Country: United Arab Emirates

Committee: Unesco-2

Topic: Barriers to education in conflict-affected countries

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) or simply the Emirates is a country in Western Asia. It is located at the eastern end of the Arabian Peninsula and shares borders with Oman and Saudi Arabia while having maritime borders in the Persian Gulf with Qatar and Iran. Abu Dhabi is the nation's capital, while Dubai, the most populous city, is an international hub. The United Arab Emirates' oil and natural gas reserves are the world's sixth and seventh-largest, respectively.

The education system through secondary level is monitored by the Ministry of Education in all emirates except Abu Dhabi, where it falls under the authority of the Abu Dhabi Education Council. It consists of primary schools, middle schools, and high schools. The public schools are government-funded and the curriculum is created to match the United Arab Emirates' development goals. The medium of instruction in the public school is Arabic with emphasis on English as a second language. There are also many private schools that are internationally accredited. Public schools in the country are free for citizens of the UAE, while the fees for private schools vary.

The higher education system is monitored by the Ministry of Higher Education. The ministry also is responsible for admitting students to its undergraduate institutions. The adult literacy rate in 2015 was 93.8%. The UAE has shown a strong interest in improving education and research. Enterprises include the establishment of the CERT Research Centres and the Masdar Institute of Science and Technology and the Institute for Enterprise Development. According to the QS Rankings, the top-ranking universities in the country are the United Arab Emirates University, Khalifa University, the American University of Sharjah, and the University of Sharjah.

Exposure to conflict affects children in several ways, ranging from direct killings and injuries to more subtle, yet persistent and irreversible effects on schooling, health, nutrition, future opportunities, and well-being. Children’s educational attainment is particularly compromised by exposure to violence. The likelihood of young children dropping out of school is also significantly higher in conflict-affected countries than elsewhere in the world. Research has highlighted in particular the causal adverse impact of conflict exposure in terms of reducing the number of years children spend in school and restricting grade progression. These effects have been shown in turn to affect considerably future life prospects of affected children, including access to the labor market, earnings, and health outcomes in adulthood which may aggravate risks associated with the outbreak or renewal of violent conflicts.

These findings call attention to the importance of reforming education systems in conflict-affected countries. This is, however, a major challenge for countries emerging from years and sometimes decades of armed violence. On the one hand, the destruction of infrastructure, social institutions, and markets may create important barriers to the supply of schooling and the creation of enabling environments in which education systems can be rebuilt. On the other hand, changes in economic and social structures within families and communities, alongside persistent insecurity, may create demand-side barriers to children joining schools during and after violent conflicts.