

Education Cannot Wait (ECW) & Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Complementarity Note

November 2024

1. Purpose

The primary purpose of this note is to outline, for ECW and GPE donors, the rationale for having two global funds for education – one that focuses on emergencies and protracted crises, and another that focuses on longer-term education systems strengthening. To do this, the note highlights the added value of having two funds and explains how ECW and GPE are working together at all levels in complementary ways to support the education of children and adolescents across the development and emergency spectrum. The note also introduces suggestions for strengthening the collaboration between ECW and GPE in the future.

2. About ECW and GPE

The number of crises around the world has increased over the last ten years and this upward trend is unfortunately continuing. By the end of 2023, the number of forcibly displaced people across the globe had reached 117.3 million, and by April 2024 it was estimated to have exceeded 120 million, including 31.6 million refugees. The school-aged refugee population is estimated to stand at 14.8 million this year. Of those children, 49 per cent are estimated to be out of school – that means approximately 7.2 million refugee children are missing out on education. ECW estimates that globally, the education of over 224 million children and adolescents is being impacted by displacement, climate change and conflict.

ECW's mission is to generate shared political, operational and financial commitment to meet the education needs of millions of children and adolescents affected by crises, with a focus on more agile, connected, and faster responses that span the humanitarian-development continuum to achieve sustainable education systems.

It is also critical to provide continuous and consistent support to strengthen government education systems for longer-term, sustainable and equitable delivery of education services to all children and adolescents. In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, governments must be able to meet the most urgent education needs while also building resilient, equitable education systems for the future.

As part of its broader mandate to transform education systems in lower income countries, GPE therefore strengthens the capacity of education systems to prepare for, respond to, and recover from crises. GPE's standard approach to crisis response is to either adapt ongoing programmes or provide a share of its indicative grant support more rapidly when urgent needs arise prior to grant allocation, during a process to develop longer term reforms ('accelerated funding' of up to 20% of the allocation or max \$10 million).

Both funds ultimately aim to improve the participation and holistic learning outcomes of our respective beneficiaries, with ECW focussing exclusively on children and adolescents impacted by crises and GPE covering this target group as part of its wider objectives. These two distinct but interconnected mandates underscore the need for both funds. The way in which GPE and ECW have been set up provides a natural point of convergence in fragile and protracted crisis contexts, supporting the continuum between humanitarian and development programming.

The need for funding to support quality education provision for children and adolescents impacted by crises has never been greater. Given the massive shortage of resources to education, we are not aware of any country or context supported by ECW and GPE where education financing needs are fully met. This in turn highlights the importance of the ongoing efforts of ECW and GPE to maximize funding for education.

3. Complementarity and added value

It is important to define the ways in which ECW and GPE are complementary, as well as to distinguish between duplication and complementarity. Duplication would mean that the same activities for the same beneficiaries are supported by both funds in a way that overlaps; for instance, both funds financing the same kind of training for the same teachers or providing two sets of supplies for the same school. To be clear, we have robust quality assurance processes in place to prevent this happening.

The definition of complementarity relates to both the global and country level. At the global level, complementarity relates predominantly to which countries are supported by ECW and by GPE. ECW can intervene in crisis contexts not eligible for GPE funding, while GPE supports many countries where there is no (current) need for education emergency support. In contexts that receive support from both funds, the specificities of each context determine the exact nature of the complementarity. It may mean both funds supporting the same types of activities in different parts of a country; different but mutually reinforcing activities in the same location; or different activities in different locations. Some examples of complementary programming are outlined in section 4 of this note.

Both ECW and GPE recognize that we need to do more to further streamline processes at country-level where both funds engage, to reduce potential confusion and limit transaction costs. Several of the improvement areas listed in section 5 are geared towards addressing this need.

Within an overall context of an increasing number of crisis-affected children and youth at risk of losing out on a quality education, there are four important reasons for having two education funds:

- I. Generating more overall funding for education – two funds, each with different, but complementarity mandates and mutually reinforcing financing instruments, offer more potential to raise funding across the humanitarian-development spectrum for education. Separate funds provide a more comprehensive framework for raising funds. This is evidenced by the fact that since ECW's creation, there have been year on year increases in funding for education in emergencies, both within and outside appeals and response plans.¹ ECW itself has mobilized \$1.65 billion for its trust fund and leveraged an additional \$1.2 billion, the bulk of which is channelled through the nexus-focussed Multi-Year Resilience Programmes (MYRPs). Meanwhile, since ECW was created in 2016, GPE has mobilized \$5.96 billion in donor contributions and leveraged an additional \$4.5 billion in multiplier co-financing. And, although ECW and GPE may indirectly vie for resources from the same development-orientated funding budgets from donors, there is a clear division with regards to emergency funding (for which ECW's mandate is best suited) and broader fundraising for education systems, including leveraging domestic financing for education which is a core part of GPE's mandate. The private sector and funding from foundations is sufficiently diverse to ensure that both funds do not overlap when seeking funds from these donors.

¹ https://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/7-Key-Insights_Unlocking-Futures-A-Global-Overview-of-EiE-Financing.pdf

The fact that needs vastly outstrip available resources for education in lower-income and crisis-affected countries is highly concerning. ECW and GPE therefore continue to advocate for increased funding to education both jointly and separately. Our respective efforts to raise additional funds for education through increasingly innovative mechanisms point to the added value we have in calling attention to the detrimental impact of reductions in education financing² and doing everything we can to reverse this trend.

- II. Offering strength through diverse options for support – ECW and GPE offer a range of flexible in-country financing options adapted to the varied contexts which both funds support. Often, the need for short- and longer-term funding co-exists in countries that have nascent or fragile education systems. While countries are doing their best to plan with a development view, vulnerabilities to crisis continue to exist or a crisis may affect one part of a country in a more protracted way than others. Bridging the humanitarian-development nexus requires leveraging the comparative advantages of different actors, including those of ECW and GPE.

Through its First Emergency Response window, ECW is able to quickly respond to sudden-onset disasters and rapid escalations of existing crises. At the other end of the spectrum, System Capacity, System Transformation and Multiplier Grants from GPE offer partner countries the ability to make evidence-based investments in programmes that drive systemwide change while also building resiliency into education systems. Both funds thus often converge in fragile and protracted crisis contexts. In the kinds of situations where GPE's accelerated funding is activated, country partners have flexibility to determine the basis for accessing these funds. For example, accelerated funding can finance the implementation of government-led resilience strategies into their sector plans. However, country partners can also opt to use ECW's MYRP as the basis for accelerated funding. This in turn may result in reduced transactional costs at country level. Exit/transition strategies are systematically built-in to support better sequencing of interventions. In all but the most severe crises, the bulk of GPE's grants are still geared towards system reforms with longer-term impact.

- III. Reinforcing complementarity coordination mechanisms – ECW's entry point for its investments at country level is the humanitarian coordination mechanisms (Education Clusters, Education in Emergencies Working Groups, Refugee Education Working Groups, etc.). GPE works through national education development coordination mechanisms (local education groups). Both funds put significant emphasis on strengthening and connecting these complementary coordination mechanisms, which need to come together to ensure cohesive and well-coordinated responses across the nexus. Thus, having both funds support the education architecture at country level can help to maximize efficiency and effectiveness of support. The relevant staff responsible for country programmes in each of the secretariats continue to advocate for and support the improvement of the connection and flow of information between the different coordination mechanisms. This includes, for example, coordinators of local education groups participating in Education Cluster/Education in Emergencies Working Group/Refugee Working Group meetings and vice versa. GPE accelerated funding applications are coordinated with key partners through both local education groups and Education Clusters to ensure that programming complements the support provided through agreed response plans, including Multi-Year Resilience Programmes, where they exist.

- IV. Forging more diverse partnerships – the combined operational modalities of the two funds stimulate a wider range of partnerships with governments, UN agencies, international and local organisations and civil society organisations both globally and at country level. ECW’s setup, with a lean structure and substantive experience in emergencies and protracted crises implemented entirely through the direct execution modality (enabling it to work without government proximity if necessary), ensure a strong focus on those left furthest behind. Meanwhile, GPE brings the added value of being anchored in partner countries’ education development coordination mechanisms, convening multilateral, bilateral and non-governmental actors around harmonized aligned, and longer-term education support. In addition, GPE supports and promotes civil society and teacher engagement in policy dialogue while also increasingly creating links to the private sector to leverage their support to education.

In summary, there is a collective responsibility between the two funds and clear structural and contextual set-ups which provide the opportunities to work together.

4. Collaboration at country level

Responding to emergencies is very much the comparative advantage of ECW, whereas supporting education system transformation in lower income countries regardless of context is the responsibility of GPE. Where the two funds meet is in the middle – fragile and/or conflict affected states with protracted crises. These contexts require a greater focus on ensuring clear communication about what both funds support.

GPE’s work with governments to prepare and respond to crisis and minimize their impact on education systems is complementary to ECW’s work in financing rapid and multi-year education responses in crises through the humanitarian system. In practical terms, in some countries GPE funding has been used to expand activities already funded by ECW, while in others complementarity has been ensured by targeting different populations and supporting different types of interventions. Both funds involve a wide range of in-country actors in decisions on funding to meet context needs and specificities, and at least a sub-set of these actors, notably the UN and donors, are involved in discussions on both funds, contributing to defining complementarity between the ways the two funds are programmed.

Our experience with partner countries affected by fragility and conflict is that no context is the same in terms of how GPE and ECW complement each other. Some concrete examples of how both funds have worked to date in several countries to deliver complementarity responses are outlined below:

i) Sudden changes in situation

In some contexts, the situation can rapidly change from a stable, development-type context into one in which it is no longer possible to work with the authorities. As ECW does not support governments directly, in general, the main impact in such situations is on GPE funding. New routes need to be found to unlock financing and continue support to the delivery of education services for vulnerable populations without channelling funds through the government. This is why GPE has built-in flexibility to move funds and shift delivery modalities to ensure the most urgent needs are met. ECW and GPE have successfully come together in several such contexts to ensure coherent actions are taken to respond to ensure education continuity and to minimize the impact on education systems. Recent examples include Afghanistan, Myanmar, Niger, Ethiopia, and Sudan.

ii) Not being able to engage with de facto authorities

Political challenges, such as those posed by *coups d'état* or other forms of political upheaval, often mean that it is not possible for the international community to have direct contact with the *de facto* authorities. In such cases, both ECW and GPE are able to work through alternative mechanisms, relying on the broader UN and donor coordination of support.

In Syria, over a decade of conflict has resulted in the deaths of more than half a million people and produced one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world. In 2016, the Education Dialogue Forum (EDF) was set up to facilitate exchange between humanitarian and development partners. To support children and adolescents with greater access to education, ECW funded an Initial Investment in Syria from 2017 to 2019, followed by the roll-out of a full-fledged Multi-Year Resilience Programme (MYRP). First Emergency Responses (FERs) have also been launched to respond to escalating emergencies.³ Syria became eligible for GPE support in 2018, \$25 million of which was programmed to support the pre-existing MYRP of \$30 million in 2019. This allowed for GPE funding to support the MYRP objectives in full coordination with humanitarian partners. The GPE funding linked closely to the EDF as the governing body ensuring the refinement of donor conditions and accountability for GPE funding as well as broader visibility of the MYRP activities, facilitating coordinated alignment with other actors supporting the response. Subsequently, in 2023 GPE approved an accelerating funding grant to support the education sector response in earthquake-affected regions.

In Myanmar, following the military takeover in February 2021 and the subsequent political crisis, most partner engagement with the Ministry of Education under the *de facto* authorities was paused. The combination of the political situation, ongoing inter-communal conflicts, and the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a massive education crisis. Following the coup, partners developed a Joint Response Framework (JRF) to coordinate and prioritize support. In 2022, GPE approved an accelerated funding grant and re-programmed its existing grant in support of coordination and monitoring around the JRF. In 2023, ECW approved a MYRP and GPE approved a reprogramming to further support implementation of JRF priorities. GPE, ECW and other bilateral support is complementary through expanding the geographical coverage of interventions in the country in alignment with JRF priorities.

iii) Protracted crises

In South Sudan, strong government leadership has provided a solid foundation upon which both funds have been able to capitalize. This context has enabled ECW and GPE to work together in lockstep to ensure international education financing targets those worst affected by emergencies and protracted crises. When one-third of the country was flooded in 2022, GPE made S\$10 million in accelerated funding available at the country's request to mitigate flood impact on education. The ministry and its partners decided to allocate this support towards the ECW-facilitated MYRP, as additional financing to the \$40 million seed funding from ECW. As a result, the GPE funding was fully integrated into the scope of work, the targeting of beneficiaries, as well as the grantee selection process. Country partners felt this made for a more efficient process. The MYRP is grounded in the reality of South Sudan, with a focus on girls and children with disabilities, the return of refugees and IDPs, and the transition from emergency to development. The MYRP is closely aligned with the country's education sector plan, which the bulk of GPE resources is supporting in areas of improving access, quality, and system management.⁴

³ <https://www.educationcannotwait.org/our-investments/where-we-work/syria>

⁴ <https://sendmyfriend.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Let-My-Friends-Learn-EiE-policy-report.pdf>

iv) Refugees and internally displaced populations

ECW and GPE are both supporting DRC to ensure the continuity of education for crisis-affected children. Since the beginning of 2023, the intensification of multiple and overlapping crises have devastated the provinces of Nord-Kivu, Sud-Kivu, and Ituri. DRC is home to over 6.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), including 1.4 million boys, girls, and adolescents, including children with disabilities ([Education Cluster](#)). DRC also hosts over 529,000 refugees and asylum-seekers who have fled violence in neighboring countries ([UNHCR](#)). In terms of programmatic interventions, the ECW First Emergency Response and a sub-component of the GPE System Transformation Grant (STG) are aligned in their support of the establishment and equipment of temporary learning spaces, teacher training including on psychosocial support, improving the quality of education, as well as gender-based violence prevention and response – with a specific focus on gender equality and the inclusion of children with disabilities. Both grants are active in Nord-Kivu, the most severely affected region, while the FER also covers South-Kivu and the STG covers Ituri. In addition, the STG supports the development of a national education in emergencies strategy in line with the education sector plan, as well as the development of an accelerated learning program for the reintegration in the formal education system of children and adolescents who dropped out of school. ECW and GPE teams are in touch to ensure continuation of synergies in light of MYRP preparation.

5. Collaboration between the two Secretariats

GPE representatives sit on ECW's High-Level Steering Group and Executive Committee and since June 2024, ECW is represented in GPE's governance structures through the UN constituency shared with UNICEF and UNHCR, thereby assuring mutual participation in each of the governance bodies. The principals meet regularly to discuss areas of cooperation and review progress on areas of collaboration. This is complemented by continuous exchanges of information and coordination on country level programmes between the two funds at the technical level.

Clearly identified relationship focal points from both organisations keep each other informed on areas of mutual interest, and thematic focal points within each organization are connected and have been exchanging on areas of common interest, for example on risk. Country focal points liaise early when there is a sudden-onset or escalating emergency to share information and discuss potential financial support available from both organizations and efforts to underpin country-level coordination. The country focal points also liaise where both organizations are funding programmes that support crisis responses, escalating issues as needed to the relationship focal points. In-country partners weigh in on priorities, grant agent selection and design – many of them involved in decisions around both funds.

Internal quality assurance processes, which ensure that both the approaches to develop grant applications and the content of the applications themselves meet rigorous quality standards in each organization, also include specific check points to ensure complementarity in contexts where both are providing funding. Work is on-going to give guidance in situations where ECW grantees are also acting as grant agents for GPE funding, so that synergies and complementarities are maximized. Lastly, the diverse and extensive external communication and advocacy channels used by each fund are regularly leveraged where appropriate to jointly amplify the needs of crisis-affected children and adolescents.

6. Opportunities for increased collaboration

There are a number of areas where further work can be done to invoke a catalytic effect in the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. The net result will be strengthened responses, increased impact, and improved coordination and sustainability of interventions. These include:

- a) **Situation analyses** – capitalizing more consistently on using the analyses and outputs of review processes produced by each organization as the basis for improving and aligning new and existing programming, emphasizing the involvement of country level partners to contribute to situation analysis and coordinated responses.
- b) **Aligning timings** where possible for greater coherence at country level on programme development, applications, and release of funding. Early discussions allow for decisions such as the harmonization of grant processes, as in the case of South Sudan, where GPE’s accelerated funding grant contributed to the MYRP.
- c) **Sequencing or delineating activities** – This depends on context, recognizing that local actors are involved in determining the most appropriate programming for both funds, which reinforces complementarity as long as coordination structures are connected. Depending on the situation, ECW funding may come in first and GPE funding could follow. Or ECW could focus on districts more severely affected by crisis while taking into account existing GPE programmes to ensure complementarity. Focus should be on aligning as much as possible with existing plans where those have been developed by partners, such as in the cases of Myanmar and Afghanistan, and using resources from ECW and GPE to extend the support available to children in line with that plan (geographic coverage and age groups).
- d) **Speaking with one voice** – ensuring ongoing dialogue at both global and country level against the backdrop of shrinking financing for education and increasing fragility, and particularly on forgotten crises. For instance, both funds raise awareness of climate related needs and opportunities within education, and the importance of not forgetting EiE in fragile and conflict-affected countries. ECW and GPE are planning for more joint advocacy on climate policy and financing, including through coordinated education sector advocacy of the global climate funds.
- e) **Coordination** – Facilitating early discussions at country level between local education groups and the education in emergency mechanism is critical. It is important to be intentional about who is consulted for the design of grant proposals to be funded by ECW and GPE, ensuring that there are opportunities for dialogue between relevant coordination mechanisms. The respective funding from ECW and GPE provides strong incentives to bring stakeholders together around inter-connected approaches at the nexus.
- f) **Common programme objectives** – when possible, using a common results framework at country level or aligning behind an existing education strategy, appeal or sector plan.
- g) **Oversight arrangements** – when ECW and GPE both have funds available for a given context, assessing the oversight arrangements for grants, e.g. whether joint steering committees could be considered when the same entities are receiving funds from both GPE and ECW.

- h) **Technical work** – for example on gender, ECW and GPE have built a strong relationship to share data and evidence, good practices, learnings and evaluations from country programmes and a shared strategic approach. Collaboration on and exchange on risk management has also been established.
 - i) **Sustainability and exit** – GPE and ECW can collaborate to ensure a smooth transition from emergency response to longer-term system strengthening. This will require careful sequencing of the exit of ECW from a country to ensure interventions are integrated in education systems so that this in turn further enhances nexus programming and strengthens the sustainability of interventions.
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