

POLICY PAPER

INVESTING IN LEARNING:

**THE CASE FOR STRENGTHENING THE
COLLECTION AND USE OF LEARNING
ASSESSMENT DATA IN EIE CONTEXTS**



**Inter-agency
Network for Education
in Emergencies**

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Executive summary

S. Glinski, IRC, 2019

Global displacement is at a record high, with children under 18 accounting for 40 percent of the 79.5 million people forcibly displaced.¹ Children in these conflict and crisis contexts make up about 20 percent of the world's primary-school aged children, but represent about 50 percent of those not in school.² While improvements in education access have been made, one in three refugee children still have no access to primary education, and two-thirds of these drop out before they make it to secondary education.³

At the same time, **the world faces a learning crisis**, with far too many children not learning the basics in school. There are numerous examples – from Ghana and Malawi, where more than 80 percent of students at the end of grade 2 were unable to read a single familiar word such as 'the' or 'cat', to urban Pakistan where 40 percent of grade 3 students could not solve a basic two-digit subtraction such as 54 – 25.⁴

Such examples shine a spotlight on **the need for more and better data on who is learning and who is not**.

Yet children and youth in conflict and crisis contexts, who have experienced disruption to their education and may suffer physically and emotionally from the effects of conflict and crisis, often **remain invisible within national education data management systems**.

This may be because they are excluded, either deliberately or for practical reasons, from participating in national assessments. Alternatively, national assessment data may not be disaggregated along important dimensions, such as international protection and displacement status, socioeconomic status, gender, location or disability status, which would reveal inequities and exclusions.

The case for measuring learning outcomes in crisis and conflict contexts

National education systems and programmes delivered by non-formal providers can only deliver better learning outcomes for vulnerable children if evidence drives collective action at all levels (schools, communities, national and subnational governments), and is supported by targeted investments.

To do this, we need more and better evidence about the learning needs and the learning results of the most vulnerable children, and whether programs actually deliver on these needs. **The assessment of learning outcomes is thus critical to drive quality education**.

In particular, we need to **focus on the full spectrum of learning needs, recognizing the importance of social and emotional learning (SEL) and psychosocial support (PSS) alongside academic skills**.

SEL encompasses skills such as resilience, motivation, confidence, self-management, teamwork and effective communication, which are important for better work and life outcomes that benefit communities, economies and nations.

¹ UNHCR 2020a, 'Figures at a glance', UNHCR, <<https://www.unhcr.org/en-au/figures-at-a-glance.html>>.

² World Bank 2018, *The World Bank report: Learning to realize education's promise*, Washington DC, <<https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2018>>, p. 61.

³ UNHCR 2020b, *Coming together for refugee education*, UNHCR, <<https://www.unhcr.org/5f4f9a2b4>>, p. 9.

⁴ World Bank 2018, op. cit. p. 16.

While measuring SEL is a rapidly emerging field, studies show that these factors are important predictors of better education, employment and life outcomes.⁵

For crisis-affected children and youth, SEL can be life saving – helping to heal the wounds of displacement and providing an opportunity for a brighter future.

The complex task of assessment

Assessment in education in emergencies (EiE) must be underpinned by established **principles for humanitarian and development action**, including the principles of 'do no harm' and conflict sensitivity.

It must also include a **framework for ethical decision making** that ensures assessment efforts do not fuel exclusion or stigmatization, nor harm crisis-affected children and youth by applying standardized national assessments to their learning.

This necessitates applying **validated and contextualized assessment tools** for EiE that encompass academic learning, psychosocial support (PSS) and social and emotional learning (SEL) in line with SDG 4.7.

It also requires considering the full spectrum of contextual factors that impact learning for crisis-affected learners. These factors include information about learners' background and experiences of displacement and disruption in their education.

To do this work effectively, we need to boost **capabilities at all levels** (classrooms, schools, local and national governments) to collect, disaggregate, analyze, share and present data that is relevant to students, teachers, caregivers, governments, donors and humanitarian and development actors.

All stakeholders then need to act, using evidence-based findings to have deeper and richer conversations about how to target education resources, policies and programs so all children learn, and national education systems serve all learners.

The recommendations below aim to guide efforts to improve the measurement of learning outcomes for crisis-affected children and youth.



Roi Ji, 2019

⁵ World Bank 2018, op. cit., p. 21.

Recommendations



We recommend that donors:

- Prioritize the integration of assessment of learning outcomes within funding mechanisms that span the humanitarian–development nexus.
- Invest in contextualizing and validating academic and PSS/SEL assessments in line with SDG4.7, and provide funding for the administration of such assessments to ensure teachers and learners in crisis-affected settings benefit.
- Strengthen national and local capabilities to design, collect, disaggregate, analyze, present and share learning outcome data between all education stakeholders, in line with the New Way of Working.⁶
- Support national governments to strengthen the system's inclusion of children and youth in conflict and crisis contexts. This includes, for instance, supporting national governments to develop costed, long-term refugee education strategies as part of national education sector plans and/or establish proficiency benchmarks that are inclusive of crisis-affected children and youth.

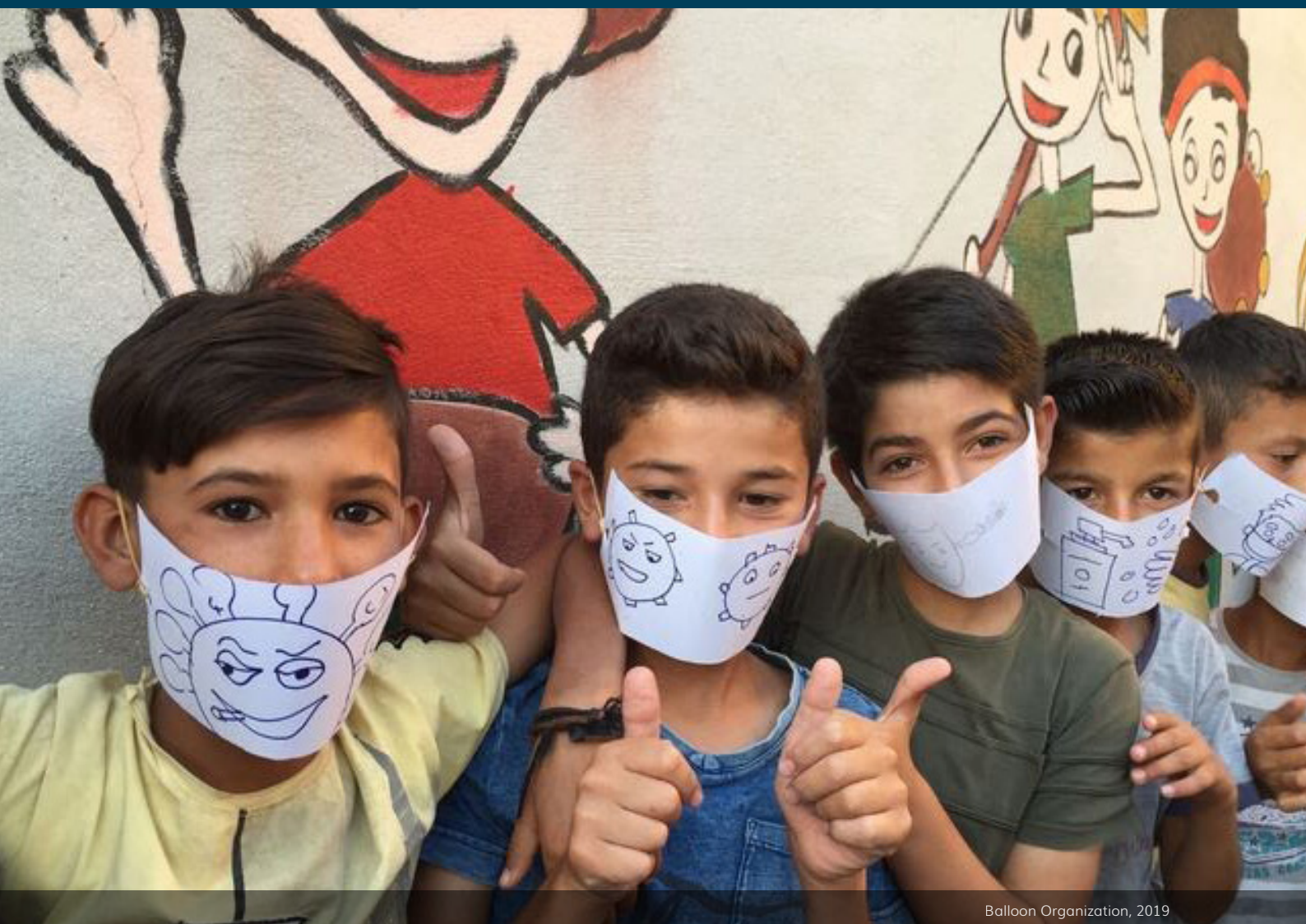
We recommend that national governments:

- Integrate crisis-affected children and youth within national education data management systems, ensuring ethical standards and protection safeguards are applied to prevent discrimination.
- Include children and youth in crisis and conflict contexts when establishing national proficiency benchmarks so that proficiency standards are inclusive of crisis-affected learners.
- Use learning assessment data to evaluate learning policies and programs within conflict and crisis contexts, and integrate evidence-based approaches within national inclusive education policy and practices.
- Leverage the support of humanitarian and development partners to assess the learning needs and outcomes of children and youth in conflict and crisis contexts.
- Establish an inclusive process for sharing data and evidence between all stakeholders, including conflict and crisis-affected teachers and students, in order to achieve greater equity within national assessment systems.

⁶ OCHA 2017, *The New Way of Working*, OCHA, <https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/NWOW%20Booklet%20low%20res.002_0.pdf>.

We recommend that humanitarian and development actors:

- Build on the good practices underway to integrate academic and PSS/SEL assessments in conflict and crisis settings.
- Harness and strengthen existing academic and PSS/SEL measurement tools, accessible through the **INEE Measurement Library**, ensuring that adaptation and validation are undertaken, and use measures of learning outcomes to assess program quality and impact.
- Continue discussions on the need to conceptualize and develop a more coherent data and evidence-generating system that collects and shares data between diverse actors for collective humanitarian and development action.
- Commit to collective efforts for evidence-based responses, grounded inter alia on the systematic assessment of learning outcomes. These efforts must respond to the real needs of children and youth in conflict and crisis settings and must drive future investment and policy and practice reforms.
- In contexts where crisis-affected children and youth do not have access to education within the national education system, or are not recognized in data management systems, advocate for inclusive education policies to improve learning outcomes for children and youth in conflict and crisis contexts.





Overview

This policy paper is for EiE sector donors, both in humanitarian and protracted crisis contexts, national governments and humanitarian and development agencies. It provides guidance on how to increase and improve the measurement of holistic learning outcomes for crisis-affected learners.

The paper builds on two extensive mapping reports commissioned by the Quality and Equitable Learning Outcomes (QELO) work stream within the Education Policy Working Group (EPWG) of the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). The mapping reports examined academic and social and emotional learning assessment guidance documents, tools and program approaches and their applicability in measuring learning outcomes in EiE contexts.

The paper is informed by an in-depth desk review of primary and secondary literature on current practices and efforts to improve the measurement of learning in EiE contexts. It is the result of extensive discussions and lively debates with the QELO work stream, donors, UNHCR and humanitarian and development agencies active in the EiE sector and the INEE.

Objectives

The paper has different objectives for different audiences.

For donors in humanitarian and protracted crisis contexts:

We aim to guide policy and resource priorities towards holistic learning assessments for children and youth in conflict and crisis contexts in order to ensure that scarce investments do actually translate into real learning outcomes and child wellbeing.

We provide key messages donors can use to advocate for and support national education systems to measure learning outcomes for crisis-affected or displaced populations. This includes internally displaced and cross-border refugees. Our recommendations support joint dialogue to promote learning outcomes assessment across the humanitarian–development nexus.

For national governments:

We propose that national governments promote more equitable, holistic and inclusive national and subnational learning assessments to support teaching and learning in hard to reach areas, including conflict and crisis contexts.

For humanitarian and development agencies:

We provide specific guidance on measuring holistic learning outcomes in conflict and crisis contexts, and we share progress and lessons from the field on the importance of assessment contextualization and data validation. We also emphasize the importance of going beyond administering learning assessments to consider how learning assessment data can be used to improve the quality of education in EiE contexts.



Part 1:

Quality learning for children and youth in conflict and crisis contexts

Mahamadou Abdourhamane, NRC, 2019

A child is more than simply:

- a tick on the attendance roll
- a student number
- an exam mark.

Children are social, emotional, intellectual and spiritual beings. They need all these skills and attributes to create the best possible future.

Children have the potential to build a more peaceful, equitable and just world. Adults are responsible for supporting them to achieve that potential.

We know quality and equitable learning is important for all children. We also know that it is critical to support crisis-affected learners because they're much less likely to receive a quality education.

When children and young people are displaced, the case for education is amplified. Continuing to provide educational services to refugee children can help mitigate the impacts of displacement, providing a protective platform to help children and their communities secure better futures.⁷

When we support children and youth mentally, emotionally and socially, their wellbeing is improved, and they become more resilient to the challenges they may face in life.

Education programs that incorporate social and emotional learning (SEL) can play a crucial role in developing protective factors in children and youth which mitigate the negative developmental and behavioral effects of exposure to conflict. SEL strengthens the healing and coping mechanisms needed to deal with adversity, violence and suffering, essential for healthy development.⁸

⁷ Save the Children 2018, *Time to act: providing refugee children the education they were promised*, Save the Children, London, p. 19, <<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/time-act-providing-refugee-children-education-they-were-promised>>.

⁸ Wessells M and Edgerton A 2008, 'Concepts and practices to support war-affected children', *The Journal of Developmental Processes*, 3(2): 2–12.

Quality education encompasses academic as well as social and emotional learning, and it has benefits for children, families, communities and countries.

Quality education is one of the most important investments a country can make in individuals, communities and the economy – making it a social and economic imperative.⁹

Psychosocial wellbeing is a significant precursor to learning and is essential for academic achievement; it thus has important bearing on the future prospects of both individuals and societies.¹⁰

The ability of a system to provide a quality education for children and youth in conflict and crisis contexts depends on the quality of those who impart it.

Teachers are the most important components of any educational system. Their ability to identify learning gaps in the classroom is the first step toward resolving them.

As adults, we are responsible for children's wellbeing. We are accountable to children, their families and communities, by the commitments we have made. These include:

- United Nations Declaration of Human Rights
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Sustainable Development Goals (particularly 4.7)
- Global Compact on Refugees.

Problem statement

The problem we are seeking to address is this:

How can we increase momentum on measuring learning in crisis and conflict contexts to drive EiE sector donors, both in humanitarian and protracted crisis contexts, national governments and humanitarian and development agencies toward the collective goal of improving holistic learning outcomes for children and youth?

It is a complex problem and finding a solution has never been more urgent.

Global displacement is at a record high. The world already faced a learning crisis, and now the COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating pre-existing disparities in countries around the world and threatening to undermine global efforts to achieve the SDGs.

⁹ Save the Children, UNHCR and Pearson 2017, *Promising practices in refugee education: synthesis report*, Save the Children, London, p. 4, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/12378/pdf/promising_practices_in_refugee_education_synthesis_report_final_web.pdf>.

¹⁰ INEE 2018, *Psychosocial support: facilitating psychosocial wellbeing and social and emotional learning*, INEE, New York, p. 9, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/inee-assets/page-images/INEE_Guidance_Note_on_Psychosocial_Support_ENG.pdf>.

Education disruption is a reality on all continents, with more than 1.6 billion learners affected and 23.8 million children and youth at risk of dropping out due to the pandemic's economic impact alone.¹¹ The education loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic is estimated to cost trillions¹², with learning losses likely to extend beyond this generation.

As we rush to mobilize education support for these children and youth in crisis and conflict contexts, it is vital that we focus on measuring learning. This can only lead to improved learning outcomes for children and youth in conflict and crisis contexts.

There are a number of dimensions to this problem:

- **Learning assessments do not include SEL and PSS skills and competencies**

In the rare instances where learning assessments for children and youth in these contexts are carried out, they typically focus on academic knowledge, and pay much less attention to child wellbeing or social and emotional skills and competencies.

This is despite research showing that:

Children with social and emotional skills do better in school, have improved relationships with peers and adults, are better adjusted emotionally, and have improved mental health.¹³

SEL and PSS interventions are increasingly recognized as integral to education and the teaching and learning of SDG 4.7 themes, including human rights, gender equity, global citizenship and peace. Yet, they are still inadequately anchored in education programs in EiE contexts, and providers of EiE services struggle to assess their impact. Accordingly, PSS and SEL interventions are seldom captured in regional, national or subnational assessment systems.

- **Children and youth in conflict and crisis contexts are invisible in national government assessment systems**

We also know that national government assessment systems seldom include children and youth from crisis and conflict contexts.¹⁴ This is due either to deliberate exclusion policies or the practical difficulties of reaching children and youth in crisis and conflict areas. It means that there is often no information on who is learning and who is not in crisis and conflict contexts, which creates a challenge for creating change.

Even when crisis-affected children and youth are included in national assessment systems, they frequently remain invisible due to a lack of data disaggregation, making it impossible to know if the national education system is meeting their learning needs.

- **The ineffective use of learning assessment data makes it harder for learning improvements to be made**

When learning assessments are carried out in conflict and crisis contexts, it is rare that results are shared back to students and teachers. Accountability to children and youth becomes lost in the administration of reporting to donors and measuring program performance.

¹¹ UNICEF 2020, *Education during COVID-19 and beyond*, UNICEF, New York.

¹² The World Bank 2020, *Simulating the potential impacts of the COVID-19 school closures on schooling and learning outcomes: a set of global estimates*, The World Bank, <<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/publication/simulating-potential-impacts-of-covid-19-school-closures-learning-outcomes-a-set-of-global-estimates>>.

¹³ The World Bank and International Rescue Committee 2013, *Learning and resilience: the crucial role of social and emotional well-being in contexts of adversity*, The World Bank, p. 1. <<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/849991468337162828/Learning-and-resilience-the-crucial-role-of-social-and-emotional-well-being-in-contexts-of-adversity/>>.

¹⁴ INEE 2020, *Academic learning measurement and assessment tools in education in emergencies*, INEE, New York.

If teachers do get access to this data, they often have trouble understanding it, because there is no guidance on how to interpret the results and make adjustments to instructional practices.

Learning measures should be used not just for tracking progress, but also for the significant tasks of reforming policy and practice to improve learning.¹⁵

- **The assessment system lacks coherence from the classroom to the national and international level, and rarely extends to conflict and crisis contexts**

There are many different assessments relevant to learning, from formative assessments that teachers administer, to national assessments and examinations administered by governments, and regional and international assessments.

Each highlights where support is needed, but they serve different purposes and different actors.

If assessment systems are nascent, priority should be given to fostering classroom assessment. Once that piece is in place, countries can develop relatively quick, sample-based, low-cost national assessments. When classroom and national assessments are established, much can be gained from participating in regional or global assessments that enable performance benchmarking.¹⁶

In conflict and crisis contexts, where humanitarian or civil society organizations provide education, integration with the national assessment system is often challenging due to practical and political constraints.

Children and youth in these contexts thus do not benefit from the actions taken to address learning gaps identified for the nation's school-age population. The lack of data sharing and alignment of data systems between various EiE actors compounds the issue and often leads to a duplication of effort.

Ingrid Prestetun, NRC, 2017



Ingrid Prestetun, NRC, 2017

¹⁵ OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) 2016, *Making development co-operation more effective: 2016 progress report*. OECD, Paris.

¹⁶ The World Bank 2018, op. cit.



Part 2:

Issues to frame policy dialogue

Enayatullah Azad, NRC, 2019

Why learning assessments are important

Key messages

- Learning assessments highlight where education systems and programs are failing to fulfill the education rights of children and youth in conflict and crisis contexts.
- They provide the evidence we need to improve learning outcomes and the wellbeing and resilience of children and youth.
- They empower national governments, development partners and humanitarian and development actors to work together to improve education programs.

When learning assessments are not used to inform the mobilization phase of EiE responses, the opportunity for teachers to address learning gaps is lost.

During the immediate humanitarian response phase, the focus is on the protective elements of education and providing children and youth with safe learning environments. In this phase, assessments typically cover the learning environment and teaching and learning resource needs. Priorities then tend to shift to recruiting and rapidly deploying teachers, who are frequently under-trained and inexperienced for the task. Questions about which curriculum and assessment system should be used and what opportunities exist for accreditation from home or host country governments are difficult to answer and are often politically sensitive.

However, there is a lot at stake. The protracted nature of refugee crises means children frequently spend their entire education cycle displaced.¹⁷ Without learning assessment data, it is impossible to know if interventions that reach the classroom are relevant.

In addition, there is no evidence from which to negotiate accreditation of learning so that children and youth have a recognised education that can support their future education and employment aspirations.

¹⁷ UNHCR 2020, 'Protracted refugee situations explained', <<https://www.unrefugees.org/news/protracted-refugee-situations-explained/>>.

Often, the content, format, language and administration of standardized assessments are obstacles to the inclusion of children and youth in conflict and crisis settings.

Experiences such as lengthy periods of education disruption and the hardship caused by displacement, neglect and loss have a huge impact on children's ability to respond positively to an assessment.

This means results are often not a true reflection of their learning proficiency. This is particularly the case for refugee children and youth, whose prior education experiences are not aligned with the national education system of the host country. It points to the need to prepare children and youth for assessment, so they become familiar with the format and administration of standardized assessments.

If test content or administration favours some test takers over others, or if their learning experiences are substantially different in relation to what is being tested, it can be difficult if not impossible to interpret test scores or to make equitable decisions on that basis.¹⁸

Importantly, children and youth who have faced conflict and crisis may bear a cognitive load far greater than that of their peers.

This means they may be disadvantaged in a standardized test that has been validated with a population not facing the same difficulties. Traditional test protocols also may not be appropriate, as they could cause additional frustration and stress for students and parents.¹⁹

Children and youth in crisis and conflict settings often remain invisible in learning assessment data at both global and national levels.

There are several reasons for this:

- **In some cases, refugee children and youth are denied access to national education systems**, and hence attend schools supported by humanitarian actors or civil society organizations either inside refugee camps or within host communities. In some instances, neither the host country nor the country of origin allows their national curriculum to be used with refugee children.

In such contexts, learning assessments are typically program based and not aligned with home or host national government education systems. This limits opportunities for certification and pathways to further education and employment.

- **In other cases, such as urban refugee contexts, refugee children and youth attend government schools, but national education data is not disaggregated**, because the measurement tools do not collect information about refugee or displacement status.

While this may be a positive step in terms of reducing stigma, it makes it impossible to track progress over time and makes it difficult for policy-makers to address these children's specific needs.²¹

This means that refugee children and youth are not identifiable in education data, including their learning achievements.

In crisis contexts, existing assessment systems are not set up to capture populations on the move. Moreover, without a consistent set of goals for what children should know and be able to do, it is difficult to build a functional learning assessment system. This results in a fragmented system with non-comparable data and few or no baseline reference points.²²

¹⁸ UNESCO 2020 *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and Education: All means All*. UNESCO, Paris, p. 131.

¹⁹ INEE 2020, op. cit.

²⁰ McPherson P and Paul R 2019, 'Rohingya "lost generation" struggle to study in Bangladesh camps', Reuters, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-rohingya-education/rohingya-lost-generation-struggle-to-study-in-bangladesh-camps-idUSKCN1QZ0EA>>.

²¹ INEE 2020, op. cit., p. 9.

²² Ibid., p. 69.

When assessments do reach children in conflict and crisis contexts, the results are rarely shared back to teacher and students. The data that national assessments generate is typically used by national governments to report to their national constituency as well as to donors and the international community. The demand for reporting drives accountability upwards, rather than towards communities affected by crisis and conflict. This limits the utility of learning assessments as an instrument to improve teaching and learning in EiE contexts.

Yet, we know that appropriately designed learning assessments are an essential ingredient to steer teachers and students towards targeted interventions.²³

As a diagnostic tool, learning assessment data can transform teaching and learning. Teachers and school leaders can use learning outcomes data to adjust pedagogy, target instruction for the different learning levels within the classroom, identify teacher professional development needs and inform school improvement plans, among other things.

Sharing learning assessment data strengthens the accountability of key stakeholders (national and local governments and schools) to children, parents and communities.

In contexts where EiE is provided outside the national education system, learning assessment data may be used to inform evidence-based approaches. However, measurement tools are often aligned with organizational frameworks and donor priorities rather than national standards or benchmarks.

Learning assessments should provide evidence of prior learning achievement, but they are rarely able to be used by children and youth in conflict and crisis contexts for future pathways to further education or employment. This is due to the incompatibility of curriculum used in EiE settings with national accreditation systems, or the failure to design the assessment for an accreditation or certification purpose.²⁴

There is a growing commitment to address these issues and validate learning programs and assessments undertaken by humanitarian and development actors in conflict and crisis contexts.

The Djibouti Declaration on Regional Refugee Education, signed by the eight member states (Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda) of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in the Eastern and Horn of Africa in 2017 is a case in point. The subsequent Action Plan that was developed and endorsed by these countries lays out specific points about accreditation and certification of programs, both for learners and teachers.²⁵

The Global Compact on Refugees places renewed rigor on data and evidence and is gradually shifting practices.

Reliable, comparable, and timely data is critical for evidence-based measures to: improve socio-economic conditions for refugees and host communities; assess and address the impact of large refugee populations on host countries in emergency and protracted situations; and identify and plan appropriate solutions.²⁶

This has led to global efforts to strengthen the ethical collection of refugee and IDP statistics,²⁷ recognizing that there can be protection risks in such disaggregation in terms of stigmatization of refugee and displaced children and youth by schools, host communities and governments.

²³ GEM 2020, op. cit., p. 148.

²⁴ INEE 2020, op. cit.

²⁵ UNHCR 2020, Implementing the Djibouti Declaration: Education for refugees, returnees & host communities, UNHCR, New York. <<https://globalcompactrefugees.org/article/implementing-djibouti-declaration-education-refugees-returnees-host-communities>>. <<https://www.unhcr.org/en-au/events/conferences/5b3295167/official-version-final-draft-global-compact-refugees.html>>.

²⁶ UNHCR 2018, Global Compact for Refugees, UNHCR, New York, p. 9.

²⁷ Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics 2018, *International recommendations on refugee statistics*, European Union and UN, Luxembourg. <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/Standards-and-Methods/files/Principles_and_Recommendations/International-Migration/2018_1746_EN_08-E.pdf>.

Protection risks are compounded in contexts where refugee children and youth unofficially attend government schools, where their identification could lead to exclusion from school and/or detection by authorities.

Despite these challenges, there is growing consensus among key actors, including UNESCO-UIS, UNHCR, Education Equity Research Initiative and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), on how to collect statistics on refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).²⁸

In contexts where national governments are unable or unwilling to provide refugee and IDP children with access to the national education system, initiatives such as UNESCO's Qualifications Passport (UQP) aim to restore dignity, recover livelihoods for refugees and implement a comprehensive lasting refugee response.²⁹

As many refugees lack formal recognition of their prior learning and qualifications, the UQP will provide information on the education, work experience and language proficiency acquired by the holder in support of their access to further education and employment.³⁰

Further Actions

- Include learning assessments from the onset so that education services meet learner needs as quickly as possible from the beginning of a crisis.
- Work with governments and assessment administrators to ensure that learning assessments are accessible in terms of content, format, language and administration to children and youth in conflict and crisis contexts and that children and youth are supported to prepare for national learning assessments and examinations.
- Make stronger connections between classroom assessments, national assessments and examinations and regional assessments to transform teaching and learning in conflict and crisis contexts. Start with strengthening classroom assessments and upskilling teachers.
- Make learning outcomes the ultimate objective of education in emergencies and protracted crises, and invest in assessments that children and youth in conflict and crisis contexts can use for future education and employment or mobility.
- Work with governments and donors to support disaggregation efforts that include displacement status, ensuring protection safeguards are in place to protect the rights of children and youth in conflict and crisis settings.

²⁸ INEE 2020, op. cit.

²⁹ UNESCO 2019, 'UNESCO qualifications passport for refugees and vulnerable migrants', <<https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-emergencies/qualifications-passport>>.

³⁰ UNHCR 2018, *Briefing note: pre-pilot UNESCO qualification passport for refugees and migrants in Zambia*, UNHCR, New York, <<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/73305>>.

How to measure quality learning in conflict and crisis contexts

Key messages

- Quality learning assessments measure academic, social and emotional learning, as well as child wellbeing, and they help us meet the unique learning needs of children and youth in conflict and crisis contexts.
- The evidence generated from learning assessments needs to inform education policies and programs in conflict and crisis so that access to education translates into actual learning outcomes.

There is no perfect tool to measure learning outcomes in conflict and crisis contexts. Despite an abundance of academic and PSS/SEL assessment tools used within the development and humanitarian sectors, the vast majority have not been validated for crisis and conflict settings.

And for good reason – validation is a resource-intensive and complex task, and crisis and conflict settings only exacerbate these issues.

Measuring learning in EiE contexts is challenging, as transplanting assessments used in other contexts can result in assessments that are too difficult, not contextually valid, or do not capture contextual factors.³¹

There are two main barriers to the effective use of learning assessments in conflict and crisis settings:

- the complexity of **testing reliability** (the precision of the measurement) and **validity** (ensuring assessments measure what they intend to measure)
- the difficulty of **contextualizing and adapting tools** to local conditions and cultural norms.

*Fairness refers to the consideration of learners' needs and characteristics, and any reasonable adjustments that need to be applied to take account of them. ... Ideally an assessment should not discriminate between learners except on grounds of the ability being assessed.*³²

This requires significant local knowledge, technical expertise, resources and time, which are often in short supply. This is particularly the case during the onset of an emergency where education is rarely prioritized in emergency sector funding.

The demand for validated tools for EiE contexts and for technical guidance for their application is on the rise. More donors and development partners are committed to addressing the learning crisis, including in EiE contexts, and are helping to drive efforts.

For example, USAID has developed detailed toolkits to support adaptation of early grade reading assessment (EGRA) and early grade mathematics assessment (EGMA) tools. EGRA has now been used in more than 70 countries and 120 languages.³³

³¹ INEE 2020, op cit.

³² International Bureau of Education 2020, 'Fairness (in assessment)', UNESCO, <<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/glossary-curriculum-terminology/f/fairness-assessment>>.

³³ USAID 2016, *Overview of the EGRA and EGMA*, <http://gaml.uis.unesco.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/08/4_USAID_20160511.pdf>

In addition, Save the Children's Holistic Assessment of Learning and Development (HALDO) and the International Development Early Learning Assessment (IDELA), the UNRWA Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) and EDC's Out-of-School-Youth Literacy Assessment (OLA) have all been validated in an EiE context.³⁴ These tools are captured in the **INEE Measurement Library**, which is a flexible platform to host additional validated tools.

The *Global Proficiency Framework* defines proficiency standards for reading and mathematics,³⁵ and offers guidance to governments on country-specific benchmarks. Although it is not a measurement tool, it could facilitate greater alignment of learning measures in conflict and crisis contexts.

While this does not guarantee that the learning outcomes of children and youth in conflict and crisis contexts will be reported, if the process for establishing national equivalency with global proficiency benchmarks is inclusive of crisis-affected children and teachers, then it will create an opportunity for equitable representation in national assessments.

The case studies below highlight efforts underway:

- *In Syria, the War Stressor Survey measured exposure to conflict and emotional repercussions of trauma, and the Snapshot of School Management and Effectiveness was administered alongside EGRA and EGMA to provide a full picture of primary education in opposition-led areas in Syria.*
- *In Greece, the Oinofyta Community School was founded in a refugee camp in Central Greece serving Afghan refugee children as a project of the NGO ArmandoAid. Classroom assessments monitored learning and each child's behavior and general performance. The information on learning was utilized to improve the operation of the school and teaching, and it was shared with donors and other development partners to highlight progress and challenges.³⁶*

These efforts pave the way for strengthening the quality of learning assessments in EiE contexts, and we can play our part.

Further Actions

- Invest in strengthening learning assessment design, as well as administration and analysis.³⁷
- Invest in strengthening teachers' and education managers' classroom assessment capacity in EiE contexts.
- Build on existing academic and PSS/SEL assessments, strengthening reliability (the precision of the measurement), validity (ensuring assessments measure what they intend to measure) and importantly, ensuring that the assessment tool is contextualized and appropriate for the learning experiences of children and youth.
- Understand the contextual factors that influence how children and youth in conflict and crisis settings are learning by complementing learning assessment data with information and analysis of student background, teachers and the learning environment.

³⁴ INEE 2020, op. cit.

³⁵ UNESCO Institute of Statistics, USAID, DFID, ACER, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation 2019, *Global proficiency framework for reading and mathematics: grades 2 to 6*, UNESCO New York, <<http://gaml.uis.unesco.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/05/Global-Proficiency-Framework-Oct2019.pdf>>.

³⁶ INEE 2020, op. cit.

³⁷ Global Partnership for Education 2019, *Strengthening learning assessment systems: a Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) discussion paper*, Global Partnership for Education, Washington DC.

Working together

Key messages

- The New Way of Working³⁸ calls on donors, national governments, humanitarian and development actors to conceptualize a new way to coordinate, fund and deliver on humanitarian obligations and the SDGs.
- When education stakeholders have a shared metric and language around learning, they can engage in more dynamic partnerships to achieve shared outcomes.
- Closing the gap in humanitarian–development action and investment in learning assessments, will improve learning outcomes for children and youth in conflict and crisis contexts.

Efforts to strengthen the humanitarian and development nexus call on the global community to remove blockages that exist between humanitarian and development action. Operationalising the nexus requires **strengthening coherence** between humanitarian and development actors to achieve shared outcomes and achieve peace.

Humanitarian–development coherence, as defined in **the New Way of Working³⁹ involves working over multiple years towards collective outcomes, based on the comparative advantage of a diverse range of stakeholders**. It emphasises the importance of 'localization' and is underpinned by the concept of resilience – reinforcing and strengthening local and national capabilities so that education systems, children, youth and communities are prepared for, and can withstand and quickly recover from, crisis.⁴⁰

Assessments can play a critical role in bridging humanitarian and development approaches and maintaining a focus on learning (rather than access only) throughout the response–recovery continuum.

Joint assessment and analysis of learning needs, which includes a wide range of actors, can allow for a common understanding of the specific context from which to develop shared tools and outcomes. As was the case with tools such as IDELA and EGRA, data can catalyze practitioners, researchers and policy makers to move towards the collective goal of improving education for all.

A measurement tool can catalyze practitioners, researchers and policy-makers to become a global network working towards the collective goal of improving education – allows for diverse partners to have a shared metric and language.⁴¹

NGOs have the capacity to develop, test and scale up evidence-based alternative education programs. These include non-formal education, bridging programs and language preparation programs that meet the immediate learning needs of marginalized groups, including crisis-affected children and youth, and that prepare and support them to enter the national education system.

This is best done in close collaboration with national and local government authorities so that learning assessments align with national competency standards that support accreditation pathways.

³⁸ OCHA 2017, op. cit.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴¹ D'Sa N, Noble F and Pisani L 2019, *Collaborative change: Leveraging international IDELA partnerships to benefit young children*, Save the Children, United Kingdom.

Learning assessments validated for EiE contexts often capture learning outcomes that are not typically considered in national assessments, such as SEL and child wellbeing. They can be used to promote dialogue about the areas of investment that are important for children and youth.

This highlights the importance of using data to bring actors together, aligning and sharing data widely, and working collectively to strengthen education policy and practice. This requires improving coordination and collaboration to deliver better results, empowering local civil society groups and communities and engaging with national and subnational structures where appropriate.

However, systemic transformation takes time – particularly in conflict and crisis contexts, where development is non-linear and slow. This calls for a shift away from short-term output-orientated programming to outcome-based programming that leverages the comparative advantage of a diverse range of stakeholders, strengthening partnerships and local capabilities to achieve shared outcomes.

At a global level, this calls for more open-source sharing of validated assessment tools, more collaboration to develop guidance on contextualization and validation of tools for specific contexts, and more sharing of promising approaches and practice. All of this requires multi-year funding and donor policies that prioritize coordination and evidence-based investments to ensure no child is left behind.

Further Actions

- Enhance the collective capacity of all stakeholders to collect, share, understand and use assessment data, by leveraging the comparative strengths of the humanitarian sector in addressing PSS/SEL and development actors' technical capacity in measuring learning outcomes.
- Align learning assessment frameworks and standards between humanitarian and development actions, building on and strengthening existing assessment tools together with national governments to set collective outcomes.
- Harness the work of INEE in the field of PSS/SEL to activate, endorse and support a multi-stakeholder initiative. This should include assessing existing approaches to PSS/SEL in refugee contexts, developing reliable approaches, providing technical assistance to implementers, supporting ministries of education in host countries to develop and adopt PSS/SEL policies, training teachers, conducting research on the benefits of PSS/SEL assessment and disseminating good practice.



Hawa Sabriye, 2016

Building better data management systems

Key messages

- Harnessing and investing in national and local capabilities to undertake quality learning assessments will generate the data we need to improve teaching and learning policy and practice.
- Accurately and effectively measuring and reporting on our progress will help us achieve the SDGs and ensure no child is left behind.

A quality data management system delivers accurate and timely data that can strengthen:

- accountability to children, youth, communities and donors
- monitoring and evaluation that provides an understanding of what does and doesn't work, for whom and where (e.g. emergency or protracted crisis settings)
- education planning and reform strategies that target investment in evidence-based approaches that improve learning outcomes
- long-term recovery efforts that benefit children and youth and build resilience in communities and nations
- global and national efforts to achieve the inclusion of crisis-affected children and youth within education and sustainable economic development goals
- national and global efforts to achieve our humanitarian objectives and the SDGs.

Strengthening organizational, national and local capabilities to design, collect, disaggregate, analyze, present and share data between education stakeholders takes significant effort and resources. This is the comparative advantage of development actors, who are embedded in local systems and have more time, resources and technical capacity to strengthen data management.

However, we need an evidence 'ecosystem' for EiE data that includes developing capacity among all stakeholders to identify what data is needed, when and for what purpose – and then to actually use it.

Addressing the NWOW [New Way of Working] for EiE data is an important issue, given the fact that the humanitarian–development divide is reflected and reproduced by data systems that differ in terms of data collection purposes, processes, dissemination structures, relevant indicators, and time frames.⁴²

⁴² NORRAG 2019, NSI 02: Data collection and evidence building to support education in emergencies, NORRAG, Geneva, <<https://resources.norrag.org/resource/view/525/276>>.

It is vital we continue to build on current efforts to improve the accessibility, reliability, accuracy and consistency of data collection and dissemination. This work must account for the varied data needs of different actors, taking into account context, existing infrastructure and the experience and capacity of users.

This requires a clear understanding of who will use the data, so that data management systems are designed with and tailored for teachers, school leaders, humanitarian and development agencies, local and national education authorities and donors to inform improvements in policy and practice.

Recent efforts include:

- Strengthening data and information systems is a priority for **Education Cannot Wait (ECW)**.
 - ECW has supported Ethiopia to include data on refugee children, youth and schools within its EMIS since the 2017–18. In Syria, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Central African Republic, ECW emphasizes reporting on learning outcomes.⁴³
- In 2018, 94 percent of **Global Partnerships for Education (GPE)** grants supported EMIS or learning assessment systems in order to strengthen partner developing country capabilities to gather and communicate sufficient data on key education indicators to UIS.⁴⁴
 - In Kenya, GPE is investing in piloting an online national EMIS to address disparities in children's access to and completion of school.⁴⁵
- **UNESCO's** efforts to improve education data and use through the "Strengthening EMIS and data for increased resilience to crisis" initiative in partnership with **ECW, Norwegian Capacity (NORCAP)** and **Swedish International Development Cooperation (SIDA)**.⁴⁶
- A joint pledge between **ECW, GPE and the World Bank** that commits to working together to increase and improve the financial support and technical assistance they provide to countries hosting large refugee populations to meet their educational needs through their national education systems is also promising.⁴⁷

Further Actions

- Invest in strengthening national and local capabilities to collect, disaggregate, analyze, present, share and use data.
- Invest in aligning EiE data with national data management systems and where appropriate strengthen national data management systems to address disparities in access and learning, targeting the ethical inclusion of children and youth in conflict and crisis contexts within host government EMIS.

⁴³ Education Cannot Wait 2019, *Annual report 2018*, ECW, New York, <https://www.educationcannotwait.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/F_EWR1004_Annual-Report_web.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Global Partnership for Education 2020, 'Data systems', <<https://www.globalpartnership.org/what-we-do/data-systems>>.

⁴⁵ Global Partnership for Education 2019, Factsheet: Harnessing the power of data to improve education systems, GPE, New York.

⁴⁶ UNESCO 2019, *UNESCO pledges its renewed support for refugees' education at Global Refugee Forum*, UNESCO, <<https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-pledges-its-renewed-support-refugees-education-global-refugee-forum>>.

⁴⁷ World Bank, Global Partnership for Education and Education Cannot Wait 2019, *Working together to close the education gap in refugee hosting states: a joint pledge*, World Bank. <<http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/280671576180907611/GRF-Joint-Finance-Pledge-Public-Statement.pdf>>.

The cost of inaction

Key messages

- The benefits of quality learning assessments outstrip the costs of conducting them.
- Investing in quality learning assessments supports evidence-based efforts to improve learning outcomes.
- Investing in quality learning assessments strengthens our accountability to children, parents and communities.

Assessments are expensive, but not assessing learning outcomes comes at an enormous cost.

Without the ability to systematically assess learning outcomes:

- teachers cannot adjust pedagogy and target instruction for different learners
- school leaders cannot identify teacher professional development needs or target school improvement plans
- governments and education stakeholders cannot monitor the impact of different policies and programs on student learning outcomes, or achieve inclusive education goals that underpin sustainable economic development
- governments cannot report on their contribution to the SDGs
- governments cannot fairly compare themselves to another country, nor evaluate their performance at an international level
- accountability to children, youth and communities is weakened
- we cannot monitor and report progress on our shared commitments to Education 2030 and the SDGs.

In summary, **without assessment we cannot mitigate the learning crisis.**

With so much at stake, assessments are one of the most cost-effective ways to support education reforms and address gaps in efficiency and equity in the system.

The cost of national assessments typically represents less than 0.3 percent of a country's education budget, yet provide a wealth of information from which to determine whether education investment is achieving improvements in learning.⁴⁸

Monitoring is critical to identify where the needs are and what works. Determining the best use for money depends on cost but also on impact.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ UNESCO UIS 2018, *Making the case for a learning assessment: Quick guide no. 2*, UIS, Montreal.

⁴⁹ UNESCO UIS 2016, *The cost of not assessing learning outcomes*, UNESCO, Montreal, <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/the-cost-of-not-assessing-learning-outcomes-2016-en_0.pdf>.



NRC, 2016

For children and youth in crisis and conflict settings, **the costs of inaction are profound.**

They stand to lose both their rights to a quality education and their hopes and aspirations for a better future. Without an assessment of their learning outcomes and evidence of their proficiency levels, they can rarely progress – only 3 percent of refugee children access higher education.⁵⁰

A recognized education is a ticket to further education, employment and a better future. Learning assessments must therefore be linked to certification so that children and youth obtain a recognised education that they can use to pursue further education and employment opportunities.

With the world facing an unprecedented level of displacement due to conflict and crisis, and with countries and education systems around the world grappling with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is time to work smarter and not simply call for more funding.

While still recognising that education is a fundamental human right, return on investment is now an imperative. 'Building back better' strategies must strive to build more resilient national systems that can respond to and meet the needs of the most vulnerable throughout periods of disruption.

Further Actions

- Strengthen investment in research practice partnerships on assessment embedded in multi-year funding. This must include children and youth in conflict and crisis contexts, where learning gaps are the greatest. This will generate more useful research and evidence, including about what works, where, for whom, under what conditions and at what cost.
- Embed learning assessments in multi-year outcome-orientated programs, and track and report on the learning progress of children and youth in conflict and crisis contexts as a barometer for measuring effectiveness.

⁵⁰ UNHCR 2020b, op. cit., p. 9.



Part 3:

Recommendations

NRC & UNHCR Pakistan, 2015

The recommendations for EiE sector donors, both in humanitarian and protracted crisis contexts, national governments and humanitarian and development agencies provide a way to establish more purposeful and coordinated approaches to improving measurement of learning outcomes for conflict and crisis-affected children and youth.

They call for collaborative and concerted action to drive improvements in the learning experiences and outcomes of crisis-affected children and youth in pursuit of our global commitment to 'reach the furthest behind first' in the implementation of the SDGs.

We recommend that donors

- Prioritize the integration of assessment of learning outcomes within funding mechanisms that span the humanitarian–development nexus.
- Invest in contextualizing and validating academic and PSS/SEL assessments in line with SDG4.7, and provide funding for the administration of such assessments to ensure teachers and learners in crisis-affected settings benefit.
- Strengthen national and local capabilities to design, collect, disaggregate, analyze, present and share learning outcome data between all education stakeholders, in line with the New Way of Working.⁵¹
- Support national governments to strengthen the system's inclusion of children and youth in conflict and crisis contexts. This includes, for instance, supporting national governments to develop costed, long-term refugee education strategies as part of national education sector plans and/or establish proficiency benchmarks that are inclusive of crisis-affected children and youth.

⁵¹ OCHA 2017, op. cit.

We recommend that national governments

- Integrate crisis-affected children and youth within national education data management systems, ensuring ethical standards and protection safeguards are applied to prevent discrimination.
- Include children and youth in crisis and conflict contexts when establishing national proficiency benchmarks so that proficiency standards are inclusive of crisis affected learners.
- Use learning assessment data to evaluate learning policies and programs within conflict and crisis contexts, and integrate evidence-based approaches within national inclusive education policy and practices.
- Leverage the support of humanitarian and development partners to assess the learning needs and outcomes of children and youth in conflict and crisis contexts
- Establish an inclusive process for sharing data and evidence between all stakeholders, including conflict and crisis-affected teachers and students, in order to achieve greater equity within national assessment systems.

We recommend that humanitarian and development actors

- Build on the good practices underway to integrate academic and PSS/SEL assessments in conflict and crisis settings.
- Harness and strengthen existing academic and PSS/SEL measurement tools, accessible through the **INEE Measurement Library**, ensuring that adaptation and validation are undertaken, and use measures of learning outcomes to assess program quality and impact.
- Continue discussions on the need to conceptualise and develop a more coherent data and evidence-generating system that collects and shares data between diverse actors for collective humanitarian and development action.
- Commit to collective efforts for evidence-based responses, grounded inter alia on the systematic assessment of learning outcomes. These efforts must respond to the real needs of children and youth in conflict and crisis settings and must drive future investment and policy and practice reforms.
- In contexts where crisis-affected children and youth do not have access to education within the national education system, or are not recognized in data management systems, advocate for inclusive education policies to improve learning outcomes for children and youth in conflict and crisis contexts.



Christopher Herwig, NRC, 2015



Part 4:

Find out more

NRC, 2019

The Measurement Library

- In November 2019, INEE, IRC and NYU launched the **Measurement Library**. It contains a set of measurement tools for academic learning, social and emotional learning, mental health and psychosocial support, as well as program implementation.
- These measurement tools have been tested for reliability and validity in contexts of displacement and fragile settings.
- The Measurement Library also contains a "**Measure Guidance**" document for "choosing and contextualizing assessment measures in educational contexts".

Background reports

- Read INEE's mapping reports on academic and SEL assessments
 - **Academic Learning Measurement and Assessment Tools in EiE contexts**
 - **SEL and PSS Measurement and Assessment Tools in EiE contexts**

Networks to join

- Join a network, workstream or community of practice and keep connected to the issues
 - Find out what has been happening in the **Data and Evidence Collaborative** and learn about the new Reference Group on EiE Data by contacting evidence@inee.org.
 - See what the **Psychosocial Support and Social Emotional Learning (PPS and SEL) Collaborative** INEE workstream is up to.



**Inter-agency Network for
Education in Emergencies**