the course of a girl's life. Education is an urgent priority in emergencies because it saves lives and provides a safe space for children. When a child loses their access to education, they face a number of risks that put their future in jeopardy.

In Somalia, for example, a girl who is unable to attend school due to family pressures such as household chores or collecting water many kilometres away is at risk of physical harm, early or forced marriage, early pregnancy, neglect, sexual or other forms of exploitation, and child labour.

The Pacific also has high rates of sexual and gender-based violence, high rates of early pregnancy, and low completion rates for adolescent girls in secondary school, all of which are exacerbated after natural disasters:

- The Pacific has some of the highest rates of early pregnancy for adolescent girls in the world. In PNG, there are 65 births per 1000 for girls aged 15-19 and in Vanuatu 66 births per 1000. In parts of the Solomon Islands, it is 70 births per 1000. When girls are unable to return to school due to natural disasters, their risk of unplanned pregnancy and early marriage increases. This is consistent with the pattern for girls in natural disasters throughout the Asia-Pacific region.
- School closures and disruptions to education as a result of natural disasters increase the burden of domestic work and childcare for adolescent girls. A survey by Save the Children across 37 countries in the Asia-Pacific region, found that domestic chores for girls had increased by 63% for girls since 2020 compared to less than 50% for boys.

### The economic benefits of educating girls

Investing in girls' education, particularly after a humanitarian emergency, isn't just life-changing for girls themselves – it creates ripple effects that can drive change for entire communities and countries.

Educating girls improves employment opportunities and outcomes, which ultimately lifts more people out of poverty, and increases a country's gross domestic product (GDP). If girls were able to complete 12 years of education, it could produce \$15-\$30 trillion to the global economy from lifetime opportunity and earnings.

- For every dollar invested into girls' rights and education, Global South countries could see a return of \$2.80, equivalent to billions of dollars in extra GDP<sup>1</sup>.
- The World Bank estimates that the return on one year of secondary education for a girl correlates with as high as a 25% increase in wages later in life.
- It also estimates that achieving universal female secondary education could virtually eliminate child marriage and reduce the prevalence of adolescent pregnancy by up to 75%.
- For every additional year of school that a girl completes, infant mortality rates are reduced by 5 to 10%.

# HOW MANY CHILDREN ARE IMPACTED BY HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES?

## Global data

Each year, globally, it's estimated that 37 million children have their education disrupted due to a natural disaster or humanitarian crisis<sup>2</sup>. The Malala Fund report, *A greener, fairer future: Why leaders need to invest in climate and girls' education*, estimates that in 2021 climate-related events prevented at least four million girls in low- and lower-middle-income countries from completing their education.

For adolescent girls in particular, the impacts of conflict and crisis are devastating and compound the barriers they already face in accessing primary

and secondary education, exacerbating pre-existing gender discrimination and harmful practices such as child marriage and early pregnancy, which have lifelong consequences.

Food insecurity disproportionately affects girls' education, with the current global hunger crisis causing immense damage to education opportunities, especially in the hunger hotspots of East Africa, Haiti and the Sahel. Early and forced marriage typically increase during these periods. This in turn escalates school drop-out rates, early or unintended pregnancies and exploitation. Eliminating barriers to girls' education through free, quality, inclusive and flexible learning opportunities, including accelerated education for out-of-school children, adolescents and youth is vital in crisis-affected countries to ensure continuous learning.

Plan International staff distribute more than 100 tablets to Ukrainian children and their parents in Romania, in a temporary learning space at a shelter where they are continuing their education following the Ukrainian curriculum. The SIERCAR (Safe and Inclusive Education for Refugee Children and Adolescents in Romania) project addresses immediate education needs of children through the establishment of temporary learning spaces, and, in the long-term, will facilitate the integration of Ukrainian children in the Romanian school system by working and engaging with the Romanian government.



ZamZam's education is under threat due to the hunger crisis in Somalia.



## CASE STUDY: HUNGER CAUSED BY DROUGHT IS FORCING SOMALI CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL

As Somalia grapples with its worst drought in 40 years, girls like 12-year-olds Juwariya and ZamZam from Togdheer region in Somaliland, are struggling to continue their education. Although both girls are still in school at the moment, hunger is affecting their ability to concentrate in class, and it takes them longer each morning to find water and do their chores.

"Most mornings I wake up at 5am as I have to be at school by 7am. If at 7am we are not there, we will be in trouble. I get up early, I pray, put tea on the fire, fetch water and then go to school. I come every day," says Juwariya.

Juwariya and her mother and grandmother moved to be closer to water and essential services after all their livestock died, which for pastoralist families means a complete loss of livelihood and income. There is little food to eat, and the family is badly undernourished.

As the drought continues to ravage Somalia, thousands of children are dropping out of school, putting them at risk of sexual violence, child labour, and early marriage. Schools are also closing due to the high numbers of dropouts caused by children migrating to other parts of the country with their families.

There are concerns about the long-term impact that the school closures and drop-outs will have on children in the country. With more than 3 million out-of-school children, Somalia has one of the highest numbers of out-of-school children around the world.

"I'd like to have more classrooms at school. Now there are three, one is an office and two are classrooms. We want more rooms. The school is a distance away from us, so we also would like a bus to come for us, so we travel to school and back again easier," Juwariya suggests.

More than two decades of conflict have crippled Somalia's education system due to insufficient numbers of qualified teachers, and inadequate resources. This has meant that students are left with few options when it comes to learning opportunities.

The loss of their livestock means that Juwariya has fewer chores to do when she gets home from school, however she is still kept busy. "I wash the dishes, I wash clothes, I clean the courtyard and the house. In the past, I used to help look after our animals but there are no sheep now, the animals are all gone as their food is nowhere to be found."

Both girls would like to become teachers when they grow up, but this ambition is increasingly in jeopardy as families are being left with no choice but to withdraw their children from school so that they can support them in searching for food and water.



Girls study in Afghanistan prior to the Taliban taking over the country in 2021.



In the Pacific, the impact of climate change is already a reality, and children are incredibly vulnerable to its effects. The remote communities of Russell Islands in the Solomon Islands lie only two metres above sea level. Plan International is working with our local partners to implement projects that help children, young people and their communities understand and adapt to climate change.

## HOW THE CLIMATE CRISIS IS ERODING EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES IN THE PACIFIC

### CASE STUDY: THE REGRESSION OF A RIGHT TO EDUCATION FOR GIRLS IN AFGHANISTAN

*“Today an Afghan girl, who wants access to the basic human right of education has two choices: if she’s lucky, go overseas – or go underground. Become a refugee or effectively become a criminal within Afghanistan. We are talking about a 12-year-old child.*”

- Shabana Rasikh, Founder of School of Leadership Afghanistan, addressing the United Nations in New York on 24 January 2023<sup>3</sup>.



**Emergencies change the trajectory of girls’ lives as their opportunities to access formal and informal education shrink and disappear before their eyes. In Afghanistan, girls have faced significant challenges accessing education through decades of conflict and upheaval. Today, under Taliban rule, the future of girls’ education in Afghanistan is bleak. The life of a twelve-year-old girl today looks far different to what it did in 2017.**

In 2017, a twelve-year-old girl was afforded the protection of the Constitution which stated that all people “have equal rights to education without any kind of discrimination”. Education was mandated up to year nine, providing girls with an opportunity to enrol in secondary school. In 2017, 40% of girls were enrolled in secondary education, a dramatic increase from 6% in 2004.<sup>4</sup> Alongside formal school settings, a twelve-year-old girl could access community-based education, a network of classes, often held in homes,

that allowed girls more flexible learning options. However, in 2017, a twelve-year-old girl still struggled with an education system that lacked investment and relied on international donors. Continuing insecurity and traditional gender norms were also barriers, with families reluctant to send their girls to school due to safety concerns.<sup>5</sup>

In September 2021, with the takeover of government by the Taliban, the education gains that were made in the past decade for Afghan girls – and all their hopes for the future – quickly unravelled as the Taliban took steps to restrict schooling for girls twelve years or older, effectively denying them a secondary education. In December 2021, university education for women was suspended, impacting over 100,000 women. For a twelve-year-old girl in today’s Afghanistan, her future is far bleaker than it was five years ago. Secondary schools are either closed or no longer welcoming of girls. Girls may try to attend informal classes however they do so at the risk of their own safety, with the Taliban arresting those who breach their edicts. Today, 80% of school-aged Afghan girls and women, 2.5 million, are out of school.<sup>6</sup>

- There is limited data on the impact of natural disasters on children, in particular girls, in the Pacific. Natural disasters are times of upheaval and insecurity and data collection is difficult.
- Situation reports from agencies and/or government form what available data there is.
- There is a notable lack of disaggregated data by age, disability, gender diversity and other intersectional factors.

### What we do know:

Australia provides Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) to 14 Pacific nations across Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia.

Across these 14 countries there are 3.8 million school aged children (aged 5 to 19), which includes 1.85 million school aged girls. School aged children make up, on average, one third of the population of Pacific countries that Australia delivers ODA to.

According to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), there were 91 major disasters between 2011 and 2020 in the Pacific. The breakdown of natural disasters indicates that tropical cyclones (storms) make up 43% of all disasters, 16% are floods and 10% are droughts<sup>7</sup>.

Tropical Cyclone Harold, which ripped through Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Tonga in April 2020 impacted 47,500 children across the region<sup>8</sup>. Tropical Cyclone Gita, which hit Tonga in February 2018, left 23,000 children without education. The most recent Hunga Ha’apai Volcano & Tsunami in Tonga affected 22,430 children – 66% of Tonga’s learning population.



## HUNGA HA'APAI VOLCANO & TSUNAMI

Urgent assistance needed for:

**64%** of schools **22,430** students



## TROPICAL CYCLONE HAROLD

**885** schools destroyed in Northern Vanuatu, with **40,000** students out of school



## TROPICAL CYCLONE GITA

**72%** schools damaged in Tonga **\$19 MILLION** of damage and loss to education sector

### Tonga – Hunga Ha'apai Volcano & Tsunami – January 2022

On January 15, 2022, Tonga experienced a catastrophic undersea volcanic eruption that resulted in a 20km high cloud of volcanic ash and a subsequent tsunami.

Some 85,000 people across 14,000 households, accounting for 84% of the total population, were affected. About 64% of schools and Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres in Tongatapu, Ha'apai and 'Eua, approximately 22,430 learners and 1,432 teachers and staff, need assistance<sup>9</sup>.

Schools were significantly affected, with inches-thick volcanic ash and sand covering buildings and classrooms. Curriculum materials including textbooks and notepads were damaged beyond use. At one school, classroom buildings were severely damaged from the waves carrying rocks from the sea and roadside<sup>10</sup>.

### Tropical Cyclone Harold – April 2020

Tropical Cyclone (TC) Harold caused widespread destruction in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Tonga in April 2020.

In Fiji, the Ministry of Education reported damage to 59 schools, impacting approximately 11,500 students<sup>11</sup>.

TC Harold made landfall in Vanuatu on April 6, 2020, as a category 5 cyclone, the second most powerful

cyclone in Vanuatu's history. Strong and sustained winds of more than 200 km/hour caused widespread destruction and exposed the vulnerability of education facilities across the islands. According to education cluster assessments, 885 schools in Northern Vanuatu were damaged or destroyed, leaving approximately 40,000 children out of school<sup>12</sup>.

Sanma Province on Espiritu Santo Islands was the hardest hit, with 90% of the island's population impacted and 70% of schools losing between 50% - 100% of their school resources and materials<sup>13</sup>.

### Tropical Cyclone Gita – February 2018

Tropical Cyclone Gita, a category 5 cyclone, was the worst in Tonga's history and disproportionately affected the education system. Rapid assessments found that 109 out of the 150 schools (72% of all schools) on the main island of Tongatapu were damaged, compared to 25% of residential buildings. This impacted on more than 23,000 students<sup>14</sup>.

Three months after the cyclone, nearly 1,200 students continued to attend classes in tents. Many schools operated with inadequate WASH facilities such as toilets and running water<sup>15</sup>. TC Gita caused a total of \$19 million of damage and loss in the education sector according to estimates by the Government<sup>16</sup>.

Recent modelling by the World Bank estimates that natural disasters cost the Tongan education sector on average US\$7.38 million per year, the equivalent of 1.5% of Tonga's GDP.

## WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES ON CHILDREN'S LEARNING IN THE PACIFIC?

- When climate change-related natural disasters strike, school aged children are hardest hit, experiencing the impacts not only in their homes and their families but through disruption to their schooling and learning. Girls with intersecting experiences of disability, poverty, diverse sexual and gender identities and indigeneity are at even greater risk of losing their education during these times.

The Pacific is facing some of the most serious consequences of climate change, with rapidly rising sea levels, extreme weather events and increasingly severe natural disasters placing them at the “epicenter” of the climate change crisis. Alongside this, the islands are vulnerable to natural disasters such as volcanic eruptions and tsunamis (which are not climate related) such as the Hunga Ha'apai Volcano & Tsunami in Tonga in 2022. These events disrupt girl's education in multiple ways<sup>17</sup>:

1. Damage to school infrastructure and learning resources: Severe natural disasters and extreme weather events result in significant damage to school buildings, as well as WASH facilities, teaching resources and children's learning materials. As outlined above, tropical cyclones have destroyed large numbers of school buildings in countries including Vanuatu and Tonga over the last five years. In some instances, children have had to attend classes in tents or other makeshift structures for months after the disaster.
2. There is evidence, globally, that girls are less likely than boys to attend temporary school facilities – families deem them unsafe for girls, travel may be more restricted and there may be heightened risk of violence and looting<sup>18</sup>. Girls and people who menstruate face additional challenges where WASH facilities are unavailable and they cannot practice good menstrual hygiene.
3. Disruption to learning: Damage to school infrastructure and the closure of schools can interrupt continuity of schooling with children unable to attend school for weeks or even months. This can lead to poor academic outcomes and gaps in learning that make recommencing school difficult.
4. For girls, the burden of caring for siblings, the need to provide financially for their families or the financial burden of returning to school increases the risk that girls do not return to school. Evidence around the world demonstrates that girls re-enrol in school after climate-change related events at rates that are lower than boys.
5. Displacement and climate change related migration: For children living in the low-lying outer islands, climate change, eroding coastlines and high tides are leading to displacement and internal migration. This can result in discontinuation of schooling or a lengthy break from education while families secure alternative housing.



Girls at school in West Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands



Children leaving school in West Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

## PROJECTED IMPACTS OF HOW THIS MAY WORSEN IN THE FUTURE

### The global picture

If current trends continue, by 2025, climate change will be a contributing factor in preventing at least 12.5 million girls from completing their education each year<sup>19</sup>.

### What this means for young people in the Pacific

There is no projected data on the impacts of climate change-related natural disasters on education for children in the Pacific. However, data on the projected impacts of climate change on Pacific nations and global reports of future climate change impacts on education build a clear case for urgent action in the Pacific.

Climate change is predicted to significantly worsen as global temperatures rise in the Pacific. Australia's Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) modelled climate change projections across 14 Pacific nations and found overall that<sup>20</sup>:

- By 2030, average temperatures will have increased by 0.7 degrees leading to a sea level rise of between 0.09 to 0.18 metres.
- By 2050, average temperatures will have increased by 1.5 degrees leading to a sea level rise of between 0.2 and 0.36 metres.
- Cyclones will become less frequent however the intensity of each cyclone will increase with global warming. Combined with heavier rainfall, this will increase the impacts of cyclones<sup>21</sup>.

The CSIRO and SPREP modelling predicted each individual country's impacts:

- In Vanuatu, sea levels rise will cause coastal inundation, erosion and saltwater intrusion into aquifers. This will expose 64% of the country's population who live within 1km of the coast and 48% of Vanuatu's infrastructure which lies within 500 metres of the coast.
- In PNG, heavier rainfall events will increase flooding, inundation, landslides and erosion, causing damage to public amenities and infrastructure. With the risk of coastal inundation and erosion, it will impact 21% of the 5.2 million people who live within 1 km of the coast.
- In the Solomon Islands sea level rises expose 65% of the 516,000 people who live within 1 km of the coast.

**These projections of more severe cyclones and rising sea levels both in the short term and medium term will have a dire impact on girl's learning and the education sector in the Pacific. Urgent action is needed in the education sector to strengthen climate change adaptation measures, risk reduction and resilience.**

i Based on a high emissions future

## CASE STUDY: SUPPORTING ROHINGYA CHILDREN AT RISK IN COX'S BAZAR

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on girls' access to education in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh – some of the most populated and crowded refugee camps in the world.

A recent study found that there was a 90% reduction in the proportion of students accessing education in these camps since the onset of the pandemic, with virtually no Rohingya girls accessing education during school closures. Before COVID-19, 53% of Rohingya boys and 29% of Rohingya girls were attending school.

In humanitarian settings, intersectional evidence suggests that girls living in host communities may receive less support from their parents than boys. In host communities in Cox's Bazar there were significant gender differences, with boys far more likely to have received help from their parents compared to girls (82% for boys compared to 71% for girls)<sup>22</sup>.

Thirteen-year-old Parmin\* fled Myanmar with her grandmother in 2017 and has been living in a Rohingya refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh ever since.

Just five years old when both of her parents died, Parmin was sent to live with relatives but was badly treated. Aware of this, her grandmother decided move in with her family so she could protect Parmin, but when conflict broke out in the country they were forced to flee their home and seek safety with thousands of others in Bangladesh.

For refugee girls such as Parmin, the multiple and intersecting barriers that they face – of displacement, persecution, and ongoing instability – make accessing education extremely difficult. With over 400,000 Rohingya children in Cox's Bazar, education programs are providing Parmin and other girls with opportunities to access education that will set them on the path to empowerment and greater economic security. A new curriculum is being trialled based on the Myanmar national curriculum, providing Rohingya children with formal and standardised education. Girls only classes, adolescent girls' safe spaces, and other measures are improving girls' access to education through flexible learning models.

Life in the refugee camp was hard at first, but over the years Parmin tells us that things have improved. "My grandmother went everywhere to find food for me. I have a good life here now. I am living a better life now here in Bangladesh," she said.

Parmin started going to school, something she was unable to do in Myanmar, and everything seemed to be going well until last year when she was only 12, Parmin's grandmother tried to arrange a marriage between her young granddaughter and their camp neighbour.

Aware that marriage would mean the end of her education, Parmin tried to protest. "When I came to know that my grandmother was thinking to marry me off, I felt bad. Before the talk of marriage, I went to

school. I like to study; I like to play with my friends. But after marriage, I knew that I would not be able to continue."

Early marriage is a common cultural practice within the Rohingya communities in Myanmar with child marriages being extremely commonplace. Rohingya children, especially those who are orphaned or unaccompanied, are at greater risk of being trafficked or forced into marriages.

Often driven by economic concerns, some families choose to marry off their daughters hoping to reduce the number of mouths to feed and secure more food as ration cards in the camp are given to individual families. When a couple gets married, they become eligible for an additional ration card.

Plan International is working alongside our partner Friends In Village Development Bangladesh in the camp to provide training to children and young people on child protection issues. Through this training, safeguarding risks are highlighted, including child labour, early marriage, child abuse, trafficking, and drug abuse.

The young people who take part in the training are then asked to develop risk mitigation plans that include raising awareness through peer outreach in the community, advocacy at a local government level, creating social awareness, and the inclusion of parents in positive parenting sessions.

Wanting to stop her marriage from going ahead, Parmin approached the project team to ask them to intervene and speak to her grandmother. "I told the sisters (programme staff) about my marriage. Then came and convinced my grandmother not to not marry me off."

Thanks to this intervention, Parmin is still in school and is happy that she is able to continue her education. "I am doing well now. I want to be a teacher in future."

\*Name has been changed to protect identity



# HOW ARE WE WORKING TO MAKE SCHOOLS MORE CLIMATE RESILIENT AND SUPPORT CHILDREN TO RETURN TO SCHOOL AFTER DISASTERS AND EMERGENCIES



17-year-old Hellena lives in a town in South Sudan's Lakes State. Her family depend on their farm for food and a source of income, but since the dry spell that started in May 2022, her parents have had to find alternative ways to earn money for food.

"My mother sells peanut paste and my father sells sugar. My mother buys peanuts and sells the paste in the market, my father sells sugar on the roadside. Sometimes the money they earn isn't enough to buy food. We can spend a whole day without eating. Sometimes it also takes a long time to pay the school fees and we struggle to pay them," Hellena tells us.

## 1. Policy frameworks

Pacific nations, together with international development partners such as Plan International, have taken important steps in advancing disaster risk and resilience policies for schools. Each country has adopted policies and frameworks that address the three pillars outlined in the Comprehensive School Safety Framework developed by the Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction & Resilience in the education sector.

The Comprehensive School Safety (CSS) Framework sets out three essential pillars for effective

disaster and risk management – safe learning facilities, school disaster management and risk reduction and resilience education.

Pacific nations including Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Fiji, Samoa and PNG are signatories to the Worldwide Initiative for Safe Schools (WISS), a government-led global partnership that provides technical assistance and expertise to Governments implementing the School Safety Frameworks.

Alongside these frameworks, individual natural disasters emergency education plans are then developed. For example, after Tropical Cyclone Harold, the Education Emergency Response Action Plan was developed by the Ministry of Education together with development partners.

## 2. Safer Learning Facilities & Climate Resilient Schools

Plan International undertakes significant work in the area of safer learning facilities and climate resilient schools. In Ukraine, for example, where conflict has disrupted the education of millions of children, Plan International and its partners are ensuring girls and boys affected by the conflict have uninterrupted access to safe, inclusive, quality education and learning approaches that support their psychosocial wellbeing, and that of their families and teachers.

In Moldova, Poland and Romania, Plan International is bringing decades of experience in protecting children in emergencies: including the establishment of teams and providing training to local staff to ensure children from Ukraine remain safe, can continue their education, and are getting the mental health and

psychosocial support they need.

Some 15,000 children have also benefitted from Plan International's formal or non-formal learning activities, including the provision of tablets to continue to follow the all-Ukrainian school curriculum online. The World Bank has led in strengthening school infrastructure to improve resilience to natural disasters.

The World Bank's Pacific Safer Schools Program is working in Tonga, Samoa and Vanuatu to strengthen and protect school buildings through physical improvements that meet higher resilience standards, rebuilding with stronger construction materials and providing more regular maintenance to ensure schools can withstand future natural disasters. In 2021, assessments of over 6,000 school buildings across Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu found that between 50% to 90% of buildings may not withstand a strong cyclone or earthquake<sup>23, 18</sup>

*"Twenty-three schools with 44 school buildings and 112 classrooms were then identified across the islands of Tongatapu, Vava'u and 'Eua as requiring repairs or reconstruction, with US\$13.81 million in World Bank funding delivered for schools' repairs, retrofitting and reconstruction, alongside additional support from the Australian Government... By the time the works are completed across Tonga by the end of 2020, approximately 9,000 students – almost forty percent of all Tongan students – will have benefited from the works.*

- World Bank





### 3. Climate change adaption curriculum

Plan International aims to deliver quality learning opportunities through education in emergencies, including the provision of climate change adaptation curriculum. In Somaliland, Plan International has strengthened the resilience and capacity of education personnel and children on climate change adaptation to mitigate the risks of future natural hazards that affect education delivery.

In the Pacific, the Australian Government is working with ODA partner, Kiribati, to improve school infrastructure and deliver climate change curriculums taught by teachers trained in climate change at the Kiribati Teacher Training College. Children in Kiribati schools today access the 'Skills for Life' curriculum which supports children to develop local actions and solutions to climate change<sup>24, 19</sup>

*“Through the \$97 million (2011-2023) Kiribati Education Improvement Program (KEIP), Australia is working with the Ministry of Education to ensure school facilities have raised floors and optional protective seawalls to reduce future coastal flooding. The facilities provide a light and naturally ventilated learning environment, with disability access, and are built with regionally sourced sustainable materials. Clean water, via rainwater capture, and improved sanitation facilities are also priorities.*

- DFAT



### 4. Humanitarian response and recovery

There are a range of measures that international development and/or humanitarian partners provide after natural disasters. These include:

- Establishment of temporary learning spaces – these are usually temporary tents and tarpaulins set up as learning spaces.
- “School-in-a-box kits” which contain teaching materials and supplies provided by UNICEF.
- Replacement learning materials designed to be more inclusive including posters, teacher

- resources, story books and learning games. STC, in response to Tropical Cyclone Harold, replaced damaged teaching material with new, more inclusive learning resources. Home-based learning packages and guidance for parents and caregivers to support better educational continuity.
- In Ukraine, 1,200 backpacks with school materials were provided to children as part of Back to School campaigns in conjunction with local municipalities and ministries of education.
- Rebuilding WASH facilities in and around schools to ensure that children have access to clean water, toilets and menstrual hygiene.



A group of adolescent girls in Malawi, where Cyclone Freddy caused widespread devastation in early 2023. Densely-populated poorer communities, living in brick and mud houses, have been hardest-hit. Some of these houses have crumbled into flood waters, while others have been entirely swept away.

## RECOMENDATIONS

### How can the Australian Government support girls' to access their education during humanitarian crises?

The UN Global Fund, Education Cannot Wait, is the global fund supporting children to access quality and inclusive education during emergencies and protracted crises. They support and protect every child's right to access an education.

This fund kick started its replenishment in February 2023. It needs \$1.5 billion to ensure that an additional 20 million children and young people affected by crises – including 12 million girls – receive an education over the next four years.

Through a contribution to Education Cannot Wait, the Australian Government can help protect the right of girls to an education, particularly when it is disrupted by circumstances outside of their control.

### Education Cannot Wait's impact Since 2016:

**7 MILLION**

children and adolescents supported to get an education across 41 countries affected by war, climate-induced disasters, and displacement.

ECW's #EmpowerHer ensures girls' can access **12 YEARS** of quality education.

**31.2 MILLION**

children and adolescents supported through its COVID-19 emergency response, 51.8% girls.

**19.5 MILLION**

girls reached

Trained almost

**90,000 > 57%**  
teachers. women.

**92%**

of ECW investments showed improvements in gender parity

Actively campaigning and advocating for the rights of girls' education globally, including in response to the situation in Afghanistan.



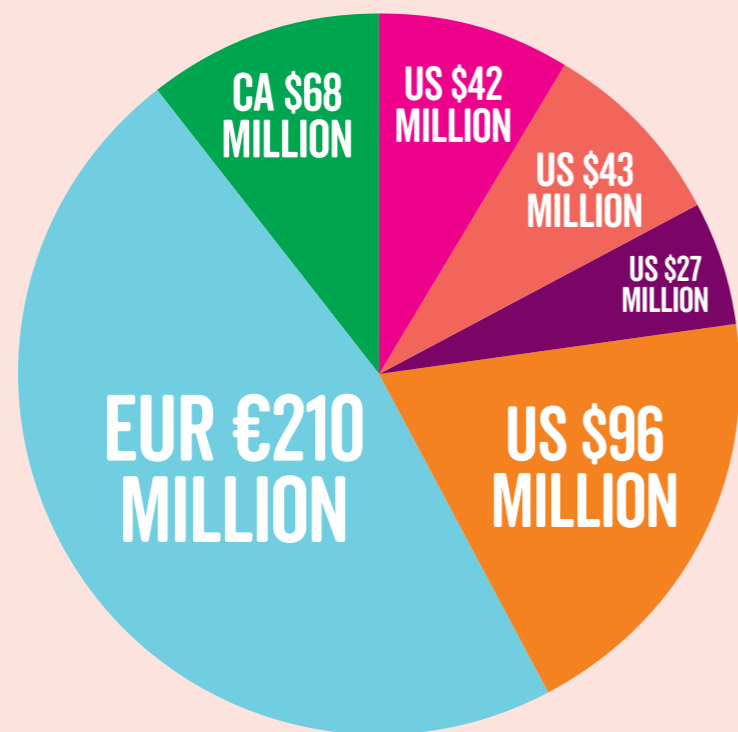
Ukrainian children in a re-opened school in Kyiv. Plan International is working to support the refurbishment of schools and bomb shelters in Ukraine and is creating Digital Learning Centres to help children catch-up with their classes and enjoy other extra-curricular school activities. We are distributing school supplies and digital technology to support the online education of children in areas where they cannot return to their schools.

Education is a catalytic investment when it comes to alleviating poverty. For children affected by crises, it is even more important, providing protection, normalcy and a sense of hope for their futures.

It's time for the Australian Government to protect the right of girls to an education, particularly when it is disrupted by circumstances outside of their control.

Plan International Australia recommends the Australian Government invests \$24 million over three years in Education Cannot Wait, the UN Global Fund for education in emergencies and protracted crises.

### Governments around the world have already committed support to Education Cannot Wait in 2023:



- USAID
- NORWAY
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION
- UNITED KINGDOM
- GERMANY
- CANADA

## APPENDIX A

	Girls aged 5 - 19	Boys aged 5 - 19	Total
<b>Tuvalu</b>	13.8% of population 1,460 girls	15.4% of population 1,629 boys	3,089 children aged 5-19
<b>Tonga</b>	16.4% of population 16,363 girls	17.7% of population 17,661 boys	34,024 children aged 5-19
<b>Fiji</b>	13.6% of population 121,714 girls	14.3% of population 127,979 boys	249,693 children aged 5-19
<b>PNG</b>	15.5% of population 1,443,340 girls	16.9% of population 1,573,706 boys	3,017,000 children aged 5-19
<b>Solomon Islands</b>	17.9% of population 133,248 girls	18.3% of population 136,226 boys	269,474 children aged 5-19
<b>Kiribati</b>	15.4% of population 18,901 girls	16.3% of population 20,005 boys	38,907 children aged 5-19
<b>Vanuatu</b>	16.7% of population 51,426 girls	17.6% of population 54,197 boys	105,624 children aged 5-19
<b>Samoa</b>	17.4% of population 34,974 girls	18.8% of population 37,787 boys	72,762 children aged 5-19
<b>Palau</b>	9.3% of population 1,672 girls	10% of population 1,798 boys	3,470 children aged 5-19
<b>Federate State of Micronesia</b>	14.4% of population 15,262 girls	15.1% of population 16,004 boys	31,266 children aged 5-19
<b>Marshall Islands</b>	17.5% of population 9,528 girls	19.3% of population 10,508 boys	10,036 children aged 5-19
<b>Tokelau</b>	14.2% of population 212 girls	15.4% of population 230 boys	442 children aged 5-19
<b>Niue</b>	13.8% of population 211 girls	14.4% of population 220 boys	432 children aged 5-19
<b>Nauru</b>	16.5% of population 1968 girls	18 of population 2,147 boys	4,115 children aged 5-19
<b>TOTAL</b>	1,850,279 girls	18 of population 2,147 boys	4,115 children aged 5-19
	Round down: 1.85 million school aged girls		Round down: 3.8 million school aged children

Data sourced from SPC, Pacific Data Hub, Population Dashboard - 2022 - <https://pacificdata.org/population-dashboard>

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