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Closing the Gap: Adolescent Girls' Access to Education in Conflict-Affected Settings

Today, 62 million girls around the world are not in school,ⁱ and at least 20 million of them live in conflict-affected and fragile settings as refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), or otherwise vulnerable populations.ⁱⁱ Crises deepen gender inequities – four of the five countries that currently have the largest gender gaps in education also experience high levels of conflict.ⁱⁱⁱ In this context, educating displaced *adolescent*^{iv} girls is particularly challenging, but can contribute to stability and long-term prosperity.

Educating girls is the world's single best development investment. Ensuring access to quality and consistent education for girls across the globe is crucial to:

- preventing early or forced marriage;^v
- lowering maternal and neonatal mortality;^{vi}
- creating smaller, more sustainable families;^{vii}
- improving health and nutrition outcomes for families;^{viii}
- shrinking rates of HIV/AIDS and malaria;^{ix}
- opening opportunities for women's political leadership;^x
- building familial resilience vis-à-vis natural disasters and climate change;^{xi} and
- boosting national economic growth.^{xii}

To access education, however, displaced adolescent girls must overcome several interrelated challenges:

- transition and disruption;
- host country, camp, and emergency response capacity gaps;
- financial support for families;
- personal insecurity; and
- social norms.

Enabling every girl's education during displacement is a multi-faceted challenge. Yet, educating this demographic is critical to creating a more stable and secure environment out of crisis.

Organizations and institutions across the world have been and continue to design and implement innovative solutions to meet this challenge. [Closing the Gap: Adolescent Girls' Access to Education in Conflict-Affected Settings](#) examines the organizations initiating innovative solutions in this space. To let girls learn is to move societies from protracted crisis to promising opportunity. The world cannot afford to miss this moment.

ⁱ Let Girls Learn, "Fact Sheet: Let Girls Learn," accessed November 10, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/letgirlslearn>.

ⁱⁱ Gene B. Sperling and Rebecca Winthrop, *What Works in Girls' Education* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2016), 80.

ⁱⁱⁱ Susan Nicolai, et al., "Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crises: Towards a Strengthened Response" (background paper, Oslo Summit on Education for Development, Overseas Development Institute, London: 2015), 9, <http://www.odi.org/publications/9688-education-emergencies-protracted-crises-toward-strengthened-response>.

^{iv} The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), in accordance with the United Nations, defines an adolescent as anyone aged 10-19 years old. UNICEF does acknowledge the difficulty in defining adolescence, given that the definition is particular to different cultures and locations. See: UNICEF, *Adolescence: An Age of Opportunity* (New York: UNICEF, 2011), http://www.unicef.org/adolescence/files/SOWC_2011_Main_Report_EN_02092011.pdf.

^v UNICEF, "UNICEF Focuses on Ending Child Marriage on the International Day of the Girl Child," October 11, 2012, http://www.unicef.org/media/media_66156.html; Jennifer Parsons and Jennifer McCleary-Sills, "Preventing Child Marriage: Lessons from World Bank Group Gender Impact Evaluations," The World Bank Group, August 8, 2014, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2014/08/20105853/preventing-child-marriage-lessons-world-bank-group-gender-impact-evaluations>.

^{vi} Saffron Karlsen et al., "The Relationship Between Maternal Education and Mortality Among Women Giving Birth in Health Care Institutions: Analysis of the Cross Sectional WHO Global Survey on Maternal and Perinatal Health," *BMC Public Health* 11, no. 606 (2011): 1, <http://bmcpubhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2458-11-606>; Sonia Bhalotra and Damian Clarke, "Educational Attainment and Maternal Mortality," *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)*, September 1, 2013, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002259/225945E.pdf>; Emmanuela Gakidou et al., "Increased Educational Attainment and Its Effect on Child Mortality in 175 Countries between 1970 and 2009: A Systematic Analysis," *The Lancet* 376, no. 9745 (2010): 970, [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(10\)61257-3/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(10)61257-3/abstract).

^{vii} Sperling and Winthrop, *What Works in Girls' Education*, 227; The World Bank, *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2011), 8, <https://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2012/Resources/7778105-1299699968583/7786210-1315936222006/Complete-Report.pdf>.

^{viii} UNICEF, "Multi-sectoral Approaches to Nutrition: The Case for Investment by Education Programmes," accessed February 19, 2016, http://www.unicef.org/eu/files/101322_000_Unicef_Brief_EducationNutrition_A4_v1r14.pdf; Ruth Levine et al., *Girls Count: A Global Investment & Action Agenda* (Washington DC: Center for Global Development, 2008), 19.

^{ix} UNICEF, "Girls, HIV/AIDS, and Education," 2004, accessed February 19, 2016, 13, [http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Girls_HIV_AIDS_and_Education_\(English\)_rev.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Girls_HIV_AIDS_and_Education_(English)_rev.pdf); Sperling and Winthrop, *What Works in Girls' Education*, 48.

^x Department for International Development (DFID), "Girls Education: Towards a Better Future for All," January 2005, 2, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/development/docs/girlseducation.pdf>; Sperling and Winthrop, *What Works in Girls' Education*, 54-58.

^{xi} Elizabeth Frankenberg et al., "Education, Vulnerability, and Resilience after a Natural Disaster," *Ecology and Society* 18, no. 2 (2013): 1, <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol18/iss2/art16/>; Brian Blankespoor et al., "Adaptation to Climate Extremes in Developing Countries," The World Bank, 2010, 3, <http://poseidon01.ssrn.com/delivery.php?ID=575102124071068088022106064080029068005049004006005030120060101029054007027004103035022004082103127071054020086103103005093099019075001097016074104120066011087089126004087112084002021113007&EXT=pdf>.

^{xii} Tembon and Fort, *Girls' Education*, 5, 7; Jad Chaaban and Wendy Cunningham, "Measuring the Economic Gain of Investing in Girls: The Girl Effect Dividend" (Policy Research Working Paper 5753, The World Bank, Washington, DC, 2011), 22, http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2011/08/08/000158349_20110808092702/Rendered/PDF/WPS5753.pdf.