

# Who is doing what and where?

by Lori Heninger

*Due to the multiplicity of actors, we have no clear global picture of education programming in emergencies. The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children has sought to plug the knowledge gap.*

**T**he *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies* has gathered information on how many refugee, displaced and returnee children and youth have access to education and the nature of the education they receive.

Information obtained from UNHCR, UNICEF and UNESCO – together with interviews with international NGOs and field visits to Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Thailand – showed that:

- More than 27 million children and youth affected by armed conflict do not have access to formal education; 90% of them are IDPs.
- The majority of internally displaced and refugee children in school are enrolled in the early primary grades.
- While girls are almost as likely as boys to be enrolled in pre-primary and grade one, their enrolment decreases steadily after that.
- Only 6% of all refugee students are enrolled in secondary education; for IDP youth even fewer opportunities exist.
- Adolescents and youth have the least access to formal education; many have not completed even primary education and require a range of formal and non-formal education options.

Teachers in emergencies face stressful working conditions, often having to teach over 50 students of widely differing ages in a class. They receive little or no compensation and often become frustrated, fail to come to work or seek other employment. As the most qualified teachers are the most likely to find other means of supporting their families, the quality of education deteriorates.

Many refugee and displaced teachers do not meet the minimum requirements of their governments to be considered 'qualified'. High quality teacher training and continued

follow-up are essential to support these teachers and to improve the quality of education available to refugee and displaced children and youth.

In conflict-affected countries girls and women generally have low education levels. As a result, the majority of teachers are men. Recent evidence of sexual exploitation of students by teachers suggests that increasing the number of female teachers in schools may be an added protection mechanism for girls. Female teachers are important role models for young girls.

In refugee situations, efforts are often made to ensure that children study the curriculum of their home country and have the opportunity to take national exams so that their education will be recognised in the event of repatriation. In reality, though, a wide range of curricula is used in emergency situations – from home country to host country to a curriculum that is modified to meet the present circumstances and needs of the refugees.

The language of instruction can pose an additional challenge for refugee students. While it is generally recommended that refugees study in the language of their home country they may also be required or wish to learn the language of their host country. When education is only available in the language of the host country, refugee students may become frustrated and drop out of school. In other instances, students will want to learn the local language in order to interact with the local community or to gain access to post-primary education or the local labour market. Learning a new language requires additional time either through formal instruction or through non-formal learning within the community.

In situations of conflict, the curriculum is frequently contested, and

therefore requires careful review and adaptation in order to avoid exacerbating tensions. There is increasing recognition that education for conflict-affected populations must include some discussion of peace, conflict resolution, human rights and citizenship.

Education in emergencies is critically underfunded. In 2002, of the \$46m requested for education through the UN Consolidated Appeals Process (excluding appeals for Afghanistan) only \$17 million was actually contributed or pledged. Six countries received one-third or less of their request. There is an urgent need to increase funding and support for education for IDPs as under-investment contributes to high repetition and dropout rates.

From the forests of eastern Burma to the IDP camps outside Monrovia, Liberia, families seek out and communities support educational activities with the hope that one day their children will have a better life and the opportunity to contribute to the rebuilding of their countries. Continued focus on girls' education is required to reach the Education for All goal of eliminating gender disparities in education by 2005.

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