

## Foreword: Education – a humanitarian and development imperative

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For far too long, donors and the international community have neglected education in humanitarian response. Switzerland was no exception. Food, water, health and shelter were the usual priorities during emergencies, while education was considered more of a long-term objective to be tackled by national governments and development agencies once a crisis was over.

However, we were wrong. We simply ignored the families' tendencies to see their children's education – often interrupted or absent – as a priority need in displacement. We were not sufficiently aware of education's life-sustaining and protective role during conflict and crisis. We underestimated the impact education can have on peaceful coexistence and misjudged the social and economic consequences of the lack of education during displacement for both host and home countries.

Luckily, we have come a long way. Since the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, there has been growing awareness of the humanitarian imperative to ensure access to education during crises. Fifty-two per cent of the 69 million people displaced globally are under the age of 18. Displacement crises are increasingly protracted and often affect a significant proportion of the time a child takes to grow, develop and prepare for adult life. The right to quality education does not stop because of conflict and displacement. National governments, international organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), parties to the conflict and we as donor agencies have an obligation to protect the right to education, regardless of the circumstances. Children must be able to go to school and learn in a safe environment. They must be given the chance to develop their potential to the full, whether they live in a refugee camp, a makeshift settlement or a town, or are still on the move. Education – a right

enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child – is a collective responsibility.

Switzerland regards education as the essential foundation for individual, social and economic development and as a pillar for values such as equality, respect, tolerance and dignity. Accordingly, basic education and vocational skills development are priority areas of our international cooperation. Hence for the 2017–20 period, we have doubled our financial support in these areas. In 2017, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) published its first education strategy to guide Switzerland's bilateral and multilateral engagement in this sector. Increasing education support in fragile and crisis-affected contexts is a strategic priority for Switzerland as this is where inequalities and vulnerabilities are greatest and where education can help bring about more inclusive, just and peaceful societies. Protecting the right to education during emergencies, protracted crises and displacement is part of Switzerland's humanitarian mandate and an indispensable aspect of protecting children and giving them hope for the future.

This edition of Forced Migration Review is timely and necessary. In a time of unprecedented displacement, rising hostilities and an increase in protracted conflicts, it is important to recall what is at stake if displaced girls and boys are prevented from going to school. Education is the most powerful means of breaking cycles of vulnerability and poverty, and without education there can be no sustainable development. The young displaced generation has enormous potential for contributing to society. However, greater international commitment is needed to support countries dealing with rising population movements. Eighty-five per cent of refugees live in developing countries that already struggle with over-stretched education systems. We

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need to provide assistance to countries to ensure that displaced children can access local schools. We need to provide support to national education ministries, teachers and parents so that both displaced and host-community children can learn and grow up in safe, child-friendly environments. We need to find creative solutions to enable children and youth who have missed out on learning to catch up. All this requires the joint action of the humanitarian and development communities, NGOs, multi- and bilateral agencies and the private sector. Switzerland calls on others to follow suit by prioritising education in policy making, funding and

action on the ground. The provision of education for displaced children and youth is both an immediate emergency response and an effective way to work towards durable solutions during protracted displacement.

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