

Towards Comprehensive School Safety

A Global Call to Action

Without preparedness and resilience, continued shocks and stresses threaten to exacerbate an already staggering global education crisis.

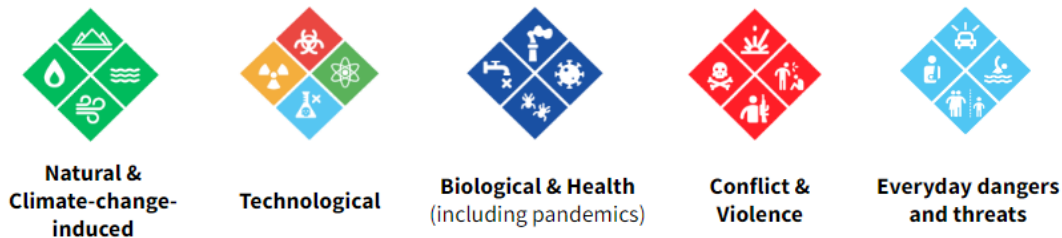
But while crises are sadly inevitable, the adverse impacts on children’s learning are not. Experience and expertise gathered from decades of work in school safety and resilience have culminated in a framework for a different future: the [Comprehensive School Safety Framework for Child Rights and Resilience in the Education Sector 2022-2030 \(CSSF\)](#).

The Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector (GADRRRES) calls on all governments, development partners, and organisations to endorse¹, implement, report on, and champion the CSSF to strengthen education systems now.

Millions of children’s futures are in peril. There is not a moment to lose.

Varied and deepening crises affect children’s learning

Crises disrupt learning for millions of children every year. From the climate crisis to conflict and outbreaks to outages, children – and their learning – face a wide range of risks. These risks are compounded by the interplay between them.



Education systems face a wide range of risks, requiring an all-hazards approach to school safety and resilience.

In the first two decades of the 21st century alone, over 7,000 disasters affected more than four billion people globally,² with at least 26 per cent affecting children under 15.³ During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, education was disrupted for 1.6 billion learners across the globe.⁴ In 2022/23, an average of eight attacks on education were recorded daily.⁵ And right now, 224 million crisis-affected children are in urgent need of education support.⁶

The likelihood of disasters affecting education is only set to increase as the climate crisis deepens. Already, over one billion children live in countries at extremely high risk from the impacts of climate change.⁷ Flooding, the intensity of storms, drought, and other climate-related impacts are on the rise, so much so that by 2050, almost every child will face high heatwave frequency.⁸

These crises exacerbate an already staggering global learning crisis, which sees 250 million children out of school⁹ and nearly two-thirds of 10-year-olds globally unable to read and understand a simple text.¹⁰ Simply put, **crises undermine the already unstable foundation of children’s right to learn** and to be safe and protected in and on their journey to school.

The impact of crises on children's learning

Crises and disasters have a range of impacts on children's learning. Environmental disasters can damage or destroy schools and the infrastructure around them, making it unsafe for children to attend. Attacks on schools further jeopardise the safety of children and teachers in these institutions, locking children out of learning as violence in and around schools escalates. Schools can also be closed for learning - and educational continuity disrupted - if there is no planning in place, especially when schools are serving as temporary shelters during times of conflict, crisis, or displacement, or when disease outbreaks hit. Regardless of the reason, school closures interrupt learning and can lead to increased dropout rates, with evidence of this seen in countries as diverse as Ethiopia, Pakistan, and Chile.¹¹

Even if schools remain open and children attend, this does not mean children's learning is unaffected. The psychosocial impacts of violence and conflict disrupt children's ability to learn, and has even been linked to children dropping out of school.¹² Crises such as heat waves also disrupt children's ability to learn and undermine their academic progress, with reports indicating a marked reduction in test scores during times of extreme heat.¹³

Some children, however, may be unable to attend their school, even if it is open. When crises and disasters exacerbate poverty, children can be pulled out of school because families are unable to afford school fees and other associated costs.¹⁵ Children may also be forced to work in order to contribute to household income in times of economic crisis. In the worst cases, children and their families may be forced to flee their homes, meaning children are displaced way from their homes and unable to attend school - possibly never to return.

“My mother almost got killed by armed forces because of conflicts over farmland. We were displaced from our home. It is now not easy for me to be in school. I'm always sent away from school because we cannot pay school fees.”

Fahima, Sudan¹⁴

Not all children are affected equally

While children around the globe are affected, the impacts are far from uniform. Some children face additional and compounding barriers to learning. For instance:

- **Girls in all their diversity** are disproportionately affected by hazards, increasing the risk of gendered caring responsibilities or withdrawal from school as families struggle to cope with the negative financial strain of disasters. The financial impacts of disaster may also increase child, early and forced marriage, a practice only likely to increase as climate crises deepens. In fact, by 2050, the number of girls at extreme risk of climate change and child marriage is set to increase by one-third to nearly 40 million, with additional consequences for their education.¹⁶ **Boys** can also be disproportionately affected by increased reliance on their contribution to family income when livelihoods have been impacted, or with increased risk of recruitment into armed forces when schools are closed.¹⁷
- **Children with disabilities** often lack the additional and unique support required to continue learning, or even stay safe, during disasters. People with disabilities are rarely reflected in disaster risk reduction (DRR) plans, with just 8 per cent of respondents in a 2023 survey reporting that local DRR plans addressed their specific needs. Beyond DRR, children face additional barriers to learning including stigma and discrimination, poverty, and poor infrastructure, among other factors.¹⁸

- **Displacement** can be a result of crises, but refugee and displaced children can also face the additional impacts of crises and disasters. For instance, housing for refugee communities is often in places at increased risk to the impacts of climate change, increasing the likelihood of multiple disruptions to learning and further environmental degradation.
- The **poorest children and young people** are often those already facing the greatest barriers to learning and at greatest risk of the impacts of crises. They are among those most likely to be pulled out of school due to the inability to pay school fees and those whose families may have the least resilience in the face of disasters. They are also among the children most likely to be accessing poorly constructed or dangerously located school buildings that are not built to withstand environmental impacts and extreme weather, or where water and sanitation facilities are inadequate.

The lifesaving power of learning

While disruption can have devastating consequences for children’s learning, **education is also a powerful force for positive change.**

Investments that provide resilient schools and education systems can reduce climate risks for 275 million children.²⁰ DRR education improves children’s and communities’ resilience in the face of crises, teaching them the lifesaving knowledge and skills they need when disaster strikes. Education also promotes peaceful societies and economic prosperity, giving children hope for a better life after crises subside.

"My friends and I feel safe. We don't fear floods or cyclones anymore."

Margarida, Mozambique¹⁹

Another future with the Comprehensive School Safety Framework

The Comprehensive School Safety Framework is an all-hazards, all-risks approach to protecting children and education, setting out a tangible, practical and proven model to strengthen the resilience of education systems, support education continuity and provide children with the skills, knowledge and behaviours to prepare for and respond to all shocks and stresses.

The Framework takes an ‘all-hazards, all-risks’ approach, recognising that education systems must be resilient to a range of hazards and - critically - the interplay between them.

Over 70 countries have endorsed the CSSF, using its clear, outcome-focused approach to support safer, more resilient schools in their country.



The CSSF in practice

Enabling Systems and Policies

In **Iran**, UNESCO and UNICEF collaborated with the Ministry of Education to strengthen enabling systems and policies in line with the Comprehensive School Safety Framework for the inclusion of vulnerable groups. The initiative focused on developing materials and guidelines to better prepare students with disabilities for disasters, while enhancing the knowledge and skills of policy and decision-makers, officials, and teachers regarding the needs of children with disabilities in school safety initiatives. The project also involved creating accessible and inclusive learning modules, alongside environmental literacy assessments, contributing to safer, more resilient, and inclusive learning environments for all children.

Pillar 1: Safer Learning Facilities

In **South Sudan**, the Ministry of General Education and Instruction has worked with Save the Children, World Vision, Windle Trust International, Finn Church Aid, Peace Corps Organization, Help Education South Sudan, and Action for Children Development Foundation to construct and rehabilitate 22 schools across the country to improve their resilience. In the past, flooding had caused many children to drop out of school, with schools submerged and families forced to relocate. Now, the new flood-resilient schools and classrooms have led to improved access to education, increased enrolment, and enhanced sanitation in certain areas. In Tiap Tiap Primary School in Warrap State, enrolment has more than doubled since the project began.

The new schools are part of the Global Partnership for Education-funded Multi-Year Resilience Programme for South Sudan, which – in addition to disaster risk management – addresses gender and inclusion, mental health and psychosocial support, school materials, and teacher training, leading to a comprehensive improvement in quality education.²¹

Pillar 2: School Safety and Educational Continuity Management

In the **Philippines**, Save the Children's Comprehensive School Safety Ecosystem (CSSE) project aims to strengthen the resilience of the Philippines school system to all hazards, with education continuity management a key element. In partnership with the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Prudence Foundation, CSSE created the Disaster Risk Reduction Management Information System (DRRMIS) which featured three digital apps to increase data collection for school safety response and planning. One of these apps, engaged children in the process of mapping the school environment and identifying hazards to ensure a comprehensive approach to risk assessment.

The CSSE has already reached over 620,000 people across the Philippines through different interventions and serves as a sustainable and scalable strategy for protecting all 47,000 schools in the Philippines against disasters, including the effects of climate change.²²

Pillar 3: Risk Reduction and Resilience Education

UNDRR has developed an [online game](#), 'Stop Disasters', to help children, young people, educators and the public understand disaster risk reduction (DRR). The game presents five scenarios across diverse geographical contexts, requiring players to save lives by implementing disaster risk reduction plans and actions. The game can be used in classrooms with children aged 9-16 as an important tool for learning about DRR. The game was most recently updated in May 2024.

Why endorse the Comprehensive School Safety Framework?

The Comprehensive School Safety Framework sets out a robust, clear, and complete roadmap to building a cross-governmental strategy on school safety. The Framework:

- **adopts an all-hazards approach:** supporting an approach that is true to the experience of many countries and relevant for a wide range of disasters and the compounding effects of multiple crises.
- **contributes to cost-saving:** setting out how to develop safe and resilient infrastructure that can withstand future shocks and impacts, with investment in mitigation proven to have as much as a 6:1 cost-benefit ratio.²³
- **supports whole-of-community knowledge and approaches,** with DRR lessons learned in school communicated by students to their families and safe schools used as examples in the community, improving knowledge on hazard-resistant construction techniques.²⁴
- **supports interministerial engagement:** predicated on cross-governmental dialogue, engagement, and budgeting, in recognition of the fact that the impacts on education are not limited to the education sector.
- **offers practical solutions:** with each section of the CSSF articulating key actors, responsibilities, and recommended strategies for implementation.

Endorsing the CSSF not only demonstrates a commitment to ensuring that every school is a safe school; it means agreeing to make the necessary policy and programmatic changes, allocate funding, and implement actions to drive forward comprehensive school safety. It is both a political commitment and a roadmap to successful and safe schools for all.

Call to action

GADRRRES calls on all governments, development partners, and organisations to:

- 1) **Endorse¹ the Comprehensive School Safety Framework.** Endorsement of the CSSF signals high-level commitment to work towards implementing and institutionalising the 3 pillars and foundation of the CSSF.
- 2) **Implement the CSSF.** Use the recommendations included in the framework to shape policy, programmes, resources, and ways of working, including establishing multi-sector coordination mechanisms and work together with Ministries and Departments of Health, Environment, Climate Change, Meteorology, Civil Protection and National Disaster Management Authorities.
- 3) **Report on progress implementing the CSSF,** sharing impact, updates, and lessons learned with national and global stakeholders.
- 4) **Champion comprehensive school safety in your region,** including encouraging regional bodies and other countries to endorse and implement it, showcasing best practices, and raising its profile in different policy spaces and events (across climate change, health, DRR, humanitarian and education).

Conclusion

The causes of disasters are diverse, but the outcome is the same: **a risk of disruption to children's right to learn.** We need urgent action from every government to endorse, implement, report, and champion the Comprehensive School Safety Framework. The clock is ticking.



Endnotes

- ¹ To endorse the CSSF, **governments** should [send an email to the GADRRRES Secretariat](#) explaining their commitment to comprehensive school safety and the actions they propose to undertake following their endorsement. [A template endorsement email can be downloaded from the GADRRRES website](#). For **organisations** interested in supporting and advocating for CSSF, see the relevant page on the [GADRRRES website](#).
- ² CRED (2020). [The Human Cost of Natural Disasters: A Global Perspective](#).
- ³ The World Bank (2021). [Population ages 0-14 \(% of total population\) | Data](#).
- ⁴ UNESCO, [Education: From COVID-19 school closures to recovery](#).
- ⁵ Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) (2024). [Education Under Attack 2024](#).
- ⁶ Education Cannot Wait (2023). [Crisis-Affected Children and Adolescents in Need of Education Support: New Global Estimates and Thematic Deep Dives](#).
- ⁷ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2021). [Children's Climate Risk Index](#).
- ⁸ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2023). [The Climate-Changed Child](#).
- ⁹ UNESCO (2023) [250 million children out-of-school: What you need to know about UNESCO's latest education data](#).
- ¹⁰ The World Bank, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, UNICEF, UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, USAID, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and UNESCO (2022), [State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update](#).
- ¹¹ World Bank Group (2024). [The Impact of Climate Change on Education and what to do about it](#).
- ¹² Ryan, G., Lemmi, V., Hanna, F., Loryman, H. and Eaton, J. (2019). [Mental Health for Sustainable Development: A Topic Guide for Development Professionals](#). K4D Emerging Issues Report. London and Brighton, UK: Mental Health Innovation Network and IDS.
- ¹³ Cho, H (2017). [The effects of summer heat on academic achievement: A cohort analysis](#). Journal of Environmental Economics and Management, vol.83, May 2017.
- ¹⁴ Save the Children International (2019). ['Our Education, Our Future': A child-led research study in Sudan](#).
- ¹⁵ Plan International (2023). [Climate Change and Girls' Education: Barriers, Gender Norms and Pathways to Resilience Synthesis Report](#).
- ¹⁶ Save the Children International and Save the Children US (2023). [Global Girlhood Report 2023: Girls at the Centre of the Storm – Her planet, her future, her solutions](#).
- ¹⁷ Paris Principles Steering Group (2022), [Paris Principles Operational Handbook](#).
- ¹⁸ Send My Friend to School (2022). [The right climate to learn: Education in a changing climate](#).
- ¹⁹ UNICEF USA (2023). [Climate-proof schools in Mozambique: Climate adaptation that works](#).
- ²⁰ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2021). [Children's Climate Risk Index](#).
- ²¹ Read more at: [Rising Above the Floods: Transforming Education in South Sudan with Flood-Resistant Classrooms | South Sudan | Save the Children](#)
- ²² Read more in: Save the Children (2024). [CHILD-CENTERED EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS: EXAMPLES AND GOOD PRACTICE](#).
- ²³ In the United States, a report in 2020 notes that federal grants invested in mitigation saved the country \$6 for every \$1 invested since 1995. See: https://www.nibs.org/files/pdfs/ms_v4_overview.pdf.
- ²⁴ See: [Challenges and benefits of community-based safer school construction - ScienceDirect](#)

About GADRRRES

The Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector (GADRRRES) was established in 2013 to provide a comprehensive approach to school safety. It is a multi-stakeholder alliance composed of UN agencies, international non-governmental agencies, humanitarian and development organisations and networks, youth organisations, donors/multilateral funds, and private sector organisations that work together to advocate for and support child rights, resilience, and sustainability in the education sector across the humanitarian, development, peace nexus. GADRRRES has regional networks in Asia, the Pacific, the Americas and the Caribbean and West and Central Africa.

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