

Strengthening access to and improving quality of basic education and child protection in emergencies in Northeast Nigeria



Zaynab*, 16, lives in Borno, Northeast Nigeria

Zaynab* is a Girls' Champion for Save the Children Nigeria and has participated in global, regional and national events speaking out on issues surrounding girls and how conflict in Northeast Nigeria affects children. She campaigns against child marriage and for girls' access to education.

The ongoing conflict in Nigeria has had a disastrous impact on the education and protection of children. Many children have not been able to go to school for a long time. Families and children have fled to places where there are no educational facilities anymore, or it is simply not safe enough to go to school. The ongoing violence puts children at great risk of safety.

When children are not able to go to school, they often end up in child labor to help provide for their families. Girls are often married off to save money. In Nigeria, 3 out of 10 girls marry before the age of 18. In addition, the rates for gender-based violence in Nigeria are extremely high, which means that girls and women are extremely often confronted with (sexual) violence. Once children drop out of school, it's extremely difficult to get them back to school.

To prevent children from ending up in child labor or child marriage, it is essential to get them back to school. That is why Save the Children has launched the program 'Strengthening access to and improving quality of basic education and child protection in emergencies in Northeast Nigeria' since 1 May 2024. This humanitarian program focuses on providing education and protection to 4,570 children, with special attention to girls and young women. The program focuses on Northeast Nigeria, in the states of Northeast Borno, Yobe and Adamawa (BAY states) where the problems are the most severe. In these states, around 2.8 million children need (emergency) education. 802 schools have been closed for a long time, 497 classrooms have been destroyed through violence, 1,392 classrooms have been destroyed but can be repaired, and on average there is 1 latrine per 264 students.

The program uses various teaching methods to get children back to school and keep them in school. There are accelerated learning programs for children who are returning to school after a long time, so that they can catch up. There are catch-up clubs on various subjects and reading and arithmetic skills 'boost camps' for children who are at risk of dropping out and pupils who are returning to school. Married girls and young women receive educational support in reading and arithmetic skills, giving them a second chance at education and more independence. Additional training is given to both paid and volunteer teachers, so that they are up to date with the latest teaching methods and learn to work with children with disabilities. Teaching materials are made available in various local languages. In addition, dilapidated classrooms are renovated and improved at the same time, with attention to the inclusion of women and accessibility for children with disabilities. Attention is also paid to the mental health of children, who have often experienced horrifying events. In child-friendly spaces they can be children again and play for a while and there are creative activities aimed at trauma processing.

The duration of the program is 24 months, from May 1, 2024 to May 1, 2026. Save the Children has been active in Nigeria since 2001 and is involved in almost all types of aid; health care, nutrition, education, protection, clean water supplies, climate adaptation, mental health care, sexual education, poverty reduction and more.

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Zaynab* writes a poem about the future she hopes for girls

Zaynab* says child marriage is a form of violence that 'deprives a girl of her childhood, disrupts her education and limits her opportunities'. Her childhood friend was married off by her parents and died in childbirth. Zaynab* says that living in a conflict zone like Borno affects children in many other ways. For example, she says that children in her community are at risk of 'being kidnapped', and that boys are sometimes recruited by armed groups as child soldiers. She also says that child marriages in Borno are increasing because parents are taking their daughters out of school and marrying them off.