

# The next stage for education in fragile contexts: scaling up through integration

Rebecca Winthrop

Having moved into the collaboration phase, the field of education and fragility benefits from many positive developments and networks, yet four key gaps or challenges remain – co-ordination, policy prioritisation, financing and attention to quality. Ultimately, the field must move into a fourth phase, integration, to effectively scale up education for the millions of children and young people living in fragile contexts.

One important aspect of this next phase is integrating the work of multiple actors. For years, the international community has discussed the problems associated with the ‘relief to development’ gap, particularly around issues of co-ordination, programmatic sequencing and funding in the transition from emergency to long-term development. However, the field of education and fragility suffers from multiple gaps, including but not limited to the traditional relief to development gap. The four operational approaches noted in the previous article – development, humanitarian, security and disaster risk reduction (DRR) – are each motivated by distinct goals, derive a mandate from distinct policy frameworks and drive action around different sets of institutions and actors. While it is not inherently a problem to have multiple approaches, and each has its own merit, rarely are they found working cohesively together on the ground.

Education aid at the global level has traditionally underfunded children’s learning opportunities in fragile contexts. For example, conflict-affected fragile states only receive a fourth of basic education aid; even though they are home to 40 million of the world’s 75 million out-of-school children, only two per cent of all humanitarian funding is directed towards education. It has also struggled to develop flexible aid modalities that are fit for purpose for ensuring educational continuity in the face of diverse crises. Furthermore, education work in fragile contexts has focused heavily on expanding access to education and ensuring basic safety and protection for children – but the debates and discussions about the importance of quality learning that are so present in the ‘development’ arenas are largely absent.

## National education plans

One way of assessing if, at the country level, education and fragility issues are both co-ordinated and prioritised is to review how national education plans are crafted. Do national education plans, which figure prominently in guiding the development approach, incorporate concerns from the humanitarian, security and DRR approaches?

To date, such reviews have been initial but limited.<sup>1</sup> A 2007 study of ten education sector plans from conflict-affected fragile states

revealed that only five had specific strategies or guidance on preparedness for conflict included in their plans, and of these five, the number of strategies was limited to less than two.<sup>2</sup> This is insufficient evidence to conclude that national education plans *in general* are ‘emergency blind’.

Recent work to develop a framework and concrete guidance for incorporating education and fragility concerns into national education plans has led to several useful tools, including those developed by UNESCO-IIEP (International Institute for Educational Planning)<sup>3</sup> in its revised guidelines for the preparation of education sector plans, Education Above All,<sup>4</sup> the United Nations’ International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR),<sup>5</sup> and the UNESCO-IIEP and UNICEF’S West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO) on behalf of the Global Education Cluster. The best guidance to date for countries comes from the 2011 UNESCO-IIEP and UNICEF guidance notes for education planners, which include key steps and questions to consider while undertaking an education sector planning process through a conflict and DRR lens.

Hence we conducted an analysis of 75 national education plans from around the world that have been developed within the last five years. We selected plans that were publicly available on either UNESCO IIEP’s Planopolis<sup>6</sup> or on the Global Partnership for Education’s website and had been published in English or French in or after 2008. We chose to look at plans developed in the last five years given the increasing awareness in recent years of education and fragility issues and the increasing number of tools to help planners in education ministries address such issues.<sup>7</sup>

We found that few plans address education and fragility issues in any serious way (see Figure 1). Indeed, most plans are silent on the subject, with 67 per cent of the plans we reviewed not mentioning either conflict or disasters. Only 12 of the 75 plans mention both conflict and natural disasters. Eight plans reference only natural disasters, and another five reference only conflict. We also found that the vast majority of plans that reference conflict do so superficially, usually to note the effect that conflict has had on the education sector. This is also true for references to natural disasters.

We reviewed the plans using the framework outlined in the Guidance Notes for Education Planners, a guide for integrating conflict and DRR into education sector planning processes developed by IIEP and UNICEF’S WCARO on behalf of the Global Education Cluster. The guidelines examine a number of core strategic planning steps, including:

1. Conducting a diagnosis of the risks affecting the education sector

2. Integrating conflict/DRR measures into regular education policy, planning and programming interventions
3. Developing a relevant conflict/DRR strategy to respond to risks identified
4. Monitoring and evaluating progress on implementation of risk reduction strategies
5. Mobilising human and financial resources to implement conflict/DRR measures

Of all the plans reviewed, 25 addressed the issue of natural disasters or conflict, or sometimes both. Of the plans that referenced conflict or disaster, most only addressed the first step outlined in the guidelines by describing conflict and disaster-related risks in the particular country or region. Fewer outlined the second step of explaining what needs to be done in order to integrate appropriate measures. Only ten plans addressed Step 3 by identifying and developing actual strategies, priority programmes and key objectives – although many only briefly described these: Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Comoros, Ethiopia, Gambia, Nepal, Palestine, Qatar, Sri Lanka and Rwanda. Steps 4 and 5 are entirely absent from these plans, although it should be noted that ministries often have supplemental documents supporting the national education plans that lay out the monitoring and resource mobilisation strategies and therefore these steps may not be captured by only reviewing national education plans.

Preparing for the risks of disasters and conflict through the planning process does not necessarily mean that the government will deliver or execute all the various contingency options foreseen.

But it does provide one of the best strategies for envisioning education interventions at scale. It can also provide a clear framework in which development partners can organise themselves to ensure national- or regional-level coverage.

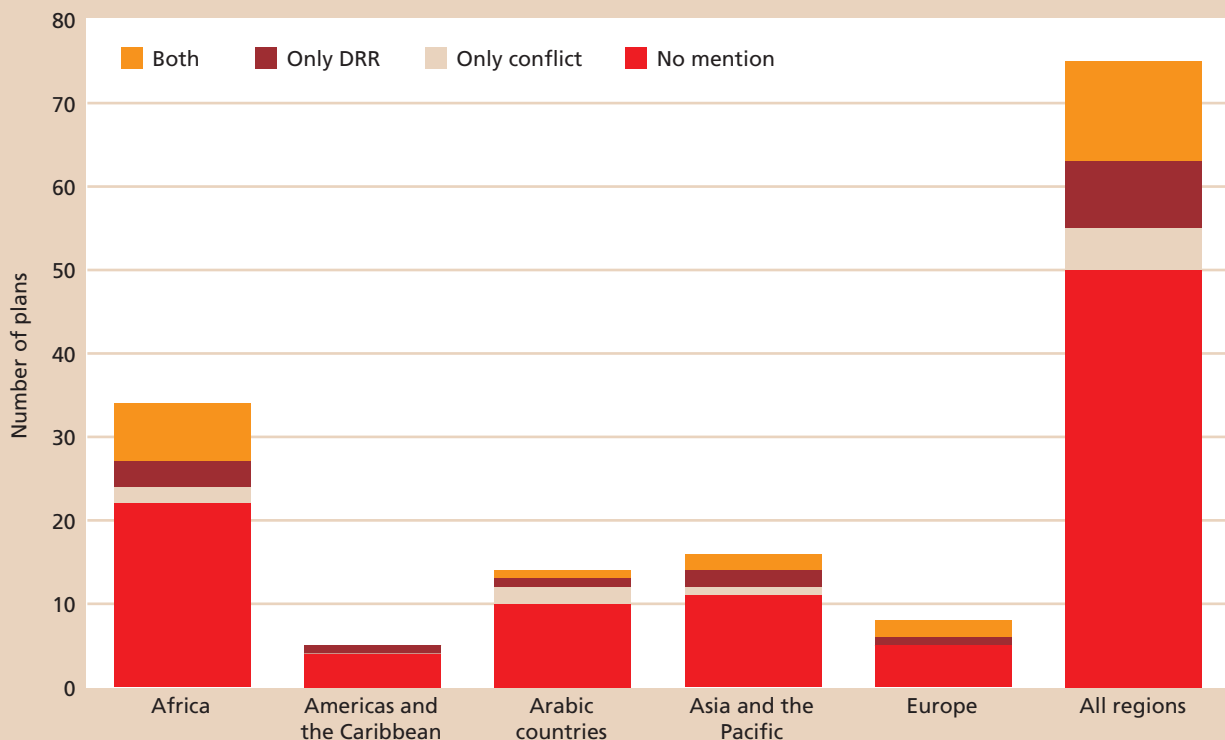
## Education’s financing level and modalities

Policy priorities translate into funding. The education and fragility field suffers from two problems: underfunding and, as with many other sectors in fragile contexts, rigid aid modalities.

### Funding levels

Within donor strategies on educational development, there has been an increasing focus on contexts of conflict and fragility. This was not always the case, and ten years ago donors focused their education aid, like much of the rest of their development assistance, on good performers. Today, countries such as the Netherlands, the UK and the USA are significant education aid donors in development that devote substantial attention to education in contexts of conflict, peacebuilding and fragility. However, data on the global financing picture for education in these contexts still shows that education and fragility are underfunded. In 2009, conflict-affected fragile states only received a fourth of basic education aid, even though they are home to close to half the world’s out-of-school children.<sup>8</sup> And while education development aid does not do enough to support fragile situations, aid focused on fragile states does not do enough to include education. For instance, of the US\$360 million the

**Figure 1: Review of national education sector plans**



Source: Center for Universal Education, 2013

Peacebuilding Fund used on a wide range of projects in 2010, only 14 per cent of the funds supported work in education.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, humanitarian aid to education has, despite sustained advocacy on the topic, remained notoriously low, hovering at about two per cent of total humanitarian aid. The UNESCO Global Monitoring Report (GMR) claims that education suffers from a 'double disadvantage' with the sector both requesting some of the smallest amounts of funds and having one of the biggest gaps between the amounts requested and amounts funded.<sup>10</sup> This limited presence of education in humanitarian funding does not just affect the sector in the short term. The GMR goes on to show the importance of humanitarian aid for long-term programming and the gravity of the fact that education receives so little:

*Humanitarian aid occupies an important place in the wider development assistance effort for conflict-affected states. In some cases it represents the majority of overall aid, outweighing long-term development assistance. Contrary to a common perception of humanitarian aid as a short-term gap filler, it often represents a large share of aid over many years. More than half of humanitarian aid goes to countries where it has represented at least ten per cent of total aid over at least nine years.<sup>11</sup>*

### Aid modalities

Often donors employ aid modalities for fragile states that were designed with stable contexts in mind. This can often become problematic. For example, providing budget support aligned with national plans is widely recognised as good practice in development, but may not be appropriate in some fragile contexts. In Mali, after the recent *coup d'état*, GPE suspended its budget support to the country and channelled its resources to international organisations working on education projects. Without this type of flexibility, both aid and, as a result, education often stop when crisis hits. Many critics of aid modalities have called for new approaches that should be 'coherent, co-ordinated and complementary' across departments within donor agencies and between donor agencies and their partners.<sup>12</sup>

The crux of the problem is that donors' engagement with fragile contexts starts from what they are able to do and provide rather than from what is needed on the ground. This is described by UNESCO's GMR as a supply-driven approach to funding education in conflict and has been discussed at length in a recent review of financing mechanisms for chronic crises for the OECD's work on conflict and fragility.<sup>13</sup> '[A]n aid architecture in which humanitarian and development aid are governed by different rules and regulations and often managed by different parts of donor agencies or different organizations... does not correspond to reality on the ground.'<sup>14</sup>

For example, USAID has recently adopted a new education strategy that includes as one of its top three priorities the provision of access to education for children and youth in conflict-affected contexts. Part of this work includes a focus on conflict analysis and conflict-sensitive programming.<sup>15</sup> This is an important development and should be lauded. However, within USAID's own strategy, this attention to conflict-sensitive perspectives does not extend to development interventions within more stable contexts, which are primarily focused on improving reading in the early grades.

Moreover, the important fragility work carried about by USAID's education development team has limited remit in humanitarian emergency or refugee contexts because primary responsibility for response in those situations rests in other bureaucratic units within the US Government. A recent study found that the US Government's work on education in fragile contexts is embedded within 13 organisational entities within seven agencies.<sup>16</sup>

This type of bureaucratic challenge is by no means unique to the US Government. The OECD's review concludes that trying to overcome this difficulty by 'gap filling', something for which aid donors appear to have a penchant, is not the answer. Indeed, there is even very limited clarity among donors on exactly what they mean by filling a 'gap'. The OECD review identifies several meanings, including:

- A dip in funding after humanitarian funding runs out and before development aid kicks in
- A lack of funding for important activities because they do not fit within a specific agency remit
- A chronological, rather than financial, gap whereby donors assume that humanitarian contexts naturally give way to development contexts, which, as we know, is not always the case

The real issue is how to provide appropriate long-term but flexible assistance to situations of chronic crisis where government counterparts are weak or illegitimate. If aid actors conceptualise the problem in this way it would shift the focus towards harnessing all instruments and capacities to meet the needs of the country, rather than putting the needs into artificial categories.

Within the education sector, one of the most promising examples of flexible modalities is the GPE. Admittedly, this is a brand-new policy that has only this year (2013) been passed by GPE's board, so the verdict is still out on how it will be implemented. But tracing the evolution of GPE's approach to education in fragile contexts is instructive.

### Case study of need-driven aid modalities: Global Partnership for Education (GPE)

GPE went through three main stages as it sought to address the educational needs of fragile states:

1. Support good performers, and exclude fragile states
2. Explore specific funds and mechanisms to only support fragile states, while having a limited impact on stable countries
3. Implement one process for supporting all countries, with flexible modalities available depending on the needs on the ground

Founded in 2002, GPE was set up as a mechanism whereby the global community could support 'good performers' to accelerate progress towards the MDGs. GPE sought to operationalise the commitment made by the global education community in Dakar that no low-income country with a credible education plan would be thwarted in its efforts by a lack of resources. GPE's efforts focused on ensuring that endorsed country plans met a gold standard and that fragile states were not considered for the partnership.

Over time, GPE's stakeholders increasingly discussed the merits of not including fragile states in the partnership. This was in part driven by the evidence, which was not unique to education, that fragile states were lagging significantly behind their more stable counterparts on human development indicators. It was also driven by increasing demand from the countries themselves. Between 2002 and 2011, the number of fragile states joining the partnership climbed slowly, from two to 13 (see Figure 2). One strategy that GPE pursued was to have a separate transition fund that fragile states could apply to and use a 'progressive framework' to guide the policy process at the country level. This strategy represented a clear focus on gap filling and countries that were not fragile at the time of applying to GPE would not be required to undergo any fragility analysis. Ultimately, this strategy was not implemented due to administrative difficulties in operationalising the transition fund and the work on the progressive framework stopped in 2008.<sup>17</sup>

In 2011, GPE returned to the topic and adopted as one of its strategic directions a focus on fragile states, which it then formalised as one of its five priorities in 2012 and supported with a robust set of operational strategies in 2013. This has subsequently led to a dramatic increase in the number of fragile states entering the partnership – jumping up from 13 in 2011 to 22 in 2013. In this short period, some of the countries grappling with the most difficult contexts joined the partnership, including South Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Pakistan.

Today, GPE's new policies on fragile states are taking a decidedly different approach from its previous efforts, although the core principle of progressivity remains. Rather than developing a separate fund for fragile states, all countries are included in one process. However, the policy includes a range of modalities that not only allow GPE to support new fragile states entering the

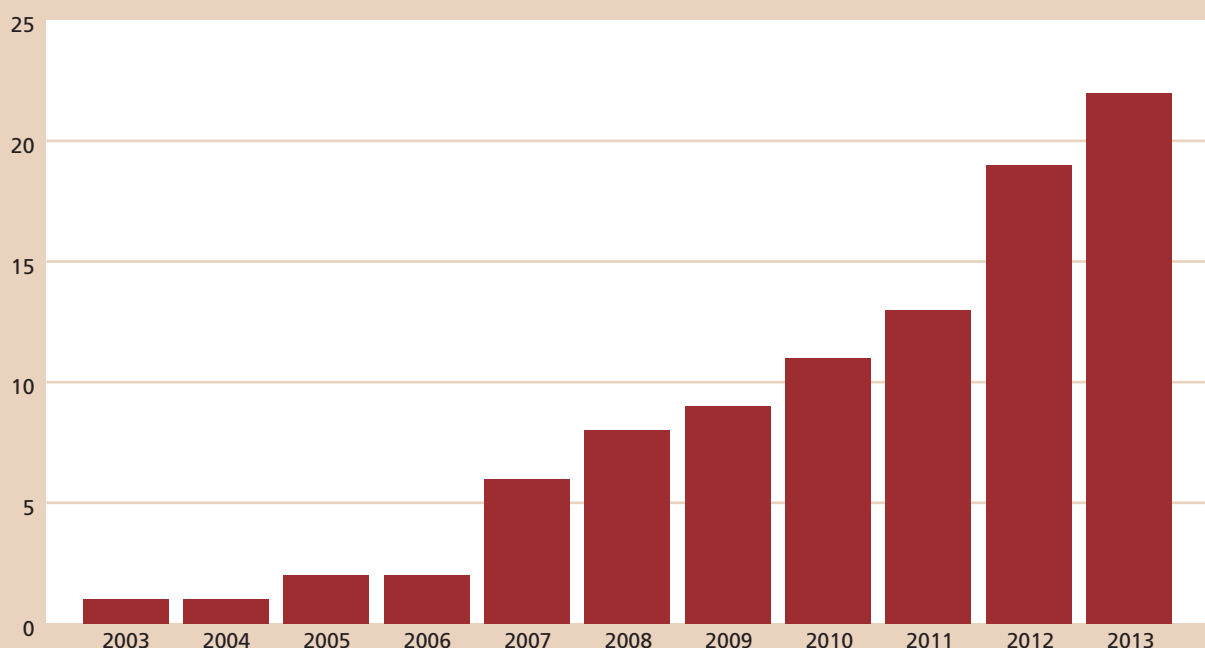
partnership but also continue supporting the education needs of young people when stable countries experience crises and disasters. The following set of conditions can trigger a change in GPE's modalities for supporting education:

- *Coups d'état* or other unconstitutional government changes
- Situations of large-scale violence or armed conflict within the country, including at sub-national levels in federal states or across borders
- Situations where the international community has raised serious concerns involving human rights violations
- Large-scale emergencies as defined by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA)
- Situations where corruption, lack of adherence to international conventions or other issues lead to donor suspension of aid
- Situations where low administrative capacity calls for a phased approach to supporting education sector activities while gradually building government capacity<sup>18</sup>

Another important feature of GPE's new approach is its focus on ensuring that stable countries in the partnership conduct a robust context analysis, which includes ensuring that conflict and DRR are integrated into national education plans. This approach represents a move away from focusing on gap filling and directs the partnership to attend to issues of fragility throughout its work.

GPE uses a pooled funding mechanism at the global level and can use its resources to support pooled funds at the country level – although to date it has only done so on a limited basis. Pooling donor funding spreads risk among many donors and leaves aid less susceptible to political volatility, something that is particularly difficult in fragile states. It also reduces transaction costs for what is

**Figure 2: The number of fragile states joining GPE 2003–13**



Source: GPE. *Working with fragile states: Building on experience*, June 2012

usually an overwhelmed and stretched government or non-governmental counterparts, and can generate efficiency gains in aid delivery by enabling donors to use shared systems and work from common plans and metrics.

## Education outcomes and good quality learning

Ensuring that educational opportunities give young people the ability to fully develop their talents and capacities is as important in fragile contexts as in stable ones. All parents, including those affected by crises, want educational experiences for their children that are safe and enable them to be effective students. Indeed, the INEE Minimum Standards are supported by various technical tools on advancing education quality amid crises.<sup>19</sup>

Available data, however, shows that around the globe, especially in fragile contexts, students are not accessing an education of sufficient quality. Learning outcomes on a number of measures are low, particularly in low-income countries. There are 120 million children around the globe who never make it to Grade 4, but there are also 130 million children who are in school but failing to learn the basics.<sup>20</sup> The inequalities on learning outcomes for students at primary level are much larger than inequalities in enrolment and participation.

For example, in the DRC, well over half of the students in Grade 4 are not meeting minimum learning levels in maths.<sup>21</sup> In Ethiopia, 94 per cent of 12-year-olds were enrolled in school, but 39 per cent could not read a simple sentence.<sup>22</sup> In two Eritrean refugee camps in Ethiopia, only five per cent of Kunama speakers and two per cent of Tigrigna speakers had reached benchmark fluency by Grade 4.<sup>23</sup> Learning outcomes for girls in conflict settings are among the worst in the world.<sup>24</sup>

Within the education development community, there is extensive discussion on the scope of and strategies to address the 'learning crisis'. The Learning Metrics Task Force has identified seven domains of learning that represent essential competencies that all children and youth should develop no matter where they live.<sup>25</sup> To date, the effort has engaged well over 1,000 players from close to 100 countries and rallied intense debates in ministries around the world, including in contexts such as South Sudan, Pakistan and the DRC. Notably absent from these global discussions on the quality of education and learning outcomes are humanitarian, security or DRR experts working on education issues within their respective arenas. The field of education and fragility itself has had very limited engagement on the topic of learning outcomes, with only a few examples of projects around the world.

This area needs much further development and attention. What makes learning outcomes portable or transferable across contexts? Should learning outcomes be understood differently for young people affected by crises and fragility? Are there new models for ensuring that good quality learning is considered in fragile contexts? There are a few examples of innovative work grappling with these questions, such as the initiative on 'borderless education' that helps connect refugee youth in Kenya with learning programmes and credentials in Canada, and research about how psychosocial well-being should or should not be included in literacy and numeracy learning assessments in the DRC. These and other

efforts like them must be supported. Ultimately, a focus not just on access but also quality is necessary in order for education to contribute fully to development, humanitarian, security and DRR goals.

## Conclusion: the need for a fourth phase

What is needed now is a fourth phase, integration, in which actors at global and national levels set much more ambitious targets, garner more resources and take strategic actions to ensure that many more children and youth in contexts of fragility gain quality learning opportunities. Embedding education and fragility concerns within the four main approaches of development, humanitarian, security and DRR is the best way to scale education continuity in fragile contexts. It is clear, however tempting it may be, that the field will not advance to the next stage through further awareness-raising among communities, technical tools development or international declarations. Instead, the field needs to scale up its vision, co-ordination, policy prioritisation, resources and ability to deliver quality education.

Investments into education systems that promote good governance and peace certainly pay for themselves. At the global level, funders must commit more resources to education in fragile contexts in order to see the desired outcomes in quality learning access. Global funding to fragile states should increase from 25 per cent of all education aid and in order for this to happen funders should seek blended strategies that build the states' absorptive and technical capacity so they can be more effective, especially in cases of protracted conflict. Large funds, such as the Peacebuilding Fund, should recognise the value of investing in education and commit to increasing the share of education funding from 14 per cent, and all funders of humanitarian aid should examine their prioritisation of education in conflict and fund education with at least four per cent of their portfolio, in keeping with the Call to Action<sup>26</sup> signed in September 2012. In terms of modalities, the model set forth by GPE should be further studied, and other donor institutions should consider the possibility for more need-driven aid and flexible modalities.

## Acknowledgement

*Adapted by kind permission from Winthrop, R. and Matsui, E., A New Agenda for Education in Fragile States, Center for Universal Education, Working Paper 10, Washington, DC: Brookings (2013).*

## Endnotes

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**“You cannot start criticising a global economy when you’re not even part of it”**  
**Dambisa Moyo**



**“Africa has experienced more than a decade of economic growth, despite the global financial crisis”**  
**Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma**



**“We stand at a critical crossroads in history when our actions – or inaction – can shape the future of life on Earth as we know it”**  
**Ban Ki-moon**



**“The hopes and fears that matter most to us are those of the world’s poor”**  
**Jim Yong Kim**

**“We take human rights and democracy seriously – we know the consequences of ignoring them”**  
**Paul Kagame**



**“I see a lot of common ground among policymakers and, importantly, a desire to come together and move forward together”**  
**Christine Lagarde**

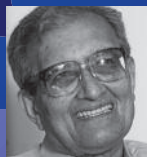


**“Global economic prosperity and security needs action, not back to back statements or tired, rehearsed exchanges”**  
**David Cameron**



**“Democracy and good governance are crucial to Africa’s renaissance”**  
**Goodluck Ebele Jonathan**

**“We do not believe that developed nations provide the sole or ideal model of democracy”**  
**Lee Hsien Loong**



**“Human rights gather their force from reasoned argument on certain freedoms being central to our lives”**  
**Amartya Sen**



**“I want to break down barriers – including the glass ceiling holding back women”**  
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