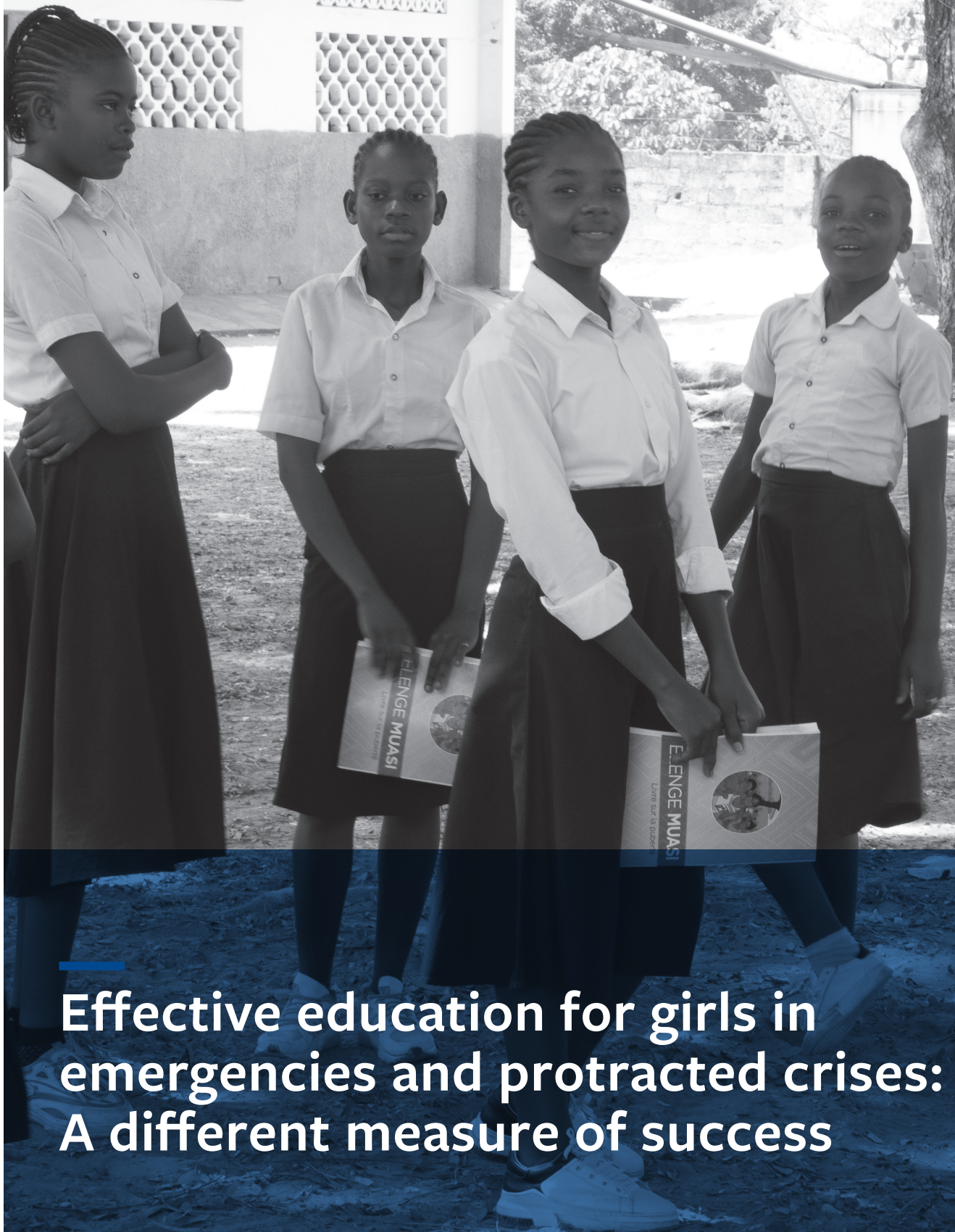


APRIL 2023

## LEARNING BRIEF #6



# Effective education for girls in emergencies and protracted crises: A different measure of success

Girls' Education Challenge



The **Girls' Education Challenge (GEC)** is the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's 12-year, £855 million Global Fund which aims to improve the educational opportunities of the world's most marginalised girls. The GEC is comprised of two types of project: 1) GEC-Transition (GEC-T) projects, which work within schools and support girls most at risk of dropping out; and 2) Leave No Girl Behind (LNGB) projects, which target highly marginalised girls who have already dropped out or who have never been able to enrol in school.

**A recent estimate indicates that there are 222 million children and young people who have either dropped out of school, or are at risk of doing so, due to conflict and crisis, including climate-related emergencies. According to INEE’s 2022 Mind the Gap report, a girl of primary school age and living in a crisis-affected country is 35% more likely to be out of school than her male contemporaries. This rate is well over double the global average for primary out-of-school rates (9% of girls and 7% of boys, globally).**

Over the last decade, the proportion of humanitarian aid to education has increased from 1% in 2014 to 2.9% in 2019, and the proportion of development aid to education in crisis-affected countries with a gender focus has also increased. Significant progress has been made toward prioritising and achieving gender equality in education, increasing access to education for crisis-affected populations and reforming humanitarian aid structures to secure longer-term, reliable funding for education in emergencies.

However, millions of girls and women affected by crisis and conflict are still left behind. The economic impact of COVID-19 and the rising inflation rates across most western economies present a serious threat to the amount of funding going to girls’ education in general – and during crises in particular – as both national education and international aid budgets are being squeezed.<sup>1</sup>

There are various initiatives that attempt to improve the setting of shared standards and approaches, such as the [INEE Data Reference Group](#) and the [OCHA Data Responsibility Working Group](#). There is, however, no institution responsible for monitoring progress against targets to improve education provision for the most vulnerable. However, many countries are now collecting and reporting sex-disaggregated education data which is a big step forward in being able to quantify gaps.

Existing structural gender inequality means that women and girls often need to work harder in the aftermath of a disaster to carry out daily functions, such as lining up for relief supplies and travelling to find water and food, which means their access to education or employment is further limited. With the onset of the entrenched drought in southern Ethiopia in 2021, families turned to child marriage to reduce the number of dependents in their household.<sup>2</sup>

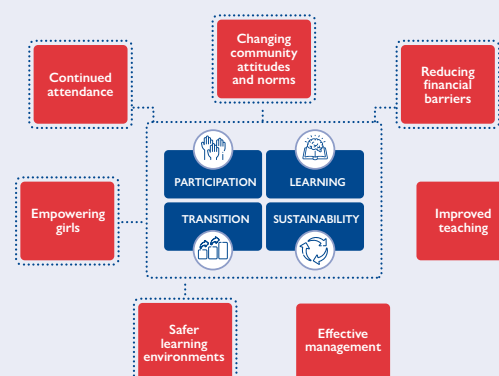


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<sup>1</sup> INEE (2021) *Mind the Gap: The State of Girls’ Education in Contexts of Crisis and Conflict*. <https://inee.org/resources/mind-gap-state-girls-education-crisis-and-conflict>, Section 4.2  
<sup>2</sup> Interview with GEC projects in Ethiopia – PIN Ethiopia

**The Girls’ Education Challenge Learning Brief series:**

To capitalise on its vast portfolio of 41 projects, operating across 17 countries, the Girls’ Education Challenge (GEC) has compiled a wealth of project learning regarding key interventions related to girls’ education. While these Learning Briefs are rooted in both quantitative and qualitative evidence, they are not research papers or evidence reports. Rather, they provide a synthesis of learning from GEC intervention designs and implementation approaches that have been paramount for supporting improvements in girls’ learning. The GEC projects take a holistic approach to improve the educational environment and conditions that support improved learning, participation, transition and sustainability outcomes. This Learning Brief is focused on effective education for girls’ in emergencies and protracted crisis which contribute to achieving the highlighted outcomes:



## Without access to safe education...

- Girls can be cut off from their friends and adults outside of their families.
- Girls lack other pathways that provide hope and make them feel like they are moving on with their lives.
- Girls stop learning, lose learning or are away for so long they cannot easily return to schooling.
- Schools close or access is constrained.
- Parents are scared to send their girls to school, especially if they are from particular ethnic communities, or from factions who do not approve of girls' education.
- Girls' freedom of movement is further limited due to perceived security concerns and no formal cause to leave home.



Crises can block girls' access to education, leading to a downwards spiral of loss of protection and eventual school dropout. Climate-related, natural disasters compound the vulnerabilities of women and girls, who experience greater social, economic, and health effects because of climate stress, slow-onset disasters, or weather-related emergencies like floods and storms.<sup>3</sup>

Girls facing intersecting factors of marginalisation because of poverty, race, ethnicity, geographical location, or disability and minority status, experience the greatest exclusion from education.<sup>4</sup> Disability, when it intersects with being a girl and being within an emergency setting can increase risks of gender-based violence. Families may feel that children with disabilities, girls especially, should be kept at home for their own protection, leading to total lack of access to education for these girls.<sup>5</sup>

The Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) portfolio of projects covers 17 countries. Almost half of these contexts are characterised as fully or partially fragile or conflict affected, with varying degrees of severity, be that related to security and conflict, environmental degradation or economic collapse

and failing governance institutions. GEC evaluation data estimate that over 500,000 of the most marginalised girls are living in fragile contexts.<sup>6</sup>

This Learning Brief shares experiences and learning from seven GEC projects implementing interventions in Somalia, DR Congo, Kenya, Afghanistan and Ethiopia.<sup>7</sup> Factors of success are structured around these interventions. It is intended to support governments, donors and implementing partners in their efforts to design and implement education programmes in fragility, conflict or violence.

Moreover, this Brief highlights the limited understanding of what works to achieve access to education and learning in contexts where violence and instability is protracted and entrenched. It explores what success looks like for education programmes in fragile, conflict and crisis-affected contexts. It also asks whether other skills and outcomes ought to be seen as on a par with – or even more important than – traditional academic progress which typically demands a degree of stability, time and cost investment that is often unavailable to learners in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

**“Crises can block girls' access to education, leading to a downwards spiral of loss of protection and eventual school dropout.”**



<sup>3</sup> (Kwauk et al., 2019) <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Girls-ed-in-climate-strategies-working-paper-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> INEE (2021) *Mind the Gap: The State of Girls' Education in Contexts of Crisis and Conflict*. <https://inee.org/resources/mind-gap-state-girls-education-crisis-and-conflict>, Section 4.2

<sup>5</sup> Leonard Cheshire Disability & UNGEL (2017). *Still left behind: Pathways to inclusive education for girls with disabilities*. <https://www.ungei.org/publication/still-left-behind>

<sup>6</sup> GEC Results Narrative October 2022

<sup>7</sup> For security reasons the implementing partners in Afghanistan and Somalia are not referenced in the brief

## The GEC project approach

Seven GEC projects have operated in contexts where the causes of fragility (conflict, climate change and refugee crisis) have overlapped and the intensity of fragility has varied overtime. The intensity of fragility has been high during active conflict and crisis, and governments have been unable to supply regular education provision (e.g., Somalia and Afghanistan). Humanitarian aid has been the predominant form of support provided by the GEC projects in these situations. Within the same contexts, the GEC projects have had to often respond to a widespread fragility related to security, climate and economic uncertainty and volatility (e.g., Ethiopia). Lastly, GEC projects have had to respond to protracted crisis and localised tension within a country where the education system is not compromised (e.g., Northern Kenya).

The GEC projects implemented four broad areas of interventions with varying emphasis depending on the intensity of fragility they have responded to:

1. Providing direct delivery of education services alongside the formal system, such as community-based education, basic education, accelerated learning and catch-up learning, remedial services and teacher training.
2. Working with parents and communities to garner support for girls' education.
3. Working towards girls' safety, mental health and psychosocial wellbeing through activities such as Girls' Clubs. Building girls' resilience and tracking retention.
4. Responding to humanitarian needs through Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs), distribution of cash/food and provision of non-formal education (NFE).



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### Challenges faced by GEC projects

#### System level:

- Poverty, poor infrastructure and low levels of education and basic healthcare
- Vulnerability to climate-related disaster (drought, flooding, food insecurity)
- Entrenched conflict, violent extremism and insurgencies
- High levels of humanitarian need and internal displacement
- Pervasive gender inequality and gender-based violence
- Local political economy with pervasive corruption, bribery and favouritism
- Opposition groups being against favouring girls over boys

#### Project level:

- Working language for project staff often not being the language spoken by local partners and schools, creating barriers for training and communications
- The threat of attacks putting project staff and local partners at risk

#### In schools:

- Threats of or direct attacks on schools by anti-government groups
- Schools inaccessible because of heavy rains, cyclones and droughts
- Working across multiple fault lines (e.g., tribal divisions, refugee and host communities, government or insurgency held areas)
- Recruitment and retention of female teachers
- Teachers being at risk of attacks when receiving support

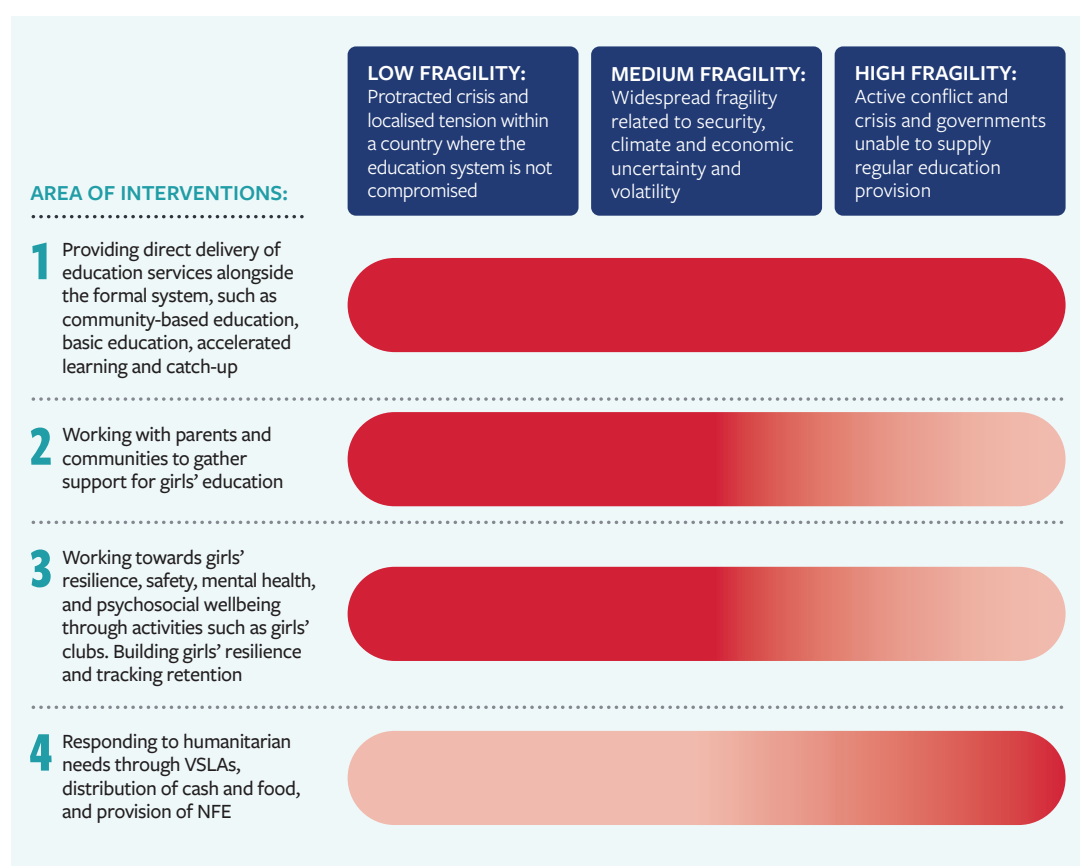
#### In communities and households:

- Parents not having their basic needs met and not engaging with long term decisions, such as investing in their children's education
- Cultural beliefs around girls' education
- Parents sending boys to schools but not girls
- Due to displacement, households being managed by women who are not prepared to lead economic due to lack of numeracy and literacy skills

#### For girls:

- Girls migrating and dropping out of school
- Girls being the victim of gender-based violence
- Girls facing psychosocial challenges and trauma impacting their health and wellbeing
- Girls not having opportunities to transition to secondary education, vocational education or employment opportunities

All GEC projects in education in emergency and protracted crises implemented activities in the four areas listed above. The degree to which they were emphasised in delivery was a function of the fragility being experienced in the context (see *Figure 1*).



*Figure 1: The intensity of interventions implemented is determined by degree of fragility*

**1. Providing direct delivery of education services alongside the formal system.** This includes community-based education (CBE), accelerated and catch-up learning, remedial services and teacher training. The [Somali Girls' Education Promotion Programme](#) (SOMGEP) and the [Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia](#) (AGES) project delivered different forms of accelerated education within the formal education system supporting the Somali government. The two projects also provided remote learning to in-school young girls in response to insecurities caused by attacks from the military group al-Shabaab as well as during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In DR Congo, the [Réussite et Épanouissement via l'Apprentissage et L'Insertion au Système Éducatif](#) (REALISE) project (Save the Children) delivered community-based education and catch-up provision as well as accelerated education to marginalised girls needing to enter Grades 6-8. In Kenya, in addition to accelerated learning courses, the [Kenya Equity in Education Project](#) (KEEP) project (WUSC) also delivered support to girls through guidance counsellor services. While all projects seek to reach girls not otherwise

served by the formal system – such as girls of particular ethnic backgrounds (DR Congo), pastoralists (Somalia), refugee girls (Kenya) and out-of-school girls (Afghanistan) – they still work within that system and by and large are bound by its constraints.

**2. Working with parents and communities to gather support on girls' education.** GEC projects have worked closely with parents, communities and religious leaders to change perceptions around girls' education. In Somalia, the SOMGEP project worked with mothers through VSLA to ensure girls continued their education and that gendered social norms were discussed with their daughters. [The project's Endline Evaluation](#) found a meaningful increase since baseline in the share of caregivers who believe girls' education to be a worthwhile investment, rising from 76% to 88%. In addition to increasing support for education, GEC projects have also worked with girls, teachers and community members to overcome the context of uncertainty and fear. In DR Congo, the REALISE project worked with parents who feared sending their daughters to schools due to the high volatility of conflict.

## CASE STUDY: Improving learning through community-based education

The **Steps Towards Afghan Girls' Education Success (STAGES)** project implemented CBE and remote and blended learning to bring education closer to girls in Afghanistan. [Endline Evaluation](#) results from STAGES suggest that both EGRA reading fluency and EGMA aggregated scores improved significantly for girls supported by the project, particularly for girls involved in CBE and accelerated learning classes. Furthermore, girls in CBE and accelerated learning classes had higher mean EGRA and EGMA scores when compared with their government school counterparts in the same grade. The same results were found for girls who can be categorised as more marginalised: girls who do not speak the language of instruction, girls with disabilities, and girls who conduct household and other forms of labour.



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### 3. Working towards girls' resilience, safety, mental health, and psychosocial wellbeing.

GEC projects have also worked on keeping girls safe and building their life and functional skills during times of fragility and conflict. The REALISE project worked to improve protection of girls by delivering sexual and reproductive health education. The project worked on improving girls' literacy so that they could understand information on sexual reproductive health education and take control of their lives. REALISE also worked with community groups and local government institutions on managing cases of abuse. Giving girls skills and support networks through communities and parents were key to keeping girls safe. GEC projects also have worked on reducing tensions by engaging with girls, boys, teachers and community members. [Endline Evaluation results](#) from the SOMGEP project suggest that the community education committees and girls' empowerment networks were effective in reducing conflict in schools and creating a safer learning environment for girls.

GEC projects have also worked towards building girls' resilience and providing them with psychosocial support during times of crisis and conflict. [Endline Evaluation results](#) for the KEEP project suggest that the project made progress in transforming attitudes and perceptions towards girls' education and in making girls more resilient. A research study conducted by the project to understand the psychosocial wellbeing of young women in Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps showed that young women who benefitted from psychosocial support felt more resilient and were better able to negotiate access to resources in the home.

GEC projects have also worked on making schools more resilient by helping teachers adapt and deal with frequent absences during times of fragility and conflict and on tracking migration,

retention and dropout of girls to ensure they continued their education during times of fragility and conflict. The REALISE project worked with community members to mitigate the risk of girls dropping out of schools. The SOMGEP project worked on tracking migration of girls during severe droughts caused by climate change. Girls' Empowerment Forums were used to monitor attendance and dropout of girls from school. [Endline Evaluation results](#) from the SOMGEP project suggest that girls who attended Girls' Empowerment Forums had a higher retention, higher completion rates and better learning outcomes. Girls' Empowerment Forums were also a key intervention to reduce early marriages.

- 4. Responding to humanitarian needs.** GEC projects have provided humanitarian aid in direct response to crisis. In Ethiopia, the [CHANGE](#) project (People in Need) provided schools feeding and household support during the Borena climate crisis. GEC projects have also responded to the issue of increased poverty during times of fragility and conflict by providing cash transfers and scholarships to ensure girls continued their education. According to the [Endline Evaluation results](#) from the REALISE project, bursaries have helped increase girls' attendance to school. However, some teachers reported the financial support might not be enough for the most vulnerable families, as it did not cover the extra costs of supplies and uniforms, which resulted in girls being expelled from schools. There was evidence that VSLAs helped girls go to school through their financial benefits. The SOMGEP and AGES projects worked on linking communities with financial institutions and banks and on supporting women to gain financial literacy and manage the remittances they were responsible for during times of fragility and conflict.

**“GEC projects have also worked towards building girls' resilience and providing them with psychosocial support during times of crisis and conflict.”**

## Factors for success

This section draws out the core elements that have influenced the success of programming in education in emergencies and protracted crisis. However, it is important to note, that through an analysis of projects' achievements, what has worked to bring about results can be articulated in three ways which are a departure from merely focusing on academic achievement. Projects can and should be judged on their ability to reach girls, build their confidence and encourage their transition, and engage communities and parents in ensuring girls are safe and keep learning.

### What does 'success' mean in education in emergencies and protracted crisis?

The GEC experience of what constitutes success when delivering girls' education in emergencies and protracted crisis reveals a deep and alternative view of the purpose of education which moves away from traditional outcomes focused on academic learning.

Constraints and entrenched social norms in these contexts compelled GEC projects to shape their own views of what success looks like, and to first and foremost focus on what matters for the girls. GEC projects found that the more fragile the context, the less traditional learning outcomes matter for girls.

Ensuring girls' safety and wellbeing while improving their life chances have been at the core of projects' theories of change and consequent adaptations. GEC projects found that when keeping girls at the centre of delivery in such fragile contexts, success has been about:

1. reaching more girls
2. building their confidence and encouraging their transition
3. engaging communities and parents in ensuring girls are safe and keep learning

Below is an indication of how the GEC have succeeded against these three criteria.

#### Reaching more girls

More out-of-school girls are now in school and are able to take the national exam and transition into the next level of education. This demonstrates that GEC projects have been able to work effectively with parents and communities and communicate the importance of girls' education. Messages around more sensitive subjects such as child marriage and early pregnancy have started to shift behaviour. This has especially been an area of success for projects working to reach highly marginalised and out-of-school girls. [Endline Evaluation results](#) from the SOMGEP project show that more girls are now able to delay decisions about getting married or getting pregnant.



© People in Need

#### Building girls' confidence and life skills

Girls have developed confidence and life skills that help them dealing with gender and social norms. Qualitative research from the AGES project suggests that girls' participation in the project activities contributed to a transformational change in their self-image and on gender norms, particularly regarding girls' education and their roles within the household. Girls described the learning process as 'life changing', fostering independence, self-confidence, economic empowerment and enhancing their social standing within the community. Girls explained how they are teaching the same skills to others – their siblings, parents, children and other girls. Positive results were associated with engaging the community education committees and religious leaders in shifting norms towards girls' roles, and in particular, a stronger focus on targeting husbands and in-laws to further reduce barriers for vulnerable married girls and young women in accessing education.

#### Engaging communities and parents in ensuring girls are safe and keep learning

Communities and parents are now engaged in ensuring their girls are safe and keep learning through community-based education and community education committees. Evidence from the SOMGEP Endline Evaluation suggests that community education committees were more engaged in communicating with parents, forming school management plans, monitoring schools, enrolling and re-enrolling girls, handling conflicts, and raising funds to cover salaries and school improvement projects when they could. The presence of a critical mass of community champions for marginalised girls' rights among Community education committees members is a key legacy of SOMGEP, particularly in the Somali context, where education is largely financed and managed by communities.

## Factors that led to the successful implementation of four areas of intervention

The factors for success outlined above are reported below through the areas of interventions that projects delivered.

### 1. Providing direct delivery of education services alongside the formal system, such as community-based education, basic education, accelerated learning and catch-up

- **Experimenting and stepping away from traditional ways of delivering education.** GEC projects have compared approaches within their own programming, between traditional delivery of education and shorter interventions, based on an understanding of the different barriers to learning that girls face in education in emergencies and protracted crisis. These include many girls' inability to attend school regularly in the short term due to increased chore burdens or longer term due to temporary migration. For example, the KEEP project and the REALISE project adapted their programming to shorter interventions geared to meeting girls when they were physically and emotionally available. Also, going beyond teaching literacy and numeracy has been critical for supporting girls through times of fragility and conflict. For example, the SOMGEP project ensured that adolescent girls had access to an integrated education provision that would also cover life skills and reproductive health.
- **Developing smart strategies and adaptability for bypassing severe constraints.** For some GEC projects, this has included allowing teachers the flexibility to adapt teaching according to when there would be critical mass of girls due to seasonal agricultural work and migration. This has meant varying class lengths, different scheduling, shifts in curriculum and having a willingness from teachers to teach remotely depending on where and how many girls were attending. In Afghanistan, the STAGES project also extended girls' time in schools to allow greater exposure to learning and thereby circumvent the Taliban's limitations on girls' educational rights.
- **Bringing education to the girls.** GEC projects have combined flexible community-based support with radio programming. For example, the REALISE project found this blended model to be more effective. In Nepal and Pakistan, teaching at the right level (TaRL) was effective when implemented through mobile solutions (hotlines) and support systems to improve flexibility and accessibility.
- **Working through existing systems where possible.** Working through existing systems has been critical to setting up the sustainability of activities implemented in education in emergencies and protracted crisis. For example, the sustainability of the non-formal education activities implemented by the SOMGEP project was based on working closely with the government and handing over the project activities to them after the project ended. It is important to note that aligning the provision of education with the national context and curriculum does not guarantee a quality delivery. The challenges brought about by fragility and conflict affect the degree to which GEC project could have effective collaborations with ministry counterparts who may be also hampered by a difficult environment where girls' education is a low priority, logistics and communication channels are difficult, and education funding is low.
- **Providing low-cost learning materials.** Providing low-costs materials, such as paper-based materials, is an effective way to support learning for girls. For example, the AGES project found that remote learning through paper-based materials associated with remedial education had a strong impact on learning outcomes.
- **Mitigating the drop out of girls and teachers.** GEC projects have tracked girls to mitigate their dropout from school. For example, within the KEEP project, community mobilisers followed up with girls' families to understand reasons for girls' absence or drop out from school. GEC projects also conducted awareness raising and back-to-school campaigns. Addressing the issue of teachers' turnover is key as schools often lack funds to respond to this issue by investing in the professional development of new teachers.

**“Going beyond teaching literacy and numeracy has been critical for supporting girls through times of fragility and conflict.”**





## 2. Working with parents and communities to gather support for girls' education

- **Building social relationships and networks around the girls.** GEC projects have worked on restoring social ties at family and community level. Working with authorities and village groups (such as women's groups, religious groups and savings' groups) has been positively associated with school enrolment. Conversely, social marginalisation has been associated with increased educational marginalisation.
- **Conducting political analyses to mobilised community champions for girls' education.** GEC projects have conducted solid political analyses at various point of implementation to understand which local social networks supporting the girls they were seeking to engage with. Projects have also looked at local incentives these groups have had for supporting girls to be in school – despite the inherent risks related to getting girls into school in some contexts. This has made for more strongly anchored interventions. In Kenya, school-based champions and guidance counsellors were critical in supporting girls in their learning and transition.
- **Shifting attitudes towards girls' education.** GEC projects have consistently involved community members, mothers and religious leaders in the design and delivery of interventions establishing powerful platforms for change and bringing communities and girls along the processes of changing attitudes towards girls' education. Projects which engaged key influencers at community level were able to overcome resistance to locally sensitive subjects such as sexual reproductive health education. This engagement has proved essential in allowing more girls to access education. In Somalia for example, engaging community leaders and parents has resulted in girls' higher attendance rates, shifts in parental attitudes regarding early marriage and girls' chore burden and girls rejecting early marriage. Ultimately this has led to girls staying in schools for longer, with stronger transition and better learning outcomes.
- **Pivoting and drawing in additional resources.** The CHANGE project was required to pivot towards an emergency response mode as a result of the outbreak of conflict in northern Ethiopia and then to respond differently to girls' needs once the conflict died down. As an education provider, they understood their role in facilitating a deep healing process to reknit societal ties back. This required specialist expertise in reconciliation, which the project itself acknowledged lacking and responded to drawing in additional resource.

- **Planning for risks of backlash.** Teachers and girls involved with the projects are often perceived to be unfairly receiving support or being favoured. This brings a risk of backlash. GEC projects have worked on developing mitigation measures to address these risks during the design and implementation phases. For example, the REALISE project did not extend support to boys in communities where they supported girls. The project revised their support packages to no longer be directed at individual girls. By supplying classroom kits, textbooks and opening access to clubs, they better alleviated feelings of exclusion and grievances from boys and families.
- **Leveraging reputation and experience of working across multiple sectors, such as education and health.** GEC projects have leveraged their existing presence and reputation to overcome lack of trust by the community members.

## 3. Working towards girls' resilience, safety, mental health and psychosocial wellbeing through activities such as Girls' Clubs. Building girls' resilience and tracking retention

- **Prioritising the provision of safe learning spaces to girls in the immediate aftermath of a crisis.** GEC projects have provided food, water and shelter for refugees and internally displaced people as well as safe learning spaces with psychosocial first aid.<sup>8</sup> Projects have also worked on addressing violence through identifying and supporting survivors, enhancing girls' wellbeing and preventing future violence whether in school or more widely in their communities. Projects' commitment to safeguarding has also stretched into the homes of girls. For example, the CHANGE project implemented homebased learning first during COVID-19 and then again in response to the outbreak of conflict in northern Ethiopia. The priority for the project became maintaining contact and maintaining girls' commitment to learning.

## 4. Responding to humanitarian needs through VSLAs, distribution of cash and food, and the provision of non-formal education

- **Overcoming the constraints around poverty.** GEC projects have worked with teachers and school staff to mitigate the increase in financial constraints to education access during times of fragility and conflict. These include the temporary reduction or cancellation of school fees for students, or for specific groups of students, in particular internally displaced people and indigenous groups.
- **Looking for ways to get girls out of their immediate context.** Resident schools and scholarship programmes have given girls in Northern Kenya better opportunities for quality learning and consistency, despite their parents' low economic income. This would not prove a silver bullet as some communities rejected the scholarship to remain within the family unit.

**“Projects which engaged key influencers at community level were able to overcome resistance to locally sensitive subjects such as sexual reproductive health education.”**

<sup>8</sup> For more detail on approaches to psychosocial first aid, see GEC's [learning brief on Social Emotional learning](#) which discusses the range of social and emotional learning interventions.

## Keeping girls safe in education in emergencies and protracted crisis

Education plays an important protective function as well as helping children to learn. When children and young people are displaced from school, they face heightened risks of sexual violence, trafficking, recruitment into armed groups and, in the case of girls, early marriage. According to INEE data, 70% of girls and women experience sexual violence in conflict.<sup>9</sup> There is evidence that disruption to education has significant impacts on children's wellbeing and learning, and that safe learning environments and earlier returns to schooling can help to limit them.<sup>10</sup> Working towards providing girls with educational opportunities in a context of fragility and conflict can be a way of ensuring girls are protected as much as possible. However, schools are not always a safe place for girls in a context of fragility and conflict.

*"It's a chicken and egg situation. Education for girls can most definitely be a protective factor, with the caveat that that education is good. Education has the potential to mitigate many of these risks in addressing gender inequality, negative social norms, protecting girls against violence. All of this is possible through education. However, given the context of desperation and violence, we know that school can actually be the place where all of these things are perpetuated. So, schools are places where violence is happening and where gender norms are being reinforced. Unfortunately, schools are part of the problem."*

KEEP project staff member

The GEC experience of implementing girls' education programming in a context of fragility and conflict suggests that ensuring safeguarding processes are in place and safeguarding standards are met is key when navigating these

complexities. Over the years, the GEC projects have built clear safeguarding systems, guidance and policies aimed at protecting girls in various contexts, including in contexts of fragility and conflict. The paper '[Protection is possible. How an innovative operating model strengthened safeguarding for the Girls' Education Challenge](#)' outlines the GEC Safeguarding Operating Model, which has helped GEC projects strengthen their safeguarding work through meeting the 14 Safeguarding Minimum Standards.

Additionally, the ability to understand the context, likely risks and be responsive and adaptive has been fundamental to an effective delivery. The GEC projects have been ranked and monitored according to the level of risk in the context and the project's ability to manage the risks. The ranking is captured by a quarterly colour-coded rating system, which indicates the level of compliance to GEC Safeguarding Minimum Standards. On this basis, the GEC projects work on developing and reviewing action plans, prioritising actions aimed at improving the safety of project staff and stakeholders, including girls.

Equally, GEC projects work to address multiple forms of violence perpetuated on girls, such as corporal punishment in schools located in an area of conflict, as well as on ensuring Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for case handling are followed in these fragile contexts, where systems may be broken. This is to ensure cases are ethically and effectively managed. Overall, meeting all the GEC safeguarding standards has been particularly challenging when working in unstable systems. However, many GEC project have now adopted conflict-sensitive approaches to ensure girls have as much protection as possible.

<sup>9</sup> [Mind the Gap: Statistics At A Glance | INEE](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Modelling the Long-Run Learning Impact of the COVID-19 Learning Shock: Actions to \(More Than\) Mitigate Loss \(riseprogramme.org\)](#)

### CASE STUDY: Reassessing the needs of the population and girls through post-conflict analysis

The **CHANGE** project was met by a different set of demands from the population and girls as a result of conflict between the nationalistic paramilitary group Tigray People's Liberation Front and the government, in early 2022. The project made assessments for where and how to restart and conducted post-conflict assessment to understand what had happened to the girls and to the teaching centres. According to interviews with community members, parents and girls, this assessment found the destruction of livelihoods following huge damage to farms, life stock and household materials looted. The high degree of dilapidation of homes and critical infrastructure led communities to request different things than the education services of the past. Girls changed their expectations of education providers and were instead requesting financial support in the place of learning-centred services.



## Value for money

The GEC experience of working in education in emergencies and protracted crisis suggests that delivering value for girls means reaching them, facilitating teaching and learning activities relevant to the context, but first and foremost enabling improved safety for girls. On the other hand, costs are higher when delivering and it is important to acknowledge how difficult it is to operate in such complex contexts. These issues are implicitly considered within the [GEC Value for Money \(VfM\) approach](#), where we consider equity and its higher cost justification. VfM was measured in the same way across all GEC projects and was based on the criteria of *effectiveness*, *relevance*, *efficiency* and *sustainability*. VfM scores for GEC projects delivering in education in emergencies and protracted crisis vary from offering 'reasonable' value for money to 'very good' value for money. The cost per beneficiary varies from £49 to £179 and annual expenditure per secondary school child varies from £76 to £244.

The KEEP project targeted highly marginalised communities (including refugees) and their approach was not tailored enough. The lack of a tailored approach impacted the overall effectiveness of the project with improvements associated with remedial classes and scholarships. Also, there was not much evidence on sustainability at endline, which is explained by the target of refugee camps. The REALISE project also did not have much evidence on sustainability at endline

because of their targeting refugee camps. For the REALISE project, bursaries were high costs and did not target the poorest (they targeted school grades instead), so this was not good value for money. The STAGES project offered good sustainability as the project planned ways of how to continue CBE centres post-closure. However, some elements of the STAGE project were also not very cost-effective, such as their provision of humanitarian aid/food aid to beneficiaries during the change in regime.

The SOMPGE and STAGES projects targeted the most marginalised and were successful at reaching these individuals through the project activities, including community-based education. These projects were therefore highly relevant and were also efficiently delivered and able to evidence good results regarding transition rates, and teacher training. Efficiency was also associated with adaptive delivery methods. The AGES project, for example, conducts a girls' survey every quarter to assess what is working well or not well and is adaptive to the results of the survey. The SOMGEP project also showed some contributions to sustainability at the community level by strengthening links with parents and schools through committees. With its positioning and policy connections the project was on a good foundation for influencing at the systems level at the time of closure.

**“The GEC experience of working in fragile and conflict-affected contexts suggests that delivering value for girls means reaching them, facilitating teaching and learning activities relevant to the context, but first and foremost enabling improved safety for girls.”**



## Recommendations

This section synthesises findings outlined in this Learning Brief and offers guidance on how practitioners can support project delivery in fragile and conflicted-states. The guidance provides practical tips and can also form the basis of a situational analysis.

**1. Consider what success looks like by putting girls at the centre.** Priorities and expectations when delivering education services in education in emergencies and protracted crisis may differ considerably from more stable contexts. Working in unpredictable contexts may require reconsidering what success looks like. Be open about defining and measuring success beyond academic learning outcomes to include non-academic learning, such as building girls' life and functional skills. Be open to define success around the opportunities that girls have to feel safe and become more employable and connected with the world around them. Design and deliver programmes according to the realistic opportunities available to girls locally to set them up for success and add value to their lives. Develop criteria for measuring success accordingly. Be sensitive to the risks of positive messaging around the importance of girls' education and their rights to it. Over-optimistic messaging might lead to risks of frustration. If more girls go through the system and end up achieving below expectations, then younger girls might question the worth of education.

**2. Consider implementing short, sharp remedial education interventions.** Consider designing short, sharp interventions, such as catch-up programmes and remedial education programmes to get girls ready to return to school.<sup>11</sup> Catch-up programmes are particularly effective in setting clear goals, significant gains and intensive focus during holidays. Girls are able to prioritise learning, supported by the community, especially for those households with economic demands. Shorter interventions are easier for girls (and especially teenage mothers) to engage with. This approach also works when conflict leads to displacement, as girls will learn skills that are important in the immediate future. Girls gain the confidence that they can learn through intensive interventions.

**3. Ensure remote learning is aligned to national education curriculum.** While remote learning solutions can prove highly effective, they need to be validated and integrated into national education curriculum, policies and systems to have lasting impact or be sustainable during a protracted crisis.<sup>12</sup> Girls also need mentorship, learning materials and access to the internet to learn, do homework and take exams. Internet is often not available to girls living in education in emergencies and protracted crisis.

**4. Work with parents and communities to gather support for girls' education.** Implementing complementary interventions, such as catch-up and remedial education programmes, whilst working closely with the communities can play a key role in how communities perceive education. Consider community backlash on girls at the design stage and when/where appropriate, include the entire student body into programming. Even when a project's focus is on a group of girls, they do not study in a social vacuum. Boys and girls in classes without support feel neglected, build up grievances and might discriminate against students who receive support. Providing some support to all children can offset these potentially negative effects. Consider the risks of working across multiple fault lines, be that across tribal divisions, between refugee and host communities, government or insurgency held areas with a possible difference in provision on either side of such fault lines. When working in such difficult contexts it is important to be agile and transparent without exacerbating or perpetuating divisions further through project interventions.

**5. Reinforce social relationships and networks around the girls.** Reinforce the components of programmes that allow social relationships and networks to develop around girls, such as VSLA groups, girls' clubs and sexual and reproductive health work. Work with communities to ensure ownership and engagement of these groups. Girls' Clubs can significantly contribute to girls' safety, mental health and psychosocial wellbeing. Psychosocial support should be mainstreamed in education and not only delivered in emergency contexts.

**6. Keep learning from situational analyses.** When armed conflict is rooted in the marginalisation of certain groups of people, education projects can inadvertently reinforce inequalities of access to education. Careful consideration of the inequalities of access to education of different groups that education programmes themselves might generate or reinforce is therefore very important to understand. Underpin any design and programming decisions with rigorous post-conflict, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) and Do-Not-Harm analyses to understand potential ramifications on the conflict and community populations. Monitor and review how conflict is changing and who is marginalised. Conduct a regular risk analysis and look into how risks have been or will be mitigated. Consider carefully how risks may be exacerbated too as a result of some project activities.

**“Priorities and expectations when delivering education services in fragile and conflict-affected contexts may differ considerably from more stable contexts.”**

<sup>11</sup> AEWG Catch-up Programmes – 10 Principles\_screen.pdf (inee.org)

<sup>12</sup> Closing the Gap: Advancing Girls' Education in Crisis and Conflict | INEE

Girls'  
Education  
Challenge



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