

OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR EFFECTIVE SUPPORT IN FRAGILE AND CONFLICT- AFFECTED CONTEXTS

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Contents

1. Introduction.....2

2. Background.....2

3. Principles for engagement in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.....4

4. Approach to supporting fragile and conflict-affected contexts under GPE 2025....7

5. Adapting GPE’s engagement after the emergence of a crisis.....11

1. Introduction

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) is strongly committed to ensuring quality education for children living in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. GPE convenes partners and mobilizes funds to help governments in 90 lower-income countries build and finance strong and sustainable education systems that deliver quality learning to more girls and boys, especially those who are marginalized by poverty, gender, disability or displacement.

Strengthening resilience and mitigating the systemic impacts of crisis continue to be critical to GPE's mission. As we have just witnessed with COVID-19, there are events that can force even the most stable countries into crisis. The range and frequency of crises in GPE partner countries calls for GPE to ensure that preparedness for responding to crises and changing circumstances are integral parts of diagnostics, sector planning and implementation support, and that our operational model is flexible enough to respond to changing circumstances.

This operational framework outlines approaches that allow GPE to support education systems when countries experience a crisis with systemic impacts on the education system. This introduction is followed by an overview of GPE's support to fragile and conflict-affected contexts up to now. The framework then outlines our principles for engaging in these contexts as well as GPE's approach under the 2025 strategic period. The final section outlines the processes and mechanisms available for adapting GPE's engagement after the emergence of a crisis.

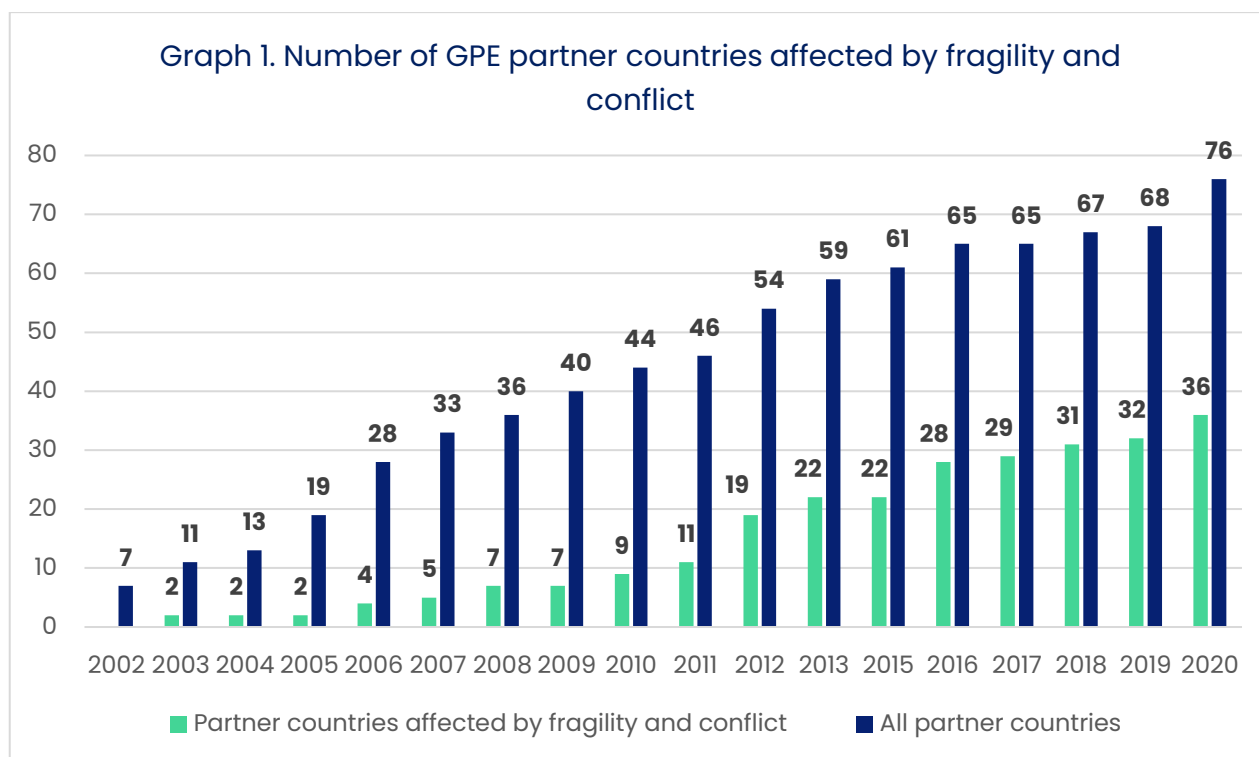
2. Background

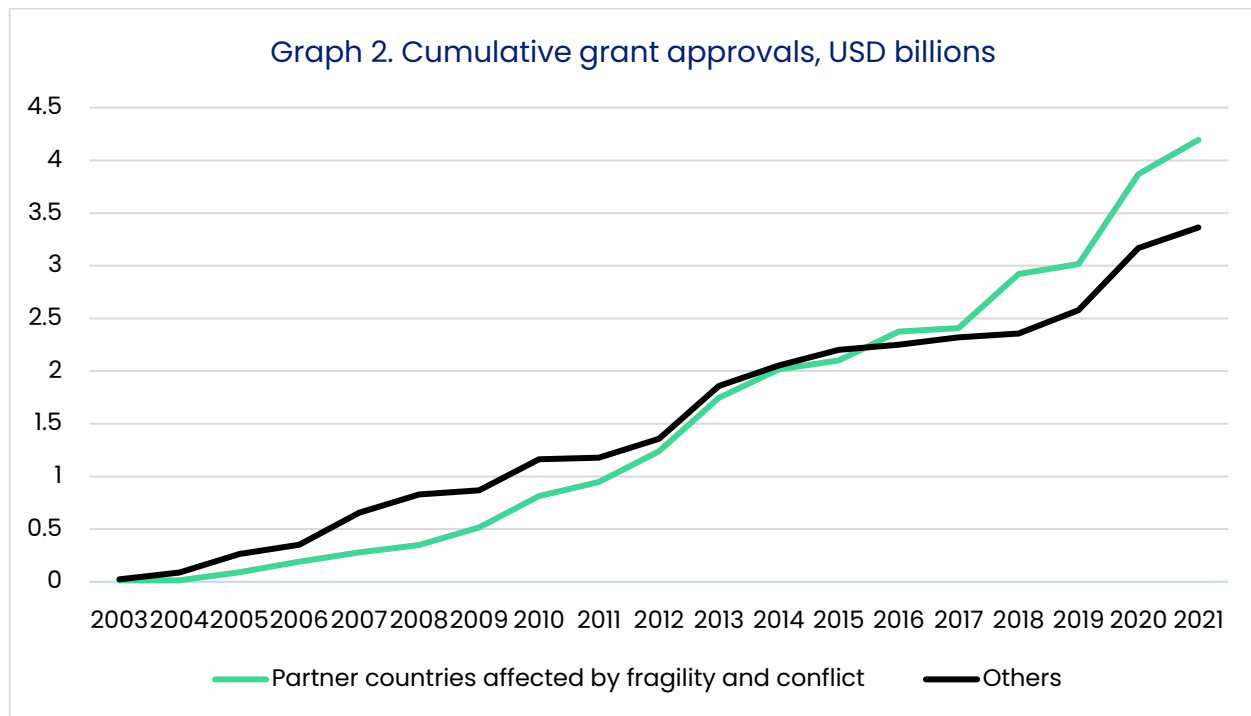
GPE has supported partners affected by fragility and conflict since 2002, but with a particular focus since 2011 following the restructuring of GPE to its current form and the prioritization of education in these countries in GPE's strategy 2012–2015. The Operational Framework for Effective Support in Fragile and Conflict-affected States was first adopted in 2013 to introduce principles, modalities and procedures relating to GPE-funded grants in fragile situations. The operational framework also included a mechanism for accelerated support, to allow countries to respond to urgent education needs and to allow GPE to maintain continuous support through crisis situations, including coup d'état. The framework formalized some of the ways that GPE support had previously been adapted in such situations to continue support to education. The operational framework was supplemented in 2018 with principles for operating in complex emergencies, which provided further guidance for GPE's engagement in situations of total or considerable breakdown of authority.

Support to partner countries affected by fragility and conflict substantially increased over the last decade, to where nearly half of GPE partner countries are affected by such situations (graph 1). Cumulative grant approvals for partner countries affected by fragility surpassed those for other countries in 2016 (graph 2), as GPE places an emphasis on low- and lower-middle-income countries with high levels of out-of-school children and specifically weights allocations toward countries affected by fragility and conflict.

Building on its experience supporting planning and implementation of transitional education sector plans in partner countries affected by fragility and conflict, GPE launched guidelines in 2016 together with IIEP to support countries to prepare transitional education plans in situations where longer-term planning or the implementation of an existing sector plan is compromised by contextual uncertainties.

In response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, GPE supported governments and partners to respond by promoting alignment and coordination behind national response plans and funding mitigation and recovery. It mobilized an additional US\$500 million to support partner countries with planning and implementing their education responses. This included planning grants to 87 countries and response grants to 66 partner countries.





3. Principles for engagement in fragile and conflict-affected contexts

3.1 Guiding principles

As set out in the [Charter](#), GPE's guiding principles are:

- Education as a public good, a human right and an enabler of other rights.
- Focusing our resources on securing learning, equity and inclusion for the most marginalized children and youth, including those affected by fragility and conflict.
- Achieving gender equality.
- Enabling inclusive, evidence-based policy dialogue that engages national governments, donors, civil society, teachers, philanthropy and the private sector.
- Providing support that promotes country ownership and nationally identified priorities, and is linked to country performance in achieving improved equity and learning.
- Improving development effectiveness by harmonizing and aligning aid to country systems.
- Promoting mutual accountability and transparency across the partnership.
- Acting on our belief that inclusive partnership is the most effective means of achieving development results.

In its engagement in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, GPE also adheres to the OECD's [Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations](#) and to the peace-building and resilience building principles of the Busan Declaration ([New Deal Principles](#)).

3.2 Operating principles for political crises

Experience has shown that even within this framework of principles, further guidance is required for operating in situations where there is no legitimate or recognized government, where a government does not have authority over large sections of its territory, or where other groups have authority over education. Accordingly, the Operational Framework includes a set of operating principles for political crises. These principles may be invoked in situations such as, for example, coup d'état or large-scale violence, armed conflict, or human rights abuse. Following the emergence of such a crisis, the Secretariat will engage in discussions with the coordinating agency and local education group or development partners, including grant agents, about whether and how support to education needs to be adapted in light of the situation, including the potential application of these principles (see section 5).

Basis for engagement

The best interests of children

Ensuring the protection of children's rights, as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, is the first consideration in all engagements. This overarching principle applies in all situations of GPE engagement but is particularly cogent when standard GPE principles and operating arrangements present practical challenges, such as government leadership of: (i) stakeholder consultation, (ii) development partner coordination, (iii) sector processes and dialogue, and (iv) GPE program development, implementation and monitoring. GPE engagement will build on existing guidance on education in emergencies, including INEE Minimum Standards, the Education Cluster approach, and UNHCR guidance as relevant.

	<p>Protecting the system</p> <p>When it works in crisis situations, GPE's role is to help ensure that the functional elements of the education system, particularly those closest to the schools and communities, do not collapse and that they provide a basis for recovery and reconstruction under a new, or reconstituted, central or decentralized authority.¹</p>
	<p>Humanitarian principles</p> <p>GPE adopts the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence in its engagement in political crises.</p>
Alignment and interim authority	<p>Non-political engagement</p> <p>GPE engagement with any parties to further the interests of children and their learning does not imply political endorsement of, or support for, any individual, authority or group.</p>
	<p>Alignment with UN/International arrangements</p> <p>The starting point for GPE engagement is to follow the legal and institutional arrangements that the UN has put in place, including the Office of the UN Special Representative (where one has been appointed), the Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator, and the Education Cluster where it has been constituted².</p>
	<p>Interim authority on GPE processes</p> <p>Where direct participation of government in standard GPE processes is not practical or feasible, the remaining local education group can fulfill these functions, in alignment with existing UN/International institutional arrangements, until formal participation of authorities is re-established. Where an education cluster is established, the development partners should coordinate closely with the cluster.</p>

¹ This approach is in line with the concept of shadow alignment, which is a state-avoiding approach. It does not give an authority or government control over resources, but does use funding mechanisms that are parallel but compatible with existing or potential organization of the state. It aims to avoid creating a diversionary institutional legacy that can undermine or impede the development of a more accountable and legitimate future relationship between the people and their governments (WHO Health Systems Strengthening Glossary 2011).

² The UN system abides by UN Resolutions, and thereby GPE would also be following UN Resolutions as a result of aligning with existing UN arrangements.

	<p>Function over form</p> <p>Where the country level arrangements to ensure donor coordination and wide stakeholder consultation are not possible through the standard mechanisms such as a local education group, country level partners should ensure that as far as possible donor coordination and stakeholder consultation are achieved through alternative arrangements and the processes followed reflect GPE guidance. GPE partners should work to ensure coordination mechanisms are harmonized and streamlined.</p>
<p>Working with others</p>	<p>Commitment to a shared planning framework endorsed by key stakeholders as the basis for interventions</p> <p>GPE support should be located within a wider plan that ensures donor coordination and alignment of GPE and other donor interventions within a single plan. Depending on the context, this could be the Humanitarian Response Plan, Education Cluster Strategy, Multi-Year Resilience Program, Transitional Education Plan, or other interim plan, as determined by development partners in dialogue with emergency-focused coordination groups as relevant. Revisions to the partnership compact will depend on the intensity and duration of the crisis. It is assumed that in cases where the crisis is one of no legitimate or recognized government, the partnership compact would not be revised until a time when the process can be government-led once more, though this is a decision by country-level partners.</p>
	<p>Complementarity</p> <p>GPE-funded grants should be based on an analysis of available and potential funding and support to maximize resource allocation, minimize duplication, and optimize complementarity. Attention should be paid to ensuring complementarity with interventions funded by other partners including Education Cannot Wait.</p>

4. Approach to supporting fragile and conflict-affected contexts under GPE 2025

The overall goal of GPE 2025 is to accelerate access, learning outcomes and gender equality through equitable, inclusive and resilient education systems fit for the 21st century. GPE 2025 outlines three objectives that the partnership will pursue under this strategic period.

- Strengthen gender-responsive planning and policy development for system-wide impact

- Mobilize coordinated action and financing to enable transformative change
- Strengthen capacity, adapt, and learn, to implement and drive results at scale

These three country-level objectives are supported by an enabling, global objective: to mobilize global and national partners and resources for sustainable results.

GPE's approach to fragile and conflict-affected contexts is based on an understanding that any country can be hit by a crisis – as we saw with COVID – meaning that education systems everywhere need to be able to mitigate the impacts of crisis and conflict in a way that does not undermine current and past investments in the sector. Education also has a vital role in peacebuilding before, during, and after crisis or conflict. While education can be a force for peace and mutual understanding, it can also be a force to the contrary if the system excludes some learners. GPE promotes the mainstreaming of equity and inclusion in all education policies and plans to ensure that all children enjoy their basic human rights without discrimination.

GPE's operating model 2025 is centered on supporting system transformation, meeting partner countries where they are. We recognize that contexts of adversity are also opportunities to positively adapt or even transform ('build back better'). GPE's role in crisis situations is to sustain support to the government and partners to plan, respond and recover by promoting alignment and coordination, strengthening capacity, sustaining continuity of education services, and building back better in terms of effective, responsive and inclusive education system delivery. The ways that these roles have been built into the GPE 2025 operating model are outlined below.

GPE 2025 OBJECTIVES	APPROACH
Strengthen gender-responsive planning and policy development for systemwide impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The operating model, through the analysis of enabling factors and partnership compact dialogue, encourages countries to reflect on education system resilience, including preparedness to crises and the opportunities available to marginalized groups such as displaced children. This includes identifying the different challenges faced by children and educators as a result of their gender and identifying ways to address these. • The analysis of enabling factors in the model is context-specific, rather than based on fixed benchmarks. This allows a better consideration of fragile and conflict-affected contexts and comparison with other similar countries.

Mobilize coordinated action and financing to enable transformative change

- Weighting for fragility in funding allocations has been maintained, thus prioritizing GPE support to countries affected by fragility and conflict.
- The operating model encourages coordination between relevant actors in crisis contexts, specifically that representatives of humanitarian education coordination mechanisms³ are invited to participate at key moments in partnership compact and grant processes.
- The system capacity grant can fund strengthening coordination between the local education group and humanitarian education coordination mechanisms, as well as cross-sector coordination, such as between education and health, or between different ministries with mandates for education in crisis.
- System transformation grants and grants from the GPE Multiplier can support sustained investments in resilience over a longer term when this is linked to a theory of change around system transformation.
- System transformation grants and Multiplier grants can also support the inclusion of displaced children into national systems, as these situations are mostly protracted. The Multiplier is now available to all 90 GPE-eligible countries and has the added benefit of leveraging additional funds.
- The Girls Education Accelerator is available to 20 partner countries affected by fragility and conflict, allowing GPE to provide dedicated support to girls, who are often worst affected by crisis and conflict.

Strengthen capacity, adapt and learn, to implement and drive results at scale

- The system capacity grant can support analysis, planning and capacity building for system resilience and inclusion of displaced children. The grant is available to all 90 GPE-eligible countries. *For further information see Box 1 below.*

³ Such coordination mechanisms include: Education Cluster, Education in Emergencies Working Group, and/or Refugee Education Working Group.

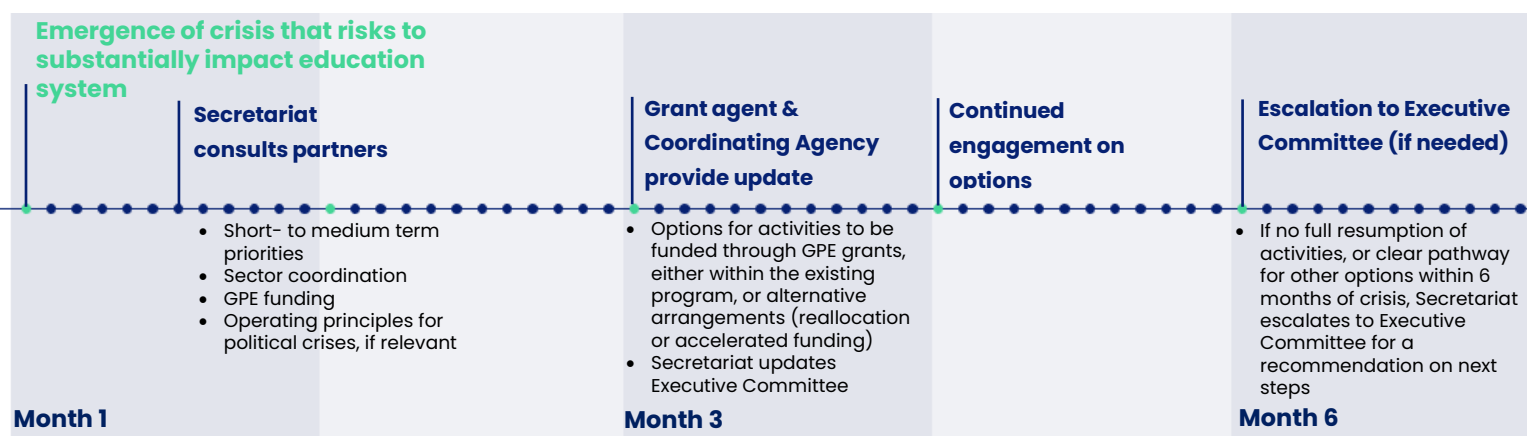
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved monitoring of results in partner countries affected by fragility and conflict, including more systematic monitoring of how programs target displaced children and support resilience. • KIX and Education Out Loud investments in countries affected by fragility and conflict, including south-south knowledge exchange.
Mobilize global and national partners and resources for sustainable results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic capabilities can be developed to reinforce country capacities for system transformation, including crisis preparedness, where there is demand from multiple countries for this. • Continuation of existing partnerships such as with UNHCR and the joint action plan with the World Bank and ECW on improving financing to refugees.

Box 1. Supporting analysis, planning and capacity building for system resilience and inclusion of displaced children

The **system capacity grant** provides continually available and flexible funding to support capacity strengthening, in areas of strengthening gender-responsive planning and policy development; mobilizing coordinated action and financing to enable transformative change; and strengthening capacity, adapt and learn, to implement and drive results at scale.

- The grant can be mobilized to fund activities that **strengthen system resilience**, in other words the ability of the education system to prepare for, respond to and recover from adverse events. These can be related to any type of event with systemic impacts on the education system, such as climate-driven disasters, public health emergencies, conflict, forced displacement, political crises, or economic shocks.
- Activities may include (for comprehensive list please see [Guidelines for system capacity grant](#)): Diagnostic of contextual risks to the education system, or the impacts of crisis on specific groups of children such as girls; Analysis of forced displacement trends; Development of data systems that track risks and their impact on the education system, and/or track the education needs of displaced and refugee populations; Capacity-building and technical assistance related to integrating resilience and risk management in planning, monitoring and evaluation; Development of contingency plans or mechanisms that allow the system to respond to and recover from adverse events.

5. Adapting GPE's engagement after the emergence of a crisis



5.1 Consultation with partners: Following the emergence of a crisis that risks to substantially impact education continuity for all or specific groups of children or threatens the continuity of the education system itself, the Secretariat will engage in discussions with the coordinating agency and local education group or development partners, including grant agents, about whether and how support to education needs to be adapted in light of the situation, including:

- Short- to medium term priorities, including the joint planning framework⁴ that will be used to determine changes to support education;
- Sector coordination, including engagement of representatives of the Education Cluster, Education in Emergency Working Group, or Refugee Education Working Group in discussions, as relevant;
- Potential application of operating principles for political crises, which may include situations such as coup d'état or large-scale violence, armed conflict, or human rights abuse (see section 3.2).

⁴ Depending on the context, this could be a continuation or adaptation of the existing Education Sector Plan, but also a Humanitarian Response Plan, Education Cluster Strategy, Multi-Year Resilience Program, Transitional Education Plan, or other interim plan, as determined by development partners. Revisions to the partnership compact will depend on the intensity and duration of the crisis. It is assumed that in cases where the crisis is one of no legitimate or recognized government, the partnership compact will not be revised until a time when the process can be government-led once more, though this is a decision by country-level partners.

- Taking into consideration available funding from other sources, including humanitarian funding, whether to adapt GPE support. Partners can consider three options that are not mutually exclusive:

- 1. Modify activities and/or implementation modalities within the current GPE-funded program**, using the established pathways and guidance for program revisions; and/or
- 2. Apply for accelerated funding from an outstanding allocation;** and/or
- 3. Reallocate GPE funds from an existing program to a different program as accelerated funding, under the same or different grant agent.** This option entails cancellation of the allocation of an existing GPE grant or part thereof, in order to finance other activities developed to mitigate the impact of the crisis. The CEO is mandated to cancel up to 20% or US\$10 million of any grant, whichever is lower, to allow for financing of a proposed program developed to mitigate the impact of the crisis, within certain limits⁵. Any additional cancellation for an amount exceeding this limit will need to be decided by the GPE Board.

The Secretariat will provide support to the local education group or development partners, including through sharing the guidelines on accelerated funding which define how to access an outstanding STG and/or multiplier allocation and how resources related to existing GPE financing can be reallocated as accelerated funding.

⁵ Cancellation and withholding of transfers to the grant agent does not apply to amounts of the allocation that are subject to outstanding financial obligations and liabilities incurred in the implementation of activities related to said allocation prior to the date of receipt by the grant agent of notice of the decision to withhold transfers or to cancel such allocation or a part thereof.

5.2 Impact on existing grants or grant development: If a crisis situation impacts all or part of its activities supported by a GPE grant in a country, the grant agent will inform (i) the local education group or development partners, and (ii) the Secretariat through the coordinating agency, in writing within 5 business days. This includes, but is not limited to, any decision by the grant agent to temporarily withhold further disbursement to and/or cooperation with government. The notification should be made regardless of the status of the grant, i.e. whether it is still under development (and thus affects its preparation timeline) or already approved. In cases where the program is still under development and the remaining timeframe to apply is less than 6 months, the Secretariat can, if requested, grant an extension to the deadline to apply up to 6 months following this notification.

5.3 Government leadership: In principle, GPE supports the government's leadership of the crisis response. Should the crisis be a political one (for example a result of a coup d'état or large-scale violence, armed conflict, or human rights abuse), GPE will also determine whether to suspend engagement with the government and/or grant activities in accordance with established governance pathways.

5.4 Update within 3 months: The grant agent and coordinating agency will be requested to provide an update to the Secretariat within 3 months of the emergence of the crisis with options for activities to be funded through GPE grants, either within the existing program, or alternative arrangements. The coordinating agency should consult with the local education group or development partners, but also seek the input of relevant humanitarian coordination mechanisms for education, such as the Education Cluster and/or refugee education working group. The Secretariat will in turn update the Executive Committee.

- In cases where the activities have not resumed by the 3 month update, the grant agent will inform the Secretariat on the amount of the allocation that is subject to outstanding financial obligations and liabilities incurred in the implementation of activities related to that allocation prior to the date. Any allocations that have not been formally committed by the Trustee to the grant agent will be considered available for reallocation, as will committed amounts that have not been transferred, unless the grant agent specifically claims that transferred amounts are insufficient to cover outstanding obligation and liabilities. In cases where activities are (partially) continuing, but the grant agent has decided to temporarily withhold further disbursement to and/or cooperation with government, the grant agent will be required to indicate whether that decision is still applicable, and clarify the planned next steps.

5.5 Continued engagement on options: The local education group will continue its engagement with partners to further clarify and act upon options to mitigate the impact of the crisis on children's education, including through development of pathways to resume and revise activities within existing grants, or allocate funding to other proposals in line with the options outlined above. The Secretariat will provide a follow-up update to the Executive Committee three months following its first update, and after that at the Secretariat's discretion unless requested by the Executive Committee.

5.6 Escalation, if needed: If there is no full resumption of existing activities or clear pathway for alternative arrangements within 6 months of the emergence of the crisis, the Secretariat would report to the Executive Committee with options and a recommendation on next steps.

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