

Conflicts and disasters forcing 59 million young people into illiteracy – UNICEF study

31 January 2018 – Nearly three in ten young people between the ages of 15 and 19 living in conflict- or disaster-affected countries are illiterate, the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) said Wednesday, calling for greater investments in the education, particularly for the most disadvantaged children and youth.

The situation is particularly dire for girls and young women in that age group, with 33 per cent of them in emergency countries failing to learn even the basics, compared to 24 per cent of boys.

“These numbers are a stark reminder of the [tragic impact that crises have on children's education, their futures](#), and the stability and growth of their economies and societies,” said Henrietta H. Fore, the Executive Director of UNICEF, in a news release announcing the findings.

“An uneducated child who grows into an illiterate youth in a country ripped apart by conflict or destroyed by disasters may not have much of a chance.”

The findings, calculated using literacy data from the UN Educational, Science and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) in 27 emergency countries, also revealed that Niger, Chad, South Sudan and the Central African Republic all with a long history of instability and high levels of poverty recorded the highest illiteracy rates among those aged 15-24 with 76 per cent, 69 per cent, 68 per cent and 64 per cent, respectively, unable to read or write.

Globally, the number stands at 59 million.

Education can make or break a child's futureUNICEF chief Fore

Ensuring adequately funding for education programmes, particularly during humanitarian crises, is critical to improve these statistics.

At present, only 3.6 per cent of humanitarian funding goes toward providing education for children living in emergencies, making it one of the least funded sectors in humanitarian appeals.

UNICEF estimates that over the next four years, it will spend approximately \$1 billion a year on education programmes.

In its [2018 Humanitarian Action for Children appeal, launched on Tuesday](#), the UN agency called for \$900 million for education in countries affected by conflicts and natural disasters. Some of its key interventions include

accelerated education and non-formal learning opportunities, training teachers, rehabilitating schools and distributing school furniture and supplies.

RELATED: [Millions of children in crisis zones face 'bleak future,' UNICEF warns, launching emergency appeal](#)

At the same time, UNICEF also called on Governments and partners to provide young children with access to quality early education programmes to support their development and set them up to continue learning throughout their childhood; and offer illiterate young people the opportunity to learn to read and write and further their education through specially designed alternative and accelerated education programmes.

“Education can make or break a child’s future,” said Ms. Fore.

“For all children to fully reap the benefits of learning, it is key that they get the best quality education possible, as early as possible,” she stressed.

The UNICEF analysis has been released ahead of the Global Partnership for Education Replenishment Conference in Dakar, Senegal, (1-2 February) which aims to raise funding for education from partner countries, and current and new donors in order to ensure that all children and youth are in school and learning.

[Without young people, Global Goals will not be achieved, UN forum told](#)

30 January 2018 – Young people today are more connected, dynamic and engaged than ever and the Global Goals can’t happen without them, speakers told an annual United Nations forum, where young leaders called on the Organization keep its promise to “leave no one behind” on the road to creating a prosperous life for everyone on a clean planet.

The first day of the 2018 [Youth Forum](#), convened by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), got off to a rollicking start with young people from every corner of the world leading discussions with ministers and high-level government officials, UN agencies and other international organizations.

One of the highlights of today’s events was the dialogue between Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and Jayathma Wickramanayake, the UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth.

The conversation revolved around the Forum theme, ‘the role of youth in building sustainable and resilient urban and rural communities’ and how youth

can engage in the implementation of the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development, adopted by UN Member States in 2015. Ms. Mohammed said that the Agenda 2030 was “shaped with youth” and young people were “the loudest voice” in the ground-breaking [My World survey](#), in which almost 10 million made their voices heard during the UN system-wide discussions on the landmark 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

She encouraged youth to “make noise” for their voices to be heard.

Stressing that the importance of youth engagement by Member States in their national plans to implement the [SDGs](#), Ms. Wickramanayake said: “We talk about leaving no one behind but if we don’t keep up with that phase, young people will leave the UN behind.”

In a keynote address, Salina Abraham, President of the International Forestry Students’ Association, said: “Sustainable development is not having to leave your home, family and culture behind to provide your children with an adequate life. It’s not having to conceal your language or culture in an attempt to conform, only to never truly be accepted.

Participants at opening of the 2018 Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Youth Forum. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

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“Sustainable development is having the security, access, resources and tools to create new opportunities wherever you choose to call home,” she said.

For her part, ECOSOC President Marie Chatardová said that young people imbue urban and rural communities with energy, creativity, and innovation.

“Your drive for innovation and consumption choices are crucial to our goals of increasing the eco-efficiency, minimizing waste and pollution, and of promoting access to and the sustainable use of all resources,” she said.

“You are a key partner in efforts to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, and resilient, and to build a global coalition to reverse land degradation and protect biodiversity,” she added.

“We are here to listen to your voices. Our landmark frameworks – including the 2030 Agenda, the [Paris Agreement](#) and the [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#) – already recognize you as the key partners in efforts to build a better future,” she stressed.

Also addressing the Forum was General Assembly President Miroslav Lajčák, who stressed that “if we neglect young people, we will not achieve a single SDG.”

He highlighted the role of youth in innovations that help reverse the trends that are harming the planet as well as in preventing conflict and building peace.

“I want to conclude with a blunt truth: our international system simply was not set up for young people. If you look at photographs of the signing of the UN Charter, you will not see any young men or young women. That is why, for years, young people were not seen – and were not heard – in the conference rooms, like this one,” he said.

“Young people can no longer be dismissed as the rebel fighters; the terrorists; the disenfranchised. They are the innovators, the solution-finders; the social and environmental entrepreneurs,” he added.

[Relentless fighting in Syria continues to exact terrible toll on civilians, says UN deputy aid chief](#)

30 January 2018 – Hostilities in Syria continues to drive hundreds of thousands from their homes and the number of displaced in the seemingly unending conflict continues to rise along with the suffering of affected communities, the United Nations deputy humanitarian chief said Tuesday, calling on all parties to ensure the safety and protection of civilians caught up in the violence.

Ursula Mueller, the Deputy UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, said the situation is most concerning in north-west Syria where recent fighting has claimed many lives and forced over 270,000 civilians to flee for safety.

“Camps for the displaced are overstretched, forcing most of those displaced to seek shelter in some 160 makeshift settlements. During these cold and wet winter months, many families have nothing else than improvised tents which they share with others,” said Ms. Mueller, briefing a Security Council meeting on the humanitarian situation in the war-torn country.

Elsewhere in Syria, fighting in Afrin (in Aleppo governorate) where on one hand, some 16,000 people have been displaced, but at the same time, civilian movement has reportedly been restricted by local authorities, particularly for those wishing to leave the area.

The situation is equally concerning in eastern Ghouta and in areas of Damascus where at least 81 civilians – including 25 women and 30 children – were killed in the first ten days of January.

RELATED: [‘Enough is enough;’ world cannot become numb to killing of children, says top UNICEF official in Syria](#)

According to estimates, altogether 13.1 million people are in need of protection and humanitarian assistance, including 6.1 million people who are

displaced within the country and a further 5.5 million people have become refugees in neighbouring countries.

Wait for medical evacuations continue to claim lives

Ms. Mueller also informed the Security Council that although in late December, 29 patients in need of urgent medical care were allowed out of eastern Ghouta, hundreds more – most of them women and children – require immediate medical attention.

The law is clear [...] medical evacuations take place without conditions and without delay
UN deputy aid chief Ursula Mueller

“So far, there have been 21 civilian deaths among those needing medical evacuation. Their needs are critical, and the law is clear,” she said, calling on all parties and all those with influence over the parties, “to see to it that all such medical evacuations take place without conditions and without delay.”

In the midst of the catastrophe, relief workers delivering life-saving assistance continue to face considerable challenges, including access to those in need of assistance.

Last month, none of the UN cross-line convoys could reach besieged locations and only two convoys reached hard-to-reach areas. This month, UN and partners have had no access to any such locations at all, stressed Ms. Mueller.

“Not one convoy has been able to deploy. Discussions about convoys have stalled over requirements to lower the number of beneficiaries, and splitting convoys in a way that would not allow us to provide food or other essential items,” she said, noting also issues in other parts of the country preventing delivery of aid.

“Our deliveries must continue to be based on humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law, impartially based on civilian need,” reiterated the senior UN official.

Five key areas for concrete progress

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Noting five key areas where the UN is looking to make concrete progress, she called for urgent funding for the Organization’s Syria humanitarian response plan for 2018.

Ms. Mueller also called for an urgent agreement on medical evacuations and assistance for those trapped in eastern Ghouta and other besieged areas of

Syria. She further underlined the need for improved humanitarian access; and for an agreement on UN-supported aid convoys from Damascus to Rukban in south-eastern Syria.

“Fifth, more effective arrangements to enable the UN to support the work of Syrian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and to enable international NGOs to play the stronger role they can and are ready to play in relieving the suffering,” she said.

Sochi talks on Syria proposes forming constitutional committee under the Geneva-process

Meanwhile, talks sponsored by Russia on a political solution towards ending the seven-year Syrian conflict concluded today in Sochi.



Staffan de Mistura, United Nations Special Envoy for Syria. UN Photo/Violaine Martin

Speaking to the press in New York, via telephone from Sochi, Staffan de Mistura, the UN Special Envoy for Syria said that the main outcome of the talks was the declaration to set up a committee that will draft a new constitution for the war-torn country under the auspices of the UN-led Geneva process.

The committee’s mandate, terms of reference, powers, rules of procedure and selection criteria for its composition will be decided by parties to the Geneva talks based on proposals made by the Special Envoy.

The devil is in the detail [and] the job ahead is complicated – we always knew it – but we believe we can build on it UN Special Envoy de Mistura

Mr. de Mistura further clarified that each of the guarantors – Russia, Iran and Turkey – will provide about 50 names which could be considered as, in his terms, “candidates for such a committee” but the body will “very likely” be composed of 45 to 50 members at a maximum.

“I plan to consult widely, including those who did not attend the conference [in Sochi] and consistently with Security Council [resolution 2254 \(2015\)](#), will prepare a list of 45-50 people based on criteria that will be soon announced by me in Geneva, based on very wide consultations,” he added, elaborating on the declaration announced by the participants at the conference.

“The devil is in the detail [and] the job ahead is complicated – we always knew it – but we believe we can build on it,” expressed Mr. de Mistura.

Somali leaders, international partners and UN determined to make Somalia famine resistant

30 January 2018 – One year after Somalia declared drought as a national emergency, famine has so far been averted due to collective and unprecedented humanitarian action, and on Tuesday, the country marked a turning point towards ending the cycle of recurring crises, with the launch of a Government-led, United Nations-supported humanitarian response plan.

At a [high-level event](#) in the capital Mogadishu, the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan, seeking \$1.5 billion to address the needs of 5.4 million people, was jointly presented with a Recovery and Resilience Framework (RRF), which outlines the way forward for recovery and longer-term resilience aimed at addressing the root causes of Somalia's recurring humanitarian crises.

To address the impact of recurrent drought and famine risk, as a consequence of fragility, the Federal Government of Somalia led a Drought Impact Needs Assessment (DINA), in partnership with Federal Member States, the Banadir Regional Administration, the European Union, the UN and the World Bank.

The outcomes of the assessment have informed the RRF, which will enable the Federal Government and Federal Member states to devise medium- and long-term solutions to promote development and address the root causes of vulnerability to drought. The DINA and the RRF have been developed in alignment with the 2018 Response Plan and in coordination with humanitarian partners, in order to ensure complementarity and, most importantly, to protect humanitarian achievements.

The joint launch was attended by Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire and other senior representatives of the Somali Federal Government, as well as the international community, including the Administrator of the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)), Achim Steiner, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock, World Bank Senior Vice-President Mahmoud Mohieldin, and the European Union.

Opening the event, Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire emphasized his Government's resolve in moving from crisis to recovery, saying: "Somalia is turning over a new leaf in its history. Important and significant progress is being made on our peace- and state-building agenda. We are determined to overcome the challenges posed by recurring droughts that risk undermining these gains, and we count on our international partners to support us in this endeavor."

On his first visit to Somalia, Mr. Steiner recognized the Government's leadership in averting famine in 2017 and highlighted the opportunity to

build on this achievement while simultaneously implementing longer-term solutions.

“Today, Somalia has more effective institutions than it has had in decades. Progress in the state-building and peace-building processes in Somalia since 2012 has now created conditions in which targeted efforts can be made to define and implement solutions so that Somalia’s citizens will hopefully not have to face the risk of famine again,” he said.

Noting the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis, Mr. Lowcock [urged](#) the international community to sustain its life-saving support, while recognizing that that the situation cannot be solved by humanitarian interventions alone.

“Ending need in Somalia can only be achieved if we respond to immediate humanitarian needs while simultaneously implementing longer-term solutions to build resilience. Humanitarian and development partners are working with the Government to help ensure Somalis are less vulnerable to food insecurity and malnutrition, to natural hazards and displacement, and that they have better access to basic social services,” Mr. Lowcock said.

Referencing the [new way of working](#), and emphasizing the significance of the HRP being jointly launched with the RRF, Mr. Mohieldin stated that “Somalia is ahead of the curve in its effort to overcome the challenges facing the country”. He noted that hard investment was required to implement the RRF and applauded the Government’s efforts to normalize its relations with the international finance system.

In its statement, the European Union expressed appreciation for the Government’s leadership and pledged its continued support.

“As a major partner to Somalia, who promotes a comprehensive approach linking security, political engagement, development and humanitarian aid, the European Union is pleased by the resolve shown by the government to lead us in a collective effort to move from reaction to prevention,” said Fulgencio Garrido Ruiz, Deputy Head of the European Union Delegation to Somalia.

[Thousands flee violence in eastern DR Congo, seek shelter in nearby countries – UN refugee agency](#)

30 January 2018 – Surging violence in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is driving thousands of Congolese into neighbouring Burundi, Tanzania and Uganda, the United Nations refugee agency said Tuesday.

“Thousands of children, women and men have [abandoned their homes](#), in the

midst of intensified military operations against Mai Mai armed groups in South Kivu province,” Babar Baloch, spokesperson for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) told press at the regular briefing in Geneva.

“Since last week almost 7,000 people have crossed to neighbouring Burundi and an additional 1,200 to Tanzania,” he added, noting that many more may be displaced inside South Kivu without shelter or food.

While some refugees have told UNHCR that they fled forced recruitment, direct violence and other abuses by armed groups, others say they left in anticipation of military operations and out of fear.

“It is imperative that people fleeing the violence are allowed safe passage, and that humanitarian access to the internally displaced is facilitated,” Mr. Baloch stressed.

Most refugees heading to Burundi are crossing Lake Tanganyika on small fishing boats, arriving to extremely limited shelter, sanitary facilities, drinking water and food in Nyanza Lac and Rumonge.

“Together with the authorities and other partners, UNHCR is transferring the refugees to transit centres and camps – already overcrowded – in Burundi’s north and east,” the spokesperson explained.

In addition to the Congolese citizens, UNHCR is also concerned about the situation for over 43,000 Burundian refugees just across the lake in South Kivu, mainly at Lusenda and Mulongwe.

“Although these locations have not been directly affected by the fighting, it is vital that all parties to the conflict respect the humanitarian character of the sites where refugees are and refrain from activities that could hinder the delivery of humanitarian assistance,” underscored Mr. Baloch.

Congolese heading to Tanzania are also crossing Lake Tanganyika from South Kivu to locations in and around the city of Kigoma – many exhausted and unwell.

“The influx is placing enormous pressure on existing shelter, water and sanitation facilities, and many people have no choice but to sleep in the open,” asserted Mr. Baloch, adding that UNHCR was mobilizing relief aid for the reception areas and preparing to transfer the new arrivals to the country’s north-west Nyarugusu refugee camp.

Conflicts in the north DRC – including inter-communal violence in Ituri province and military offensives in North Kivu – have also driven more Congolese to Uganda.

Since December, more than 15,000 people have entered Uganda either on foot or by crossing Lake Albert in fishing boats or canoes. January arrivals, at around 330 people per day, are four times what they were in December.

The DRC is one of the world’s most complex crises – deteriorating as local

conflicts escalate.

As 2018 began, some five million Congolese were displaced, about 674,879 of them in other African countries, and about 4.35 million internally.

“This places DRC among the world’s biggest displacement crises,” concluded Mr. Baloch.