

# Connecting with the Commonwealth: Education Cannot Wait Delivers with Humanitarian Speed and Development Depth



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**Nations across the Commonwealth are impacted by a number of ongoing conflicts, emergencies and protracted crises that are pushing children out of school, disrupting economies and derailing development gains.**

The multiplying impacts of COVID-19, the climate crisis and massive displacement into Commonwealth countries, such as Bangladesh and Uganda, are further exacerbating the challenge. This puts girls and boys at grave risk of gender-based violence, early childhood marriage or recruitment into armed groups. It denies them their human rights and undermines the shared goals of the Commonwealth for “development, democracy and peace.”

As the United Nations (UN) global fund for education in emergencies

and protracted crises, Education Cannot Wait (ECW) works with strategic partners across the globe – and across the Commonwealth – to provide crisis-impacted children and adolescents with the safety, hope and opportunity that quality and holistic learning environments provide. Through these multilateral partnerships, we are delivering on our promise of Education for All (SDG4) as outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and paving the way for a more peaceful, more prosperous future.

Since ECW was founded in 2016, we have seen an unprecedented spike in the number of crisis-impacted girls and boys in need of educational support. Over a few short years, the number has nearly tripled, from estimates of around 75 million in 2016 to approximately 222 million today. Of these children,



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more than 72 million are out of school altogether according to new estimates.

With our donors and partners across the Commonwealth, we must come together to address these issues and realise the [#222MillionDreams Campaign](#) as we unite to mobilise \$1.5 billion for ECW.

As outlined in our [2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#) and our [Case for Investment](#), these new resources will allow us to reach 20 million children and adolescents over the next few years. As we deliver with humanitarian speed and developmental depth, the

funding also supports global efforts to end hunger and poverty, address the climate crisis and build back better from the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to disrupt education and economies worldwide.

#### **Delivering across the Commonwealth**

ECW has invested in a number of Commonwealth countries. Of the more than 40 countries that have benefitted from ECW funding to date, 11 are within the Commonwealth.

Through our investments, ECW has partnered with governments, donors, UN agencies, civil society partners, the private sector, and local and international non-profit organisations (NGOs) to provide holistic educational support. Commonwealth countries that have benefitted – or continue to benefit – from ECW’s investments include [Bangladesh](#), [Cameroon](#), [Kenya](#), [Malawi](#), [Mozambique](#), [Nigeria](#), [Pakistan](#), [Papua New Guinea](#), [Tanzania](#), [Uganda](#) and [Zambia](#).

ECW’s First Emergency Responses – designed to get a child back into

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education after an acute emergency – provide six to 12 months of continuous access to education, protection and psychosocial support, teacher support and safe learning environments. Our three-year holistic investments delivered through our signature Multi-Year Resilience Programmes provide a broader range of services – including continuous access to education, protection and psychosocial services, teacher training, school feeding, improved learning outcomes, gender equality, disaster risk management, school administrative support the inclusion of refugees in national education systems, resource mobilisation and systems strengthening.

Stories of hope and resilience arise from across the Commonwealth. After

the massive floods in [Pakistan](#), which impacted over 33 million people, ECW and our strategic partners launched a fast-acting 12-month [First Emergency Response](#). Delivered in partnership with the Government of Pakistan by Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED) and UNICEF, the investment will reach more than 80,000 girls and boys impacted by the floods, building on ECW’s ongoing [Multi-Year Resilience Programme](#) in Pakistan – which focuses on providing equitable access to inclusive and quality learning environments, establishing temporary learning spaces, and providing children with the psychosocial supports they need to avoid dropping out of school permanently.

[Uganda](#) hosts 1.5 million refugees, the largest refugee population in Africa. With our donors, ECW has invested \$80.8 million in funding to date. By crowding in resources and bringing partners together, ECW is ensuring localised aid has a real impact on the ground. To date, these investments have reached more than 187,000 children, including over 130,000 refugees. More than 160,000 children received training materials, 283 classrooms were built or rehabilitated, and over 1,700 teachers received financial support.

ECW takes a proactive stance toward gender responsiveness, targeting 60 per cent of girls through our multi-year programmes.

In human terms, this means that refugee girls like [Janat Ara](#) in





Bangladesh are able to attend school safely. It means building a connection between climate action and educational support in [Mozambique](#). It means breaking down barriers to girls' education with targeted responses in [Uganda](#) and beyond.

### Addressing the funding gap

With the wars in Ukraine and Sudan, floods in Pakistan, jumps in forced displacement across many Commonwealth countries, the spectre of famine across many parts of Africa, and other protracted crises, education in emergencies funding appeals reached \$2.9 billion in 2021, up from \$1.4 billion the previous year, according to analysis from [ECW's Annual Results Report](#).

Currently, funding for education in emergencies only accounts for 2-4 per

cent of global humanitarian funding. While 2021 saw a record-high \$645 million in education appeal funding, the overall funding gap spiked by 17 per cent, from 60 per cent in 2020 to 77 per cent in 2021.

Leaders are stepping up – with many Commonwealth donor countries leading the way – but large gaps remain.

Since its inception, ECW and our strategic partners have mobilised more than \$1.5 billion. Donations to ECW from Commonwealth donor countries total approximately \$393 million to date – about 26 per cent – with contributions from the United Kingdom (\$259 million), Canada (\$127 million) and Australia (\$7 million). Other developed Commonwealth countries and businesses headquartered in the Commonwealth are encouraged to step up to join ECW and our

strategic partners in delivering on our promise of universal education and universal human rights.

The return on investment is truly remarkable. For every dollar invested in girls' education, we see \$2.80 in return, and [World Bank studies](#) indicate that “making sure all girls are finishing secondary education by 2030 could boost the gross domestic product (GDP) of developing countries by 10 per cent on average over the next decade.”

In the end, education is the best investment we can make in achieving not just our goals for 12 years of quality education for every girl and boy on the planet, but also our common goals for ending hunger and poverty, building gender equality, and making a more peaceful, more prosperous world for generations to come. ■