

Strengthening resilience: The ICRC's community-based approach to ensuring the protection of education

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Abstract

Education has received increased attention within the humanitarian sector. In conflict-affected contexts, access to education may be hampered by attacks against and the military use of educational facilities as well as attacks and threats of attacks against students, teachers and other education-related persons. Affected populations may also find themselves unable to access education, for example due to displacement.

This article looks into the different sets of humanitarian responses aimed at (1) ensuring the protection of educational facilities and related persons, mostly through advocacy efforts centred on weapons bearers, and (2) (re-)establishing education services where they are not present or are no longer functioning, mostly through programmes directed at affected populations. It then argues that, in contrast with

dominant practices, the protection of education can also be ensured through programmatic responses with meaningful participation of affected communities, and examines the example of the Safer Schools programme in Ukraine.

Keywords: education in emergencies, protection of education, community-based responses, Ukraine.

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Introduction

Armed conflict poses serious challenges to children's ability to access education in a safe and nurturing environment. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), there were 27 million children out of school in twenty-four conflict-affected countries as of 2015.¹ Educational facilities, students and teachers have been deliberately targeted – often in violation of international humanitarian law (IHL) – or schools have been used for military purposes by armed actors in seventy countries surveyed between 2009 and 2013, with a significant pattern of attacks observed in thirty of them.² Education can also be disrupted as a consequence of displacement,³ and at times families may leave their homes in search of safe and reliable education for their children.

The impact of conflict on education is primarily a concern of children and parents in humanitarian situations. A report by Save the Children, which analyzed sixteen studies reflecting the voices of 8,749 children, revealed that “99% of children in crisis situations see education as a priority”.⁴ The study also takes into account the voices of parents, caregivers and communities from various contexts, which also reflect the understanding of education as a priority, alongside food, shelter and water.⁵

Therefore, it has become increasingly apparent that education is not only a significant issue in the development agenda, but also a humanitarian need in contexts affected by conflict. This has prompted increased attention to education in emergencies in international fora and has generated growing levels of humanitarian response.

The first part of this article argues that lack or disruption of education is a humanitarian concern in two specific ways. The first way focuses on the issue of “the

1 UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), *Education Uprooted: For Every Migrant, Refugee and Displaced Child, Education*, New York, September 2017, available at: www.unicef.org/media/files/Education_Uprooted_DIGITAL.pdf (all internet references were accessed in April 2018 unless otherwise stated).

2 Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), *Education under Attack – 2014*, New York, 2014, p. 8, available at: www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/eua_2014_full_0.pdf.

3 See Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Missing Out: Refugee Education in Crisis*, September 2016, available at: www.unhcr.org/57d9d01d0.

4 See Save the Children, *What Do Children Want in Times of Crisis? They Want an Education*, June 2015, pp. 1, 16, available at: www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/WHAT_DO_CHILDREN_WANT1.PDF.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

protection of education from attack”, including the protection of educational facilities from attacks and military use,⁶ as well as the protection of students, teachers and other education-related persons from attacks and threats of attacks. The second way concerns the lack of access to education for populations affected by conflict and violence, for example due to displacement. While the first approach focuses on the impact on existing educational infrastructure, the second looks at areas where such infrastructure is absent or not accessible.

Evidently, insecurity itself, including challenges to the protection of education from attack (first concern), can be a reason why education is inaccessible (second concern); however, the responses to these issues also vary, which makes the distinction between them even clearer. The first set of responses focuses on seeking to ensure the protection of educational facilities and education-related persons. This approach is mostly preventive, and, as will be demonstrated, has been translated largely into efforts targeting authorities and weapons bearers, mostly through advocacy or dialogue. On the other hand, the second set of responses – i.e., to address lack of access to education – focuses on establishing or re-establishing educational services where they are not present or are no longer functioning. This approach is mostly remedial, and it is argued here that it has been the most prominent arena for the proliferation of humanitarian programmes, especially by those in the education in emergencies (EiE) humanitarian sub-sector, targeting populations who lack access to education due to conflict and other emergencies.

Nonetheless, as it will be argued, although focused on the issue of lack of access to education, the EiE sub-sector also offers a basis for programmatic responses to ensure the protection of education from attack, a realm otherwise dominated by authority-centred, advocacy- or dialogue-oriented efforts.

The second part of this paper explores some operational examples of activities implemented by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in conflict-affected contexts in favour of education, addressing both the issue of the protection of education from attack and that of lack of access to education. Finally, the ICRC's programmatic response to ensure the protection of education from attack through the case study of the Safer Schools programme in Ukraine will be examined. Special focus will be put on the value of engaging affected populations in such community-based responses.

Education as a humanitarian concern

In this section it is submitted that education needs are usually responded to through two distinct approaches. The first focuses on attacks against and military use of

6 There is no provision of IHL that specifically prohibits the military use of schools, but such use must be assessed in light of the obligations under IHL that require parties to armed conflict to take all feasible precautions to protect the civilian population and civilian objects under their control against the effects of attacks.

educational facilities and attacks and threats against education-related persons, such as students and teachers. The second concerns the lack of access to education services, which become nonexistent or non-functioning due to conflict and violence.

The first approach gives rise to responses focused on ensuring the protection of education by mitigating the impact of conflict on existing educational systems as well as ensuring the safety of students and education personnel. On the other hand, responses to lack of access to education focus mostly on establishing or re-establishing education services for populations affected by armed conflict (and other emergencies).

Hence, the article will initially explore the development of an international agenda around the protection of education, under which efforts to prevent or mitigate attacks on education have mostly targeted States and non-State armed groups and focused on conduct of hostilities. Following that, it will explore the rise of EiE as a humanitarian sub-sector, with its focus on bridging gaps in the provision of education. Finally, it will discuss the programmatic responses that the EiE sub-sector can inspire to ensure the protection of education. These programmatic responses complement the range of humanitarian activities that can address the issue of the protection of education from attack by adding a programmatic option to existing authority-centred, advocacy- or dialogue-based efforts. At the same time, they also complement the range of programmatic activities targeting education in the humanitarian sector by adding a preventive approach, focused on the protection of education from attack, to the existing remedial approach, focused on re-establishing access to education.

An issue of increased international concern: the protection of education in conflict situations

Alongside the protection afforded to education under IHL, in recent decades United Nations (UN) initiatives have increasingly sought to strengthen the protection of education in situations of conflict. In 1994, Graça Machel, former minister of education of Mozambique, was appointed to conduct a study on the impact of armed conflict on children.⁷ The resulting report highlighted key areas in which children are affected by armed conflict, including education.⁸ The report discussed the risks that armed conflict poses to education, due to the damage to which schools are exposed and the difficulties in keeping formal education services running, and observed challenges and opportunities in ensuring children's access to education in times of conflict.⁹

7 *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children: Note by the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. A/51/306, 26 August 1996, para. 1, available at: www.un.org/documents/ga/docs/51/plenary/a51-306.htm. See also UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG-CAAC), "Timeline", available at: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/about-us/mandate/history/>.

8 *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children: Report of the Expert of the Secretary-General, Ms. Graça Machel, Submitted Pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 48/157*, above note 7.

9 *Ibid.*, paras 186–202.

While some of the report's recommendations reflected a perspective focused on bridging gaps in access to education, as will be discussed below,¹⁰ the first recommendation called for more active protection of educational facilities from targeting.¹¹ It was precisely around this rationale of the protection of education that the UN peace and security agenda for children developed, as outlined below.

In 1997, UN General Assembly Resolution 51/77 created the mandate of the Special Representative on the impact of armed conflict on children, and included a request for the Special Representative to prepare annual reports on the situation of children affected by armed conflict.¹² Two years later, in 1999, the UN Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 1261 – the first UNSC resolution on children and armed conflict.¹³ Resolution 1261 effectively “placed the issue of children affected by war on the agenda of the Security Council”¹⁴ and identified and condemned grave violations against children in times of conflict, including “attacks on objects protected under international law ... such as schools and hospitals”.¹⁵ It also framed the protection, welfare and rights of children during conflict as a peace and security issue,¹⁶ which was reaffirmed in clearer terms a year later by UNSC Resolution 1314.¹⁷

Subsequently, in 2005, UNSC Resolution 1612 established the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) and the Security Council Working Group on Children,¹⁸ which “created a channel to link information [on grave violations against children] collected at country level with reporting to the Security Council and to other organizations that can press actors to comply with international child rights and protection standards”.¹⁹ One of the six grave violations against children to be monitored by the mechanism was attacks against schools and hospitals.²⁰

10 *Ibid.*, para. 203(a). This is notably the case with regard to recommendations on the provision of educational opportunities for refugee and internally displaced children (para. 203(d)), and on supporting the re-establishment and continuity of education (para. 203(e)).

11 *Ibid.*

12 SRSG-CAAC, above note 7; UNGA Res. 51/77, 20 February 1997, paras 36–37, available at: www.un.org/documents/ga/res/51/ares51-77.htm.

13 UNSC Res. 1261, 30 August 1999, Item 2, available at: [http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=S/RES/1261\(1999\)&Lang=E](http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=S/RES/1261(1999)&Lang=E).

14 SRSG-CAAC, above note 7.

15 UNSC Res. 1261, above note 13.

16 *Ibid.*, Item 16.

17 UNSC Res. 1314, 11 August 2000, Item 9, available at: [http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=S/RES/1314\(2000\)&Lang=E](http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=S/RES/1314(2000)&Lang=E).

18 UNSC Res. 1612, 26 July 2005, available at: [http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=S/RES/1612\(2005\)&Lang=E](http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=S/RES/1612(2005)&Lang=E).

19 UNICEF and SRSG-CAAC, *Machel Study 10-Year Strategic Review: Children and Conflict in a Changing World*, New York, April 2009, p. 86.

20 The other five grave violations are the killing or maiming of children; recruiting or using child soldiers; rape or other grave sexual violence against children; the abduction of children; and the denial of humanitarian access for children. See *Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. A/59/695-S/2005/72, 9 February 2005, para. 68, available at: <http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=A/59/695&Lang=E>.

A more recent stepping stone in the consolidation of education as an issue in the UN peace and security agenda for children was the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1998, which requested the Secretary-General to list parties to armed conflict that engage in “recurrent attacks on schools and/or hospitals” as well as “recurrent attacks or threats of attacks against protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals in situations of armed conflict”.²¹ The resolution also requests the Secretary-General to continue to monitor and report on (although not to list parties to armed conflict responsible for) the “military use of schools and hospitals in contravention of international humanitarian law”.²² Since 2011, the MRM has been listing parties to conflict responsible for “attacks on schools and hospitals” on an annual basis.

In parallel to the UN processes discussed above, the issue of protection of education also gained attention amongst civil society, notably through initiatives led by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA). The GCPEA was created in 2010 by a group of international organizations, and is now governed by a steering committee made up of both NGOs and UN agencies.²³ In 2014, the GCPEA released the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict* (the Guidelines), which present a range of practical tools for parties to armed conflict with the aim of reducing the military use of schools and universities and minimizing the negative impact such use may have on students’ safety and education.²⁴ The Safe Schools Declaration,²⁵ the document through which States can commit to implementing the Guidelines, was open for endorsements on 29 May 2015 and has been supported by eighty-one States as of 4 September 2018.²⁶ The Guidelines and the Declaration as its supporting document call for armed parties to avoid using educational buildings so as to avoid rendering them lawful targets of attack; to collect data on attacks on educational facilities, victims and the military use of schools and universities; to assist victims; to investigate and prosecute violations of national and international law; and to support programmes working to prevent or respond to attacks on education.²⁷ The Guidelines and Declaration complement the issue of protection of education featured in the UN agenda for

21 UNSC Res. 1998, UN Doc. S/RES/1998 (2011), 12 July 2011, Item 3, available at: [http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=S/RES/1998\(2011\)&Lang=E](http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=S/RES/1998(2011)&Lang=E). The first time the UN Secretary-General was asked to list parties to armed conflict engaged in violations against children was in 2001, concerning child recruitment. See UNSC Res. 1379, UN Doc. S/RES/1379 (2001), 20 November 2001, para. 16, available at: [http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=S/RES/1379\(2001\)&Lang=E](http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=S/RES/1379(2001)&Lang=E).

22 UNSC Res. 1998, above note 21, Item 4.

23 GCPEA, “Who We Are”, available at: www.protectingeducation.org/who-we-are.

24 GCPEA, “Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use”, available at: www.protectingeducation.org/restricting-military-use-and-occupation.

25 GCPEA, Safe Schools Declaration, available at: www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/safe_schools_declaration-final.pdf.

26 GCPEA, “Safe Schools Declaration Endorsements”, 4 September 2018, available at: <http://www.protectingeducation.org/guidelines/support> (accessed in September 2018).

27 See GCPEA, *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*, available at: www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/guidelines_en.pdf; see also GCPEA, above note 25.

children and armed conflict inasmuch as they address the issue of military use of educational facilities beyond the letter of IHL, noting that the UN monitors and reports, *inter alia*, cases of military use of schools when in contravention to IHL.²⁸

The UN-led initiatives discussed above, as well as the Safe School process that culminated in the Guidelines and the Declaration, approach education in armed conflict from a perspective focused on the way parties to conflict conduct hostilities. These efforts focus on preventing and mitigating the impact of certain behaviour of weapons bearers that pose risks to educational facilities and related persons.

Consequently, this agenda gave rise to a series of efforts centred on authorities – that is, on engaging State and non-State actors in pursuit of their compliance with certain standards aimed at ensuring the protection of education, through specifically designed mechanisms, such as the MRM, and tools, such as the Guidelines and other documents produced by the GCPEA.²⁹

Nonetheless, one of the calls in the Safe Schools Declaration is for States to “provide and facilitate international cooperation and assistance to *programmes* working to prevent or respond to attacks on education”.³⁰ This programmatic response is the approach that this article ultimately seeks to explore.

Before discussing programmatic responses to ensure the protection of education from attack, however, it is necessary to understand the development of humanitarian responses in the field of education more broadly, which have predominantly focused on bridging gaps in access to education.

Bridging gaps in access to education

Although some humanitarian organizations have been involved in education activities over several decades,³¹ in general, humanitarian agencies have been slow to include education in their response to emergencies.³² As of 2000, only 2% of total humanitarian aid was allocated to education.³³

It was only in the 2000s that EiE emerged as a sub-sector in the humanitarian platform, with the establishment of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) in 2000³⁴ and the publication of the *INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early*

28 UNSC Res. 1998, 12 July 2011, Item 4, available at: [http://undocs.org/S/RES/1998\(2011\)](http://undocs.org/S/RES/1998(2011)).

29 See, for example, GCPEA, *Implementing the Guidelines: A Toolkit to Guide Understanding and Implementation of the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*, 2017, available at: www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/toolkit.pdf.

30 GCPEA, above note 25 (emphasis added).

31 A notable example is the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which has had the task of meeting the demand of Palestine refugees for education since 1950, when the Agency began its operations. See George Dickerson, “Education for the Palestine Refugees: The UNRWA/ UNESCO Programme”, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1974, p. 122.

32 USAID, *Education in Crisis Situations: Mapping the Field*, New York, 2005, p. 9, available at: www.beps.net/publications/EdCrisisFinal.pdf.

33 INEE, *INEE Strategic Plan 2008–2010*, 7 January 2008, p. 4, available at: http://s3.amazonaws.com/inee-assets/resources/doc_1_INEE_STRATEGIC_PLAN_2008-2010.pdf.

34 USAID, above note 32, p. 10.

Reconstruction (Minimum Standards) in 2004.³⁵ The establishment of the INEE Minimum Standards provided the EiE sub-sector with a clear framework for action, which served as a foundation for the creation of the UN Global Education Cluster in 2006.³⁶

Recent developments further contributed to the development of EiE as a sub-sector. In 2012, for the first time, the Global Partnership for Education, which was at the time the world's only global fund for education and primary development actor in education, decided to allow funds to be “dispersed for educating children trapped in humanitarian contexts”.³⁷ EiE was to re-emerge as a key topic during the consultation process that led to the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and during the Summit itself.³⁸ The WHS also saw the launch of Education Cannot Wait, “a new global fund to transform the delivery of education in emergencies” with the ambitious aim of providing safe, free and quality education to all children affected by emergencies by 2030.³⁹

All of this being said, however, a predominant focus of EiE has been to ensure access to education services for populations affected by humanitarian crises, including conflict. As EiE experts put it, the term “education in emergencies” – or “emergency education”, as it is sometimes referred to – is generally used at the inter-agency level to refer to education in situations where children lack access to education systems, at the national or community levels, due to man-made crises or natural disasters.⁴⁰ Differently from the protection approach which seeks to preserve existing education systems during conflict, the EiE sector seems to be mostly focused on establishing or re-establishing education

35 INEE, “History and Development”, available at: www.ineesite.org/en/minimum-standards/history. See also INEE, *INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction*, 2004, available at: www.unicef.org/violencestudy/pdf/min_standards_education_emergencies.pdf; as well as its updated edition, *INEE Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery*, 2010 (2010 Minimum Standards), available at: http://toolkit.ineesite.org/toolkit/INEEcms/uploads/1012/INEE_GuideBook_EN_2012%20LoRes.pdf.

36 Education was not initially considered a key sector to be included in the Cluster System when it was created in 2005. For more details on the lengthy process which led to the establishment of the Education Cluster and the involvement of the INEE and Save the Children in those efforts, see Allison Anderson and Marian Hodgkin, *The Creation and Development of the Global IASC Education Cluster*, UNESCO and Education For All Global Monitoring Report, 2010, pp. 1–9, available at: http://s3.amazonaws.com/inee-assets/resources/Creation_and_Development_of_Global_Education_Cluster.pdf.

37 Brookings Institution, *New Momentum for Global Education and the Post-2015 Development Agenda*, 30 November 2012, available at: www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2012/11/30-education-winthrop.

38 INEE, “World Humanitarian Summit 2016”, available at: www.ineesite.org/en/whs-2016.

39 See the official website of Education Cannot Wait, available at: www.educationcannotwait.org/; see also INEE, “Education Cannot Wait: A Fund for Education in Emergencies”, available at: www.ineesite.org/en/education-cannot-wait.

40 See, for example, Margaret Sinclair, “Education in Emergencies”, in Jeff Crisp, Christopher Talbot and Daiana B. Cipollone (eds), *Learning for a Future: Refugee Education in Developing Countries*, UNHCR, Geneva, 2001, p. 4, available at: www.unhcr.org/4a1d5ba36.pdf; Susan Nicolai and Carl Triplehorn, *The Role of Education in Protecting Children in Conflict*, Humanitarian Practice Network Paper No. 42, March 2003, p. 2, available at: www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/520.pdf.

services for populations who have been displaced or are otherwise unable to access education due to armed conflict. Specifically, priority attention seems to have been paid to the education needs of displaced populations⁴¹ and to inclusion strategies aimed at ensuring that education is accessible by specific groups of children who may be denied education due to their status, ethnicity or language. Such groups, in addition to displaced children, include ethnic or religious minorities, children with disabilities and, notably, girls.⁴²

The INEE Minimum Standards include key actions focused on bridging gaps in access to education, such as ensuring that “[n]o individual or social group is denied access to education and learning opportunities because of discrimination”, removing “[b]arriers to enrolment, such as lack of documents or other requirements”, and ensuring that “[s]ufficient resources are available”.⁴³ In practice, organizations such as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Save the Children implement a range of activities aimed at achieving these goals. These activities include the provision of temporary school facilities (including school tents); school construction; teacher trainings and recruitment; the provision of teaching materials; supporting curriculum development; language trainings, so that children and teachers are able to adapt to environments where the prevailing language is not their mother tongue; and supporting the costs of education.⁴⁴ As will be seen below, the ICRC itself also implements some of these activities – notably the provision of teaching materials and supporting the costs of education.

- 41 One of the four types of crises eligible for funding through Education Cannot Wait is “[c]rises with large-scale displacement with affected host populations”. See Education Cannot Wait, “The Situation”, available at: www.educationcannotwait.org/the-situation/. During the WHS, in terms of education in emergencies, particular emphasis was put on displacement settings, “with several significant commitments made to guarantee the provision of quality education for refugees and to bolster education support to refugee-hosting countries”. See WHS, *Commitments to Action*, 8 September 2016, p. 5, available at: www.agendaforhumanity.org/sites/default/files/resources/2017/jul/WHS_Commitment_to_Action_8September2016.pdf. Furthermore, the WHS saw thirty-eight actors, including States, NGOs and international organizations, make seventy-seven commitments related to education. A third of those commitments (i.e., twenty-six, by twenty-one actors) mentioned displacement directly, including references to migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, host communities and countries, and refugee camps. This is based on a brief mapping, conducted by the authors, of all commitments listed under the category “Education” on Agenda for Humanity’s website. See Agenda for Humanity, “Individual Commitments”, available at: www.agendaforhumanity.org/explore-commitments/indv-commitments/.
- 42 Susan Nicolai, *Education in Emergencies: A Tool Kit for Starting and Managing Education in Emergencies*, Save the Children, London, 2003, pp. 29–30, available at: http://toolkit.ineesite.org/toolkit/INEEcms/uploads/1045/Active_Learning_Diagram.pdf. According to the mapping conducted by the authors, mentioned in above note 41, about 10% of education-related commitments made during the WHS concerned inclusive education – most notably, girls’ education. “Girls’ education and gender issues”, as well as “inclusion and social cohesion”, are also key activities of UNHCR’s Education Strategy; see UNHCR, *2012–2016 Education Strategy*, Geneva, 2012, pp. 15–16, available at: www.unhcr.org/5149ba349.
- 43 2010 Minimum Standards, above note 35, p. 55.
- 44 Save the Children, *Delivering Education for Children in Emergencies: A Key Building Block for the Future*, London, 2008, pp. 8–9, available at: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/2710/pdf/2710.pdf>; UNHCR, above note 42, pp. 11–12, 15–16, 19–20.

Programmatic responses to ensuring the protection of education

In addition to its focus on responding to humanitarian situations in which children lack provision of education, it is argued that the EiE sub-sector also regards the protection of education from attack as a humanitarian concern, and that EiE activities contribute to the protection of education in situations of armed conflict. In this way, the expertise that this sub-sector has developed offers a basis for programmatic responses to ensure the protection of education from attack.

To start with, the INEE Minimum Standards observe that “[e]ducation facilities can be targeted during conflict or students and education personnel can be attacked on their way to and from school”,⁴⁵ and attacks on educational institutions, students and school staff are mentioned throughout the document. In addition, monitoring is one of its standards, and it includes the monitoring of “violations of the safety and well-being of learners, teachers and other education personnel” as well as of the state of education infrastructure.⁴⁶ It also emphasizes the need for learning environments to be “free from military occupation and attack”.⁴⁷

Further, during the WHS, attention was given to the issue of protection of education, through mentions of safe education, safe learning environments and the safety of students and teachers in education-related commitments.⁴⁸

In some cases, these mentions of safety referred to threats internal to the school environment, and were often accompanied by a logic preconizing the mainstreaming of protection in EiE activities. As a practical matter, UNCHR’s Education Strategy observes that ensuring that schools are safe learning environments should be of especial concern to organizations which are providing education directly and are engaged in school construction, with special attention paid (but not limited) to the prevention of violence inside schools, “including issues of pedagogy, corporal punishment, peer-to-peer violence, and sexual harassment or exploitation”.⁴⁹ Some examples of organizations that take this approach are UNHCR and the International Rescue Committee (IRC),⁵⁰ Plan International,⁵¹ and UNICEF.⁵²

Nonetheless, in addition to protecting individuals from threats within schools, EiE programmes can also be designed to reduce exposure to external threats – to ensure the safety of students and school staff as well as to preserve the integrity of school buildings. This can be achieved through community-based

45 2010 Minimum Standards, above note 35, p. 3.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

48 Eight actors mentioned these terms in their commitments to education, according to the mapping conducted by the authors, mentioned in above note 41.

49 UNHCR, above note 42, p. 15.

50 UNHCR and IRC, “Creating Safe Learning Environments: E-Course”, available at: http://s3.amazonaws.com/inee-assets/resources/SLE_e_course_flyer.pdf.

51 Plan International, “Preventing Violence against Girls at School”, available at: <https://plan-international.org/because-i-am-a-girl/violence-at-school>.

52 UNICEF Cambodia, “Safe Learning Spaces”, available at: www.unicef.org/cambodia/12962_19147.html.

programmes in which school communities, including students, their parents and school staff, prepare for future emergencies, including by strengthening their resilience and school infrastructure. Such initiatives correspond to a programmatic response to ensure the protection of education.

Some of the commitments made during the WHS reflect this focus. For example, both Save the Children and World Vision endorsed the Key Principles of Community-Based Safe School Construction and committed to adhering to these principles for “every classroom [they] substantially remodel or rebuild”.⁵³ The Key Principles establish minimum standards of life safety for every new school building to be constructed, as well as for existing school buildings that are to be “strengthened, renovated, remodelled, refurbished or modernised”.⁵⁴

Even more clearly related to the issue of protection of education is the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East's (UNRWA) commitment, in the context of the WHS, to recognizing “the importance of schools working hand in hand with the community towards the safety, well-being and learning of its students”,⁵⁵ to “ensur[ing] the safety of teachers and other staff and to develop[ing] their capacity to better cope in an emergency.”⁵⁶ In fact, UNRWA has already been implementing safety and security measures in its schools in Syria and Gaza, such as the provision of risk education trainings and security training materials, all of which are aimed at reducing the risk exposure of school staff and students.⁵⁷

The INEE Minimum Standards also establish community participation as a foundational standard, and, within that, they recommend the “development, adaptation and delivery of education for disaster risk reduction and conflict mitigation”, drawing upon and strengthening “positive local coping strategies and capacities”.⁵⁸ As the Minimum Standards observe, “[b]y participating in problem-solving, decision-making and risk reduction, children and youth can feel less helpless and can contribute to their own well-being”.⁵⁹

53 Agenda for Humanity, “Commitment Description (252018)”, available at: www.agendaforhumanity.org/commitment/2675; Agenda for Humanity, “Commitment Description (294016)”, available at: www.agendaforhumanity.org/commitment/3491.

54 See Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience in the Education Sector, *Towards Safer School Construction: A Community-Based Approach*, 2015, pp. 11–12, available at: www.gfdrr.org/sites/default/files/publication/45179_towardssaferschoolconstruction2015_0.pdf.

55 Agenda for Humanity, “Commitment Description (288019)”, available at: www.agendaforhumanity.org/commitment/3338.

56 Agenda for Humanity, “Commitment Description (288026)”, available at: www.agendaforhumanity.org/commitment/3345.

57 UNRWA, *Schools on the Front Line: The Impact of Armed Conflict and Violence on UNRWA Schools and Education Services*, 2016, p. 12, available at: www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/schools_on_the_front_line.pdf. UNRWA also provides security trainings to staff from Jordan and Lebanon; see UNRWA, “Fostering the Safety and Security of School Communities, UNRWA Runs an Integrated Training Programme for Education Staff and Safety Personnel”, 16 December 2015, available at: www.unrwa.org/newsroom/features/fostering-safety-and-security-school-communities-unrwa-runs-integrated-training.

58 2010 Minimum Standards, above note 35, p. 30.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 62.

Indeed, activities aimed at preventing harm and contributing to strengthening school communities' resilience, such as mine risk education in schools, have been implemented by organizations such as Save the Children⁶⁰ and UNICEF.⁶¹ In addition, the inclusion of disaster risk reduction (DRR) practices in curricula was part of Save the Children's global education strategy from 2012 to 2015,⁶² and Plan International has programmes to improve safety in schools in seismic risk zones.⁶³

DRR practices can also inform safe behaviours to be adopted by school communities exposed to armed conflict. In fact, the promotion of safe behaviour and evacuation procedures as preparedness for situations of armed violence, part of ICRC programmes in schools in the southern Caucasus, were prepared with the support and expertise of the DRR units of the Armenian Red Cross and Azerbaijan Red Crescent.

This community-based, resilience-strengthening response to education-related needs amidst conflict partially responds to concerns related to the protection of education. By focusing on communities, this programmatic response can complement the engagement with authorities and weapons bearers in ensuring the protection of schools and related protected persons.

The GCPEA, although focused on advocacy efforts vis-à-vis States to ensure the protection of education, has also paid attention to the importance of programmatic responses to the issue. As mentioned above, one of the calls of the GCPEA's Guidelines is for States to "support programmes working to prevent or respond to attacks on education", and the Coalition has produced comprehensive reports on activities that can be implemented at the community level to "protect education from attack and military use".⁶⁴ These include examples from contexts such as Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Pakistan and Thailand, where communities have adopted measures to ensure physical protection, such as the strengthening of school infrastructure; early warning systems, for example through text message services; psychosocial support; and even direct negotiations with parties to conflict, to protect schools from attacks and military use.

60 Save the Children Sudan, "Child Protection", available at: <https://sudan.savethechildren.net/what-we-do/child-protection>.

61 UNICEF Bosnia and Herzegovina, "Mine Risk Education in Schools", available at: www.unicef.org/bih/mine_action_3314.html.

62 Save the Children, *Moving Ahead on Education: A Focused Strategy for Achieving our Education Goals 2012–2015*, 2012, p. 12, available at: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/sites/default/files/documents/6526.pdf>.

63 See Plan International, *Policy Brief: Advancing Comprehensive School Safety for Asia and the Pacific*, November 2016, available at: <https://plan-international.org/file/14593/download?token=wOXTzRLd>.

64 See GCPEA, *The Role of Communities in Protecting Education from Attack: Lessons Learned*, New York, 2014, available at: http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/the_role_of_communities_in_protecting_education_from_attack.pdf; GCPEA, *What Schools Can Do to Protect Education from Attack and Military Use*, New York, 2016, available at: www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/what_schools.pdf.

It is precisely this community-based approach to the protection of education in times of conflict that this article now wishes to explore, especially by sharing the ICRC's experience with similar programmes and the expertise developed therein. Before looking into the ICRC community-based response in schools, however, we will offer a brief overview of the organization's engagement in the field of education more broadly.

ICRC response

Access to education has long been part of the ICRC's strategy on children, and over the years, field delegations have developed and implemented a number of initiatives in different contexts and formats, aimed at responding to challenges in accessing education in situations of conflict. In 2016, the ICRC started a process of consolidating its approach to education in humanitarian settings; this involved consultations with external experts and internal staff, both in the field and at headquarters.

Both in past examples and in the current process of consolidating the ICRC's approach to education as a humanitarian need, there is an emerging consensus within the organization that the ICRC's role is to facilitate access to education, rather than to provide education directly to affected populations. This consensus largely stems from the understanding of the added value and strengths that the ICRC brings to supporting humanitarian initiatives in situations of conflict.

In this section, three dimensions of the ICRC's response are explored. Firstly, the ICRC's authority-centred approach – that is, the dialogue that it has with State and non-State actors on the issue of access to education – is discussed. This approach benefits education both in the sense of protecting it from attack, and from the predominant EiE perspective focused on establishing or re-establishing access to education services. Secondly, the ICRC's activities that also aim to enable access to education by providing direct assistance to affected populations are examined. Finally, the article discusses how the ICRC engages communities with the goal of protecting education, while looking into the specific example of the Safer Schools programme in eastern Ukraine.

Protection dialogue with authorities and weapons bearers

A key activity of the ICRC's protection work concerns engaging in a confidential dialogue with weapons bearers and authorities in order to prevent and/or end violations of IHL. This work relates to education in humanitarian settings in two ways.

Firstly, whether in times of peace or in conflict, States bear the primary responsibility for providing education to their citizens. Non-State armed groups

are also bound by certain rules regarding education under IHL.⁶⁵ From this perspective, the ICRC reminds authorities of their obligations under international law in order to ensure access to education.⁶⁶ In this area, the ICRC may request that authorities implement or improve education services, especially for certain groups of children who may face particular challenges in accessing education, such as displaced children and children in detention.

In this case, the ICRC's dialogue with authorities aims to ensure education for populations that do not enjoy access to such service. Therefore, this dimension of the ICRC's authority-centred activities builds on the organization's mission and the obligations of State and non-State actors under IHL, and as seen above it relates more closely to an approach focused on bridging gaps in access to education in humanitarian settings.

Another dimension of the ICRC's engagement with authorities and weapons bearers concerns the issue of protection of education, related to the conduct of hostilities by parties to armed conflict and closely linked to IHL, as seen above.

65 Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions obliges parties to non-international armed conflict – which includes non-State armed groups – to ensure that children “be provided with the care and aid they require”, and in particular that “they shall receive an education, including religious and moral education, in keeping with the wishes of their parents, or in the absence of parents, of those responsible for their care”. See Protocol Additional (II) to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts, 1125 UNTS 609, 8 June 1977 (entered into force 7 December 1978) (AP II), Art. 4.3(a). Furthermore, research shows that non-State armed actors in recent history have provided education or acted as regulators and facilitators of the provision of educational services; see Protect Education in Insecurity and Attack, *Education and Armed Non-State Actors: Towards a Comprehensive Agenda*, 2015, available at: www.genevacall.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2015/12/Geneva_Call_Paper1.pdf. More recently, in a study by Geneva Call, “all interviewed ANSAs [armed non-State actors] affirmed that they would support in some way or another the schools located in the territories where they operate”. Geneva Call, *In Their Words: Armed Non-State Actors Share Their Policies and Practice with Regards to Education in Armed Conflict*, November 2017, p. 8, available at: <https://genevacall.org/new-study-education-conflict-zones-perspectives-armed-non-state-actors/>.

66 Customary IHL relating to children (a norm that is applicable in both international and non-international armed conflicts) dictates that “children affected by armed conflict are entitled to special respect and protection”, and practice indicates that this includes access to education. See Jean-Marie Henckaerts and Louise Doswald-Beck (eds), *Customary International Humanitarian Law*, Vol. 1: *Rules*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005 (ICRC Customary Law Study), Rule 135. In addition to customary IHL, provisions specific to non-international armed conflict (see above note 65), and to the general rules of IHL that protect students, educational personnel, and educational facilities in the conduct of hostilities, the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol I specifically address education with regard to the following situations in international armed conflict: all children under 15 orphaned or separated as a result of war (see Geneva Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949, 75 UNTS 287 (entered into force 21 October 1950) (GC IV), Arts 13, 24); civilian internees, notably children and young people (GC IV, Arts 94, 108, 142); occupation (GC IV, Art. 50); circumstances involving evacuation of children (Protocol Additional (I) to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, 1125 UNTS 3, 8 June 1977 (entered into force 7 December 1978) (AP I), Art. 78); and prisoners of war (Geneva Convention (III) relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War of 12 August 1949, 75 UNTS 135 (entered into force 21 October 1950), Arts 38, 72, 125). Finally, the right to education is also enshrined in several instruments of international human rights law, which also apply in times of armed conflict.

During conflict, both State and non-State actors have the responsibility to minimize the impact of hostilities on civilians and civilian objects.⁶⁷ In this regard, the ICRC documents incidents affecting education facilities and related protected persons, and the data collected inform the ICRC's interventions with weapons bearers. Reminding parties to the conflict of their obligations under IHL is a tool through which the ICRC seeks to ensure the protection of students and school staff, as civilians, as well as schools and other educational facilities, as civilian objects – insofar as they preserve their civilian character. When feasible, the ICRC also encourages parties to take measures beyond the letter of IHL, such as preventing the use of schools for purposes that could cause them to lose their protection under the law.

In practice, the ICRC has engaged both State and non-State armed actors on issues such as attacks against schools, military use of schools, and threats against teachers. It has also addressed other factors that restrict access to education during conflict, including location of checkpoints and military facilities in the vicinity of a school, security threats (such as weapon contamination) on school routes, child recruitment and sexual violence, as well as movement restrictions. These efforts are also authority-centred; however, a crucial difference between these and the advocacy work of organizations such as the GCPEA and of the MRM, is that the ICRC's dialogue with authorities and weapons bearers is confidential.

Direct assistance to school-aged children or their caretakers

Another way in which the ICRC contributes to access to education in humanitarian contexts is through the direct provision of assistance or of specific services to children and their families.

In many conflicts, children do not have access to education for economic reasons, including because their families/caretakers are not able to afford school fees, uniforms and/or other education-related expenses. In such cases, the ICRC may provide school materials as part of aid distributions, or even cover the costs of school fees. For example, in 2015 in Egypt, the ICRC provided economic support to cover school and transportation fees for about 1,000 Syrian children. In southern Russia, the ICRC has provided school kits to over 2,000 displaced Ukrainian children, and in Syria it distributed 100,389 school kits in 2014 alone. The provision of educational materials can also support the education of children in detention, and the ICRC has provided this kind of assistance in the form of one-off distributions, for example, in Israel, Afghanistan and Ethiopia.

67 This responsibility is enshrined in the rules of customary IHL concerning the distinction between civilians and combatants, the distinction between civilian objects and military objectives, indiscriminate attacks, proportionality in attack, precaution in attack, and precautions against the effects of attacks (see ICRC Customary Law Study, above note 66, Chap. I). It is also reflected in AP I, particularly Article 48 (on the principle of distinction), Article 51 (on the protection of the civilian population) and Article 52 (on the protection of civilian objects), as well as in AP II, particularly Article 13 (on the protection of the civilian population).

In some contexts, particularly those affected by displacement, the ICRC may facilitate the transfer of documents required to enrol children in schools in their new place of residence. The organization may also support the transportation of students to and from educational institutions – for example, in 2016 in South Sudan, the ICRC transported twenty-eight internally displaced students from their displacement sites to Juba University, so that they could attend their exams in spite of the fighting.

This response to education needs in humanitarian settings reflects the predominant EiE approach focused on addressing gaps in access to education. It also corresponds to standard EiE activities for populations that lack access to education – notably, the provision of teaching materials and supporting the costs of education.⁶⁸

Community-based activities

Another pillar of the ICRC's work to ensure the protection of civilians consists of community-based activities, which are built on dialogue with communities themselves and focused on strengthening the resilience of affected populations and their capacity to reduce exposure to threats and to harmful coping strategies. Such activities complement the authority-centred approach seen above and may have a more immediate effect on the protection of schools and communities at risk.⁶⁹

The ICRC's community-based activities are carried out in a multidisciplinary way, building on the specific expertise of different units within the organization's Assistance and Protection Divisions, including Health, Water and Habitat, Economic Security, Detention, Protection of the Civilian Population, and Weapon Contamination. The material assistance provided to affected populations plays a pivotal role in these programmes, as they help achieve protection outcomes by reducing risk exposure. This is precisely the case with regard to the community-based programmes examined in this section.

Community-based activities can help ensure the protection of education by strengthening the resilience of school communities, including students, teachers, school staff and parents, as well as of school buildings themselves. This article will discuss in detail the ICRC's programme in schools in Ukraine, as an example of the organization's community-based approach to protecting education.

Similar community-based programmes targeting schools and school communities particularly exposed to risks have been implemented elsewhere, including Armenia, Lebanon and various cities affected by urban violence in Latin America, such as Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), Guatemala City (Guatemala) and

68 See above note 44.

69 See Angela Cotroneo and Marta Pawlak, "Community-Based Protection: The ICRC Approach", *Forced Migration Review*, No. 53, October 2016, p. 37, available at www.fmreview.org/sites/fmr/files/FMRdownloads/en/community-protection/cotroneo-pawlak.pdf.

Ciudad Juarez (Mexico). However, for the purposes of this article, we will focus on Ukraine because it is a context in which the ICRC has implemented one of its most holistic programmes in conflict-affected schools.

*The ICRC's Safer Schools programme in eastern Ukraine*⁷⁰

Since April 2014, when the armed conflict began, people in eastern Ukraine, especially those living in proximity to the contact line (the line separating government-controlled from non-government-controlled areas) on both sides, have faced increasing hardships amidst the worsening conflict.

The continuity of education services has also been seriously challenged, particularly along the contact line. According to UNICEF, the area within 5 kilometres of the contact line on the government-controlled side is home to some 54,000 children and 110 educational facilities.⁷¹ The 2018 *Humanitarian Needs Overview* for Ukraine by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports 700,000 students and teachers to be in need of educational support, including some 220,000 in “immediate need of safe and protective schools to learn and recover”.⁷²

The ICRC had a small presence in Ukraine from 1995 until 2011, when it decided to close its presence in the country. In March 2014, with the start of the crisis, the ICRC opened a new delegation in Kiev, gradually expanding its operations to respond to growing humanitarian needs. Offices were opened on both sides of the contact line, in Donetsk, Luhansk, Sieverodonetsk, Sloviansk, Mariupol and Odesa. The delegation's staff has gradually grown to more than 500 people today.

As part of the expansion of its presence and activities in the country, in 2015 the ICRC began to implement a programme aimed at making schools and school communities safer and more resilient to the adverse impact of hostilities.

In its initial phase, up to late 2016, the programme targeted some fifty schools in thirty-one towns and villages in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. As it evolved, it was named the Safer Schools programme⁷³ and extended to schools in all five ICRC offices along the more than 450-km contact line.⁷⁴

As will be seen below, the programme, still in place today, has community engagement at its core and is multidisciplinary in nature, involving most of the

70 Unless otherwise indicated, the information in this section pertaining to ICRC programmes in Ukraine comes from internal reports on file with the authors.

71 UNICEF Ukraine, *The Children of the Contact Line in East Ukraine: An Assessment of the Situation of Children and Their Families Living in Government-Controlled Areas Along the Contact Line in the East Ukraine Conflict Zone*, June 2017, pp. 3, 14, available at: www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/assessments/children_of_the_contact_line.pdf.

72 OCHA, *Ukraine Humanitarian Needs Overview 2018*, December 2017, pp. 3, 37, available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/humanitarian_needs_overview_2018_en_20171130.pdf.

73 The ICRC Safer Schools programme in eastern Ukraine is not to be confused with the Safe Schools Guidelines initiative led by the GCPEA and outlined previously in the present article.

74 For details of the early stage of the programme, see ICRC, “ICRC Support to Schools and Kindergartens – Eastern Ukraine”, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yboh9xm8>.

operational departments of the sub-delegations, including Protection, Health, Weapon Contamination, Water and Habitat, Economic Security, and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support.

By the summer of 2015, when the programme started, schools near the front line, in both government- and non-government-controlled areas, had sustained heavy damage – their walls and roofs had been riddled with holes, their windows broken, and their heating and water-supply systems destroyed. While some schools managed to reopen in time for the 2015 school year, others had not resumed classes. As the mother of a student from Marinka, Donetsk region, put it: “We do worry about our children, but we have nowhere to go, the whole family is here. School is the only thing which keeps us going.”⁷⁵

In August 2015, the ICRC conducted focus group discussions with school communities – i.e., directors, teachers, students and their parents – at six schools in Luhansk province. This direct dialogue with affected communities, essential to a community-based approach, was central to the ICRC’s response as it strengthened the organization’s understanding of the challenges faced by communities and the threats to which they were exposed, and of the ways communities were responding to the security challenges affecting schools along the contact line.

Issues raised during the discussions included the schools’ proximity to military positions, access to safe spaces, evacuation procedures, first-aid capacities, routes used by children to and from school, and access to psychosocial support.

The discussions also revealed that community members, including children, knew which areas in their villages and what times during the day were the most dangerous. Community members reported that they were familiar with the warning signs of incoming fire, and that they had learnt to detect the distance and direction of shellfire.

In parallel to this, in July and August 2015 the ICRC conducted a risk assessment of some seventy-seven schools and kindergartens in the government-controlled areas of Luhansk and Donetsk provinces, including nine schools which were no longer operational. The exercise took into consideration the history of incidents (e.g., the last time the school was occupied by armed actors, or experienced shelling), damage (and need of repair), the proximity of military positions, and the presence of explosive remnants of war in the area. In some cases, it also documented the number of students enrolled before the conflict and at the time of the assessment, as well as the amount of time for which students were able to attend classes.

Of sixty-eight schools still operational as of September 2015, the risk assessment classified thirty-four as high-risk due to their location in contact-line areas, vulnerability to shelling, history of direct hits and/or military presence in their vicinities. Twenty schools were considered medium-risk – i.e., were less vulnerable to shelling and/or did not experience shelling within the last three

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

months, and/or had a military presence within 1 to 5 km of their premises (i.e., not in their immediate vicinity).

The information gathered through the group discussions and the risk assessment provided a basis for the ICRC to start what would later become known as the Safer Schools programme in Ukraine, in September 2015.

The paragraphs below intend to provide a general overview of the community-based activities that compose the Safer Schools programme.⁷⁶ However, the reader should bear in mind that despite the wide implementation of the programme, the activities were tailor-made according to each school's own problems and challenges. As the head of the ICRC in Sieverodonetsk, Christophe Gravend, explained: "Together with our experts, the parents, children and the schools came up with their own plan to reinforce the safety and well-being of the students."⁷⁷

One of the most widely implemented activities of the programme was school rehabilitation.⁷⁸ In terms of the ICRC's community-based activities, this corresponds to a reinforcement of passive security – that is, the adaptation of spaces in the interests of safety. School rehabilitation consists of efforts to repair damage done to educational facilities and/or to strengthen the structure of their buildings, in order to prevent further injury and damage. In order to achieve this, the ICRC has donated waterproofing and construction materials so that affected communities can conduct repairs themselves – only on one occasion did the ICRC conduct repairs itself, on the entrance to a school's bomb shelter. The ICRC has also done rehabilitation work on the water and sewage system of some schools.⁷⁹

School rehabilitation has also involved the donation of basic equipment, such as sandbags, for the reinforcement of windows. The ICRC has also provided and installed, in some cases with the Ukrainian Red Cross, safety film to prevent windows from shattering, should shelling occur.⁸⁰

In this dimension of the programme, communities have been involved not only by carrying out repairs themselves, but also by having a say in how school rehabilitation is done. For example, some schools were reluctant to have their windows reinforced with sandbags, which, as military equipment, seemed incompatible with the school atmosphere. For this reason, in eleven schools the ICRC equipped windows with special panels, made of multiple layers of plywood

76 The authors' detailed understanding of the programme stems from internal reports and a support mission of the ICRC's education adviser to the delegation in Ukraine. This allowed for a categorization of the activities implemented as follows: (1) school rehabilitation; (2) mine risk education and risk awareness; (3) evacuation drills; (4) provision of assistance for emergency preparedness; (5) first-aid trainings; and (6) psychosocial assessments and support for teachers. These are the dimensions of the programme that are explored in the paragraphs below.

77 See ICRC, above note 74.

78 See above note 76.

79 See above note 76.

80 See ICRC, "Ukraine: ICRC Helps Schools Affected by Conflict", 6 January 2016, available at: www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=7&v=6KVUdjnFoW4.

and metal, to protect students from shrapnel.⁸¹ Contrary to the sandbags, although just as protective, the panels do allow daylight into classrooms and do not look like military equipment, and they can be painted and decorated, which allows for a better fit with the school environment.⁸²

In addition to school rehabilitation, the programme has sought to reduce school communities' exposure to risks by promoting safe behaviours. To that end, the ICRC and the Ukrainian Red Cross have conducted sessions of mine risk education and risk awareness with school communities. Teachers were trained to recognize and manage the risks posed by explosive remnants of war, and children received comics specifically designed for them, explaining the dangers of weapon contamination and giving advice on safe behaviours.⁸³

The promotion of safe behaviour also included training children and school staff on what to do in situations of shelling, not only in schools but also along school routes. As the mother of a student notes, "The most dangerous place is the road to the school. ... I always walk with my son to the school and bring him home again. If shooting or shelling starts, I can cover him with my body."⁸⁴

In order to ensure the safety of school communities in case of shelling or shooting, the ICRC also revised schools' evacuation drills. Some communities voiced concern that evacuations could take place in an unplanned way. Most evacuation routes to safe rooms were exposed to risks, either because entrances to basements (which most often served as safe rooms) were located outside the school, or because of large external windows on the route.

In response, the ICRC proposed measures to make evacuation routes safer (such as adding handrails to stairs and other anti-slip measures), or suggested alternative evacuation routes. The ICRC also discussed with communities how warning signals could be integrated into evacuation plans, which in turn could provide school principals with a standard framework for making the decision on whether to order the evacuation.

The Safer Schools programme has also aimed to help school communities prepare for possible emergencies, which has been translated into the direct provision of assistance to schools and kindergartens. Schools have received mattresses, blankets, tarpaulins, fire extinguishers, flashlights, lamps, buckets, jerry cans and/or food supplies not subject to rapid spoilage, such as biscuits and nuts. These materials were used to equip their basements, in case students and school staff had to take shelter for extended periods of time. In some cases, the assistance provided also included water and heating equipment.⁸⁵

In addition, the Ukrainian Red Cross has delivered first-aid trainings to teachers, and sometimes to students, and the ICRC has distributed dressing sets which can be used to tend to the wounded during emergencies.⁸⁶

81 ICRC, above note 74.

82 The school in Novotoshkivske is an example where the special panels were used. See *ibid.*

83 *Ibid.*

84 *Ibid.*

85 *Ibid.*

86 *Ibid.*

By combining trainings with direct assistance, the ICRC, in partnership with the Ukrainian Red Cross, has sought to build school communities' capabilities and capacity to respond to future emergencies. This is an effective approach because it builds on the communities' existing protection strategies, recognizes their agency and ensures their ownership of the programme.

Nonetheless, due to their exposure to conflict over time, community members experience unusually high levels of stress. Communities also reported that children were frightened by the shelling and highlighted the need for additional psychosocial support. Thus, following an assessment of psychosocial needs, school teachers participating in the Safer Schools programme benefited from a related ICRC initiative, called "helping the helpers". Under this activity, the ICRC provided psychosocial support to teachers and trained them in providing such support to students, which helped them deal with students' as well as their own stress.⁸⁷

In parallel to the activities under the Safer Schools programme, the ICRC's presence in Ukraine continues to engage authorities and weapons bearers in the protection dialogue discussed above. Although not focused on communities, such authority-centred efforts complement community-based protection and are relevant in contexts where schools and school communities are exposed to the risks created by armed conflict. The ICRC's dialogue with authorities aims to ensure that schools are respected and spared from the effects of hostilities and that military positions are not in close proximity to schools, which would put them at risk of incidental damage.

Strengths and challenges

The main strength of community-based programmes aimed at mitigating the impact of conflict on schools is community involvement. In the Safer Schools programme, dialogue with communities was key not only during the early stages, when school communities helped the ICRC to understand the challenges they faced, but also throughout the programme's implementation. This allowed communities to have a voice on how to respond to their needs, which in turn allowed for raising concerns that might have otherwise gone unnoticed, such as the impact of using specific equipment to reinforce school structure on the school atmosphere. Such community participation is also essential to ensure that the humanitarian response communities receive is tailored to their specific needs, which is particularly relevant to programmes, such as Safer Schools, implemented in multiple locations across a region. All this reflects the ICRC's view that communities "are the 'experts' on their own situation".⁸⁸

Partnerships with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies) have also been fundamental in the ICRC's community-based programmes in schools, not only in Ukraine but also in Lebanon and Latin America. In the

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ A. Cotroneo and M. Pawlak, above note 69, p. 36.

example of the Safer Schools programme discussed above, the Ukrainian Red Cross was a key actor in activities conducted directly with the communities, such as mine risk education and first aid trainings. National Societies are valuable assets in the ICRC's response in schools, because of both their proximity to communities and their specific expertise on first aid and disaster risk reduction, which definitely plays a role in mine risk education and the promotion of safe behaviour in schools. Furthermore, the systemization of safety procedures to be adopted by school communities to mitigate the consequences of possible security incidents was initially inspired by Safer Access, a set of guidelines the ICRC created for National Societies to carry out their work in sensitive and insecure contexts.

Finally, as mentioned above, the ICRC's community-based programmes are rich in their multidisciplinary nature, building on the wide range of expertise within the organization. As seen in the Safer Schools programme, the ICRC was able to offer a holistic response to the protection challenges faced by school communities in Ukraine, which allowed it to strengthen communities' resilience and preparedness for emergencies; offer support, including psychosocial, to mitigate the consequences of armed conflict; and strengthen the structure of school buildings and other educational facilities.

One of the main challenges faced by community-based programmes is the risk of losing their community-based nature – especially when they are implemented in multiple locations in the same region. Once consultations are carried out and activities start being implemented in the first few communities, field workers may begin to feel that they already know the problem in that area, which in turn may lead to a less engaged dialogue with additional communities to be included in the programme.

It is crucial, however, that humanitarians continue to engage communities with a “blank page” – that is, that no assumptions are made, reflecting an understanding of every new community as unique in nature. Regardless of how similar the context might be, communities may see their situation in distinct ways, see the problems they face differently, assign different priorities to their needs and challenges, and have a different opinion on the response strategies adopted. Adopting a “blank page” approach keeps the door open for additional activities to be devised and included in the programme, and for improvements to existing ones.

This also applies to the lessons learned from the Safer Schools programme. While the authors hope the practices discussed above can provide some inspiration for humanitarian organizations working in the field of education, or simply on community-based protection, the essence of a community-based response remains the continued dialogue with communities. Therefore, it is not the authors' intention to provide a standard approach to ensuring the protection of education during armed conflict that can be replicated in other contexts. Each response must be based on needs and vulnerabilities, as assessed in and discussed with different communities.

The Safer Schools programme may constitute a good, comprehensive example of community-based response to the risks faced by schools and other

educational facilities exposed to shelling and shooting. Nonetheless, with the above-mentioned concerns in mind, it is important to acknowledge that many of the activities implemented in Ukraine could be problematic, and even increase risk exposure, in contexts where schools are used for military purposes.

The rehabilitation of school structures and the provision of material assistance to equip school basements for future emergencies may make schools more attractive to armed forces or armed groups for use as bases, barracks and temporary shelters, or for other military purposes. In the case of the Safer Schools programme more specifically, the circumstances were favourable to school rehabilitation and emergency preparedness activities because, at the time the programme began, a ceasefire process had started, during which emphasis was put on not using schools for military purposes. Yet, even in contexts where schools are not used for military purposes, a continued dialogue with authorities and weapons bearers is necessary in order to ensure that military positions are not in proximity to schools, as seen above.

The last challenge lies in the fact that such programmes might give a false sense of protection to affected communities, and encourage parents to send their children to schools that are, despite the protective measures implemented, still exposed to risks. Thus, it is essential that before implementing activities, a proper risk assessment is conducted, in order to evaluate whether the activities planned (or even the mechanisms already adopted by communities) can be an effective response. Maintaining a protection dialogue with the parties to the conflict is key in this sense, as it contributes to ensuring security of and around schools.

Concluding remarks

This article sought to distinguish between differentiated approaches to education that have been prominent in the humanitarian field. It sought to show that, while EiE is largely associated with responses addressing gaps in access to education, the sub-sector also focuses on responding to the need to protect education. This latter area of programmatic response complements the advocacy-oriented and authority-centred efforts to ensure the protection of education from attack associated with the UN international agenda for children and the Safe Schools Declaration (and the Guidelines).

The ICRC's response to education needs in humanitarian settings can also be understood in parallel to the distinction between gaps in access to and the protection of education. In terms of bridging gaps in access to education, the ICRC's engagement with authorities is based on their various responsibilities and obligations regarding the facilitation or provision of education. With regard to the protection of education, the ICRC's dialogue with parties to armed conflict relies heavily on IHL (as well as complementary frameworks and standards where relevant), and focuses on the conduct of hostilities in order to prevent or mitigate the impact of armed conflict on school buildings, students and school staff.

In addition to authority-centred efforts, the ICRC also engages communities in both areas. In terms of bridging gaps in access to education, the organization's relation to communities works predominantly in one direction only, as it is based on direct provision of material assistance or other services (such as transfer of documents and transportation of students). In contrast, in seeking to ensure the protection of education the ICRC was able to establish a two-way dialogue with communities, building a deeper and meaningful engagement, as the Safer Schools programme in Ukraine demonstrates.

This is not to say that communities cannot be engaged and involved in programmes aimed at bridging gaps in access to education – this is not only a real and existing approach, but also common in contexts marked by a lack of formal education options, where communities might be directly involved in the provision of informal education.

The ultimate goal of this article was to share the ICRC's experience in the field of education, while emphasizing the potential beneficial relationship between community-based approaches and the protection of education. Although not exhaustive, the authors hope the practices and thoughts shared above can further inform the development of a growing sector.