

# Opinion: Refugees, children fleeing countries in crisis need more schools

By Anthony Lake, Project Syndicate, adapted by Newsela staff on 10.26.15  
Word Count **876**



Kurdish children sell snacks and gum on the street near the camp in Urfa, Turkey. Photo: Mitchell Prothero/McClatchy DC/TNS

NEW YORK, N.Y. – Some time ago, I met a young girl in a refugee camp in Jordan. Like the tens of thousands of other children there, she and her family had escaped the ever-worsening violence in Syria. I first met her in a cheaply constructed classroom located in a sea of tents. Later, I saw her again, playing with other children in a poorly built playground.

I asked her where she would rather be, learning in the classroom or playing with her friends. I know what my answer would have been at her age — the playground. Instead, she chose the classroom – and her answer says a lot. Violence in her war-torn Middle Eastern home country forced her to leave behind her home and friends. Her education was the one thing she could not afford to lose. She needed an education if she was ever going to get her dream. She wants to grow up and become a doctor, to prevent a future controlled by poverty, violence and loss.

## **Desperate To Go To School**

I've heard that same desire for learning from so many children affected by the crisis in Syria and other emergencies around the world. Children desperately want to go to school. Their families desperately want them to get an education.

In the middle of violence and constant change, school is a safe place. It is a place to learn, get opportunities and live a healthy life. It is a place where children can hope for the future. Education increases the chances that someday children will be able to make money and give their families a better life. But it also provides them with the skills to rebuild the communities they are from. It can help them to forgive those who wronged them during the wars once the fighting is over.

## **Sustainable Development Goals**

So reaching the children affected by emergencies and giving them the chance to learn definitely helps them. But it also helps their home countries. Leaders around the globe are beginning to plan. They want to start focusing on some new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals will guide some positive changes in poor countries across the world for the next 15 years. Development goals help leaders make their countries better countries so they can be more independent, make their own money and help the people in those countries. Focusing on education is extremely important as leaders discuss the SDGs.

The good news is that people around the world are beginning to agree that schools can help create a more equal and stable society. The Sustainable Development Goal for education shows this. It says that everyone should be able to get an education no matter what their background is. They have had goals like this in the past. One goal said everyone should go to primary, or elementary, school. The SDG is different. It wants to give students an education through secondary school or high school.

## **Many Children In Crisis**

As we begin working toward the new goal, we should know about a big problem that could block us from achieving it. There are many children facing danger around the world. According to a new report by the Overseas Development Institute, nearly 1 in 3 children out of school today is living in a country affected by crisis. In the 35 countries most affected by violence, 65 million children ages 3 to 15 are at risk of missing out on learning.

For the youngest children, crisis and conflict mean that schooling never starts. For others, it means that education is interrupted, never to be restarted. For still others, the quality of education is poor because of a lack of adequately trained teachers or appropriate materials. It can be bad enough that students will not even learn basic reading or writing skills.

### **Not Enough Money**

Though the number of children affected by crisis is reaching an all-time high, the amount of money to help support countries with education in emergencies remains outrageously low. In 2013, less than 2 percent of emergency aid went to education and learning opportunities. To meet the new SDG goal on education, we need to respond to the realities of a rapidly changing world. Learning is not only an important part of relief for every child in an emergency, but also an investment in the future development of their societies. We must act on this knowledge, by securing greater and more predictable funding for education in unpredictable emergencies.

### **Global Fund Needed**

Over the last few months a group has been talking about creating a global fund for education in emergencies. There is a lot that must be discussed but the idea is gaining strength. We should build on that.

We face a choice that we must make together. Should we spend more now on education, or pay the price later? If we do not pay for schools, we will have a lost generation of poorly educated children. These children will someday not have enough knowledge from school to rebuild their broken societies. They will not reach their own dreams and will find it much harder to give their own children a chance at a better life. The cost of that vicious cycle will affect us all in the future.

## Quiz

- 1 Read the section "Sustainable Development Goals." Which idea is MOST clearly supported by evidence in that section?
- (A) Many children are affected by emergencies.
  - (B) Education helps children make their own money.
  - (C) Many people believe school is important for equality.
  - (D) Development goals help countries to be more independent.
- 2 Which of the following statements provides the STRONGEST support for the author's claim that funds for education during emergencies are too low?
- (A) Though the number of children affected by crisis is reaching an all-time high, the amount of money to help support countries with education in emergencies remains outrageously low.
  - (B) To meet the new SDG goal on education, we need to respond to the realities of a rapidly changing world.
  - (C) In 2013, less than 2 percent of emergency aid went to education and learning opportunities.
  - (D) We must act on this knowledge, by securing greater and more predictable funding for education in unpredictable emergencies.
- 3 Read this excerpt from the introduction [paragraphs 1-2].

*She needed an education if she was ever going to get her dream. She wants to grow up and become a doctor, to prevent a future controlled by poverty, violence and loss.*

In this sentence, the word "prevent" means:

- (A) avoid
- (B) create
- (C) predict
- (D) cure

- 4 Read this excerpt from the final paragraph of the article.

*They will not reach their own dreams and will find it much harder to give their own children a chance at a better life. The cost of that vicious cycle will affect us all in the future.*

What do the words "vicious cycle" describe in the excerpt above?

- (A) a situation that is unfortunate and cannot be stopped
- (B) a situation where people do not reach their dreams or goals
- (C) a situation that is outside of anyone's control, but people still try to improve it
- (D) a situation where problems in the present continue to cause problems in the future