To: Global Education Monitoring Report  
From: The International Rescue Committee  
Re: Comments for the Global Education Monitoring Report 2019

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) is grateful for the opportunity to provide input into the 2019 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report, *Migration and Education*. The IRC welcomes the forthcoming report’s focus on the impact of forced displacement on education. Of the 50 million children who have migrated across borders or been forcibly displaced within their own countries, more than half—an alarming 28 million—have been forced to flee due to conflict.¹ The IRC has education programs in 20 countries affected by conflict and crisis; we are the only organization focusing solely on these contexts with education as one of our core programming areas. We know there are unique challenges to ensuring children in these settings are in school and learning which, if not overcome, can have a lasting impact on development goals and future generations. Without attention to the education of displaced children, we will fail at meeting Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Below we provide thoughts on how the GEM Report can address the specific needs of displaced children to access safe, responsive, quality education. This memo lays out critical barriers the IRC sees to achieving learning for displaced children and offers solutions that we hope are meaningfully reflected in the final report. Our suggestions address the questions raised in the concept note under “Forced and Involuntary Migration and Education” (pp. 10-11).

I. Supporting learning outcomes for displaced children

*Question addressed from the GEM Report concept note:*

- *How can students be supported in such situations [of forced migration and displacement]*?

Forcibly displaced children must be supported to not only access education, but to achieve learning outcomes necessary to succeed in school and beyond. The education in emergencies sector has for too long measured success by outputs such as number of children enrolled and teachers trained, which tell us nothing about whether children are regularly attending school, safe and learning. An important first step is for policymakers and practitioners to define and agree to learning outcomes for all children.

The education in emergencies sector has traditionally relied on a narrow definition of learning that does not encompass the broad range of skills needed for children affected by crisis to heal, learn, develop and thrive. Children who have been forcibly displaced have often suffered multiple and prolonged adversities, including loss, violence and poverty. Neuroscience research shows that these experiences can cause a toxic stress response that inhibits healthy development of the brain, with long-term consequences for children’s physical and mental health, behavior and ability to learn.² But these effects can be reduced or reversed through quality educational opportunities that include social-emotional learning (SEL). SEL can strengthen children’s well-being, positive behavior and peer relationships, such as by enhancing their abilities to show empathy, resolve problems peacefully and control their impulses. Furthermore, research from stable contexts shows that building social-emotional skills can contribute to

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students acquiring foundational academic skills like literacy and numeracy. The international community must therefore define and strive to achieve learning outcomes that include social-emotional skills for displaced children as well as children from host communities. Donors should fund programs that include SEL, and work with and encourage governments to include it in their national response.

What is the IRC doing to take an outcomes-based approach? As part of the IRC 2020 strategy, we determined our success by whether we are making measurable improvements in the lives of the people we serve. The IRC has defined five core outcome areas, one of which is education. The IRC’s Outcomes and Evidence Framework (OEF) defines the specific outcomes (literacy, numeracy, social-emotional and livelihood skills, as well as safety and gender equality) we seek to achieve for children by age group, and offers a theory of change that outlines the pathways to achieve each outcome.

Once these outcomes are collectively defined, stakeholders need to commit to measuring and communicating progress towards them to provide donors, policymakers, and practitioners with information on the scope of the problem and the impact of investments, and guide future investments towards effective interventions. There is currently a major data gap when it comes to learning outcomes for displaced children due to a number of obstacles.

For one, the short-term nature of humanitarian funding leads to a lack of investment in education-related data for displaced populations by both host governments and donors, without incentives or capacity to collect meaningful data over long periods of time.

Furthermore, the statistical capacity of many LMICs, including refugee-hosting countries, are limited; many do not have an existing national assessment and/or an effective education management information system, hindering their capacity to monitor progress. Global education statistics do not systematically track whether refugee and internally displaced children are enrolled in and attending school, much less learning. Where data do exist, estimates suggest that learning levels globally are extremely low—for example, the 2014 Education for All Global Monitoring Report found that 250 million children globally reach the fourth grade without knowing how to read or write—but we lack the data on displaced children specifically.

Finally, we have a lack of reliable measures to assess learning in displacement contexts. The most commonly used measures of literacy, numeracy and social-emotional well-being in conflict contexts are too difficult for children, or have untested validity and comparability across contexts. Without credible measures that look at the holistic education needs of children, policymakers and donors cannot understand the scope of the problem, nor assess whether their resources are effective in addressing it.

We need a greater focus on filling this data gap to ensure we know whether children are learning the skills they need for success in school and beyond. Donors should incentivize and invest in building the capacity of governments and other actors to assess and communicate progress against outcomes for all children, and should invest in developing valid, reliable measures to capture learning data that will highlight problems and progress.

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What is the IRC doing to measure progress towards learning outcomes? The IRC has shown that it is possible to assess learning outcomes in challenging crisis and displacement contexts. Due to significant gaps in data and information on learning inside Syria, the IRC undertook an Annual State of Education (ASER) assessment of students in five IRC-supported schools in Idleb Governorate to better understand the reading and math levels among students in grades 1-8. The assessment found that alarmingly, nearly 60 percent of 6th, 7th, and 8th graders are unable to do second grade math, and only 50 percent are able to read at a second grade level.5 This information will subsequently influence IRC’s programming to ensure children are not only in school, but learning.

In addition, we need to invest substantially in research that can help us determine the most effective ways to support and improve children’s learning. The evidence base on what works to improve learning in crisis and conflict contexts is scarce. While there have been 227 rigorous studies carried out to measure learning in low- and middle-income countries,6 there have been a mere 13 education studies conducted in countries affected by crises.7 Of these in conflict settings, only five were rigorous experimental studies and even fewer were on learning outcomes. While evidence generated in stable contexts yields important lessons, displaced and conflict-affected children and youth have unique needs. Research on what works, how, why, for whom and at what cost in these contexts is necessary to ensure programs and policies positively impact children’s lives. Without sound evidence upon which to base decisions on the best use of resources for helping children in fragile or humanitarian contexts, policymakers may rely on assumption and intuition rather than fact, and may not direct resources towards what will yield meaningful outcomes for children.

What is the IRC doing to invest in research? The IRC has launched an initiative with NYU Global TIES for Children called Education in Emergencies: Evidence for Action (3EA). This includes a five-year, multi-country research agenda on what works to improve students’ literacy, numeracy and social-emotional skills that includes evaluation research to assess the effectiveness of our interventions, implementation research to better understand how our programs are working, and measurement research to understand what tools provide reliable data on the processes and outcomes of our programs.

Research that shows what works at what cost is critical to gauge what interventions yield the best value-for-money. We need analyses of both cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness to direct scarce resources towards what will result in the greatest impact at the lowest cost for the most number of children. Cost analyses are rare in displacement contexts. In a recent Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) cost-effective analysis, not one of the 29 interventions studied focused specifically on displaced populations.8 As a result, we do not truly know what providing education in protracted displacement

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5 https://www.rescue.org/report/impact-war-syrian-childrens-learning-testing-shows-gaps-literacy-and-math-skills
8 https://www.povertyactionlab.org/policy-lessons/education/increasing-test-score-performance
contexts costs; we lack transparency around what ingredients comprise cost-per-child benchmarks; and we do not have accurate data to inform evidence-based decision-making around how and where to invest limited resources. Given the massive number of children who are forcibly displaced, understanding cost effectiveness is critical if we are to scale successful interventions.

What is the IRC doing to generate and promote the use of evidence? The IRC has developed the Systematic Cost Analysis (SCAN) tool, and used this to conduct cost analysis of different teacher professional development activities in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon and Pakistan.

II. Removing barriers to displaced children’s access and learning

Questions addressed from the GEM Report concept note:

- To what extent do people and schools that move across borders face challenges from different curricula, languages and education programmes?
- How to certify the credentials of education providers in crisis setting?
- How may formal and non-formal education opportunities be expanded out of schools or within communities, for example through flexible learning initiatives and new technologies?
- How can the negative effects of unpreparedness by both migrating and receiving populations be prevented?

Displaced children face complex and multiple barriers to accessing quality education and to learning. Even when the formal system opens its doors to refugee children, such as through second shift approaches, refugee children may still struggle to access schools due to distance, cost of transportation and fear of safety along the routes to school, and due to policy barriers such as registration and enrollment requirements. Those who enroll in formal schools may face challenges learning when the language of instruction or curriculum is different from that to which they are accustomed. Displaced children may have missed years of schooling, or be struggling with toxic stress, which can prevent them from learning in school. Economic pressures may result in parents choosing to have their children work or have their daughters marry rather than enroll them in school.

To address barriers to quality and mitigate the negative effects of host countries’ unpreparedness for an influx of displaced children—as well as displaced children’s unpreparedness to integrate into a new school system—governments and donors should support and fund a range of quality, accredited, flexible alternatives with pathways to the formal system. Nonformal opportunities such as community-based education can provide children instruction in their home language, with teachers from their community who understand their experiences, in a safe location close to their homes. For children who have missed years of schooling, accelerated learning programs provide crucial support to help them catch up in order to successfully integrate into the formal system when ready. Remedial education can provide specialized support such as language instruction to children within the system who may be struggling and at risk of dropping out or not acquiring skills. Furthermore, nonformal opportunities may alleviate pressure on host communities who may not be able to immediately absorb a large influx of displaced children.

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9 Lebanese schools, for example, use English or French as the language of instruction for many courses, thereby posing a challenge for Syrian children in the second shift system who do not speak or understand either language.
Complimentary education services—delivered under national frameworks and by trusted civil society partners—can reduce the pressure on overstretched education systems that may be struggling to provide quality education to host children and find themselves unequipped to meet displaced children’s needs, particularly given gaps in schooling, language barriers and social-emotional needs. Alternatives can help ensure displaced children do not miss critical years of schooling and integrate in a way that does not overwhelm an already burdened school system and cause or exacerbate tensions between host and displaced communities.

Teachers also have a central and crucial role to play in promoting students’ well-being and learning, but in many contexts, teachers are displaced themselves, suffering the same adversities as their students. It is critical to recognize and address the challenges teachers face; their well-being has a direct effect on students’ outcomes. Refugee teachers must be allowed to teach and earn a regular salary of livable wages. It is essential to support teachers’ motivation as well by supporting them to receive certification for their work so that when they return home, they can rebuild their education system. Certification can be facilitated by working with national actors to align teacher training with the national curriculum and teacher performance standards. In-service training opportunities with local teacher training institutes should certify teachers while allowing them to work without delay.

**How has the IRC achieved teacher certification in crisis settings?** In Ethiopia, the IRC worked with the government to allow community volunteer teachers in rural areas working at alternative basic education schools to take summer courses at local teacher training institutes that would be considered equivalent to pre-service training, and would lead to their certification.

### III. Improving coordination and aid effectiveness

**Questions addressed from the GEM Report concept note:**

- **To what extent and how can actions and funding initiatives by different stakeholders in education and forced migration be better coordinated?**
- **How can the negative effects of unpreparedness by both migrating and receiving populations be prevented?**

Education for children affected by forced displacement remains significantly underfunded. As of December 2016, humanitarian response plans required more than $635 million to meet educational needs globally; actual funding fell short at just $208 million.\(^\text{10}\) In 2016, a mere 1.6 percent of all humanitarian funding went to education. But it will take more than additional funding to improve the educational attainment of displaced children; it will take changes in how aid to education is disbursed, how expected outcomes for that aid are defined, and how progress towards outcomes is measured.

Funding for programs in humanitarian crises tends to be through short-term grants (less than one year), which fail to match the long term nature of displacement today (on average, ten years). At the same time, education programs funded through development institutions like the World Bank, which typically aim to improve a country’s formal school system, rarely target and often do not reach displaced

populations. Education for children who have been forcibly displaced therefore falls through the so-called humanitarian-development divide. A more coordinated approach that brings together a diverse set of donors and implementers is needed. But in our experience, increased funding and improved coordination is necessary but insufficient without stakeholders committing to the leadership and diplomacy necessary to ensure all children receive quality education and achieve learning outcomes.

Donors should show leadership by helping governments write education sector plans that are inclusive of refugees to balance their needs with those of host populations and determine the best solutions for ensuring their access to quality learning opportunities.

Donors should also work with relevant government representatives and humanitarian and development actors to engage in joint assessment and analysis of education needs and constraints. The joint assessment process should involve defining shared outcomes for both displaced and host communities—which, as noted above, should focus on improving both academic and social-emotional skills. Governments and humanitarian and development actors should then define a common results framework for all children to outline a pathway to achieve shared outcomes and guide development of a portfolio of solutions that balances the immediate and long-term needs of host and displaced children. This approach can prevent the grievances that can arise when differing levels of support and quality are achieved by host and displaced populations.

It is critical that financing is used towards solutions that are evidence-based and/or evidence-generating, and solutions that, given scarce resources, are cost-effective and cost-efficient. Donors must place a premium on programming that is based on the evidence we have and that generates new research for the future as well as to enhance implementers’ ability to iterate their programs for better results as part of continuous quality improvement. In addition, standardized cost analysis could help guide donors towards putting their scarce dollars towards the most cost-effective and cost-efficient programs, ensuring the greatest value for their money.

Finally, donors should take a long-term approach to policy and planning. Recognizing that displacement is no longer a short-term problem, donors need to move away from funding short-term solutions which cannot have a meaningful impact on children’s learning, and provide flexible, multi-year financing. Donors should also encourage governments to recognize that refugee children may spend their entire education within their borders and orient their policies accordingly.

One potential solution that could help solve many of these challenges are compact agreements between host governments, donors and humanitarian agencies. When well-executed, compacts can align the incentives of host governments, donors, and implementing organizations by establishing mutually reinforcing commitments to resources and policy changes necessary to improve the delivery of quality education interventions. In turn, a compact serves as a mechanism to incorporate the overarching principles for better aid—especially outcome- and evidence-driven decision making about funding—in a systematic way rather than on an ad-hoc and one-off basis. It further enforces accountability among all actors to ensure investments are coordinated and balanced, and have the intended impact of improved learning among refugees and vulnerable host communities. While this approach is still being tested in places like Lebanon and Jordan, it is a model that, if done well, could help ensure that the comprehensive response of all actors is greater than the sum of their individual efforts.\(^{11}\)

\(^{11}\) For further recommendations on refugee compacts, see the International Rescue Committee and Center for Global Development report “Refugee Compacts: Addressing the Crisis of Protracted Displacement” (2017) at [https://www.rescue.org/report/refugee-compacts](https://www.rescue.org/report/refugee-compacts).