

Background Guide: UNICEF (English Committee) – Universal access to quality education for children in rural and conflict contexts

Introduction to the Institutional Mandate and the Global Response Architecture

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) represents the cornerstone of the international community's humanitarian and development architecture regarding the safeguarding of children's rights. Operating in over 190 countries and territories, UNICEF's mandate transcends the mere provision of technical assistance; it is founded on the categorical imperative to reach the world's most disadvantaged children and build an environment where every individual can develop their full potential¹. At the epicenter of this mandate is equitable access to quality education, an inalienable human right that functions as the primary catalyst for socioeconomic development, poverty eradication, and long-term peacebuilding.

UNICEF's strategic vision in the educational sphere is articulated through several interdependent pillars that seek to address vulnerabilities from a holistic perspective. Inclusive education is a priority to dismantle the barriers of discrimination, stigma, and the routine failure of public policies that have historically excluded children with disabilities, confining them to segregated schooling systems or completely denying them access to skills for employment and independent living³. Simultaneously, girls' education constitutes a tool for demographic and economic transformation. The empirical evidence managed by UNICEF unequivocally demonstrates that educated girls delay the age of marriage, enjoy healthier lives, generate higher incomes, and contribute to intergenerational prosperity³.

However, it is in the realm of education in emergencies where UNICEF faces its most formidable operational challenges. In contexts of acute or protracted crises, the school ceases to be exclusively a literacy center and becomes a survival infrastructure³. Schools provide a vital sense of stability and social connection, act as protective shields against physical exploitation, child labor, and recruitment by armed actors, and frequently operate as the only safe logistical nodes for the distribution of water, hygiene supplies, and nutritional assistance³. To mitigate disruptions in these contexts, UNICEF has aggressively promoted digital education as a lifeline, developing innovative learning products aimed at displaced children, asylum seekers, and populations marginalized by climate disasters, relying on adaptive tools and artificial intelligence to improve the reach of schooling³.

The magnitude of these challenges demands collaborative governance. UNICEF exercises decisive leadership in critical global alliances that structure the international response. Prominent among these initiatives are the *Learning Passport*, recognized as one of the best inventions by TIME magazine in 2021, designed to close the learning poverty gap through a flexible curriculum; the *Giga* initiative, which has the ambitious goal of connecting every school on the planet to the

internet; and *Generation Unlimited*, focused on young people's transition into the labor market³. Likewise, UNICEF intrinsically collaborates with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), the Global Education Cluster, and the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), ensuring a coordinated and predictable response in affected communities³.

A fundamental milestone in this institutional architecture was the establishment of *Education Cannot Wait* (ECW), the United Nations global fund dedicated to education in emergencies and protracted crises⁵. Conceived following the call of the UN Special Envoy for Global Education, Gordon Brown, at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2015, and consolidated at the World Humanitarian Summit, ECW is administered under UNICEF's financial and human resources rules, although it operates with its own independent governance structure⁶. ECW's objective is to generate a massive political and financial commitment to offer a more agile and connected response that spans the entire humanitarian-development continuum, mobilizing multi-year investments to provide safe and free access to learning for tens of millions of children and youth caught in the crossfire of geopolitical instability¹.

The Anatomy of the Global Education Crisis: Evidence and Stagnation

Despite decades of normative commitments and billions of dollars invested in official development assistance, the international system faces an alarming paralysis in its efforts to universalize education. The convergence of demographic pressures, structural budget cuts, and the proliferation of armed conflicts has created an educational exclusion crisis that threatens to destabilize entire generations.

The Stagnation of Schooling and the Paradoxes of Achievement

UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report for the year 2026 exposes a grim reality: an astounding 273 million children and youth are currently out of the school system worldwide⁸. These updated estimates, which incorporate a new analytical model combining administrative data with household surveys, suggest that the out-of-school population has increased for the seventh consecutive year, evidencing that global efforts have hit an insurmountable plateau where the reduction of exclusion has been barely 1% in the last decade⁹. Projections indicate that, already by the year 2025, countries will deviate from their national educational targets by approximately 75 million students¹³.

The distribution of this exclusion is profoundly asymmetrical. The educational level suffering the greatest hemorrhage of talent is upper secondary education, which concentrates 130 million out-of-school students, representing 48% of the global total¹¹. Geographically, the burden falls overwhelmingly on the Global South. Approximately three-quarters of the global out-of-school population in upper secondary education is concentrated in Central and Southern Asia (46%) and Sub-Saharan Africa (28%)¹⁰. Even more concerning is the regression observed in low-income countries, where the out-of-school population has experienced a relative increase of 29% since 2015, while the figures in wealthier nations have remained static¹¹.

Nevertheless, data analysis reveals counterintuitive nuances and statistical paradoxes that require sophisticated evaluation. While out-of-school rates have stagnated, educational cycle completion rates have shown substantial improvements.

Educational Level	Completion Rate (Year 2000)	Completion Rate (Current)	Reduction in Repetition Rates
Primary Education	77%	88%	62%
Lower Secondary	60%	78%	38%
Upper Secondary	37%	61%	N/A

This apparent divergence is fundamentally explained by a dramatic drop in high grade repetition rates, which have decreased by 62% in primary and 38% in lower secondary education since the year 2000⁸. However, this progress in completion masks an endemic problem of temporal efficiency: in low- and lower-middle-income countries, late enrollment and residual repetition mean that students complete each cycle with years of delay. The gap between "timely" completion (achieved within three to five years of the official graduation age) and "ultimate" (late) completion is four percentage points globally, but expands to nine percentage points in low-income countries, a divergence that has been growing since 2005⁸. UNESCO simulations warn that, if current expansion rates are maintained, the world would not achieve the target of 95% upper secondary completion until the distant year 2105⁸.

To mitigate these deficiencies, governments have attempted to transform their policy approaches towards equity, leveraging investments in technology, transport, and health. Between 1998 and 2023, the proportion of countries requiring 12 years of compulsory education increased from 8% to 26%, and the average duration of free education rose to 10.8 years⁸. At the post-secondary level, one in three countries has eliminated tuition fees in public universities, almost half subsidize student housing, 40% support transport costs, and almost 30% subsidize textbooks⁸. Even so, the efficacy of these measures is systematically undermined when intersected with factors of rurality and armed violence.

Dismantling Socioeconomic, Geographic, and Gender Barriers

The educational ecosystem in rural areas of the developing world is characterized by chronic structural fragility. Geographic isolation imposes formidable logistical barriers; students must often travel extreme distances over inhospitable terrain to reach precarious infrastructures that lack basic water, sanitation, and electricity services. In this context, more than 400 million children globally live in poverty, deprived of at least two essential daily needs, profoundly affecting their cognitive development and school retention capacity².

Multidimensional Poverty and the Traditional Model

In rural areas, the opportunity cost of education is prohibitively high for families in a subsistence situation. Economic necessity pushes minors towards agricultural or domestic work. Furthermore,

educational systems in these regions often depend on multigrade and single-teacher schools, where teachers must impart lessons to children of diverse ages and levels simultaneously, often without appropriate teaching materials¹⁴. This traditional model, when not accompanied by active pedagogies and flexible promotion, results in students spending barely 50% to 60% of their instructional hours engaged in productive schoolwork, leading to atrocious dropout and repetition rates¹⁴. Methodological discontinuity is also a factor in abandonment; when rural students manage to transition to urban schools, they frequently clash with rigid traditional models centered on the teacher or purely cognitive constructivist approaches that ignore their experiential background, generating demotivation and eventual school dropout¹⁵.

The Intersectional Vulnerability of Girls

Geographic and economic barriers are exponentially magnified when intersected with gender. The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) has extensively documented how discriminatory social norms, child marriage, and unpaid domestic work exclude young women from the educational system¹⁶. In 2018, the global figure for out-of-school girls reached 129 million, a number that the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic crises have severely amplified¹⁷.

Girls' vulnerability is particularly acute in environments characterized by fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV). In these contexts, girls are 90% more likely to not attend secondary school compared to those residing in stable areas¹⁸. Upon reaching upper secondary education, female participation collapses, and globally only 24% manage to access this level in crisis conditions¹⁷. Emergency environments radically exacerbate gender barriers. The route to school, and often the school facilities themselves, become high-risk zones for Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV)¹⁶. Faced with widespread insecurity and the collapse of livelihoods, families frequently resort to early child marriage as a perceived economic survival mechanism, permanently truncating the educational trajectory of adolescent girls and exposing them to early pregnancies that carry paralyzing social stigmas¹⁶. In many regions, furthermore, deep-rooted discriminatory attitudes among educators themselves perpetuate a cycle of institutional marginalization that undermines female students' self-esteem and academic performance²⁰.

The Militarization of Education and the Devastating Impact of Armed Conflict

The chronic underestimation of the impact of war on educational systems is one of the gravest failures in global monitoring. The collection of administrative data collapses during conflicts, leaving millions of internally displaced persons and refugees off the statistical radar¹². It is estimated that more than one in six school-age children lives in conflict-affected areas, and that these nations host half of the entire global out-of-school child population⁹. War not only interrupts access but transforms the learning space into a theater of military operations.

The Six Grave Violations and Security Council Monitoring

To understand the magnitude of the atrocity, it is imperative to turn to the framework established by the United Nations Security Council following the historic 1996 Machel Report. The UN has identified and categorized Six Grave Violations against children in times of armed conflict, a

fundamental mechanism for monitoring, reporting, and demanding accountability²⁴.

Grave Violation documented by the UN	Direct Impact and Mechanism in the Educational Ecosystem
1. Killing and maiming of children	Results from the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons in civilian areas, directly impacting school facilities and student transit routes ²⁴ .
2. Recruitment and use by armed forces	Schools are systematically raided by state and non-state armed groups to abduct and forcibly enlist minors as combatants or logistical support personnel ²⁴ .
3. Sexual violence	Occurs with impunity during assaults on educational institutions, including rape, sexual slavery, and forced sterilization, destroying the psychological fabric of the youth ²⁴ .
4. Attacks against schools and hospitals	The deliberate destruction of physical infrastructure annihilates the State's capacity to provide social services and functions as a tactic of psychological terror against the population ²⁴ .
5. Abduction of children	Systematically employed (e.g., Boko Haram in Nigeria) to subject students to human trafficking, forced marriage, and ideological radicalization ²⁴ .
6. Denial of humanitarian access	The deliberate blocking of aid prevents the delivery of educational materials, psychosocial support, and vital assistance in schools functioning as temporary shelters ²⁴ .

These violations illustrate that attacks on education are not accidental collateral damage, but calculated military tactics.

Contemporary Trends in Attacks on Education

The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) has provided a harrowing empirical analysis in its flagship report *Education under Attack 2026*. The study recorded an exponential increase in violence: at least 8,566 attacks on education and cases of military use of

schools and universities occurred in the 2024-2025 biennium, representing an increase of more than 40% compared to the previous period²⁷. These attacks have harmed over 10,600 students, teachers, and education personnel²⁷.

The geography of educational terror is extensive. Nations such as Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Haiti, India, Myanmar, Nigeria, Palestine, Turkey, and Ukraine are categorized as "very heavily affected," accounting for hundreds and even thousands of individual incidents²⁹. For example, 3,078 attacks were documented in Palestine, while in India and Ukraine the figures exceeded 6,700 harmed individuals and 1,062 attacks, respectively²⁹. In Myanmar, the systemic deterioration after February 2021 was characterized by the proliferation of explosive devices and retaliatory armed strikes consecutive to the military occupation of educational campuses²⁹.

An emerging and alarming tactical trend is drone warfare. GCPEA identified at least 320 reports of drone-related attacks on education between 2024 and 2025, incidents that killed or injured almost 300 people and partially or totally destroyed at least 250 schools²⁹. This technological sophistication of attacks further blurs the boundaries between the battlefield and civilian learning spaces.

The Military Use of Schools and International Humanitarian Law

Beyond direct attack, the military use of schools constitutes one of the greatest threats to the integrity of the educational system. Armed forces and rebel groups frequently requisition school buildings to use them as barracks, weapons depots, detention centers, or sniper posts²⁸. This usurpation has a catastrophic double effect: first, it de facto interrupts access to education; second, and more critically from a legal perspective, it transforms a civilian object into a legitimate military objective under the laws of war, exposing the facility to lawful attack by opposing forces, which maximizes the risk of incidental harm if civilians are nearby³¹.

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) codifies explicit protections. The principle of distinction requires belligerent parties to differentiate at all times between civilian and military objectives, directing operations solely against the latter (Articles 48 and 51 of Additional Protocol I; Article 13 of Additional Protocol II)³². Schools, like hospitals, enjoy special protection, reinforced by customary law that classifies them as cultural property³¹. During belligerent occupation, the Fourth Geneva Convention (Article 50) imposes on the Occupying Power the duty to facilitate the proper working of all institutions devoted to the care and education of children³¹. In internal conflicts, Additional Protocol II (Article 4) guarantees as a fundamental right that children receive an education in keeping with the wishes of their parents³².

Faced with the ambiguity with which some armed forces interpret "military necessity," several States have enacted exemplary national legislation. Higher education laws in Argentina, Ecuador, and Nicaragua enshrine the inviolability of university campuses, explicitly prohibiting the entry of public forces without a written court order, while the Military Commissions Act of the United States sanctions the intentional use of protected property to shield military operations³¹. These domestic legislative measures are vital for shielding educational infrastructure against tactical occupation.

Legal Frameworks, Political Commitments, and Response Mechanisms

The international community has structured a legal and political architecture to counteract these

vulnerabilities, combining binding resolutions, intergovernmental agreements, and unprecedented financing commitments.

United Nations Resolutions

At the General Assembly level, the adoption of Resolution 64/290 (2010) on the right to education in emergency situations marked a milestone in normative codification. This resolution urges Member States to integrate education as a substantial and integral element of humanitarian assistance and response, recognizing that flexible and inclusive approaches are indispensable for conflict mitigation³³. It vigorously reaffirms the obligations of international law to refrain from using educational institutions for military purposes and highlights the role of education as a preventive shield against sexual violence, human trafficking, and the worst forms of child labor³³. More recently, the Security Council unanimously adopted the historic Resolution 2601 (2021), co-sponsored by 99 Member States³⁵. This resolution elevates the protection of education to a central issue of international peace and security maintenance, unequivocally condemning attacks against schools and demanding that States adopt urgent preventive and corrective measures to facilitate the continuation of schooling during armed conflicts³⁵.

The Safe Schools Declaration

Operationalizing these principles, the Safe Schools Declaration was launched in 2015, an intergovernmental political instrument that, as of February 2026, has been endorsed by 123 countries³⁹. The Declaration provides a framework for exchanging best practices and commits signatories to implement national policies aimed at restricting the military use of schools and protecting educators³⁹. In November 2025, the Fifth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration in Nairobi served as a critical accountability forum, evidencing that the translation of political will into military application on the ground remains inconsistent³⁰.

The pragmatic core of this instrument lies in the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict* developed by the GCPEA. Guideline 6 is the pivot for systemic transformation, urging all parties to armed conflict to explicitly integrate these norms into their military manuals, rules of engagement, doctrines, and operational orders⁴⁴. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has provided extensive legal commentary on these guidelines, offering direct technical assistance to armed forces to ensure their assimilation into the chain of command, regardless of whether the State has formally endorsed the Declaration or not³¹.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)

Recognizing that physical survival must be accompanied by psychological resilience, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has issued comprehensive guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings⁴⁷. The IASC postulates that the immediate restoration of safe learning spaces is one of the most potent psychosocial interventions available in the humanitarian arsenal. The structured routine of school acts as a defense mechanism against paralyzing trauma, providing children with emotional stability and peer support networks that are vital for mitigating the long-term sequelae of exposure to atrocities⁴⁷.

Sustainable Financing and the Operationalization of the HDP Nexus

Despite moral and legal imperatives, education in emergencies suffers from chronic underfunding. Historically, the education sector received a marginal 3% or less of global humanitarian funding appeals, under the false premise that education was a long-term development objective, secondary to life-saving interventions like food or medical assistance⁵¹. In the year 2025, less than one-third of the global financial requirements for education in crisis contexts were met⁵².

Innovations in Financing: The European Union and ECW

To reverse this systematic marginalization, the European Union, through the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), implemented a paradigmatic reform: since 2019, it maintains the binding commitment to allocate 10% of its initial humanitarian aid budget exclusively to education in emergencies⁵¹. This threshold guarantees a predictable injection of resources in regions plagued by protracted conflicts, allowing agencies like UNICEF to fund interventions for disaster preparedness, child protection, and comprehensive psychosocial support⁵⁷.

Simultaneously, the creation of the *Education Cannot Wait* fund has revolutionized the financial ecosystem. ECW, which recently announced massive multi-year grants to strengthen resilience in critical areas such as the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (with a \$10 million grant), Chad, and Haiti, functions as a catalyst to attract public and private capital¹. Its approach avoids the trap of short-term emergency projects by structuring investments that ensure teacher remuneration, the construction of safe classrooms, and targeted subsidies to keep girls in the system⁵.

The Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus

The historical disconnect between emergency relief, development planning, and peacebuilding has been the main structural obstacle in post-conflict educational reconstruction. In response, the international community has pivoted towards the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus paradigm, originated as the "New Way of Working" at the 2016 Humanitarian Summit⁶¹.

The application of the HDP Nexus in education rests on four interdependent operational pillars:

1. **Transversal Coordination:** Substituting inter-agency competition with joint planning based on shared risk assessments and "collective outcomes," integrating government authorities, local actors, and NGOs from the initial phase of program conception⁶¹.
2. **Flexible and Multi-year Financing:** Overcoming restrictive grant cycles through the use of pooled funds that allow fluid transitions from emergency assistance to structural support for the education sector. Instruments such as the World Bank's State and Peacebuilding Fund (SPF) exemplify this, funding cross-border projects like the recovery strategy in the Lake Chad basin or youth employment initiatives in Mali, closely coupling capacity building with security objectives⁶¹.
3. **Risk Mitigation and Capacity Building:** Systematically investing in the institutional training of local governments and community actors, ensuring that interventions are conflict-sensitive ("do-no-harm") and avoid perpetuating the inequalities that originated the violence⁶¹. In practice, this implies training educators to address intercommunal tensions within the classroom and designing curricula that foster social cohesion⁶⁴.
4. **Leadership, Accountability, and Evidence:** Aligning tactical interventions on the ground with global policies, developing indicators (such as HDP integration indexes) to monitor progress towards sustainable peace, while prioritizing hyper-local knowledge⁶¹.

In regions plagued by protracted crises such as Burkina Faso or Mozambique, the operationalization of the HDP Nexus allows, simultaneously with the delivery of survival kits, the strengthening of the information systems of the Ministries of Education and the planning of early recovery curricula⁶⁶.

Evidence-Based Solutions: Case Studies and Successful Models

Rebuilding educational infrastructure cannot be limited to building walls; it requires methodological innovations and validation systems adaptable to the realities of displacement and extreme poverty.

The Escuela Nueva Model: Rural Pedagogical Innovation

Originated in Colombia in the 1980s and 1990s to combat the profound deficiencies of single-teacher and multigrade rural schools, the *Escuela Nueva* (EN) model is paradigmatic in its impact¹⁴. The fundamental problem that EN resolved was the ineffectiveness of the solitary teacher trying to teach standardized curricula to different grades in the same classroom. The Fundación Escuela Nueva (FEN), led by visionary figures like Vicky Colbert (awarded the Yidan Prize), decentralized the learning process¹⁴.

The methodological core of EN resides in interactive learning guides that facilitate cooperative work in small groups, placing the student at the center of the lesson and transforming the teacher into a facilitator⁶⁷. Crucially, the model allows for **flexible promotion**; since the agricultural calendar or outbreaks of violence frequently force children to be absent, the methodology ensures they can resume their studies exactly where they left off without the stigma or penalty of repeating the entire school year⁷⁰.

Evaluations funded by the World Bank and the Instituto Ser de Investigación yielded conclusive empirical results: students in official *Escuela Nueva* schools demonstrated significantly superior performance on standardized tests (SABER Tests) in areas such as language and mathematics compared to traditional models¹⁴. The impact is of such magnitude that it mitigates socioeconomic and gender gaps, generating egalitarian civic behaviors, better self-esteem, and peaceful coexistence¹⁴.

The transferability of the model was demonstrated with its international expansion to more than 40 countries. In Guatemala, under the name Nueva Escuela Unitaria (NEU), it demonstrated superior economic efficiency by drastically reducing repetition rates and achieving spectacular increases in completion rates for both indigenous boys and girls¹⁴. Likewise, graduates of derivative programs such as the *Universidad en el Campo* have evidenced the retention of rural talent through entrepreneurial agricultural projects (such as coffee cultivation and organic fertilizers), proving that rural education can empower the community and be financially sustainable⁶⁹. However, analysts point out a critical risk: methodological discontinuity when transitioning to urban secondary schools, where the return to rigid and rote approaches often demotivates students trained in the experiential constructivism of EN, causing late dropouts¹⁵.

The UNESCO Qualifications Passport (UQP): Recognition and Mobility

For populations in transit, such as refugees and asylum seekers, the challenge is not only access, but the bureaucratic recognition of their human capital. When fleeing violence, the vast majority lose or abandon their diplomas and academic transcripts, preventing them from continuing their

higher education or entering the skilled labor market in host countries. Globally, a meager 6% of refugees access higher education⁷¹.

To dismantle this barrier, UNESCO, in collaboration with the Council of Europe and aligning closely with the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR), launched the **UNESCO Qualifications Passport (UQP)** in 2019⁷¹. The UQP is a revolutionary standardized validation instrument based on alternative evaluation methodologies: through rigorous interviews, triangulation, and secondary documentary analysis, a panel of experts evaluates and certifies the individual's formal and prior learning⁷⁴.

The adoption of the UQP is global: 33 countries have embraced the methodology, interacting with 13 national qualification authorities and implementing it in 11 refugee hosting areas, resulting in the issuance of 183 passports to date⁷⁴. In Uganda and Zambia, for example, the impact has been transformative, illustrated in stories like those of Jean Marie (a Burundian economist who regained access to project evaluation studies after ten years in limbo), Faïda (who was able to resume her nursing career left behind in the DRC), and Lévi (who, thanks to the UQP, transitioned from a camp in Zambia to higher education in Italy)⁷¹.

The UQP program is not limited to passive accreditation but has cultivated a vibrant alumni network that drives community resilience. Beneficiaries like Zebron Mwenebatu, Boniface Ahishakiye, and Martin Pete in Uganda and Zambia have actively participated in refugee-led research projects (such as JIGSAW/Refugee Education UK), providing peer mentoring to help other displaced persons navigate the administrative complexities and emotional burden of asylum, and launching technical innovation programs through platforms like *Ustawi Africa*⁷⁶. By developing the capacities of credential evaluators in host Ministries of Education (as in the recent launch in South Sudan), UNESCO anchors the UQP institutionally, guaranteeing long-term systemic sustainability beyond simple humanitarian intervention⁷³.

Regional Integration Strategies: Africa and the Arab World

Responses to the educational crisis require frameworks adapted to the geopolitical specificities of each continent.

The Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA)

The African continent faces a perfect storm of exponential demographic growth, abysmal infrastructure deficits, and multiple active conflict zones. It is estimated that there is a critical deficit of 15 million qualified teachers needed to achieve the 2030 goals; in parallel, the annual financing gap is approximately \$77 billion, with an average expenditure per student of barely \$54 in low-income countries, in contrast to \$8,500 in high-income nations⁷⁹. In response to this asymmetry, the Heads of State and Government of the African Union adopted the **Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2026-2035 (CESA 26-35)**, which updates and expands the mandate of the previous CESA 16-25 plan⁸⁰.

This new strategy, structured under the coordination of the Association of African Universities (AAU) and aligned with Agenda 2063, is organized around six Strategic Areas (SA): resources and enabling environment (SA1); teachers, educators, and caregivers (SA2); pre-primary to secondary education and skills development (SA3); higher education and TVET (SA4); second chance programs and lifelong learning (SA5); and a non-negotiable focus on gender, equity, and

inclusion (SA6)⁸¹. Cross-cutting themes such as digitalization, artificial intelligence, greening education, and emergency preparedness permeate the entire strategy⁸⁴.

A vital pillar of resilience in this decade will be the newly inaugurated **Education in Emergencies and Resilience (EiE) Cluster** of the African Union Commission⁸⁰. This cluster has the ambitious task of safeguarding learning continuity against the collapse caused by endemic violence (such as the fourfold increase in school closures in the Central Sahel and the over 16.5 million excluded children in Sudan)⁸⁶. By mobilizing direct national and international financing to education sector plans and promoting the systematic inclusion of refugees in national systems (in line with the Safe Schools Declaration and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child), the CESA EiE cluster seeks to institutionalize crisis preparedness⁸⁰.

ALECSO and the Arab Context

In the Middle East and North Africa region, characterized by some of the most severe refugee crises and protracted conflicts of the contemporary era (Syria, Palestine, Yemen), the **Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO)** plays an analogous role. Operating under the auspices of the League of Arab States, ALECSO leads coordination initiatives aimed at adapting educational systems to extreme emergency conditions, promoting the resilience of human capital, and rescuing cultural heritage in war-torn zones⁸⁷.

Conclusions and Deliberation Axes for Delegates

The exclusion of hundreds of millions of children and youth from the global educational system is not an inevitable accident derived from poverty, but the direct result of systemic deficiencies, deeply rooted socio-geographic barriers, and the deliberate weaponization of civilian infrastructure during armed conflicts. Rebuilding the foundations of global education requires abandoning the siloed aid model and transitioning towards a holistic intervention paradigm.

The delegates of this UNICEF Committee have the responsibility to structure binding resolutions and operational frameworks around the following critical axes:

1. **Enforcement and Accountability regarding Militarization:** The guidelines stipulated by the GCPEA and the Safe Schools Declaration can no longer remain mere suggestions. It is imperative to develop coercive legal mechanisms that force national and international military hierarchies to codify the prohibition of military use of schools in their rules of engagement, applying drastic sanctions against the six grave violations outlined by the Security Council.
2. **Operational Institutionalization of the HDP Nexus:** Emergency response cannot rely on insufficient and fluctuating annual collections. Universal policies must be established that set non-negotiable quotas for education in emergencies, emulating the EU's 10% humanitarian budget guarantee, while encouraging the channeling of aid through multi-year pooled funds (like ECW) that immediately strengthen the ministerial capacities of host countries.
3. **Pedagogical Expansion and Harmonization (Escuela Nueva and UQP):** The Committee must advocate for the South-South transfer of proven pedagogical models. The flexibilization of student promotion and collaborative learning like *Escuela Nueva* must be scaled urgently in rural and post-conflict zones. Simultaneously, the ratification and adoption of the UNESCO Qualifications Passport by all Member States is the definitive mechanism to combat the bureaucratic waste of the talent of refugees and displaced

persons.

4. **Eradication of Gender Vulnerability:** The systemic barriers that perpetuate female dropout in fragile zones must be dismantled through targeted financial interventions (transport subsidies and conditional cash transfers) and zero-tolerance programs against School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV).

Universal access to quality education is not simply a variable of socioeconomic development; it is the only viable instrument for mitigating generational violence. The decisions made in this forum have the potential to restore the social contract for humanity's most vulnerable cohort, transforming infrastructures currently under siege into inviolable sanctuaries of knowledge.

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