



# Education for IDPs: poor marks

by Erin Mooney and Colleen French

Among the barriers to education that IDP children frequently face are<sup>1</sup>:

- **Lack of infrastructure:** In situations of conflict-induced displacement, schools have often been destroyed or damaged and school premises (and teachers) singled out for attack. In IDP camps and settlements schools tend to be makeshift and only offer primary education. Many of the schools established – often by IDPs – lack blackboards and even roofs.
- **Safety:** Going to school may entail crossing minefields or military roadblocks. In Afghanistan, threats of sexual violence *en route* to school kept many IDP girls at home.
- **Loss of documentation:** Displacement often results in the loss or confiscation of identity documents. Without documentation, IDP children may be unable to enrol in school. Getting replacement documents is often very difficult and dangerous, requiring IDPs to return to their area of origin, even if the area remains unsafe.
- **Language barriers:** Displacement disproportionately affects minorities and indigenous groups, who may not speak the local language of instruction. In Peru, Quechua-speaking IDP students – particularly girls – were unable to understand or communicate with their Spanish-speaking teachers, resulting in higher levels of non-attendance and female illiteracy.
- **Discrimination:** Frequently, IDPs suffer discrimination as a result of their ethnicity or even the mere fact of being an IDP. Indigenous and minority IDP students have been turned away even before entering classrooms. Discrimination also exists within school walls. In Colombia, an IDP boy was told by his teacher: “no wonder you are so stupid – you are a displaced.” Discrimination may also take the form of segregated schools established for IDPs, as in Georgia.

- **School fees:** Although primary education is supposed to be free, informal levying of school fees often occurs. In Colombia, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education reported that IDP families were forced to choose between eating or sending their children to school.
- **Material requirements:** Pencils, stationery and uniforms must be paid for – costs that IDP families with destroyed livelihoods have great difficulty meeting. In Azerbaijan and Tajikistan an inability to also contribute wood for school heating in winter kept a number of IDPs out of the classroom.
- **Economic responsibilities:** IDP children often miss school because their labour is needed at home or to generate household income. Post-primary dropout rates are particularly high for IDP girls burdened by domestic, child-care and/or agricultural responsibilities. Family poverty drives many IDP girls out of school and into early marriage, prostitution and trafficking.
- systematically ensuring provisional educational services, such as ‘school in a box’ kits
- organising escorts to accompany IDP children walking to and from school
- issuing IDPs with temporary documentation so they can register for school
- ensuring IDPs have access to education in a language they understand
- encouraging school enrolment through feeding programmes and other incentives
- taking special measures, including the provision of clothing and sanitary materials, and the hiring of female teachers, to support the participation of displaced girls
- providing alternative schooling or skills training programmes for IDP children and adolescents whose household or economic obligations impede school attendance.

It is critical to introduce these and other such measures at the earliest stages of emergencies to minimise educational disruption and maximise the potential protection and support that school can offer.

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In addition, the *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies* [see p7] has found that under-funding of educational services is particularly acute for IDPs and that their education also suffers from the lack of a systematic international response to internal displacement.

Overcoming these barriers is essential not only for IDP children’s development. Going to school also provides a degree of stability and normalcy for children whose lives have been traumatised by displacement. Schooling can help protect IDP youth against threats of military recruitment, sexual violence and exploitation and provide opportunities for conveying life-saving information about landmines and HIV/AIDS.

Steps that should be taken to improve IDPs’ access to education include:

On 1 January 2005 the Project became the Brookings Institution-University of Bern Project on Internal Displacement in a new partnership with the University of Bern. It is co-directed by Roberta Cohen and Walter Kälin, the UN Secretary-General’s newly appointed Representative of the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons.

1. See Erin Mooney and Colleen French ‘Barriers and Bridges: Access to Education for Internally Displaced Children’, online at: [www.brook.edu/fp/projects/idp/idp.htm](http://www.brook.edu/fp/projects/idp/idp.htm)