PROMOTING JOINT ACTION ON EDUCATION IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

During the 2016 Arab-DAC Dialogue on Development, Arab and DAC providers agreed to explore setting up a joint task force on education in refugee camps. Since then, the Islamic Development Bank, Norway and the United Kingdom, with support from the OECD, have exchanged ideas on possible joint activities to accelerate access to quality education in areas that are not being addressed through other initiatives or that have gaps in coverage.

Key issues for discussion:

- What are the gaps in policy, planning and programming strategies for education interventions in fragile settings, with a particular reference to those areas experiencing forced displacement, or hosting large and often protracted refugee populations?
- What are the challenges to delivering adequate and effective financing for education in fragile contexts? What gaps are currently observable in the way financing for education is allocated in these circumstances? How could these challenges be overcome and the gaps filled?
- What implementation mechanisms and strategies (including development finance) have worked in fragile settings to ensure timely and effective response to these circumstances? How could these be scaled up for greater impact on the ground and to ensure sustainability?

Possible outcomes:

- Agree to strengthen co-ordination in the education sector leading to better access, quality and impact. Promote better understanding of alternative mechanisms to support coherent policies and programmes for education in fragile situations.
- Identify concrete measures that ACG and DAC providers could take to continue the joint work started in 2016 on education in fragile settings, in particular to support the large displaced populations resulting from on-going conflicts, notably the Syrian civil war.
- Clear the Task Force terms of reference and endorse the suggested priority areas for collaboration with a focus on ‘Promoting Joint Action on Education and Fragility’.

The challenge of ensuring education for all

Education plays an important role in improving the quality of life, reducing poverty and attaining sustainable economic growth. There is consensus that investing in education yields high economic returns. There is, moreover, a renewed global commitment towards education after universal endorsement of 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The 4th Sustainable Development Goal enjoins policy makers to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all and promote lifelong learning opportunities.”

However, although worldwide improvements have been made in achieving universal access to education, progress has been recently dampened for a number of reasons, including escalating conflicts resulting in large-scale displacement and the consequent problem of children with limited or no access to education. This is the case, for example, of Syria where the civil war has displaced around 11 million people, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Many Syrian refugees have sought safety and assistance in neighbouring countries (Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq), while others remain internally displaced and in dire need of support in a context where humanitarian access remains severely constrained.
The presence of large displaced populations adds to already existing structural constraints (e.g. lack of infrastructure, shortage of teachers, poor safety and security) and demand-side challenges (e.g. household poverty, child labour). Other bottlenecks to addressing the challenges generated by large displaced populations include limited political will, bad governance, poor management capacity and low financing levels. Education can both be affected by fragility but can also reinforce and perpetuate fragility, for example, through barriers to access for particular individuals or groups, or through structures that further entrench social divisions or tensions. On the other hand, education can enhance the resilience of the community or the individual, providing access to new life skills or a safe space where people can better cope with the effects of conflict.

The ACG-DAC Task Force on Education

The challenge of ensuring education for all remains a key concern for both Arab and DAC providers. The issue was raised during the 2016 Arab-DAC Dialogue on Development when the Islamic Development Bank championed the idea of creating a joint ACG-DAC Task Force to explore how the two communities could work together to support education in fragile contexts and in particular to address the needs of the growing number of refugees in member and participant countries.

The main objective of setting up this Task Force was to create a platform to exchange ideas and develop a common framework for joint activities on a number of priority areas that would ultimately accelerate access to quality education for all and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (in particular SDG no. 4). Activities could range from global advocacy to analytical work, and would rely on existing work and partnerships. The list of suggested priority areas are set out in the draft Terms of References for the ACG-DAC Task Force on Education.

To demonstrate the potential for achieving concrete results, the members of the task force proposed to focus this session on the implementation mechanisms and measures (including development finance) that can support education, to highlight the critical need to mobilise more domestic and external resources including through blending (e.g. using small grant financing to leverage much larger financing), concessional financing for education, special funds and philanthropic institutions.