



# EDUCATION

## at the International Rescue Committee

*More than 80 years after Albert Einstein helped create the International Rescue Committee, the number and intensity of humanitarian crises across the globe warrant a dose of Einstein-inspired innovation.*



GIRLS ARE TAUGHT MATH IN AN IRC-RUN SCHOOL IN PAKISTAN'S JALOZAI CAMP PETER BIRO/IRC

## WHO WE ARE

The mission of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) is to help people whose lives and livelihoods are shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover and gain control of their future. Our vision is that the IRC will lead the humanitarian field by implementing high-impact, cost-effective programs for people affected by crisis, and shape global policy and practice by sharing our learning and experience with others.

All IRC programs are designed to achieve meaningful change in people's health, safety, education, economic wellbeing and ability to influence the decisions that affect their lives. Our Education programs seek not only to improve learning, but also to achieve overall well-being. We believe that education during crisis and conflict is a necessity, not a luxury. Throughout our 84-year history, education programs have been an essential part of the IRC's response in working with people affected by conflict.

## WHY OUR WORK MATTERS

*62 million out-of-school children and youth are living in nations affected by crisis and are in desperate need of educational support.*

Education keeps children safe and gives them the skills essential to survive, recover and gain control of their futures. In recent years, less than 2% of all humanitarian funding has gone towards education. However, the average length of displacement is approximately 20 years, which means not investing in education in emergency settings may result in an entire generation of children missing out on schooling.

Neuroscience studies have shown that children who experience the types of adversity common in crisis settings can produce a "toxic stress" response that inhibits their brain development, impacting their physical and mental health, cognition, behavior and relationships. *Social and emotional skills* are first developed through consistent, nurturing interactions with adult caregivers that provide the child with a sense of comfort, security and confidence.

**Social and emotional skills**, sometimes called *life skills* or *emotional intelligence*, help a person build resilience, understand and manage emotions, control their impulses and persevere, solve problems, set and achieve goals, feel and show empathy for others, and establish and maintain positive relationships.

For young children, important social and emotional skills include secure attachment to primary caregivers, positive relationships with family members, teachers and peers, and the ability to concentrate, play cooperatively with other children, understand and follow simple rules, and identify and manage their feelings.

Research shows that the stability and predictability that comes from regular participation in education is one of the single most important factors to children's overall well-being. This is especially true in conflict- and crisis-affected communities where the IRC works to ensure that children of all ages participate in safe, functional and responsive education to support their immediate and long-term learning outcomes.

## WHAT WE DO

IRC practitioners provide technical assistance to more than 30 country programs. Technical advisors are charged with staying abreast of the best available research and practices in their respective fields and sharing these with the IRC's frontline teams. They also lead advocacy strategies to encourage partners and policy makers to adopt the interventions proven to be effective based on our research and experience.

All IRC education programs seek to provide children, youth and adults in crisis contexts with access to consistent, safe and quality learning opportunities. This includes both government and community-based, non-formal or alternative education opportunities that provide sufficient spaces for all out-of-school children, including those in remote or difficult to reach areas.



### > Early childhood development

Surviving the first years of life and ensuring that young children have the opportunity to thrive is essential for their ability to learn and develop. The cognitive, social and emotional skills children rapidly develop during their earliest years underpin their success in school and work and influence their long-term health and well-being. Crisis and conflict have direct and profound effects on children's physical safety and ability to learn.

In the countries where the IRC operates, children are exposed to a variety of colliding risk factors: poverty, neglect, violence, disease, malnutrition, maternal depression and lack of stimulation. Research shows that this adversity has immediate and long-term effects on critical brain development, but that we can mitigate the effects by building the resilience of children and caregivers.

### *Holistic health and well-being*

The IRC approaches the early years in a holistic manner with integrative care in health, education and programs that support parents and caregivers. In collaboration with health staff from

the Ministry of Health in Burundi, the IRC provided training and support to health and nutrition workers to integrate play and communication activities into caregiving practices for children suffering from malnutrition and disease. Trainings equipped healthcare workers with skills to encourage parents and caregivers to engage in play and early learning activities.

### *Preparing Children for School*

To support young children to transition to primary school, the IRC focuses on comprehensive programming. The IRC's *Healing Classrooms* approach is tailored for preschools to provide content focused on trauma recovery and the psycho-social needs of young children. In these classrooms, the IRC works with children to develop the skills they need to enter school, including basic literacy and numeracy skills, and learn to express their needs, play cooperatively, follow rules and manage their feelings.

**In Lebanon, more than half of the 1.1 million registered refugees from Syria are under the age of 18, and nearly 17% are children under the age of five.** To prepare them for the Lebanese school system, the IRC is providing early childhood education to children living in tented settlements in northern Lebanon. The classes help young children who have witnessed war and displacement overcome adversity and gain social and emotional skills to build their resilience.

### > School-aged children

Education is absolutely critical for school-aged children living in communities affected by crisis and disaster. School is where they develop the foundational skills of reading and math, as well as the social and emotional skills to help them recover, persevere, learn and be resilient in the face of adversity.

Education programming for this age group ensures children read and write at an age-appropriate level, learn basic math, recognize shapes and patterns, and use numbers to solve problems. Children are equipped with the tools they need to manage information without being distracted, control impulses, solve problems, get along with others and manage anxiety.



**The IRC's Healing Classrooms:** *Built on 30 years of education in emergencies experience and a decade of research and field testing, the IRC's Healing Classrooms offer children a safe, predictable place to learn and cope with the consequences of conflict.*

Unlike many education programs that focus solely on teaching academics, *Healing Classrooms* build children's social-emotional skills and their capacities in reading, math and other traditional subjects. This approach is based on research that shows social-emotional learning programs improve students' life skills, behavior and academic performance.



UMER FAROOQ/IRC

**> Youth and young adult education**

Education has not kept pace with the needs of youth and young adults, especially in crisis-affected, low-income communities where even students attending school may lack fundamental literacy and numeracy skills. The IRC's education programs work with youth and young adults to improve self-esteem, set future goals, establish financial security and protect them from violence, trafficking, forced labor and recruitment into armed forces. These programs focus on employment-related skills such as budgeting, accounting and marketing, as well as trade-specific technical skills. Given the opportunity, these young people can drive progress towards economic stability and lasting peace.

The IRC develops specialized programs for women and girls as individuals that can have a cascading effect on their families, communities and local economies. During and after conflict, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, early and forced marriage and early parenthood. The IRC's *Creating Opportunities through Mentoring, Parental Involvement and Safe Spaces* (COMPASS) program creates safe learning environments for girls and their caregivers to develop locally tailored life skills, builds the local capacity of health and case management providers to respond to violence against girls, and engages the wider community in these efforts. This program is implemented in refugee camps in Ethiopia and with displaced communities in both the DRC and Pakistan.

**HOW WE DO IT**

**> Teacher professional development**

Research shows that teachers who engage in some form of professional development on a regular basis develop better teaching skills and are more likely to be motivated and stay in the profession. The IRC supports tens of thousands of teachers working in the most challenging, under-resourced and volatile settings. *Healing Classrooms* strengthen teachers' well-being by providing opportunities to learn from their peers and professional coaches.

**In Iraq, the IRC has trained over 300 teachers working in 25 schools in lesson planning and child protection.** These teachers regularly participate in *teacher learning circles*—facilitated forums for teachers and school management on topics ranging from pedagogy to class management. To support and monitor what teachers have learned from both the training and learning circles, IRC education officers conduct continuous classroom observation and mentoring sessions.

**> Support for parents and caregivers**

Recognizing that families are the most important and immediate layer of supporting children's well-being and development, the IRC has been developing evidence-based parenting programs for children in crises since 2009. Research shows that attachment to caregivers during infancy influences the health of an individual throughout their lifetime. The IRC's *Families Make the Difference* programs aim to strengthen the capacities of caregivers to reduce violence in the lives of children and support their healthy development by introducing techniques parents can use to communicate and problem solve effectively with their children.

**Preliminary findings from parents participating in *Families Make the Difference* programs in the countries surrounding Syria indicate a 55% increase in the use of positive coping strategies and a significant decrease in violent discipline.**

**> Formal and non-formal education**

Education comes in many forms, and the IRC uses a variety of methods depending on the local context and children's needs. We partner with both government and communities to offer a wide variety of educational options: remedial education, after-school programs, apprenticeships and vocational training, and Accelerated Learning Programs (ALPs). ALPs—for children who have missed out on months or years of schooling due to conflict and crisis—offer a condensed curriculum, allowing children to catch up with their education and eventually reintegrate into formal schools. *Community-based education* (CBE) programs are managed by

communities where there is usually no other option for children to learn. The learning may take place in a community space or home. CBE has proven to be an effective means of bridging the gaps where access to education is blocked by distance and geography, security concerns, financial hardship or lack of resources. Working independently or in partnership with local and national governments, CBE can dramatically improve enrollment and attendance.

Because it is designed to be flexible, CBE can supplement formal, national systems under strain to accommodate the educational needs of refugees and displaced populations, or to sustain and expand services in fragile and resource-depleted environments. CBE has also shown to increase community engagement, positively shift community attitudes in favor of education and boost parental support of students.

**In Afghanistan, the Basic Education for Afghanistan Consortium (BEACON) program provided access to education for 25,517 children, youth and adults through 917 ALPs, CBE programs and adult literacy classes in rural and remote regions of Afghanistan.** Afghanistan's Ministry of Education adopted the Community-based education model and absorbed village-based schools into the national system.

To help teachers, school personnel and communities create *Healing Classrooms*, the IRC:

- Supports and trains teachers to establish safe, predictable and nurturing environments;
- Creates and provides teaching and learning materials to build students' academic and social-emotional skills; and
- Connects parents and caregivers with schools.

The Pakistan reading project improves reading skills of children in grades one and two and focuses on improved classroom learning environments, policies, systems and community-based support for reading. The project is improving teaching quality by providing a model for continuous professional development for working teachers and making supplemental instructional materials more widely available to primary school teachers. **The project is reaching 1,300,000 students and 23,800 teachers across 7 provinces.**

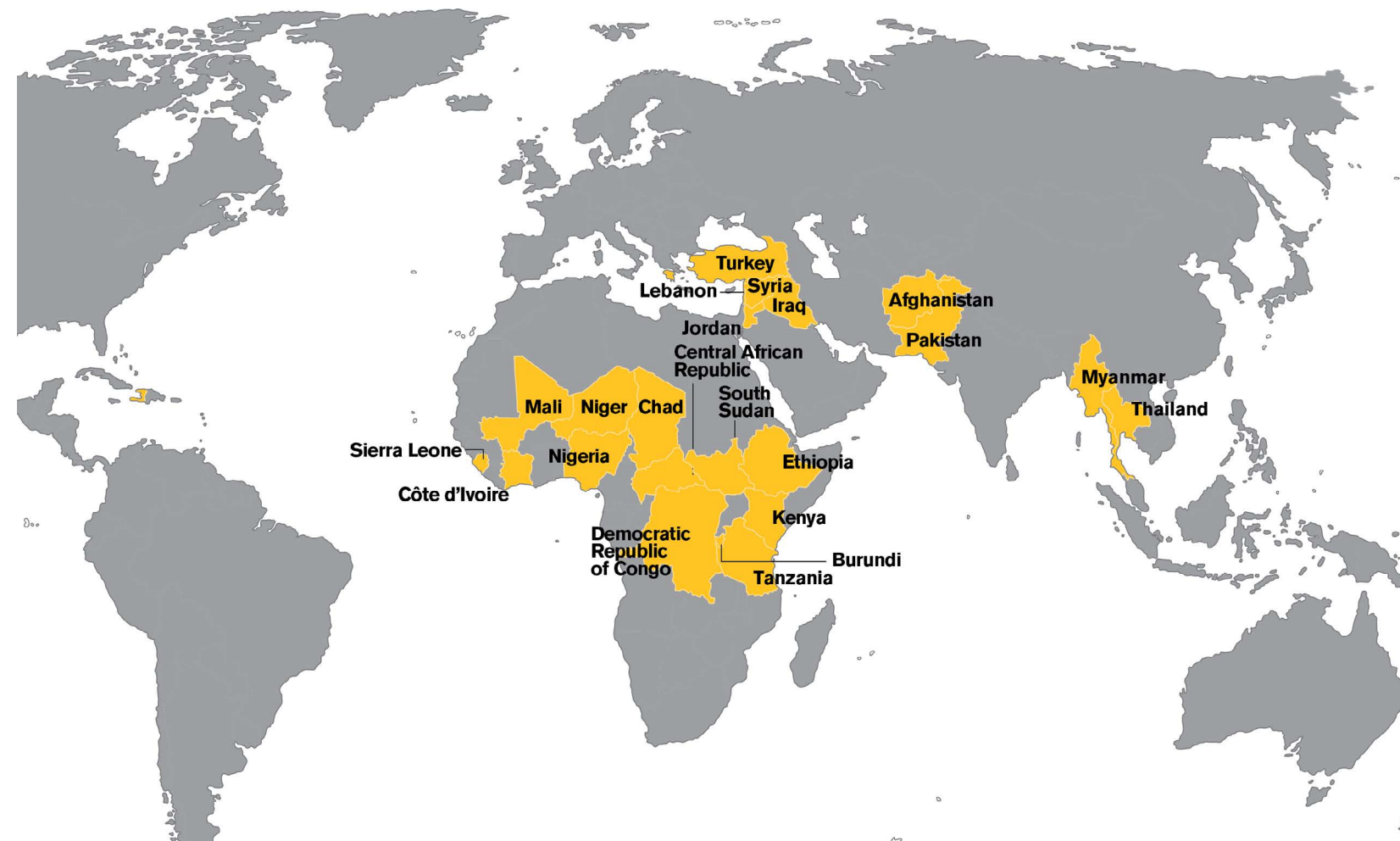
**IN 2015**

**24,555** families provided with parenting support

**1.3 million** children provided with schooling and educational opportunities

**54,000** educators and **7,959** schools supported

**WHERE WE WORK: Education Programs at the IRC**





**FRONT:** PRIMARY GRADE STUDENTS ENJOY THEIR READ-ALoud SESSION AT ISLAMABAD MODEL SCHOOL. SHAHZAD A. FAYYAZ/IRC  
**BACK:** CHILDREN IN AN IRC-SUPPORTED SCHOOL IN AN ISOLATED VILLAGE IN MYANMAR'S CHIN STATE. PETER BIRO/IRC

The International Rescue Committee responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises, helping to restore health, safety, education, economic wellbeing, and power to people devastated by conflict and disaster. Founded in 1933 at the call of Albert Einstein, the IRC is at work in over 30 countries and 26 U.S. cities helping people to survive, reclaim control of their future and strengthen their communities.

**New York**

122 East 42nd Street  
New York, NY 10168-1289  
USA

**London**

3 Bloomsbury Place London  
WC1A 2QL  
UK

