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## Children in Humanitarian Crises: We must act now to save childhood rights- REACH Network

### Communique Issued after the Second Meeting of the Reporters for Early Age Children in Humanitarian Crisis (REACH) Network, Hosted by the Moving Minds Alliance via Zoom on April 29, 2025

The REACH Network is a global movement of reporters dedicated to advocating improved care and support for young children and their caregivers in emergencies, displacement, and crises through their reporting. REACH focuses on:

- Investigating and reporting on early childhood development in emergencies.
- Advancing evidence-based interventions and best practices in early childhood care during emergencies.
- Advocating for increased attention, resources, and sustainable Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes in humanitarian crisis response efforts.

Having reviewed and reflected on the state of children in crisis settings, we note the following regarding early childhood development. Today, the world is in crisis — countries are at war, global warming is accelerating at an unprecedented scale, freedom and dissent are under attack, and human rights violations have become widespread. Where do children's rights fit in? Currently, there are around 2 billion children around the world who are between [0-14 years](#). [Babies and young children](#) are among the most vulnerable people. Childcare in a humanitarian crisis is [critical](#) as it is often the key to [laying the foundation](#) for the children. UNICEF [has pointed out](#) that for babies and young children in humanitarian settings, access to early childhood services can be a matter of life and death. It is imperative that we act now to ensure early childhood rights are not curtailed. In this communique, we focus on a few countries where large-scale distress is unfolding. We are also putting forward a list of recommendations which, though country-specific, can make a significant difference to the overall lives of children in humanitarian crises around the world.

### Observations

#### India

India is home to 19 per cent of the world's children. More than one-third of the country's population is below the age of 18 years. Intersectionality is the key in understanding the local context and how the desired outcomes can be achieved in the sectors of education, health, nutrition, closing gender disparity and breaking the chain of intergenerational violence.

India is extremely prone to natural disasters, with the country witnessing [three major cyclones in 2023](#), and [four in 2024](#). It is anticipating longer heatwaves [this year](#), and 37 cities in the country experienced temperatures above 45 degrees Celsius [last year](#). Over [2.4 million children](#) required assistance. [Flood exposure](#) in India worsens child malnutrition. Disasters also stand in the way of children receiving [timely immunisations](#). Studies also show the deep [psychological impact](#) on children in the aftermath of disasters. The climate crisis has also left women and children vulnerable to [trafficking](#) in India. [Education remains hit](#) due to excessive heat, repeated disasters.

#### Jordan

Jordan has made significant progress in child well-being, including a one-third reduction in under-five mortality, near-universal school enrollment, gender parity in education since 1979, and widespread access to improved water and sanitation services. Nevertheless, Jordan continues to encounter challenges in early childhood development. These challenges arise because of the demographic composition and the water situation.

Jordan is considered a young society, with children under the age of 18 accounting for [approximately 40 per cent of the population](#), a number expected to keep rising. Jordan relies on the [private sector to provide early childhood care and education services](#). In general, less-privileged children have access to only 5 per cent of available early childhood care services. In contrast, more privileged children have a 44 per cent access rate to early childhood care services.

[Jordan is considered one of the most water-scarce countries in the world](#). Children are particularly vulnerable to water-related diseases and malnutrition that can hinder their development. Inadequate water services could undermine educational attainment by Jordanian youth—particularly girls.

Around [50 per cent of the refugees in Jordan are children](#): Refugee children need access to education, healthcare, psychosocial support, and other services; refugee children face difficulties in accessing education. Out of 233,000 school-aged Syrian children, around 84,000 are out of school. The majority of registered Syrian refugees in Jordan live in poverty, with refugee children facing heightened vulnerability due to depleted family savings, unemployment, and heavy reliance on international aid.

## **Uganda**

With a population of 45.9 million people, children in Uganda constitute half of this population according to the country's 2022 Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS).

Uganda has made some strides in the health status of children but challenges remain. The 2022 Demographic and Health Survey indicated that 26 per cent of children between the ages of 6 - 5 years are facing stunting and wasting due to malnutrition.

The under-five mortality rate stands at 52 deaths per 1,000 live births. Access to quality education remains a concern, with only 41 per cent of children completing primary school. These issues are more pronounced in rural areas, where resources are limited. Children continue to be vulnerable to various forms of violence, exploitation, and abuse, including child labour, child marriage, and sexual abuse. 34 per cent of women aged 20-24 are getting married below the age of 18.

Over half of young children lived in multidimensional poverty, deprived in at least two key areas of their rights, and around 1 in 4 lived in extreme poverty. Uganda is also home to over 1.7 million refugees. The ongoing refugee crisis further strained resources and increased the number of children needing urgent humanitarian assistance.

## **Nigeria**

The 2024 Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in Nigeria<sup>1</sup>, published by the Nigerian government with the support of the country's office of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in April, paints a sad picture of the plight of the country's 105 million children, nearly half of its population.

In Nigeria, 2.1 million children are unvaccinated – 10.2 million children of primary school age, and 8.1 million of secondary school age are currently out of school. While 1,047 of 100,000 women who give birth die, newborn mortality is recorded at 41 per 1,000 live births.

The situation may have been further exacerbated by the renewed terrorist attacks, banditry, and violence across the northern part of the country, and indeed, across many of the nation's 36 states and Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory.

Statistics from the past year show Nigeria ranked as the country with the second highest climate risk for children, and had the world's highest number of people at 31.8 million who did not have access to sufficient food.

Meanwhile, it is [reported](#) elsewhere that across six northern Nigerian states, an average of 1.8 million children are at risk of severe acute malnutrition.

However, it is not all gloom. The situation report, which is the second edition, is, according to the authors, intended "to support government efforts to shape policies and shift investment patterns to benefit all Nigerian children".

Before the global COVID-19 pandemic struck, Nigeria was reported to have recorded some progress, especially in antenatal care, school enrollment, exclusive breastfeeding, water, sanitation, and hygiene, among others, but the pandemic and the rampaging climate crisis may have derailed the progress.

Today, there seems to be more danger on the horizon, especially following the dwindling donor funding for the developmental sector, and the increasing violence, which has rendered many farmers useless, and heightened the food crisis.

## **Cameroon**

In Cameroon, children are experiencing undue hardships following three overlapping humanitarian crises: the drawn-out Anglophone crisis, the protracted Boko Haram insurgency, and the unending influx of refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR) due to political instability. These crises have turned their lives upside down and disrupted their access to education, healthcare, and safety –leaving many in precarious situations.

In the English-speaking North West and South West regions, armed separatist groups continue to target educational institutions, learners and teachers, leading to widespread school closures. About 25 % of children between the ages of three and 17 are still unable to go to school in the conflict-ridden regions, according to the Cameroon Education Cluster. The violence has also resulted in significant displacement, with nearly half a million people, including women and children, forced from their homes.

While many children displaced by the Boko Haram insurgency face climate-induced food insecurity and limited access to essential resources like clean water, some from next-door CAR have been born in Cameroon without official documentation – leaving them stateless and without access to essential services.

Across Cameroon, 3.4 million people, including 1.9 million children, require urgent life-saving assistance and protection assistance due to these complex and multifaceted crises. The huge funding gap and difficult access to affected areas due to insecurity and poor infrastructure remain significant challenges.

## **Recommendations**

### **Nigeria**

In the face of this precarious situation, the Nigerian government would need to close the funding gaps by increasing the budgetary allocation to these critical areas that are vital to children's survival, such as health, education, and social protection services.

According to the document, these three key sectors combined, which received 22 per cent of the total budget in 2021, only received 15.7 per cent in the 2024 budget.

Also, the report indicates that a total of 200,000 teachers are needed nationwide to close the teacher-student ratio. This cannot be too much for a nation that removed fuel subsidy with the pledge that accruals would be invested in critical sectors of the national economy.

Improved security is required to ensure the return of farmers to their farms and keep children in schools in order to address the biting consequences of hunger and illiteracy.

## India

There is an urgent need to mount the lens of intersectionality in order to turn focus on early childhood interventions. Access to early childhood development [remains inadequate](#) and it is not getting the attention it deserves. Research shows that [targeted interventions are required](#) in order to fight malnutrition. Despite [the existence of several state and state schemes](#), families often struggle to provide nutrition to children. In fact, malnutrition under the age of five is a [major public health crisis](#) in India. Babies and young children need urgent attention and care under these unprecedented circumstances. The call for action includes taking note of intersectionality – this would mean acknowledging the unprecedented climate crisis burden that India faces today, and how it needs region-specific as well as national policies to deal with this crisis in order to take measures to provide early childhood development support and help break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. A holistic early childhood policy would also mean adopting a gendered focus where young mothers are educated on the need for early childhood care, including improving access to sanitation, food, education and livelihood, especially in places which are the most vulnerable to climate-related disasters.

## Jordan

To address the stark disparities in access to early childhood care and education, the Jordanian government should prioritise expanding publicly funded ECD programmes, particularly in underserved and refugee-dense communities. These include establishing more affordable and accessible childcare centres, training and certifying early childhood educators, and integrating ECD into national education planning. Public-private partnerships can be leveraged, but with clear equity-focused frameworks to ensure that vulnerable populations—especially low-income and refugee children—are not left behind.

Given Jordan's extreme water scarcity and its impact on child health and education, a coordinated national strategy is needed to improve WASH infrastructure in schools and communities, with a focus on resilience and sustainability. This should be coupled with targeted health interventions, such as nutrition programmes and disease prevention campaigns, especially in refugee camps and impoverished areas. Cross-sector collaboration between health, education, and water ministries, supported by international partners, will be essential to protect children's development and learning outcomes in the face of environmental and demographic pressures.

## Uganda

The government of Uganda should provide lifesaving health and nutrition programmes while also expanding access to quality education, especially in the rural areas where school dropouts are high, particularly among girls. Creating awareness around early marriage in communities will go a long way in bringing about change in how children between 0-8 years are treated by their parents. Employment opportunities for families will boost the standard of living of the local population. This, in turn, will translate into better parameters of early childhood care. Most importantly, Uganda's Refugee Policy should focus on the child and the unique challenges they face.

Jointly, we urge that there be multi-stakeholder collaboration. National governments and policymakers must act swiftly to implement policy reforms, prioritise increasing budget allocations for child welfare programmes, and strengthen social safety nets. Public-private partnerships and regional cooperation are vital for sustainable support, leveraging innovation and technology from the private sector to develop scalable solutions for education, healthcare, and crisis response. The future of countless children depends on our collective action.

## Cameroon

Based on the current precarious situation of children in Cameroon's multifaceted crises, the government, humanitarian actors, donors, civil society, and the international community should work towards reopening and protecting schools in conflict-affected areas as well as supporting community-based education programs and alternative learning spaces. There is also the need to expeditiously hold accountable those who attack schools, teachers, pupils and students.

Psychosocial support, trauma care, and family reunification services should be scaled up while the prevention of the recruitment and use of children by armed groups should be prioritised.

Efforts to reinforce birth registration and legal documentation, especially for refugee and displaced children, should be pursued.

Donors and other well-wishers should increase their funding for the Humanitarian Response Plan for Cameroon with dedicated child-focused programming.

Every child deserves safety, education, and a future. The time to act is now. Silence and inaction are not neutral—they are a betrayal of the most innocent. Let us stand together to protect and uplift the children of Cameroon.

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