In Their Own Words

Students, teachers and frontline education providers on the devastating impact of aid cuts

Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies

Global Education Cluster

Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies

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About the authors

*Faced with the under-prioritisation and underfunding of education in emergencies, and given the magnitude of the challenge, members of the **Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies** come together to form a strong alliance of diverse states and organisations to step up visibility, political and operational commitment and funding for EiE. A full list of the EiE Hub's members is available on the website: www.eiehub.org.*

*The **Global Education Cluster** supports Country Clusters and Working Groups to work towards a predictable, holistic, equitable and well-coordinated response by providing direct and remote field support, developing guidance, building evidence, strengthening capacities and advocating for the continued prioritisation of education, to meet growing education needs of crisis-affected children and youth.*

*The **Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies** is an open, global network of members working together within a humanitarian and development framework to ensure that all individuals have the right to a quality, safe, relevant and equitable education.*

1. Executive Summary

> *"It feels unfair, but what can we do? I want to study, I want to be a doctor, but without the right materials, it feels like I'm losing the fight."*
>
> **Maria*, a 16-year-old refugee in Tanzania, who has been without exercise books and other supplies due to cuts to foreign funding in 2025**

The foreign aid cuts from 2025 have taken a devastating toll on millions of children and youth in need of education in emergency settings. This briefing highlights the human consequences of these cuts through the voices of those most affected on the frontlines of crises: students, teachers and local education providers.[1]

For **children and youth in emergencies**, the funding cuts have led to the closure of learning centres and schools, reduced the availability of teachers, and created a lack of critical learning supplies. For children forced to flee their homes due to violence or natural hazards, the effects of abrupt cuts are often the most acute. In the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, 14-year-old Hamida* said that her dream of becoming a doctor "has broken" since her learning centre was shut down in mid-2025: "Due to the closure of the learning centre, I have forgotten all my previous lessons. Now I am helping my parents at home."

Education in emergencies, however, also goes beyond schooling: it is essential to ensuring access to other services, including healthcare, sanitation and food, as well as to providing vital protection. In Tanzania, 16-year-old refugee Maria* says that since her school can no longer afford to provide sanitary pads, she and her classmates feel forced to remain at home instead of facing the "embarrassment" of going to class. As funding cuts have impacted livelihoods and access to food, children are also increasingly being forced out of school to help out with family finances at home.

For **teachers** – who are indispensable to children's growth and learning in crisis – the impact of disappearing aid has also been severe. Many have seen their salaries reduced or even lost their jobs. In Zambia, Zebron had taught children in a refugee camp for five years, but was forced to look for other employment after last year's cuts: "Since I couldn't provide for my household, I felt like a failure. I had to find an alternative means of income generation to sustain the needs of my dependents and revive my school. Abandoning my dream to [teach] in my community was indeed difficult and painful."

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Teachers who have been able to keep working stressed that they are facing additional demands that strain both their well-being and resources, including the need to accommodate larger classes, or responding to psychosocial needs of students without adequate training or support. Despite these challenges, teachers have shown remarkable resilience and found creative workarounds to continue educating students. While teacher-led innovations have helped children and youth in crises to keep learning, teachers stressed that these efforts are not enough to fill the longer-term gaps left by the withdrawal of international donor funding.

Local education providers – including civil society organisations and community-based schools – have also had to dramatically scale back on operations after the cuts. This has led to a reduction in both schooling and associated services, often affecting the most marginalised and at-risk children and youth. In Colombia, for example, the Education Cluster, local education actors and their international partners have had to significantly scale back education programming in crisis settings, affecting both the speed of responses and the availability of live-saving education support. This has not only affected confidence in the international humanitarian system, but also hampered the progress made towards localisation and local resilience.

The 2025 funding cuts do not represent a marginal adjustment to the humanitarian response, but rather a structural rupture with far-reaching consequences. Sustained, predictable and adequately resourced education is essential, not only to protect children today, but to prevent the deepening of humanitarian crises tomorrow. Funding for education is not only cost-effective, but has widespread, positive ripple effects for children and youth, their communities and societies at large. As the aid sector continues to grapple with the effects of a fundamentally changed funding landscape, it is critical that the right of children and youth to access inclusive, quality education remains at the heart of decisions on resourcing. A full set of recommendations are included at the end of this briefing.

Methodology

This briefing has been developed by the **Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies (EiE Hub),** the **Global Education Cluster (GEC)** and the **Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)**, with invaluable input from EiE Hub members and other education stakeholders. The case studies and personal stories featured have been gathered throughout 2025 and 2026 by EiE Hub members and other actors, with particularly notable contributions from **Jigsaw Education, NORRAG, Save the Children, Teach For All** and **World Vision International**. In addition, GEC sourced data from local education providers through a survey of national education clusters. The data collection adhered to principles of informed consent and the best interest of the child. The students, teachers and other actors quoted in this briefing represent a small snapshot of the overall impact of the funding cuts on the education sector, selected based on the availability of data through contributing institutions. The authors have aimed to ensure that the case studies and evidence presented in this report are as representative as possible, within the constraints of the limitations on data availability. On occasion, names and other identifying details have been changed or kept deliberately vague to protect identities for safeguarding reasons. The EiE Hub, GEC and INEE express their sincere gratitude to all of those who participated in this briefing, in particular to the students, teachers and other frontline education actors who agreed to share their personal and professional circumstances, and to partner organisations who contributed through data collection or expert reviews.

2. Background

The scale of the problem

Amid a proliferation of acute humanitarian crises globally, children and youth in emergencies are struggling to access quality and safe education. In 2024, an estimated 234 million school-aged children and adolescents across 60 countries were affected by crises and in urgent need of educational support – a number that has increased by at least 35 million in the previous three years. More than 85 million of these children were out of school.[2] Escalating conflicts increasingly target schools, educators and students, with the UN recording 1,265 attacks on schools in 2024, a dramatic 44% increase on the previous year.[3] At the same time, more than 242 million children worldwide saw their education disrupted by the climate crisis in 2024 alone.[4]

A compounding funding crisis

Despite the critical and cross-sectoral role of Education in Emergencies (EiE), it has long been neglected in humanitarian funding and faced a larger funding gap than other sectors. In 2024, for example, donors only provided 29.7% of the funding requested for education responses, significantly less than other sectors.[5] Similarly, for the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) – the UN fund established in 2004 to deliver fast and effective humanitarian assistance – education has consistently been the most neglected of all sectors, receiving on average only 1.6% of all funding over the past five years.[6]

This situation worsened in 2025, when sweeping funding costs announced by many traditional donors took a severe toll on global humanitarian operations as a whole, with particularly profound impacts on education. In response to the new funding reality, in May 2025, OCHA announced a new, "hyper-prioritised" humanitarian response plan, which aimed to ensure that the most at-risk populations globally could still receive support despite the fewer resources available. The effects were particularly pronounced for the education sector, which had to reduce its funding requirements by an average of 33% (in some countries, such as Chad and Sudan, by as much as 90%).[7] These cuts for education were sharper than for other sectors, including the so-called "big five" (food security, protection, WASH, health and nutrition).

In 2025, donor contributions to humanitarian funding totalled USD13.68 billion, the lowest levels since 2016, and just slightly more than 30% of what the humanitarian community had requested. For education, the situation was even bleaker, with only 26% of the total USD2.65 billion needed to meet even the revised targets met by the end of the year. This trend is likely to continue in 2026, with OCHA's global humanitarian response plan significantly reducing the total funding targets to reflect the dramatically shifting donor landscape.[8] Education actors have also warned that education in emergencies could be removed in its entirety or large parts from future response plans, including in the context of much humanitarian funding for 2026 being almost exclusively channelled through Country-Based Pooled Funds.[9] In such contexts, there is a risk that education is relegated to being considered a "second-tier" or less prioritised intervention, despite being both life-saving and life-sustaining.[10] Crucially, children, families and communities themselves consistently stress the importance of education in crisis settings.[11]

Beyond humanitarian funding, broader cuts to official development assistance (ODA) have also had a significant impact on education. UNICEF has projected that total ODA to education will drop by 24% to USD3.2 billion by 2026. In practice, this means that six million more children risk being out of school by the end of the year, 30% of them in humanitarian settings.[12] Other estimates have warned that these cuts are likely to take the harshest toll on low-income countries, where ODA today accounts for as much as 12% of education spending.[13]

3. Students

> *""There is no learning facility I can enroll in... the big concern for us at this moment is, will our dream to learn come true?"*
>
> **Yasmin*, a 17-year-old Rohingya refugee in Bangladesh, whose learning centre was closed due to funding cuts in 2025**

School closures

For children and youth in crisis situations, the funding cuts have had a profound impact, including through the closure of learning centres, less availability of teachers (see below), a lack of critical learning material, or a reduction in other services they had accessed through schools. For refugee or other displaced children, who faced significant barriers to access education even before last year's cuts, the impact has been particularly severe. In Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar District, more than half a million Rohingya refugee children, who have fled persecution, violence and discrimination in Myanmar, have been almost completely dependent on humanitarian agencies for their learning. International aid actors have warned that as many as 500,000 Rohingya children could be left without education, while several learning centres were forced to close already in 2025.[14] Although new and long-term funding sources have allowed some centres to re-open in the latter half of 2025, longer-term concerns about education in the camps remain.[15]

Yasmin*, a 17-year-old Rohingya girl, is one of many who used to attend a learning centre that was forced to close in 2025. "There is no learning facility I can enroll in... the big concern for us at this moment is, will our dream to learn come true?" she says, adding that she's desperate to continue her education.[16] **Hamida*** (pictured below), 14, also saw her education disrupted when the learning centre she attended in the camps closed in June 2025. She had attended grade seven, and said she loved school since it gave her a chance to learn and spend time with her friends. Hamida had dreamed of becoming a doctor to help her community, but is now worried about her future:

"The teacher used to teach us in a proper way. The teacher used to explain history and stories to us well, which we loved a lot. Due to the closure of the learning centre, I have forgotten all my previous lessons. Now I am helping my parents at home. I had a dream to become an MBBS doctor [doctor who has a Bachelor of Medicine and a Bachelor of Surgery] by earning the highest degree from a foreign country. Now my hope has drowned, has broken. I cannot fulfil that dream anymore. So, we need strong support from you all [the international community] to reopen our school."

Hamida lives in the camp with her parents and three siblings. Her father, **Rahamat**, is concerned about what the learning centre's closure means not just for his children, but for the Rohingya community as a whole:

"We deeply want to educate our children. Reopening the learning centres would help us a lot. When we were in Myanmar, we tried our best to support our children's education. But after the conflict began, we couldn't continue. We don't have the money for education. It's heartbreaking. It's been eight years in Bangladesh. We can't even eat enough here, though we are grateful. You're helping, but it's not enough. We can't buy what we need. We can't return to Myanmar either. We're suffering."[17]

A loss of education resources and infrastructure

Even where schools have been able to remain open, funding cuts have presented other challenges. For children and youth in emergencies, schools are not just a source of education but also facilitate access to other

“If this school closes, my children will lose everything they’ve worked so hard for”

In other crises where displaced children rely on aid actors for education, the looming threat of school closures is a source of stress and tension. **Sabah*** (pictured right) is a 14-year-old Iraqi girl who has lived in a displacement camp in Northeast Syria with her mother, siblings and extended family since 2019. They fled conflict in Iraq in 2016, and faced years of hardship – including hunger and the threat of violence – while constantly moving from place to place, before arriving in the camp.[41]

Like many displaced children, Sabah has missed out on years of schooling while fleeing violence. In the camp, she could initially attend a school and study three grades, but had to stop since the school was a long walking distance from her tent. Her mother feared for Sabah’s safety due to ongoing security concerns in the camps. In October 2024, however, Save the Children opened a school closer to her tent, which enrolled almost 400 children, including Sabah and her two siblings. Although years of displacement has set her education back, she loves attending school, and dreams of one day giving back to her community:

“If I were back home in Iraq, I would be in ninth grade by now. I have missed so many years of school, but now I’m attending school again. Every day [in the camp] looks the same, there are only tents and dust.”

“When I read stories, I feel like I’m going far away from this camp, to places I’ve never seen, a place with pretty houses, rivers, and trees. Things that don’t exist here. I want to become a lawyer and defend people’s rights. If this school closes, I will be devastated and sad. I pray that never happens. If it does, I won’t have anywhere else to go because all the other schools are either full or too far. This school is my second home.”

In early 2025, however, Save the Children was forced to temporarily close Sabah’s school for one month due to an abrupt loss of funding. While the organisation managed to use its pool of emergency funds to reopen the school, permanent closure remained a threat in 2025 until a more reliable source of funding could be secured. For Sabah’s mother **Amal**, this would be devastating:

“My children and I were so happy [when this school opened]. I enrolled my three children right away. I still remember their first day at school, they were so excited, especially my daughter Sabah. She had been waiting so long to go to school but never had the chance because there was no room for her. My children are very attached to their school. I know they are in a safe place, learning how to read and write and acquiring good values like respect and cleanliness. School gives them something to look forward, something to dream about. Schools can change everything. At home, I watch them do their homework, draw, read, pack their bags, for the next day, it makes me so happy to watch them like this.”

“If children don’t get an education, they have no future, and their lives will only get harder. If this school closes, my children will lose everything they’ve worked so hard for. Their future will slip away, just like it did for my older ones. I don’t know what I’ll do if this school closes. There’s no other school for my children. Even if we find one, I can’t allow them to go. It’s too far.”

services, including nutrition, healthcare and water, while also providing protection, in particular for girls or adolescent women. Even short-term school closures can disrupt children's learning trajectories, chip away at foundational skills, and affect concentration, behaviour and psychosocial wellbeing.

In northwestern Tanzania, where hundreds of thousands of refugees from conflicts in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) live in camps, a sharp drop in aid funding from January 2025 has led to shortages of critical supplies. **Isack**, a teacher in one of the camps, said that attendance rates, dropouts and academic performance at the school where he teaches have worsened since the cuts, as children no longer receive free notebooks while girls now go without sanitary pads.[18]

Maria*, a 16-year-old refugee girl who dreams of becoming a neurosurgeon, says she and her peers have struggled without access to these essentials. Students without notebooks are unable to take notes, making it difficult for them to keep up with their studies, and often see no option but to miss out on tests.

"We have been waiting for exercise books for so long. The teachers keep telling us to wait, but we are about to complete the second term and still don't have them. How can I study without an exercise book? When we are given tests, only a few of us can do them because many don't have notebooks. It feels unfair, but what can we do? I want to study, I want to be a doctor, but without the right materials, it feels like I'm losing the fight."

The reduction of sanitary supplies, such as pads for girls, has been another significant challenge. Maria, like many girls, sometimes chooses to stay home during her menstrual cycle: "When I'm on my period, I only have two pads left. I feel embarrassed and prefer to stay at home than face the shame at school. Many girls in my class have stopped coming to school because they don't have enough pads. They say it's better to stay at home than to be embarrassed at school."[19] Maria's experience is indicative of broader evidence showing that the availability of learning materials and sanitary products directly affect attendance, retention and gender equity in education outcomes.[20]

In Zambia, **Issac Zaji**, a teacher in the Maheba refugee settlement, said a loss of essential materials related to the funding cuts has had a direct impact on attendance: "Among the refugee community, fewer children attend classes due to lack of school materials such as books and uniforms. The school used to receive [such material] [...] in the refugee camp, which we do not receive [any more since the cuts to foreign aid]. These were mainly course-related material, and teaching aids from NGOS that operated in the refugee camp."[21]

A lack of funding also affects the availability of safe, physical spaces for learning, such as schools or other learning centres. In the village of Boura in the Central African Republic, which houses displaced populations, the national NGO NAD began constructing a three-classroom school, with support from World Vision International, in 2024, but construction had to stop amid the abrupt funding cuts in 2025. Instead, parents and other

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community members mobilised to build a temporary shelter, where children are now learning in the open air under a straw roof, next to the unfinished school building.

Following violence in September 2025, blackboards were burned and the community's already-limited resources were further depleted. With no desks, many children sit on mats or benches parents have improvised from wood found in the area. The shelter is far from a long-term solution, says **Acheck Chaib**, a community leader whose children attend the school:

"We built this temporary shelter so our children would not lose another school year. But if support stops, our efforts will not be enough, and many children will drop out again. [If] funding stops, children will remain under the straw shelter, and many will not be able to attend consistently during rain and extreme heat."[22]

Broader impact of funding cuts on education

Teachers often noted how other effects of the funding cuts had impacted children's ability to learn. At the Ariaze primary school in Rhino Camp in Uganda, primarily home to refugees from South Sudan, teacher **Lilian Odasi** says that children are increasingly falling ill, something she believes is due to hunger from a lack of access to food. At the same time, reduced family incomes mean that parents are restricting children's school attendance – or even pulling them out completely – to support their families at home.

"Most learners are absconding school because they slept hungry, and other learners are being forced to do garden work in order to get some food stuff before reporting to school," said Lilian, who also notes that parents are increasingly forced to use their limited financial resources to pay for food at home instead of contributing to their children's schooling.

In Rhino Camp, parents also share these worries. **Juma Sarafino**, a father of three students at Ariaze, says that one of his daughters sometimes has to stay at home, since a reduction in food assistance means that he can no longer afford her school fees. "After the cut of food rations, I resorted to selling my goats to cater for school fees and provisions at home. Unfortunately, I have already sold all the goats."[23]

In Cox's Bazar, several teachers echoed these concerns, noting how reduced aid had led to students struggling to concentrate in class, or even dropping out of school to support their families. "The aid cuts have increased poverty, stress and tension within the community. Families are struggling to meet basic needs, which affects children's nutrition and concentration in class. I've definitely seen a drop in attendance lately. The living conditions in the camps are just so difficult right now. Families are struggling to find enough food and shelter, so kids often stay home to help out," said **Rahmot Ullah**, a Rohingya 22-year-old teacher.[24]

Another Rohingya teacher in the same camp noted how one particularly bright student had started missing classes as they needed to support their family at home: "Their academic performance has dropped, not due to lack of ability, but because of circumstances beyond their control." Other teachers raised concerns about protection issues affecting children forced out of school, including early and forced marriage or recruitment by armed groups.[25]

4. Teachers

> *"It wasn't easy abandoning my profession, [in particular due to] my connection to the children and adult learners. Abandoning my dream to [teach] in my community was indeed difficult and painful."*
>
> **Zebron, a teacher in a refugee camp in Zambia who lost his job due to funding cuts**

Loss of teacher incentives

Teachers are often undervalued or forgotten, despite being indispensable to children's learning and development. As frontline education providers, teachers are also bearing the brunt of funding cuts alongside their students. Teachers are increasingly facing job losses, delayed or reduced salaries, fewer training opportunities, and a lack of basic teaching materials, undermining both their morale and their ability to deliver quality education. Such disruptions to teacher pay and support structures also undermine protective learning environments and increase costs for future recruitment and training.

"We no longer have reliable access to many essential teaching and learning materials. There is a shortage of textbooks, exercise books, pens and teaching aids such as charts and visual materials. Shared textbooks are common and in some cases, students have no books at all," a Rohingya teacher in Bangladesh explains. "Supplies for science, mathematics and creative subjects are extremely limited or unavailable. This lack of materials makes it harder for teachers to deliver effective lessons and for students to practice and reinforce what they learn, further affecting the quality of education in the camp."[26]

Reduced funding also makes it difficult to hire and retain qualified teachers. Remaining staff – often mostly made up of volunteers in emergency settings like refugee camps - are asked to take on larger class sizes or additional responsibilities without adequate support, leading to high turnover rates and a loss of institutional knowledge, significantly hampering the education response.

In Uganda, which is home to close to two million refugees and asylum seekers,[27] reductions in funds meant that far fewer teachers were available to support the refugee response at the start of the 2026 school year. The number of available teachers falls far short of the more than 7,500 teachers required per the government's own standards, and the teacher shortage is likely to impact some 390,000 students. In some places, this will mean significantly larger class sizes, impacting children's ability to learn, and it is estimated that up to 92 schools – 68 primary and 24 secondary – may not have any teachers at all.[28]

At Ariaze primary school in Rhino Camp (see above), the number of teachers shrunk from 19 to 12 already in 2025, as the NGO paying for their salaries faced funding shortages. **Lilian Odasi**, one of the camp's primary school teachers, says she is appealing to both national and international actors to prioritise the provision of more teachers to improve pupil-teacher ratios, and to invest in technical support for teachers to handle larger class sizes.

Due to a lack of salaries or incentives, other teachers and volunteers are forced to leave the profession altogether in search of more stable livelihoods. This not only affects the professional dignity of teachers, but also weakens the continuity and quality of education for children living through crisis, threatening one of their few sources of stability and protection.[29]

Zebron Mwenebatu, a teacher from the DRC in the Mayukwayukwa refugee camp in Zambia, which has hosted refugees from Angola and the DRC since the 1960s, says: "After working as an English teacher and a Congolese languages tutor for five years [...], I realised that the school was declining. I would go for months without getting my salary because most parents couldn't afford to pay in time anymore. Since I couldn't provide for my household–my five sisters and one brother – I felt like a failure. Basically, the school was declining because there were no more resources to run it. I had to find an alternative means of income generation to sustain the needs of my dependents and revive my school. It wasn't easy abandoning my profession, [in particular due to] my connection to the children and adult learners. Abandoning my dream to [teach] in my community was indeed difficult and painful."[30]

“Teachers, communities and national authorities continue to demonstrate strong commitment to education, even in highly constrained circumstances”

Christiane Basile (pictured above with her students), a teacher supported by Teach For Niger (a member of the Teach For All network), works at a lower public secondary school in the Zinder region. She teaches more than 600 students every day, often in classes of nearly 100 learners per grade, many of whom attend lessons in temporary learning spaces, sitting on empty bags under basic shelters. Because of a lack of secondary schools in the area, students often have to walk several kilometres to reach the school in the morning, exposing them to fatigue and protection risks. The school also supports refugees from Nigeria or internally displaced students, many of whom carry trauma from fleeing violence, which strains the already limited resources available. In 2025, the school had to close its canteen due to international funding cuts, meaning that many children attend school from 8am to 2pm without eating, as many families cannot afford to buy food. Furthermore, the drop in funding has led to a lack of teaching and learning materials, and the cancellation of extracurricular activities and targeted programmes for girls.

Despite these strains, Christiane and her colleagues have continued to innovate: “I have initiated an English Club to support students’ reading, writing and speaking skills. However, limited access to basic teaching materials has constrained the club’s potential. I have also introduced market gardening activities to help students acquire practical skills that can support their families and contribute to their communities. In addition, I hope to launch a small initiative to train students in school desk production, enabling them to improve their learning environment or generate modest income. These initiatives remain on hold due to the lack of start-up resources.”

“Teachers, communities and national authorities continue to demonstrate strong commitment to education, even in highly constrained circumstances. With complementary support from partners and donors, it is possible to strengthen ongoing efforts, protect learning continuity for displaced and host-community children, and ensure that schools remain safe, inclusive spaces.”[42]

Strain on teachers’ wellbeing

Amid funding cuts and reduced services, teachers are often the first to see the residual effects on students who face learning gaps or heightened stress. This places additional demands on teachers, who must respond not only to academic setbacks but also to the psychosocial needs of students, often without adequate resources, training or support.

Cuts to education funding have also taken a heavy toll on teachers’ own wellbeing, compounding the emotional strain of working in crisis-affected settings. As programmes shrink or close, teachers face the distress of watching safe learning spaces they helped build disappear while dealing with increased workloads and job insecurity. The result is chronic stress, anxiety and burnout.

“Last month, we had to pause everything for a whole month because of funding cuts, which really upset many of the parents,” said **Nihad***, an Education Officer with Save the Children at the displacement camp in north-eastern Syria where Sabah and her siblings go to school (see above). While the organisation was temporarily able to reopen the centre, there was in 2025 a risk that it would be permanently closed again unless more funding can be secured. “We’ve received news that we don’t have enough funds to keep the space open. If the funding doesn’t come through, the space will close, and all the children will be out of school. This possibility has left families feeling extremely disappointed and uncertain about what will happen next. It is heartbreaking to think that all the work we’ve put into this place might be wasted, especially now that the children have found a safe place where they can learn and grow.”[31]

In the Cox’s Bazar refugee camps, **Nur***, a 28-year-old Rohingya teacher, discussed how the drop in resources had taken a personal and professional toll: “The funding cuts have had a significant impact on my personal health and well-being. Increased workload, reduced resources, and ongoing uncertainty have led to higher levels of stress and emotional strain. With fewer support services available in the community, it has become more difficult to cope with the psychological impact of working in a challenging environment.”[32]

Mwenebatu, the teacher in Zambia, shared a similar sentiment about how the funding cuts are personally weighing on him: “Honestly, depression is one of the things that I have failed to heal from since the collapse of my school and whenever challenges associated with the economy arise. As a teacher, my connection and attachment to the people I teach is an important aspect of my life. But it hurts when this attachment is forced to go away due to factors beyond my control as a teacher.”[33]

Teacher innovations

Despite these challenges, teachers have shown remarkable resilience and found creative workarounds to continue educating students despite shrinking resources. These often go beyond formal pedagogical roles, and involve temporary or alternative learning opportunities or other community-based initiatives. Despite the positive impact of such initiatives, teachers consistently stressed that they are not enough to fill the longer-term gaps left by the withdrawal of international donor funding.

Mwenebatu, the teacher in Zambia, has also tried to jumpstart learning initiatives for his students in light of the school closure: “Thanks to the love I have for enhancing lives through education, I came up with an online learning programme through which I [teach] to a number of students on WhatsApp at affordable prices. Even so, teaching online is still a challenge – not everyone who is willing to learn can afford that smart phone. The majority of those in possession of smart phones cannot just afford [internet] bundles to access my WhatsApp online classes nor can they afford giving me that token of appreciation.”[34]

Across all contexts, teachers have a clear message for the international community: do not abandon education.

“The continued reduction in foreign aid is having real and immediate consequences for refugee communities, particularly for children and young people. Education, healthcare, nutrition, and protection services are not optional; they are lifesaving and foundational to stability and future self-reliance,” said **Nur***, a Rohingya teacher in Cox’s Bazar. “We urge the international community and donors to recognise that aid cuts do not simply reduce programmes; they remove opportunities, increase vulnerability, and deepen long-term crises. Sustained and predictable funding is essential to protect children, support families, and prevent irreversible harm to an already vulnerable population.”[35]

Mwenebatu also stresses the lasting impacts on student’s lives donor funding for education has had: “Based on the current consequences of the international aid cuts, I hope that you [international donors] have understood how significantly effective your donations and contributions have been in empowering changemakers and in making our world a better place.”[36]

5. Local Education Providers

> *"If we can invest in locally led responses, it's not just good for us, it's practical. Women can command effectiveness and also minimum overhead. The implementation of women-led [programs] is cost-effective, and not only that, but deeply rooted in the communities."*
>
> **Ladi Clark Musa, Executive Director at Life at Best Development Initiative (LABDI), a local education provider in Nigeria**

Shrinking operations, or closing down completely

In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the central role local actors play in education responses, with more focus on supporting their interventions and strengthening their presence in decision-making structures, although progress has been limited.[37] The aid cuts since 2025 have, however, put significant strains on the ability of local actors to operate effectively, including national or local NGOs as well as community-based schools or other learning initiatives. With funds at reduced levels, many local organisations have faced termination of partnerships and seen capacity-building initiatives end. They are often forced to operate at a fraction of their previous funding, if not to close entirely. Many are struggling to sustain core activities, despite often being the first responders in crises, and having built up trust and close connections with communities they serve.

In Venezuela, the national Education Cluster stresses that there has been a significant reduction in local education organisations' capacities, with severe consequences in particular in the country's most at-risk municipalities. In practice, this has eliminated essential responses such as school feeding programmes and nutritional support, particularly for children and adolescents. Teacher professional development has also been reduced, meaning teachers receive less support in their critical roles to impart essential skills such as reading, writing, mathematics and socio-emotional support, as well as to provide care for children and adolescents with disabilities.

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Local organisations in Colombia have also been forced to scale back drastically, according to the Colombia Education Cluster. Between 30% and 50% of Education in Emergencies programmes have been reduced or completely suspended, directly impacting the provision of safe learning spaces, delivery of school materials and e-learning kits and other essential elements of education responses in crisis-hit regions. This translates into a critical delay in humanitarian responses, especially in areas affected/hit by conflict or other violence, or extreme weather events. In response to significant staffing cuts to organisations providing education, leadership of the national education cluster has transitioned to the Ministry of Education to ensure that it can continue to coordinate emergency responses.

In Venezuela, the Education Cluster stressed that, in the longer term, fewer children and youth will be reached, reducing their access not just to education but also to associated services. This will take a particular toll on the most at-risk communities dependent on ongoing support.

Impacts on the sector's localisation efforts and eroding trust in aid

The aid cuts are not just threatening the operations of local education actors, but also have broader effects on their trust in the international aid system, while reversing progress towards localisation by reducing the capacity of local actors. As programmes are scaled back or abandoned, and international partners withdraw, local partners are left to manage community needs with diminished resources. These effects are felt ever more acutely for women-led organisations (WLOs), who traditionally neglected in funding even before last year's cuts, despite their interventions being essential for crisis-affected girls.[38]

In Mali, the Association for the Survival in the Sahel (AMSS), an Education Cluster local partner organisation, stressed that abrupt aid cuts have not only left local staff without employment, but also damaged their confidence in the international community and humanitarian organisations. One former staff member said: "I left my previous job to join this project. I believed that it was an opportunity to change my life and help young people in my community. I attended training, prepared materials and I was ready to start. And then, everything stopped. I feel betrayed. I ask myself now how I am going to feed my family. I also wonder how the young people that we also recruited are going to react. They had dreams and hopes. Now, they have nothing."

In South Sudan, a staff member at the Christian Mission for Development, a partner organisation of the Education Cluster, said: "For local actors at the forefront of humanitarian response, localisation can suddenly feel elusive as financial resources dwindle beyond viability. For local actors, the struggle is real for direct funding and meaningful inclusion in decision-making, creating distrust and worsening service gaps."

Ladi Clark Musa, Executive Director at Life at Best Development Initiative (LABDI), a Nigeria EiE Working Group partner, describes how devastating the funding cuts can be for WLOs, who have often had to advocate for their space in the sector even prior to the cuts. She stresses that WLOs must be considered an integral solution to the funding crisis:

"The importance of women's leadership in the [Humanitarian] Reset[39] and funding crisis cannot be overemphasized. Why? Because this is an era of dwindling humanitarian funding. If we can invest in locally led responses, it's not just good for us, it's practical. Women can command effectiveness and also minimum overhead. The implementation of women-led [programs] is cost-effective, and not only that, but deeply rooted in the communities. Women can do it. We are better positioned to go through this Reset that is happening now. This is our home, women cannot just move away. The funding is shrinking and many international communities are moving away, but what about the local actors who remain?"

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

> *"My message to the international community and donors is simple: please don't forget about us. We need your continued support to ensure that our children receive an education, that families can meet their basic needs and that the community has access to healthcare and safety. Your support means more than just resources—it gives us hope for a better future."*
>
> **Nur, a Rohingya teacher in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar**

As mentioned above, the 2025 funding cuts do not represent a marginal adjustment to the humanitarian response, rather a structural rupture with far-reaching consequences. The withdrawal of funding has already resulted in school closures, increased drop-out rates, teacher layoffs and the fracture or loss of multisectoral services that schools provide, pushing millions of children further from their right to safe, quality education and deepening vulnerabilities for those already most at risk, particularly girls.

Funding for education will remain precarious in 2026, and there is a real risk that education will be further deprioritised in funding decisions in humanitarian crises. All stakeholders – including donors, government, philanthropy and aid practitioners – must collaborate to ensure this does not happen, to prevent a lost generation of children and youth growing up in a world of increasingly intensifying and compounded emergencies and protracted crises.

Recommendations

To donors, including governments, philanthropy and other funding actors

- **Urgently sustain or increase funding for Education in Emergencies (EiE), including in multilateral education financing mechanisms, recognising education as a lifesaving and life-sustaining intervention.** Prioritising education funding is key to ensure that children, youth and others can access other life-saving interventions including health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), protection, and psychosocial support; is critical to long-term stability, resilience and peacebuilding; and serves as a foundation to reduce the cost of humanitarian intervention in the longer-term.
- **Protect EiE from disproportionate cuts in humanitarian response plans, including in hyper-prioritized or reduced funding scenarios, and ensure that education is not removed, wholly or partially, from future humanitarian response frameworks.** Align funding decisions with country-level prioritisation processes, including Humanitarian Needs and Response Plans (HNRPs), cluster strategies, and Local Education Group (LEG) processes, to ensure allocations reflect context-specific needs and agreed priorities.
- **Provide predictable, multi-year, and flexible funding, including for local education actors,** to enable continuity of education services, retain teachers, and prevent abrupt school closures that undermine learning, children's wellbeing, and community trust. Contribute to enhancing coordination between humanitarian and developments funding to maximise the impact of limited resources across the humanitarian-development nexus.
- **Prioritise direct, equitable funding to national and local actors, including women-led organisations**, and ensure their meaningful participation in decision-making, programme design, and coordination structures.
- **Fund the transition to a more locally-led humanitarian response by investing in national and sub-national capacity for EiE leadership**, including strengthening Ministries' ability to coordinate intersectoral responses during crises and to work effectively with humanitarian and local partners. Support ministries to embed EiE directly into national education sector plans.

- **Support the replenishments efforts of the two major, global education funds Education Cannot Wait and the Global Partnership for Education**, whose complementing mandates are critical to resourcing education efforts in crisis situations and in the longer term.
- **Fund flexible "education-on-the-move" packages to support children affected by displacement,** relocation or reintegration, including rapid learning assessments, accelerated or remedial learning pathways, provision of learning materials, and school re-enrolment support.
- **Invest in integrated education, child protection and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) within learning spaces** to mitigate heightened risks of exploitation, separation and distress during displacement and transition

To national and sub-national government actors in crisis-affected countries

- **Fully integrate EiE planning into national education strategies and sector plans**, while increasing the overall allocation towards education in national budgets.
- **Prioritise the protection, retention and wellbeing of teachers in collaboration with national and local education systems**, including through adequate incentives, training, psychosocial support, and manageable workloads, recognizing teachers as essential frontline responders in crises.

To the United Nations, civil society and other aid and development practitioners in emergency responses

- **Prioritise education alongside other sector in funding allocation in humanitarian interventions** through relevant mechanisms, including through Country-Based Pool Funds.
- **Embed education in multisectoral responses**, based on proven examples of schools and learning spaces as hubs for nutrition, WASH, health, protection, and psychosocial services, for increased reach and impact, especially for girls, children with disabilities, refugees, and displaced youth.
- **Strengthen localisation in practice by placing local and national actors at the center of EiE coordination mechanisms, programme design, and decision-making**, and provide or sustain capacity sharing and technical support initiatives to bolster leadership and fund absorption capabilities.
- **Document, elevate, and act on the priorities identified by students, teachers and local organisations themselves**, ensuring that policy and funding decisions are grounded in lived experience and the realities of emergency contexts.
- **Work with donors to coordinate funding decisions to avoid abrupt withdrawals that leave children and youth without any education services**, including by jointly identifying settings where education provision depends on a single source.

To all education stakeholders

- **Ensure that efforts to reform the EiE funding architecture focus on creating a more coherent, efficient and effective system**, where funding is fast and predictable, impact-driven, coordinated across mechanisms, anticipatory and shock-responsive, inclusive, adaptive to changing contexts, more adaptive and locally-led.[40]
- **Diversify and expand the EiE donor base**, including engagement with non-OECD Development Assistance Committee donors, philanthropy, the private sector, climate finance and innovative finance mechanisms, while safeguarding public education systems and ensuring that alternative financing complements rather than replaces public responsibility.
- **Redouble collective advocacy to secure political commitment and financing for EiE**, including in the development of 2027 Humanitarian Needs Overviews and Response Plans, and in donor budget and policy processes.
- **Protect and resource teacher retention, incentives and wellbeing support in displacement-affected areas**, ensuring that receiving schools can absorb newly enrolled learners without undermining education quality or teacher wellbeing.

Endnotes

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Cover: ©UNICEF/UNI933833/Minzayar Oo. A school headmaster stands by the windows of a damaged classroom at a school in Myittha, Mandalay Region, Myanmar, on 16 January 2026.

Page 3: ©UNICEF/UNI492002. A few months ago, Zemzem was abducted by three men, a traumatic memory for the 13-year-old girl. In some rural areas of Ethiopia, girls are regularly forced into child marriage.

Page 6: ©Save the Children. Hamida, 14, outside her shelter in a Rohingya refugee camp, Bangladesh.

Page 7: ©Save the Children. Sabah,14, reading a story at Save the Children's library in a displacement camp in Syria.

Page 8: ©UNICEF/UNI933843/Minzayar Oo. A group of students attend class on 15 January 2026 inside a temporary learning shelter at the village secondary school in Magyiyoe Village, Thazi Township, Mandalay Region, Myanmar.

Page 11: ©Christian Basile. Christiane Basile, a teacher at a lower public secondary school in Niger's Zinder region, poses with here students. There are often more than 100 students in her classes.

Page 13: ©UNICEF/UNI807643/Mohammed Nateel. On 27 May 2025, UNICEF facilitated an Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) activity for children in Gaza City using a puppet show to raise awareness about the dangers of explosive remnants of war.

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