

Guidance note – Environment and the Education¹ sector, RMRP 2022

This guidance note has been adapted for the RMRP 2022. Guidance is limited to the context of the region and this emergency. The note is not intended to cover all education-related interventions or all human mobility emergencies anywhere in the world. Where education interventions overlap with those of other sectors, guidance for those sectors should also be reviewed.

Environmental factors can be causes or drivers of humanitarian needs for people on the move and host communities. The environment can be affected by the education sector response to those needs. Those impacts can be mitigated, and the education sector response can also be an entry point for low-cost and simple ways to improve environmental management. It is important to consider four ways in which environment relates to the sector:

- How environmental situations affect humanitarian needs related to education;
- How the activities of the education sector can generate environmental impacts if not carefully designed;
- Environment and environmental management may offer opportunities for education actors to achieve their goals;
- How the education sector can generate environmental benefits and enhancements through activities that the sector would generally develop anyway, and how these benefits can also contribute to sustainable development and integration.

How environment affects education:

Environmental factors affect children's enjoyment of the right to an education in emergencies in many ways. One of the main issues relates to the environmental determinants of health, which may increase absenteeism either because children spend more days unwell, or because the school environment is not healthy (e.g. due to air pollution, water quality / quantity, environmental hygiene and the presence of disease vectors and waste, or similar). Poorly located or poorly designed educational facilities can exacerbate these environmental factors and undermine children's learning: Failure to address environmental issues may result in schools becoming transmission points for disease or pose risks to children and education personnel by being physically unsafe. Additionally, it might lead to schools becoming unusable or requiring rehabilitation too soon.

Environmental factors may affect children's access to education through protection issues. In areas where there is a higher risk of either illicit environmental economies or modern slavery related to environmental economies such as charcoal, mining, illicit crop production, sugar production and seed nurseries, children may lose access to education due to child labour, smuggling or trafficking².

Environmental impacts of the education sector response:

School environment: Education in emergencies actors may need to address issues related to the school environment, possibly to add new/temporary classrooms to expand schools, add or expand

¹ <https://ehaconnect.org/clusters/education/>

² Addressed in more detail in the protection sector guidance note.

school kitchens. To that end, the environmental footprint of school construction should be considered, to avoid construction waste becoming a site for vector propagation or an accident risk. Consult USAID sector environmental guidelines for primary and secondary schools³ and ensure that an environmental management plan is developed before expanding or modifying school facilities. Sustainably sourced construction materials should be a condition of tenders, regular removal of construction wastes, regular elimination of stagnant water and any food waste, installation of mosquito-repellent plants (e.g. limonsillo) to protect workers and students, and ensure the implementation of water and energy systems to reduce consumption. Develop a waste management plan for schools⁴, noting that under pandemic circumstances, local advice may be to treat all waste as potentially infectious. Under those circumstances, consult the health sector guidance note on management of healthcare waste and best available technology for disposal of potentially contaminated waste⁵. Incineration is generally *not* recommended.

Where installing or rehabilitating WASH facilities in schools, consult the WASH sector guidance note.

School feeding: Where school feeding is organised, consider how food is provided and how waste is managed. If large amounts of food are prepared off-site and delivered, note that packaging waste becomes a visible eyesore for the community, represents a significant cost for the municipality (collection and disposal), can be a long-term environmental cost (because dumpsites fill up faster and will need to be replaced before their expected usable life ends) and a public health hazard (due to vectors, both vermin and mosquitoes). School kitchens provide a more controlled environment, although the same issues arise if school kitchens prepare food for children to take away. If it is necessary to provide packaged food, source compostable packaging using natural materials, wooden cutlery and avoid the use of Styrofoam and plastic. Where possible, provide food on site, retrieve plates and cutlery for re-use and ensure immediate disposal of waste. Aim to compost food waste and try to source food locally. In some areas, it may be possible to develop relationships with local agriculture for the removal of food waste from schools, to feed pigs.

School kits and supplies: Although importing NFIs, including school supplies, is often considered environmentally more damaging than local purchases, this is only true when the quality of the locally procured items is just as good. Where locally procured items have a shorter usable life, this results in increased amounts of waste, which is often not recyclable or compostable. Assessments of options for distribution of materials should consider the quality of items and the local potential for recycling or environmentally appropriate disposal. In the case of school supplies, the main environmental impacts are likely to relate to the packaging of materials such as books and pens, or the quality of materials such as furniture. Aim to negotiate with suppliers such that materials are delivered either without packaging or with paper packaging only. As the distributing agency, ensure that all packaging is taken back and not left to children or school personnel to dispose of, since littering is likely to occur.

³ https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/SectorEnvironmentalGuidelines_Schools_2015.pdf

⁴ Education sector indicator E-1-27: <https://ir.hpc.tools/applications/ir/indicator/e-1-27>

⁵ WHO 2019 - Overview of technologies for the treatment of infectious and sharp waste from health care facilities: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/328146/9789241516228-eng.pdf>

Environmental management as a way to deliver education goals:

Improved environmental management around education facilities can improve the delivery of education goals by reducing levels of sickness and absenteeism. Ensure waste management in and around educational facilities to reduce exposure to vector-borne disease. Ensure adequate drainage, immediate elimination of stagnant water and removal of solid and organic waste. This will limit the propagation of mosquitoes, insects and rodents. Where it is difficult to control levels of stagnant water, aim to plant mosquito-repellent plants such as lemon eucalyptus / limonsillo to reduce mosquito propagation around schools.

Improving school waste management is likely to also improve levels of school attendance and public health. If local waste management services are unreliable or overloaded, include waste management for the school and surrounding community in education response budgets if it is necessary to involve the local private sector. There may be ways to avoid the need to pay for waste management services, such as coordinating with local recycling cooperatives, so long as these use responsible practices and the removal of non-recyclable waste can also be assured.

Environmental benefits that can be generated by the education sector response:

The education sector has a lot of potential to generate environmental benefits through its interventions.

Provision of teaching: Environmental education can be offered as part of the formal school curriculum, as an extracurricular activity (through clubs or events), and through non-formal educational activities. Environmental education activities should be undertaken as part of the overall educational programme. Activities should be designed in close cooperation between environmental and educational specialists. Most governments have environmental education programmes, often managed by the local level of the ministry of environment. Connect to these programmes and see if they can provide teaching materials, staff or advice. Conduct regular focus groups with host communities regarding the situation and analyse their perceptions of the environmental behaviour of refugees and migrants. Aim to address these perceptions in education programming and hygiene promotion.

- Formal education: Although formal education is likely to be conditioned by the curriculum in the relevant country, education authorities may still require support from education in emergencies actors to adapt the curriculum, considering time lost due to COVID-19 or adaptations due to the limited size of classrooms and the need to make alternative arrangements. Under these circumstances, lobby to ensure that environmental elements are not dropped from the curriculum, note the importance of environmental education in facilitating integration by addressing environmental behaviours that can be used to underpin xenophobic narratives that can lead to anti-migrant harassment and abuse in school;
- Informal education (also including after school clubs and supplementary education activities): Informal education offers a lot of scope to implement environmental education, since implementing agencies have a greater level of control over lesson content, curriculum design, themes and messages. Environmental education can be developed as a part of lessons related to natural sciences, biology, public health and social sciences. Dependent on

the local context, joint educational activities may also be a way to break down barriers between Venezuelan and host community children, involving both in after-school activities or play-based learning related to environment and shared environmental projects. Where education in emergencies actors support education ministries with the development of virtual teaching due to COVID-19 restrictions, this may also be an opportunity to lobby for the integration of environmental education.

- **Preschool education:** Preschool education offers an opportunity to introduce environmental themes to younger children. These can be associated with self-protection (regarding environmental health, hygiene and similar) and also issues related to environmental behaviour, such as waste management (sorting and separation) and recycling. Environmental activities such as recycling of packaging materials for art projects and incentivising the reuse of materials that otherwise would be wasted can be developed while also highlighting the importance of being seen to be caring for the environment and showing that environmental stereotypes about refugees and migrants are false. These activities may also be integrated into child-friendly spaces, in collaboration with the child protection subsector.

The UNESCO guidebook on education in emergencies includes resources on provision of environmental education⁶.

Note also that synergies can be developed with child protection interventions, such as child-friendly spaces. When delivering educational activities in CFS interventions, include environmental health messages in awareness-raising, life skills and informal education. Depending on the context and age-group, it may also be appropriate to raise awareness of child protection risks such as child-labour or trafficking related to illegal environmental economies, to allow older children to reduce their exposure to risks.

Teacher training, curriculum development and education policy: These elements can be integrated into teacher training. Given that teachers are often amongst the first to detect child protection issues, make use of the protection guidance note as a resource for teacher training on child protection risks associated with the environment. Opportunities may exist to provide a more comprehensive and modern approach to environmental education in the curriculum, considering not only natural sciences but also modern issues such as urbanisation, waste, environmental determinants of health, illicit environmental economies and similar. While strengthening child protection within the education sector, child protection risks related to environment can be integrated into policy and guidance (see protection sector guidance note). All of these result in environmental benefits, through greater student awareness, as well as improved educational outcomes and child protection within the learning environment.

From whom can you receive support?

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⁶ https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000190223_eng