



# SAVE OUR EDUCATION



Save the Children

Protect every child's right to learn  
in the COVID-19 response and recovery

**Save the Children believes every child deserves a future. Around the world, we work every day to give children a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn and protection from harm. When crisis strikes, and children are most vulnerable, we are always among the first to respond and the last to leave. We ensure children's unique needs are met and their voices are heard. We deliver lasting results for millions of children, including those hardest to reach.**

**We do whatever it takes for children – every day and in times of crisis – transforming their lives and the future we share.**

## Acknowledgements

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We acknowledge the children and their carers who have shared their experiences with us and given us permission to use their images.

Some names have been changed to protect identities.

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Cover photo: Hana, 14 in Gaza describes herself as someone who looked death in the eye and survived. She says education is the biggest challenge for girls in Gaza, as many are forced to stay at home with their families or simply cannot afford to go to school. She says "education is like a weapon in a person's hand". (Photo: Alessandra Sanguinetti / Save The Children)

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Eloge, 15, a member of the Youth Council set up by Save the Children, in Kinshasa, in the DRC wears a facemask that she made. To keep herself busy during school closures, she makes masks for family members to protect themselves from the pandemic.



# Executive summary

The school that 13-year-old Hawo from Somalia attends is closed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic – as are schools for nearly a billion children around the world.

It's not the first time her education has been interrupted. When her village was hit by drought in 2017, Hawo's family lost everything. Over the past three years, they settled into a new home and started to build a new life. Hawo went back to school and was happy to be learning again.

But now the COVID-19 pandemic has turned her life upside down once again.

Without access to a TV or radio in her village, Hawo has limited ways to continue her studies during school closures.

*"I don't know when we will be able to go back, so that I can continue my education and meet my friends," she says. "This really worries me."*

## THE BIGGEST GLOBAL EDUCATION EMERGENCY OF OUR LIFETIME

Today, Hawo's hope for education, like the hopes of millions of other children around the world, is in grave jeopardy. In early April 2020, in an effort to halt the spread of COVID-19, an estimated 1.6 billion learners globally – 91% of the total – were out of school. For the first time in human history, an entire generation of children globally have had their education disrupted.

This emergency comes on top of an existing learning crisis. UNESCO's most recent projections for Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) – a good-quality education for every last child – are dire: they predict almost no progress on reducing the number of children who are out of school by 2030.<sup>1</sup> **This equates to millions of children not going to school and not learning. And a generation of children consigned to poorer life chances.**

Before the pandemic struck, 258 million children were out of school,<sup>2</sup> including 130 million girls.<sup>3</sup> And even when children were at school, many were not learning. 53% of 10-year-olds in low- and middle-income countries are not able to read well, increasing to 80% in low-income countries.<sup>4</sup>

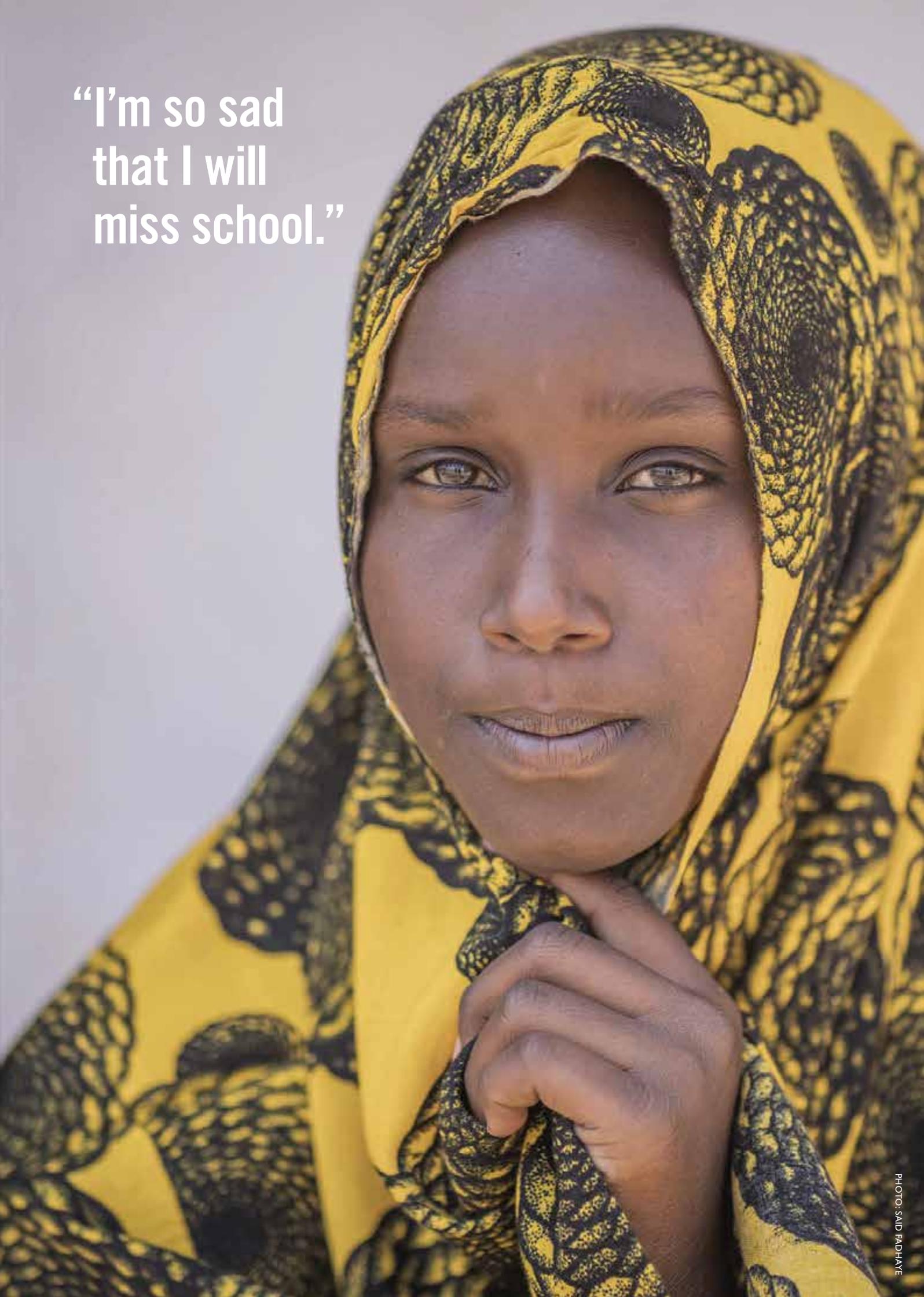
With ten years left to achieve SDG4, the question as to how the world proposes to reduce the widening gaps between the rhetoric of the education commitments and the reality on the ground has taken on a new urgency.

**The poorest and most marginalised children are at risk – especially from losing out on learning and not returning to the classroom.**

Schools not only provide children with a space to learn. For many children school is also a safe place where they can receive meals, access healthcare, including mental health services, and play with their friends. Teachers can be children's frontline responders and protectors. But with school closures, children are missing out on these essentials the school environment can offer.

As the virus begins to subside in some countries, early childhood centres and schools are beginning to reopen and children are returning. They face challenges in trying to learn in an environment where the virus still exists and where schools need to adapt to a new reality – physical distancing, learning in shifts, an increased focus on hygiene practices and concerns over children's wellbeing.

“I’m so sad  
that I will  
miss school.”



The world's most vulnerable children may not have been in school in the first place – and if they were, they now may not make it back there. These children include:

- children pushed into poverty because of COVID-19, who may be forced to work because their families are struggling to put food on the table and keep a roof over their heads
- adolescent girls who now face an increased risk of gender-based violence, early pregnancy or child marriage, trapped in a cycle of violence and poverty, and denied the chance to fulfil their potential
- refugee and internally displaced children – like Rohingya children forced to leave Myanmar or Syrian children fleeing conflict – who live in overcrowded camps and settlements with little or no basic healthcare and limited opportunities to learn
- children living in conflict-affected areas who are at risk of being recruited into armed groups; children forced to do hazardous and exploitative work; children forced into marriage and early pregnancy
- children with disabilities who already struggle to access inclusive education opportunities. Children with disabilities made up 15% of all out-of-school children before the pandemic.<sup>5</sup>

**Millions of children risk losing out on their education. The price they will have to pay is their future.**

Even for those children who do return to school, many will have experienced significant setbacks with their learning and wellbeing. In low-income and conflict-affected countries, the poorest children do not have access to the internet or devices to access online learning. Their parents may not be able to read and write. Even if children in these situations are able to get hold of printed materials, they are unlikely to be in a position to continue to learn to a satisfactory level. Many children will have experienced stress and anxiety without the safety, protection and support that schools and teachers afford, on top of the socioeconomic effects of the crisis on families and households that were already struggling.

The global community hopes that before too long a vaccine for COVID-19 will be found, produced and universally delivered, and the world will become safer. **But unless action is taken now, the long-term legacies of the pandemic will be rising inequality and a devastating impact on children's learning.**

**New analysis for this report shows how COVID-19 may affect both the funding and the delivery of education in some of the countries most at risk of falling behind.**

We know from previous crises that the longer children are out of school, the greater the risk that they do not return to school.

**Our new analysis examines which countries are most at risk of seeing their progress towards SDG4 stalling or even reversing due to the impact of the pandemic. It suggests that up to 9.7 million children are at risk of dropping out of school due to rising levels of child poverty.**

We identified 12 countries – Niger, Mali, Chad, Liberia, Afghanistan, Guinea, Mauritania, Yemen, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire – as being at 'extreme risk' of falling behind in their progress towards SDG4.

This comes at a time when we expect education budgets to be under pressure as governments shift spending towards the health and economic response to the pandemic.

**Our analysis estimates that the economic consequences of the pandemic could lead to an education financing gap in low- and middle-income countries of \$77 billion over the course of the next two years.**

As part of the response to COVID-19 in Uganda, Save the Children has distributed learning packs to more than 100,000 children across the country.



This comes at a time when new estimates from UNESCO suggest that there could be a 12% decline in aid to education.<sup>6</sup>

Concerted global action on education is essential for the world to recover from this crisis. We cannot sit back and watch as COVID-19 robs millions more children of the future they deserve. That is why Save the Children is working with children, parents, caregivers, teachers and world leaders to save a generation's education. Together, we can make sure children everywhere get a good-quality education, so they can have the chance to achieve their hopes and potential.

**The impact of schools closing on a generation of children will be immense. This is an education emergency that requires action today. We must act now to save the education and life chances of a generation of children.**

**At this time of unprecedented crisis, the world must come together to protect education and put it at the very heart of the global recovery effort.**

Governments and donors must act in the following five areas to overcome this crisis and build back better towards achieving SDG4 in 2030.

1. **PLAN: Agree and implement a global COVID-19 education action plan.** This global education emergency requires a coordinated global education response that is well planned, inclusive, gender responsive and adequately monitored and held accountable.
2. **INVEST: Commit to increased funding for education to recover from this crisis:** We call on donors to invest to ensure the global COVID-19 education action plan has the resources required to implement it. \$35 billion, including at least \$10 billion in grant financing, should be mobilised through the World Bank and other multilateral development banks, creating a supplementary International Development Association budget by the Annual Meetings in October 2020.
3. **LEARN: Interventions must ensure the most marginalised children are learning.** National governments should produce and implement national COVID-19 education response and recovery plans with targeted action

to ensure learning opportunities for the most marginalised children. **This action must:**

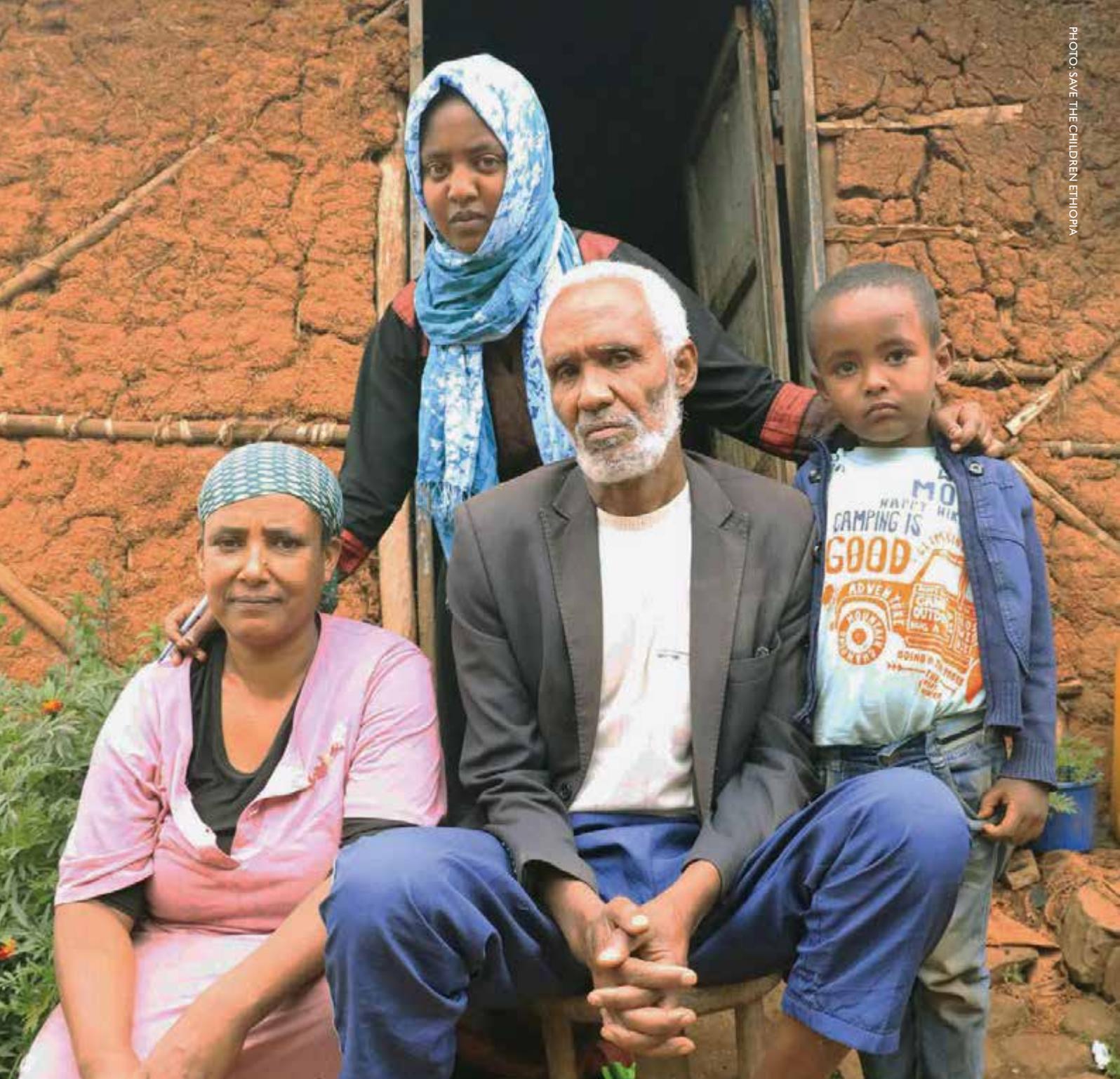
- ensure that distance learning programmes reach the most marginalised children
- deliver continued payment and incentives for teachers
- create inclusive and gender-sensitive back-to-school campaigns
- provide every child with a learning assessment on return to school to identify appropriate remedial education
- create targeted interventions and expand social protection to get the most marginalised children back to school
- address gender-related barriers to education, including laws, policies and harmful social norms that prevent girls from continuing their education.

4. **PROTECT: Ensure that all children are healthy, safe and well while out of school and when they return by:**

- ensuring that schools are safe environments for children to return to and have preparedness plans in case they need to close again
- providing food to children who normally rely on school meals
- delivering programmes in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and addressing gender-based violence (GBV)
- ensuring that child protection reporting and referral systems can be adapted for times of school closure
- minimising the use of schools as health facilities and quarantine sites.

5. **TRACK: Efforts to implement and fund the global education action plan must be tracked and actors held to account.** The education community should urgently meet to coordinate action and lead on tracking progress on the three priority areas outlined in this report:

- Keep learning alive while schools are closed.
- Prepare for the safe reopening of schools.
- Build back better, more resilient education systems.



**“Before coronavirus, I used to go to school. I used to learn in a classroom. I used to see my friends and teachers every day. I interacted with my peers in my neighbourhood. Now all that is impossible because of the virus.**

**“I’m looking forward to the time when coronavirus is history. I want students to go back to school.**

**“I tell all the children in the world to keep studying at home. Just because they’re not going to school it doesn’t mean that they should neglect their studies.”**

Saeda, 14. Ethiopia

# 1 An unprecedented education emergency

## COVID-19 HAS CAUSED EXTRAORDINARY DISRUPTION TO CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

School closures have been a central part of governments' response to controlling the spread of the virus. This meant that at its peak, **1.6 billion children and young people were out of school – approximately 90% of the entire student population.**<sup>7</sup> At the time of writing, in June 2020, 1.2 billion learners remained affected by school closures, including just under a billion children.<sup>8</sup>

The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report found that despite government efforts worldwide to provide alternative remote learning during the pandemic, **at least 500 million children and young people are currently excluded from public educational provision.**<sup>9</sup>

Where distance learning strategies are being implemented, there is a concern about the inequality of access between groups of children, with the poorest and most marginalised groups of children most likely to be missing out. Over 60% of national distance learning alternatives rely exclusively on online platforms – **yet as many as 465 million children and young people in these countries do not have access to the internet at home.**<sup>10</sup> The share of students with no access to the internet at home is as high as 80% in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>11</sup> Where it is available, it is less likely to be accessible to girls.<sup>12</sup>

Save the Children's recent survey of children from marginalised groups in Bangladesh found that 90% of children have not had any contact from their school since it closed. 91% do not have any help with learning at home (eg, from a parent or older sibling). As a result, 65% of children reported that they are only studying a little at home and 23% are not studying at all.<sup>13</sup>

It is not only school-age children who are affected by the impact of COVID-19. **It threatens young children's development in unparalleled ways.** We know that children's learning and development start from birth, long before they go to school. The inequity in young children reaching their developmental potential is likely to be amplified by the wide range of ways the pandemic is affecting their lives – weakening health systems, reducing access to health and nutrition services, eroding family livelihoods and savings, and closing early childhood care and development services. And at the same time, families are facing the psychosocial impact of the crisis on parents and caregivers, an anticipated increase in gender-based violence and child abuse, and greater work burdens for adults and children, particularly women and girls.

Right now the home learning environment is more important than ever. **Yet we know that growing up in poverty can seriously inhibit children's access to the learning environment they need if they are to thrive.** When children grow up in an atmosphere of deprivation, with little interaction with adults or persistent stress, their young minds fail to build or maintain important brain connections. The damaging effects on children's learning, development, wellbeing and health can last their whole lives.

## BEFORE THE PANDEMIC, EDUCATION WAS ALREADY IN CRISIS

This emergency comes on top of an existing learning crisis. **258 million children and young people were out of school before the pandemic** – around one sixth of the global school-age population.<sup>14</sup> Over a decade and more, little or no progress has been made in getting more children into school. **Girls face some of the greatest barriers, with inequalities starting early** – 9 million primary-school-age girls are likely to never step foot in a classroom, compared with 3 million boys.<sup>15</sup>

**Even when children are in school, we know that many are not learning, especially those who are poorest and most marginalised.**

Last year the World Bank released new evidence estimating that 53% of children in low- and middle-income countries cannot read and understand a simple story by the end of primary school.<sup>16</sup> In low-income countries, the level is as high as 80%.<sup>17</sup> And these learning gaps appear early – in low- and middle-income countries an estimated 250 million children under five – 43% of this age group – were at risk of not reaching their developmental potential.<sup>18</sup>

Children living in fragile and conflict-affected states face an even greater level of threat and disruption to their safety, wellbeing and education. At a time when governments are telling people to stay in their homes to shield from the virus, the world is witnessing the largest level of human displacement on record. **An unprecedented 79.5 million people – 1% of the global population – were forced from their homes** at the end of 2019.<sup>19</sup> 40% are children, many of whom, even before the pandemic, struggled to access a good-quality education.

Much of the focus of this crisis has been on how health systems can cope under pressure and the impact the ‘global lockdown’ will have on the economy, with early predictions from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that the global economy faces the worst recession since the Great Depression.<sup>20</sup>

**But ensuring children can keep learning and that every single child returns to school has to be an essential part of this response.** In 2016, the Education Commission rang the alarm bell of a looming skills crisis if the world did not radically invest in improving education systems. If pre-COVID-19 trends continue, by 2030 less than 10% of young people in low-income countries will be on track to gain basic secondary-level skills.<sup>21</sup>

Sobering projections from UNESCO in mid-2019 suggested that on pre-pandemic trajectories, almost no progress was being made on either getting more children into school or improving learning outcomes. Indeed, the report demonstrates that none of the ten targets that form Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) will be met by 2030.<sup>22</sup> **Governments must invest in education in order to recover from the impact of the pandemic and put us back on track to fulfil children’s rights and meet our promises in SDG4.**

## RISING POVERTY LEVELS RISK A RISE IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN

Alongside school closures, physical distancing measures being implemented have a significant impact on employment, putting a strain on family finances and the economy. This is likely to increase child poverty among the millions of children living in vulnerable communities across all countries.

The World Bank predicts the first potential reversal in global child poverty trends since the late 1990s. **In sub-Saharan Africa alone, an additional 22–33 million children could be left below the \$1.90 a day extreme poverty threshold.**<sup>23</sup>

As a result of the economic strain faced by vulnerable families, there is a risk that many children will not return to school because in order to help their family make ends meet they have been forced into child labour or early marriage.

**New analysis conducted by Save the Children for this report examined which countries might be most at risk of seeing their progress towards SDG4 stalling or even reversing due to the impact of the pandemic. Our analysis suggests that up to 9.7 million children are at risk of dropping out of school due to rising levels of child poverty** (see Annex 3 for full methodology).

We examined current out-of-school rates, including breaking this down by income group and gender, and learning outcomes (see Annex 1 for full methodology). Our analysis identified 12 countries – Niger, Mali, Chad, Liberia, Afghanistan, Guinea, Mauritania, Yemen, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal and Côte d’Ivoire – as being at ‘extreme risk’ of falling behind in their progress towards SDG4.

**“The situation is not good. Here in my area there are children who have to sell things on the street because their parents have no jobs. People have nothing to eat and if they stay at home, they will starve to death. The government should give support to families and assist families.”**

Muamina, 17, Nampala Province, Mozambique

While there's no way of accurately predicting where and how many children may drop out of school, this index provides us with analysis of where this risk may be highest based on the education situation before the pandemic hit. We know that children living in poverty and girls are two groups particularly at risk of dropping out of school, and

so countries that already had large equity gaps may require extra support in order to ensure that these gaps do not widen. We highlight here those countries at the top of the index – who we have categorised 'extreme risk' – but all low- and middle-income countries face risks of increased dropouts and widening inequalities.

**TABLE 1: VULNERABILITY INDEX: THE 12 COUNTRIES 'AT EXTREME RISK' OF INCREASED SCHOOL DROPOUTS AND WIDENING LEARNING INEQUALITIES**

Country	Pre-COVID-19 out-of-school rate	Pre-COVID-19 proportion of the poorest children who are out of school	Pre-COVID-19 proportion of girls out of school	Learning adjusted years of schooling (average per child)
Niger	63%	77%	68%	2.61
Mali	53%	78%	56%	2.74
Chad	49%	57%	55%	2.64
Liberia	42%	62%	43%	2.34
Afghanistan	42%	49%	55%	4.87
Guinea	47%	73%	55%	4.54
Mauritania	45%	63%	44%	3.42
Yemen	28%	49%	35%	4.13
Nigeria	38%	74%	40%	4.25
Pakistan	38%	66%	44%	4.78
Senegal	44%	65%	44%	4.78
Côte d'Ivoire	33%	49%	38%	4.21

## "I miss studying and playing,"

says Emerance, a five-year-old girl who lives with her parents and brothers in a refugee camp in Rwanda. Her family crossed the border from Burundi in 2015. Emerance was born in the refugee camp. She normally loves going to school.



PHOTO: CYIZA THEGENE/SAVE THE CHILDREN

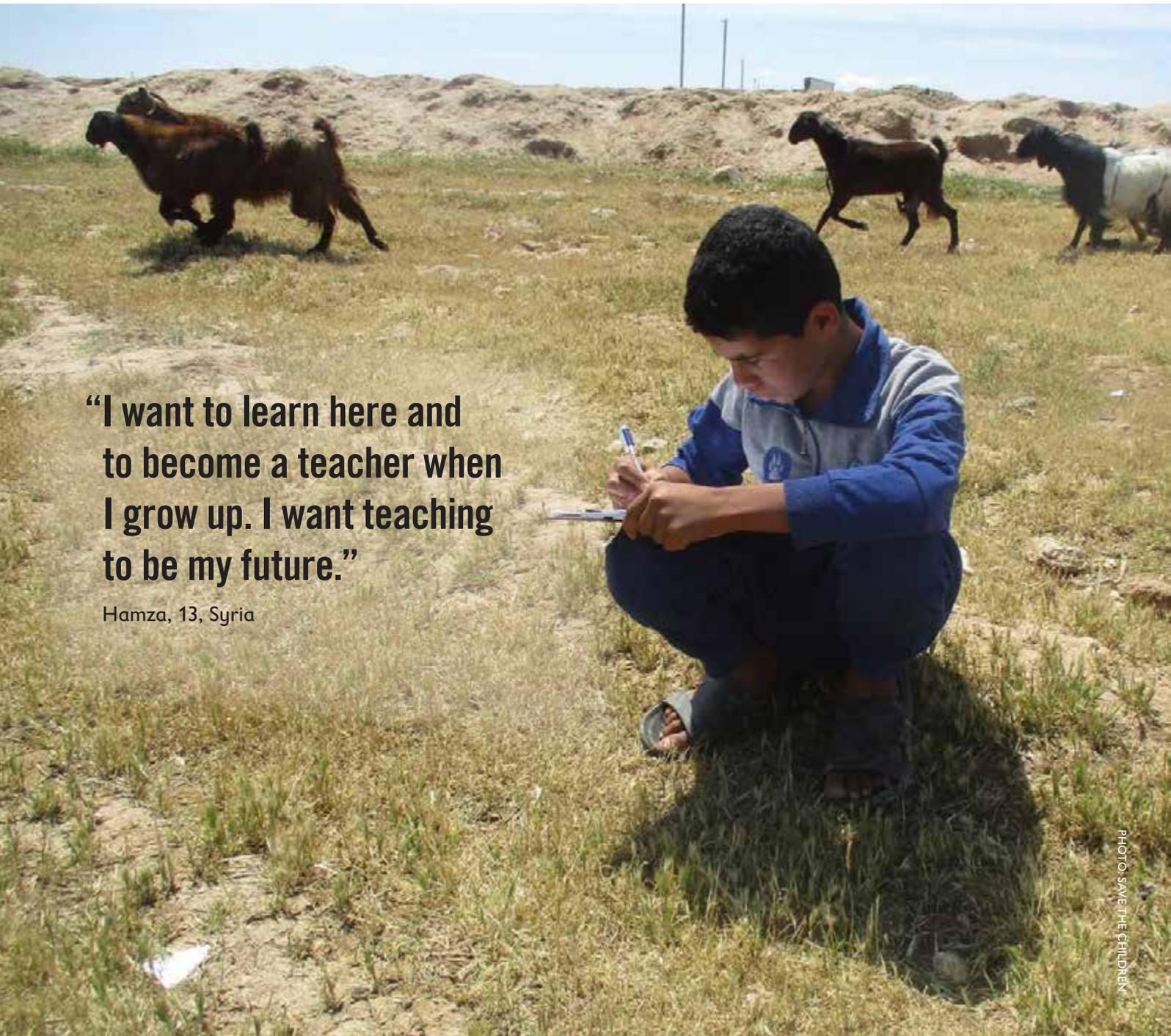
## CHILDREN WANT THEIR EDUCATION TO CONTINUE DURING CRISES

Save the Children knows from our extensive work with children from fragile and conflict-affected states that when crises hit, children want to be able to continue their education. They tell us that education cannot be delayed because it is the key to their future, their protection, their happiness and their health.

**Last year our report *Education Against the Odds*<sup>24</sup> revealed that children affected by crises are more than twice as likely to rank going to school as their top concern over other needs.<sup>25</sup>**

Children like Hamza, 13, who told us: “*I want to learn here and to become a teacher when I grow up. I want teaching to be my future.*” Hamza has been living with his family in a refugee camp in Syria ever since they had to flee their home in 2018.

We also know that during previous health crises children were concerned about missing out on education. During the 2014–16 Ebola crisis in West Africa, UNICEF surveyed young people about what bothered them most about the crisis. 71% answered “No school.”<sup>26</sup>



**“I want to learn here and to become a teacher when I grow up. I want teaching to be my future.”**

Hamza, 13, Syria

## AN OVERVIEW OF SAVE THE CHILDREN'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Save the Children has extensive expertise and decades of experience in delivering quality learning opportunities in some of the most challenging humanitarian contexts. Now, amid the COVID-19 crisis, we are capitalising on that experience to respond quickly and effectively to the learning needs of the most marginalised children. All over the world, we are adapting and expanding existing work to keep children safe, healthy and continuing their learning.

We are developing distance learning materials, such as books and home learning kits, and working with governments and teachers to provide children with lessons and support via radio, television, phone, social media and messaging apps. We are making sure children are safe at home and not missing out on the meals or menstrual hygiene kits they would usually receive at school. And we are providing guidance for parents and other caregivers to

ensure they have the right information about how to support their children's learning and wellbeing at home. We are also working with education authorities to help plan for the safe return to school. We are advocating with and on behalf of children to ensure decision-makers are aware of their concerns.

This report is built on evidence gathered from our programmatic response to COVID-19 to date and other emergencies.

### TOGETHER EVERYWHERE

As part of Save the Children's Protect a Generation campaign, children made people-shaped paper chains to symbolise our connection and stand together across the world. It gave parents the opportunity to talk to their children about global solidarity and the need to make sure every child gets the best start in life – regardless of where they were born. And as a demonstration of global solidarity, it calls on governments and institutions to work together globally to address the short- and long-term consequences of this pandemic.



PHOTO: NINA RAINGOLD/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Children in the UK make paper chains in solidarity with other children around the world living through the COVID-19 crisis.

## SPOTLIGHT ON ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia is the second-most-populous country in Africa. Although it is the fastest growing economy in the region, it is also one of the least developed countries in the world.<sup>27</sup> Like other low-income countries in Africa, Ethiopia has faced enormous challenges – rapid population growth, armed conflict, drought, famines and humanitarian crises – to creating a more inclusive and efficient education system.

90% of upper-primary-school-age children are not proficient in reading and 14% of primary-school-age children are not enrolled in school. Large-scale learning assessments of students indicate that 89% do not achieve the minimum proficiency levels at the end of primary school.<sup>28</sup>

Schools in Ethiopia closed due to COVID-19 on 16 March 2020. The Ministry of Education together with key partners, including Save the Children, developed a COVID-19 response strategy and plan setting out distance learning as an alternative method to ensure children's learning can continue. The plan also recommended the need to provide access to food for vulnerable children.

Regional education bureaus have been broadcasting educational radio and TV programmes for children to access. In addition, some private schools in urban areas focused on engaging parents and their students in learning through a mobile application called Telegram

(similar to WhatsApp). However, there have been multiple challenges to ensuring effective distance learning:

- Many disadvantaged households do not have access to digital devices.
- Efforts to respond to the crisis have sometimes been scattered and uncoordinated.
- The strategy did not provide adequate attention to pre-school-aged children. For example, families were not provided with guidance on how to interact with their children in age-appropriate ways.
- For schools using methods such as Telegram, there has not been enough emphasis on monitoring whether or not students are engaging with digital lessons.

More than 26 million schoolchildren's education has been disrupted by the pandemic in Ethiopia. Save the Children is responding in multiple ways:

- Co-leading the national humanitarian education response, together with the Ministry of Education and UNICEF
- Using the *Safe Back to School Practitioners' Guide*<sup>29</sup> to help plan an integrated, participatory process for the re-opening of schools.
- Securing **nine dedicated satellite TV channels** at no cost until the end of 2020 to support remote learning. So far, eight TV channels are functional.

*continued on next page*



In Ethiopia, Save the Children has established reading camps in more than 33 villages and supplied them with 39,000 reading books.

## SPOTLIGHT ON ETHIOPIA

- Collaborating with the Ministry of Education and UNICEF, to create a range of **mental and physical health and hygiene messages** to help children and their families to stay safe at home.
- Collaborating with four major religious institutions to develop and deliver child-friendly COVID-19 **awareness and protection messages**, which have been shared with more than 310,000 churches and 15,000 mosques and aired on television, social media and radio, reaching more than 40 million people across the country.
- Working with partners, we conducted a rapid assessment on the impact of COVID-19 that captures the views of children and their caregivers. Our findings will be used as evidence in our advocacy on education, health and protection for children.
- The Global Partnership for Education has allocated \$20 million to support **back-to-school activities**. Save the Children is working with the Ministry of Education and developing a proposal with implementation planned for September 2020.



Charles, a Save the Children staff member in Uganda, is filmed delivering messages on how children can stay safe during the COVID-19 crisis for broadcast on national TV.

## 2 Keep learning alive

A child's right to a good-quality, safe and inclusive education does not end if schools are closed. Alternative distance learning programmes using a range of modalities must be available so that every child can continue their learning.

The impact of school closures extends beyond disruption to children's learning and carries other major risks to the most marginalised children, including those from low-income households, refugees and internally displaced children, girls, and children with disabilities. These children and young people rely on schools to access other services such as school meals; menstrual hygiene kits; health services, including deworming and malaria treatment; child protection services; specialist support for children with disabilities; and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) activities and interventions.

For girls, schools can serve as a protective factor against adolescent pregnancy, as well as child marriage and other forms of gender-based violence, through schoolchildren's proximity to trusted adults, increased interaction with peers and improved knowledge of rights.

In the education response to school closure, it is essential both that learning is kept alive *and* that these other impacts are effectively addressed. **This section will focus on four areas – distance learning, protection, nutrition and children affected by conflict** – and will examine the evidence of what works, drawing on Save the Children's own evidence from programme delivery during this crisis.

### DELIVER INCLUSIVE DISTANCE LEARNING WHILE SCHOOLS ARE CLOSED

During school closures, children and young people need alternative ways to develop and learn, to stay connected to school and, when schools reopen, to feel prepared for the return.

However, access to technology and materials needed to continue learning while schools are closed is desperately unequal. The 'digital divide' refers to the gap between different individuals, families and geographical areas, with different income levels, in their access to technology and the internet.<sup>30</sup> Wealthier families are generally better able to maintain their children's learning while at home. They are more likely to have technology (computers, tablets, mobiles, TVs), connectivity and books at home. And wealthier parents are more likely to have the knowledge and time to support their children's home learning.<sup>31</sup>

Four out of five countries with school closures have provided national distance learning alternatives, but of these, 60% relied exclusively on online platforms. The digital divide here is striking: among primary and secondary students being targeted exclusively by national online learning platforms, 465 million – almost 47% of the total – do not have access to the internet at home.<sup>32</sup> There are big regional variations in home internet access: 80% of students in sub-Saharan Africa have no internet access compared with less than 15% in western Europe.

Our research shows that the inequalities of access to technology in low-resource environments we have seen over the last decades will continue up to and beyond 2025.<sup>33</sup> Access to technology is often seen in a binary way – those have access and those

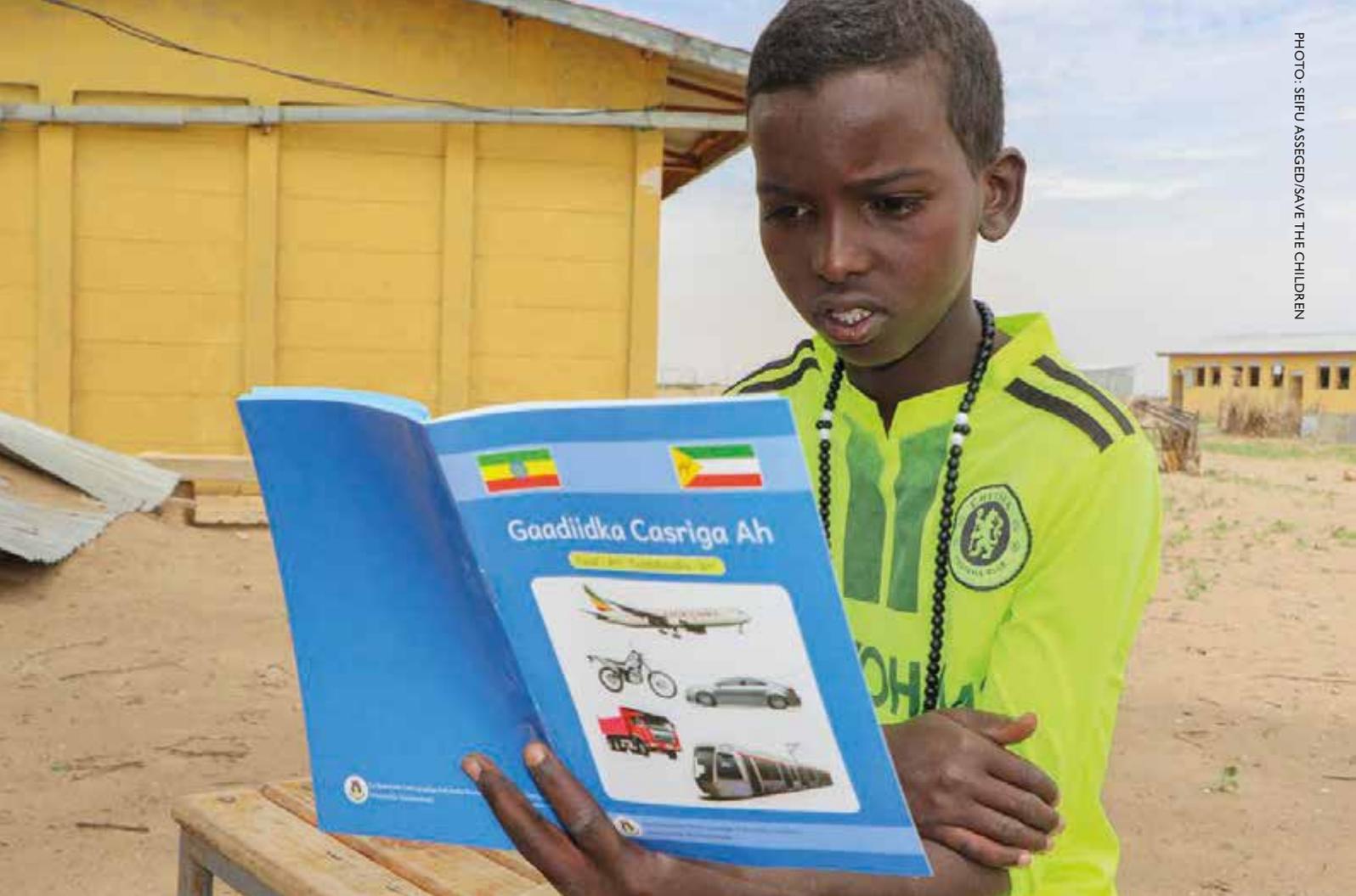


PHOTO: EDITOR ASABA/SAVE THE CHILDREN

**“When I think of and hear the word corona I feel bad because it has made me miss school and miss my friends. I’ve missed my English lessons. I’ve been trying to read my books at home after I do digging and washing plates [in the family home] but it’s not good because my younger brothers want to read with me, and when I support them we just end up playing. I can’t wait to hear that schools are open again and I can play with my friends again.”**

Stephen, 15, lives in a refugee settlement in western Uganda, which is now home to more than 100,000 Congolese refugees.

As part of our response to COVID-19 in Uganda, Save the Children is distributing learning packs to more than 120,000 children across the country. The packs include self-study materials, a child-friendly comic strip explaining how to stay safe, a wellbeing diary and daily schedule to support children’s mental health, and stationery. Some packs also include illustrated story books adapted from traditional Ugandan folk tales.



**“Schools are closed but the mobile reading camp still comes to our village once a week. The librarian lends us storybooks that we can take home to read. I borrow different storybooks from the reading camp. I find it fun reading stories to my family at home. It also helps me improve my reading skills.”**

Nassir, 12, is a 4th grade student in the Somali region in Ethiopia. With our mobile library he can continue his reading and learning at home.

who do not.<sup>34</sup> However, the type of technology available, how advanced it is, whether it needs constant internet access, and troubleshooting issues all affect a child’s experience of educational technology – or EdTech. What we do know is that those who have the latest advanced technology will benefit much more than those with older or no technology.

In low- and middle-income countries, access to mobile internet is 23% lower for women and girls –

and in fragile contexts it is even less.<sup>35</sup> Our study in 2018 found that the general dearth of high-quality impact evidence on the use of EdTech is amplified in protracted crises.<sup>36</sup>

Distance learning must take into account the gender digital divide and embed child protection systems within approaches, including violence prevention measures and psychosocial support. In some contexts, engagement with families and communities will be needed to change attitudes and social stigma

**“My experience of studying from home isn’t perfect... in fact, it’s not very good to study from home because there are many difficulties, and there are many people who do not have a phone to study online.”**

Wilson, 17, Nampula Province, Mozambique

that lead parents to limit girls’ access to phones and the internet, and that mean girls are reluctant to be seen using these technologies.

Research has consistently demonstrated that the role of the parent or caregiver is important when children use technology as a means of learning.<sup>37</sup> Children need help from adults around them about how to use the technology, including how to use it safely, as well as the motivation to keep learning. Therefore government and implementing partners should support parents in any effort to roll out the use of EdTech.

Urgent efforts must be made to reach children who have no internet access with low-tech or no-tech learning options, including paper-based learning packs. The education sector can learn much from food banks and other health emergency distribution



In Italy we have distributed educational supplies to children out of school during the pandemic.

PHOTO: FRANCESCO ALESSI / SAVE THE CHILDREN

### Getting reading books to children in rural Ethiopia: our camel library

Save the Children created a camel library in the Somali region of Ethiopia in 2010. The programme includes 21 camels, which are traditionally used by communities to transport goods across the hot lowland areas. Camels can

carry up to 200 storybooks at a time in wooden boxes strapped to their backs. The project currently reaches more than 22,000 children in 33 villages, which enables children to keep learning while schools are closed.<sup>38</sup>



Save the Children’s Camel Library in Ethiopia.

PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN



While schools are closed in Rwamwanja refugee settlement in Uganda, Save the Children is supporting lessons carried out over the radio.

PHOTO: EDITOR ASABASAVE THE CHILDREN

chains about how to ensure the safety of such deliveries, including quarantined storage facilities and the use of personal protective equipment.

Based on previous programming and global evidence, we know interactive radio and audio instruction can have a positive impact in keeping children connected with education, supporting caregivers' teaching skills and encouraging

community participation in learning efforts. Across many low-resource contexts, the necessary infrastructure and markets are already in place. Interactive radio is a multigenerational and multiuser medium; regular electricity supply is not a prerequisite for use as self-powered devices are widely available; and it lends itself to traditional forms of communication, such as story-telling.



PHOTO: PETER MORU / SAVE THE CHILDREN

Anna, 12, in north-east Uganda, keeps learning from home using a radio with support from her father.

### **The power of radio: engaging communities in children's learning**

In Indonesia's West Nusa Tenggara Province we have run radio talk show programmes – *Kelas Lintas Udara* – involving local education officials to advocate to communities about supporting children's learning during school closures. The programmes provide a space for parents to share their experiences about home learning with their children and positive parenting.

### **Adapting materials to young children's different needs in the Philippines**

We have adapted our Early Literacy and Math at Home package for children aged 3–5 years to meet different needs. Each video or audio session offers modifications in performing the games and activities for children with sensory, physical/motor and information processing difficulties. To

ensure households with or without connectivity are able to access the package, content is available in different formats, such as posters and printed materials, phone texts and calls, audio, and video.

### **Inclusive distance learning for children with disabilities in Kosovo**

We have provided education and hygiene packages for 100 children with disabilities in 20 primary schools in seven municipalities. These include toys, teaching materials and puzzles which we have for children with disabilities without any inclusive distance learning opportunities. This package continues support for all children with disabilities to carry out the activities in the new, inclusive, distance learning platform developed with the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation.<sup>41</sup>

During the West African Ebola pandemic, the Emergency Radio Education Programme, commissioned by the Sierra Leonean Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, provided programming in core academic subjects across age groups. An evaluation using focus groups reported that, while participants felt the programmes did not adequately compensate for the loss of access to schools and teachers, they helped sustain a connection to education. However, rural areas suffered from poor radio signal and battery power, and there were issues over local languages and comprehension.<sup>39</sup>

Distance learning is not always designed with children with disabilities in mind. Programmes that only use one delivery mechanism or expect rigid inputs and functional abilities from students exclude children with disabilities. For example, interactive radio instruction excludes children with hearing impairments, and self-learning materials (paper-based or on phone or tablet) may be inaccessible to children who need the continuous support of an adult.<sup>40</sup>

Distance learning and wellbeing interventions must be appropriately designed, contextually relevant,

**“When my teacher informed me that the school is closed because of COVID-19, I thought it would be a holiday time. Then I understood that I misunderstood the message, as the information given and media used are not easy to understand. Deaf children like me have difficulty understanding new words or sentences. I couldn't read people's lips when they were explaining about COVID-19 as they wear face masks.”**

Adjie, 17, West Java, Indonesia



adapted for different ages, gender sensitive and inclusive. Digital solutions will require strong child safeguarding processes to protect children (and their personal and learning data) from adult predatory behaviour, cyber bullying, abuse and child sexual or other exploitation.

Governments, donors, partners and community members must support educators to develop and deliver distance learning materials and activities that follow the Principles for Digital Development,<sup>42</sup> and are licensed so that teachers and other actors can use, adapt and contextualise them without permission or expense. Distance learning and wellbeing interventions should be effectively monitored to ensure they lead to positive outcomes for children.

We are working with education partners, teachers and governments to develop and deliver a suite of safe distance learning materials for dissemination by

internet, radio, phone or television and paper-based materials. Emphasis has been placed on assessing access in different contexts as opposed to focusing on a particular mode of delivery. Creativity and the combination of multiple delivery platforms and modalities is needed to ensure we reach the most marginalised children affected by school closures.

For children aged three to six years, Save the Children has developed semi-independent learning opportunities, including a children's programme with songs and stories delivered through mobile phones, videos of cartoon animations, radio and social media. It includes play and learning materials for different age groups, print-outs of activities portraying girls and boys engaging in non-stereotypical activities, and a guide for parents to create their own home play area with safe materials.

### **Supporting Rwanda's children to learn**

Schools in Rwanda will remain closed until September 2020. Save the Children is working with partner, Umuhuza, to remotely engage Literacy Champions to encourage parents to support reading in homes. In collaboration with the Rwanda Education Board, we have had approval for a drama series to be broadcast on radio with messages to educate parents on how to support their children's learning and reading at home. We have a new magazine, *Karame*, which captures African children's stories, games and books produced with local authors and illustrators. *Karame* will be distributed along with storybooks in five districts.

### **Online reading sessions for children in Guatemala**

We have delivered online virtual reading sessions for children and families in Nebaj, Cotzal and Quiche to provide useful techniques for improving children's reading skills at home and support on reading comprehension.

### **Supporting children's learning through TV and radio in Ethiopia**

Save the Children has secured nine satellite television channels that reach 8 million children with learning materials being developed by

regional education bureaus and the national Ministry of Education. The channels also broadcast risk awareness and protection messages, including mental health and psychosocial support, and on how to support children's education. Messages will be delivered in local languages via TV and radio across the country.

### **Supporting early learning in Nepal**

In Nepal, less emphasis nationally has been placed on addressing the youngest children's rights to learn at home, so we are carrying out two interventions to support parent-focused learning opportunities for children of pre-school age. One programme delivers distance learning activities to parents through phone calls, giving practical guidance on how to provide young children with a safe, loving and stimulating home environment that promotes their wellbeing. Parents are encouraged to practise activities with their children, using materials we provide, such as cards, shakers and balls.

Second, interactive voice receivers are being used to build caregivers' knowledge and skills. Target caregivers can call a free number to hear recorded content in local languages about playful and positive parenting and activities to promote their own wellbeing, and to ask questions.

## SPOTLIGHT ON BURKINA FASO

Since 2016, Burkina Faso has faced recurrent attacks by armed groups. Throughout the country, and specifically within six of the 13 regions, the situation has severely deteriorated. More than 900,000 people are internally displaced.

With around 70% of the population under the age of 25, Burkina Faso faces challenges in education, employment, food security and limited natural resources. In 2020, the Global Humanitarian Overview estimated that more than 2.2 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, 46% of them children.<sup>43</sup>

The education system has been targeted with violence: teachers have been assaulted and killed, schools and educational resources have been destroyed. The Ministry of Education has a five-year national strategy (2019–24) to educate students living in areas with high security challenges. The government endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration in February 2017 to protect schools from attacks.<sup>44</sup> In March 2020, more than 2,500 schools were closed because of insecurity affecting 350,000 students.

In early March 2020, when the first case of COVID-19 in the country was reported, the Ministry of Health, with support from key stakeholders including Save the Children, developed a national strategy to tackle the pandemic, focusing on risk communication, community engagement, prevention guidance, case management and guidance on post-recovery plans. Weak health systems, inadequate infrastructure and limited access to basic social services make Burkina Faso highly vulnerable to a cross-country epidemic, with children especially at risk.

To reduce the spread of the pandemic, the government took the decision to close all schools on 16 March 2020, affecting more than 4 million pupils. A month later, in mid-April, the Ministry of Education launched an online platform to support distance learning opportunities for children. This includes content for children from pre-school to secondary education, along with training materials for teachers. A new radio channel solely for remote learning purposes was

*continued on next page*



A young mother takes part in a session at a Youth in Action learning centre in Burkina Faso before schools were closed.

PHOTO: HARRISON THANE

## SPOTLIGHT ON BURKINA FASO *continued*

introduced. The Ministry of Education also came together with the Ministry of Health and the Education Cluster to develop a national plan for reopening schools. On 1 June some grades started again with preventive measures (such as masks and hand-wash kits) whilst other grades will start later.

As with many other countries, while alternative learning methods via radio, website and TV programmes have been approved by the Ministry of Education, a large number of children do not have access to electricity or telecommunication networks. The longer schools are closed, the less likely the most vulnerable children will be to return to school.

Save the Children has responded by:

- distributing 550 radio kits to vulnerable households to equip children to follow their classes remotely
- training teachers and learning facilitators on COVID-19
- assessing child safeguarding risks associated with distance learning modalities and including mitigation measures
- supporting sensitisation on the risk of increase of domestic violence due to the closure of schools.

## SUPPORT PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS TO ENABLE CHILDREN'S WELLBEING AND LEARNING AT HOME

Parents and caregivers need to be supported to provide children with a safe and loving home environment, especially during times of extreme stress and uncertainty. They should respond to children's behaviour and needs positively and without violence. This is true at all times, but even more so while schools are closed, with many parents needing to work from home while also caring for their children.

Evidence (including from Save the Children's Literacy Boost programme) shows that even in the poorest households and those with limited literacy,

parental and sibling engagement and support using very simple methods can add significantly to learning outcomes.<sup>45</sup>

Save the Children has adapted materials from its Parenting without Violence approach to provide key messages to support parents and caregivers to provide a warm, structured and loving environment for children during this time. We have also adapted parenting activities to be delivered remotely. These messages and activities are being shared via radio, podcasts, flyers and other media.

Together with the MHPSS Collaborative, Save the Children developed *Tips for parents and caregivers during COVID-19 school closures: Supporting children's wellbeing and learning*<sup>46</sup> as a basis for organisations disseminating messages to parents on how to

### Supporting children's learning in Yemen

Taken into consideration the poor infrastructure in the country and social distancing requirements, Save the Children is sharing messages about how to support children's learning and wellbeing using loudspeakers at mosques, in schools and on cars roving local communities, as well as through local radio stations. We are also working with the Yemen Education Cluster,

UNICEF and Norwegian Refugee Council to explore modalities for delivering education while schools are closed. This will herald the roll out of a national response plan that is being worked on primarily by the two Ministries of Education, the Yemen Education Cluster, Save the Children and UNICEF.



For Ntokozo and his sons, Joseph, 7, and Siphon, 13, the pandemic has followed the food crisis in Zimbabwe.

support children's learning and wellbeing throughout the crisis and during school closures. These include practical tips and activities to help children to cope with stress and establish a regular routine for learning. This guide has been translated and contextualised in various countries as a key supplement to distance learning programmes.

For the youngest children, from birth to six, Save the Children is empowering mothers and

fathers to integrate developmentally stimulating activities in everyday chores, covering all developmental domains. These playful learning activities are disseminated through a parents' audio and SMS programme, and any other available communication channels. Specific adjustments are made for more disadvantaged communities and families, including children and caregivers with disabilities.

### Supporting parents in Vietnam with online messaging

In Vietnam, we are combining activities for children and for caregivers' wellbeing into one package of messages delivered daily via Zalo online messaging platform. So that all parents can carry out the activities with their children, including those who are not able to read, we send both voice and text messages.

We are assessing whether different groups should be formed for caregivers from different minority ethnic groups to maximise caregivers' engagement.



PHOTO: HANNA ADCOCK/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Jenaica, 4, (in pink headscarf), and her family read together at home, as part of our programme to improve early childhood literacy and development in Mindanao, Philippines.

In many countries Save the Children COVID-19 programmes are being delivered through a combination of one-way communication (where beneficiaries receive information), two-way communication (where caregivers receive an automated message and response options or have a tele-parenting session with a facilitator) and nudges (reminders through SMS, ringtones, advertisements, radio spots). The selection depends on each context, and every community receives a combination of delivery channels and types of material (video, audio and print) to ensure that the materials are as accessible as possible to populations with different needs.

A 'flashing service' reminds caregivers that the content is available. To ensure these messages reach the targeted beneficiaries, audio content is strategically aired in local radios in local languages. Families in Nepal and Bangladesh receive a regular phone call from the group facilitator. During these calls, the facilitator reviews the activities with the caregiver and asks the caregiver to try out the activities with the child. The group facilitator is part of a network of facilitators that meets remotely once a week to discuss trends and challenges, and receives support from a supervisor.

## SUPPORT TEACHERS AND THE EDUCATION WORKFORCE

The pandemic is putting public budgets under significant strain as governments scale up health and social protection services. In many countries, contract teachers, substitute teachers and education support personnel risk seeing their contracts broken and their livelihoods disappear. The implementation of social protection floors in line with SDG 1.3 (basic unemployment benefits, child benefits, etc) can significantly mitigate the risks such as COVID-19 creates for teachers and education support staff. This crisis should not become a pretext to sideline labour rights or reduce standards. Governments and all public and private education providers should work with teachers' unions to preserve the entire teaching and education support staff, and their salaries and benefits. They will be essential for speedy and effective recovery when schools reopen.

Where it is not possible to preserve teachers' salaries and benefits, and where no viable social protection programmes exist to compensate them for loss of income, humanitarian organisations can consider the use of cash voucher assistance for teachers and school staff to cover their basic needs, until schools are reopened.<sup>47</sup>

### Adapting teacher training in Jordan

The Transforming Refugees Education for Excellence (TREE) Programme (in partnership with Community Jameel, Dubai Cares, J-WEL and Hikma Pharmaceuticals) is coordinating with the Ministry of Education to support the development of online learning resources for teachers that focus on their professional development and wellbeing. The programme has adapted its approach during the COVID-19 crisis

and is now conducting its meetings with teachers, principals, and counsellors online, with a focus on enabling and equipping teachers with tools and resources to use online and distance learning with their students and community. A survey was conducted to better understand the availability of internet connection and the willingness of teachers to attend online sessions. Findings informed the design of the online sessions.

Teachers are not immune from the impact of COVID-19 and school closures. They risk becoming isolated from their colleagues and students. Keeping teachers connected during this crisis and supporting them to provide distance learning and student outreach could have significant long-term gains for teacher wellbeing and professional motivation. Teachers whose own children are affected by school

closures or sickness will also need extra support at this time. Additional assistance will be required for female teachers, who are more likely to take on caring responsibilities. It is critical to retain female teachers as role models for students and examples to communities of women in leadership roles and of how education can empower girls.



PHOTO: EDITOR ASABAYME THE CHILDREN

**Brenda, a teacher in a refugee settlement in Uganda, supports home learning.**

### Supporting teachers in DRC through the crisis

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), we are supporting teachers in small groups with socially distanced face-to-face professional development as well as self-study modules. This support ensures that teachers have accurate information on COVID-19, that they are supported with wellbeing strategies to manage their own stress and are equipped to talk to children of different ages about the virus in appropriate ways and keep them protected.

These COVID-19-specific Teacher professional development modules we developed have been shared with the Ministry of Education and Education Cluster to be included as part of the national response to COVID-19 and its support to teachers. In partnership with the Institute for Development Studies, we are conducting research on the impact of COVID-19 on teachers' and students' wellbeing in DRC and Niger and how this further compounds vulnerabilities in conflict contexts.

### Online training for teachers in Somalia and Mozambique

We are using Zoom and other platforms to provide remote professional development for teachers in Somalia and Mozambique, with a particular focus in Mozambique on girls' education. Through partnering with teacher training colleges we are supporting teachers to continue to build their professional competence and to access supportive and learning networks while schools are closed.

### Supporting teachers and parents in Central America

The Education Cluster in Venezuela, which is co-led by Save the Children, launched a new multi-platform course aimed at education communities in all countries of the region – including parents, caregivers and teachers. Taking into account socioeconomic realities of people's lives, the course – *The Right to Education in Times of Crisis: Alternatives for educational continuity* – is available online, downloadable for offline use, through radio and podcasts.

## ENSURE CHILDREN ARE PROTECTED WHILE LEARNING AT HOME

Hundreds of millions of children around the world will likely face increasing threats to their safety and wellbeing – including violence, gender-based violence, exploitation, social exclusion and separation from caregivers – because of the COVID-19 virus itself and actions taken to contain its spread.

For many vulnerable boys and girls, school provides a haven from violence and other threats, as well as access to services, including social welfare, and mental health and psychosocial support. Research has shown that the interruption of formal education is one of the most significant stressors in post-conflict settings, particularly given that schooling is perceived by children and their families as a route out of poverty and to a more prosperous life.<sup>48</sup>

Risk factors<sup>49</sup> for violence, abuse and neglect are on the rise for children under lockdowns. With the closure of schools, children are more exposed

to risks at home and in the community, including child labour, child marriage, teenage pregnancy and gender-based violence, as well as the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups in fragile and conflict-affected countries. COVID-19 prevention measures have also cut children off from positive and supportive relationships they may rely upon, including at school, in the extended family, and in the community.<sup>50</sup> Stigma and discrimination related to COVID-19 may make children more vulnerable to violence and psychosocial distress.

Save the Children's COVID-19 child protection response focuses on how we can best support the protection of children in their homes and in their communities. We have adapted activities in our Parenting Without Violence, Steps to Protect, and Safe Schools approaches to ensure we are using evidence-based programming and guidance. This includes recommendations for ensuring that reporting and referral mechanisms can be maintained while children are out of school.

**Zina, 10, is supported through remote learning during the pandemic in north-west Syria.**



PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN'S PARTNER SYRIA RELIEF

We have developed global case management guidance, which aims to provide initial support to child protection staff and partners to adapt their case management programming within the contagious environment of COVID-19. It adapts Steps to Protect, our approach to child protection case management, to take into account the particular characteristics and implications of

COVID-19 during the immediate preparedness and initial response phases. Our guidance covers remote case management and makes recommendations on the importance of designating the social service workforce as essential workers, to be provided with personal protective equipment when face-to-face support is necessary to help children to recover.

### **Partnering with faith-based communities in Ethiopia**

We have partnered with the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, the Islamic Affairs Supreme Council, the Ethiopian Catholic Church and Mekane Yesus Church to disseminate COVID-19 protection messages via their respective networks: places of worship, TV, radio and social media channels, reaching tens of millions of people.

### **Protecting girls and girls' education in Malawi**

As part of the Let Girls Learn project, our REAL Fathers intervention aims to motivate fathers to be more supportive of girls education and to mentor other fathers to do the same. We have

linked up REAL Fathers with mothers' groups and teacher role models who are part of community child safeguarding structures, in order to support girls' education and raise awareness of child safeguarding issues in communities and at home during school closures. This linkage will increase child protection during and after the pandemic.

### **Getting child protection on the airwaves in Nepal**

Save the Children is partnering with the Ministry of Health and Population and the Child Protection Cluster to produce public service announcements on child protection risks. The announcements have been aired by more than 30 local radio stations in the east and far-western regions, and nationally through Radio Kantipur.

## CHILD LABOUR

Across all countries, the poorest families with adults who are unemployed or in unstable employment are likely to see their incomes further diminish as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. This increases the risk of children being forced to work to contribute to the household budget which prevents them from continuing with their learning during the crisis. Following the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone, boys reported being involved in mining and petty trading, while girls reported being involved in collecting firewood for sale. Once schools reopened, children who had found work were rarely encouraged by their parents to return to school.<sup>51</sup>

A joint analysis by Save the Children and UNICEF reveals that 586 million children – almost one-third of children in low- and middle-income countries – lived in monetary poor households before the pandemic hit.<sup>52</sup> New projections estimate that this number is set to soar by more than 100 million because of COVID-19.<sup>52a</sup> Disease in a family often forces girls to drop out of school due to the need to earn or to care for family members.<sup>53</sup> Girls taking on additional care work during COVID-19 will also have less time for distance education, reducing both their connection to school and the likelihood they will return there.

A survey in Bangladesh across a large sample of poor people suggests that income has fallen by more than 70% since the onset of the epidemic. Approximately two-thirds have lost their jobs and are currently unemployed.<sup>54</sup> This puts children in these families at greater risk of being forced to work in order to increase household budgets.

### Supporting vulnerable families in Vietnam

In Vietnam's Lao Cai Province, we are providing direct cash transfers to families of 500 disadvantaged children. The unconditional cash support helps families with children's school fees, school equipment, personal protective equipment and other essential needs.

## RISKS TO GIRLS ARE EXACERBATED

School closures have significant implications for the learning and wellbeing of both boys and girls, but evidence from the Ebola pandemic in West Africa and existing gender-specific vulnerabilities indicate that COVID-19 school closures will disproportionately affect girls.

A recent survey<sup>55</sup> from the Centre for Global Development of staff from over 80 education NGOs in 32 countries found that school closures in response to COVID-19 are putting girls in developing countries at a substantial risk of gender-based violence, early pregnancy, and dropping out once schools reopen. 69% of respondents said that school closures will disproportionately affect girls and ranked school-age girls' increased exposure during school closures to gender-based violence, early marriage and pregnancy as an important or very important concern.

During school closures in Sierra Leone due to Ebola, a simple one-hour daily class for girls in life skills, sexual and reproductive health, and vocational learning was effective. The small classes, held in safe spaces in villages, served a total of 4,700 adolescent

### Using the power of local radio to protect children in Mozambique

In collaboration with local radio stations in Mozambique, we are adjusting our existing materials on child protection and girls' empowerment to create simple messages in local languages for broadcast. We are designing research into the wellbeing of girls and their experiences within the current crisis.

### Delivering accelerated learning from a distance to girls in Pakistan

Our model of distance learning support in Pakistan – involving 90 teachers and four social organisers – helps girls enrolled in accelerated learning centres to continue their studies. The teachers provide distance teaching and tutoring support to 2,300 girls. Each social organiser has developed a WhatsApp group of his or her Village Education Committee, through which they share daily messages on the importance of education for girls and on the negative effects of early child marriage, along with information on how to support girls' education.

girls. After the crisis, school enrolment rates fell by only 8% in areas where the classes had taken place, compared with 16% in villages that had not received the intervention.<sup>56</sup>

Frequently girls access menstrual hygiene products through school, enabling them to manage their periods and keep coming to school. During school closures alternative distributions of menstrual hygiene kits in take home packs must be part of the response. In addition to menstrual pads and soap, these kits should also provide basic information on reproductive health and how to use pads. Save the Children is providing women and girls with these kits in many countries.

## GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence exists in every society worldwide and is exacerbated in emergencies. School closures can leave girls exposed to risks of violence and abuse by limiting survivors' ability to distance themselves from their abusers as well as to access external support. Shockingly, the UN Population Fund expects 15 million additional cases of domestic violence for every three months that lockdown is extended.<sup>57</sup> Even in humanitarian settings, gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health services are frequently diverted and options for safe reporting reduced. Distance learning programmes and protection services should take violence against girls and women into account within their planning and implementation.

Witnessing intimate partner violence in the home causes immediate and long-lasting harm to children. Boys who live in a household where violence takes place are more likely to perpetuate violence as adults, and girls who witness violence

in the home as children are more likely to be in violent relationships later on. The increased risks of violence against girls and women during the pandemic could have an impact for many years to come.

## CHILD MARRIAGE AND EARLY PREGNANCY

With increased pressure on household budgets and ongoing school closures, parents may decide their young daughters should marry. This may be more likely in contexts where marriage results in dowry payments or where girls are at risk of sexual exploitation, including in exchange for food, money or shelter.

In West and Central Africa, where 42% of women are married before the age of 18, 70% of girls enter primary school but only 36% complete lower-secondary education. Our recent study shows that while girls' education and poverty can influence child marriage rates, deep-rooted gender norms play a larger part in the risk of girls being forced into early marriage, as well as their choices about their fertility.<sup>58</sup>

During the Sierra Leone Ebola crisis, there was an increase in teenage pregnancy in some areas of up to 65%.<sup>59</sup> Marie Stopes International predicts that COVID-19 restrictions on its services could mean 3 million additional unintended pregnancies, 2.7 million unsafe abortions and 11,000 pregnancy-related deaths.<sup>60</sup> The disruption to programmes to prevent child marriage is predicted to result in an additional 13 million children being married over the next decade.<sup>61</sup>

### What girls want in the DRC

We are working with local leaders and community structures in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to address issues of gender-based violence within the context of COVID-19 and to make appropriate adjustments to referral pathways. Our hotline is receiving a high number of calls highlighting two main concerns, especially for girls: when will school reopen so they can go back there? And when will sexual and reproductive health clubs reopen?

### Let's talk about sexual health

Online misinformation on sex and sexuality contributes to high rates of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases in Sierra Leone, especially in urban areas. Talking about sex is taboo in families and communities, and sexual education is not taught in schools.

Save the Children has launched an innovative, interactive game app for boys and girls which provides reliable information on sexual health as well as how to stay safe from COVID-19. It also shows them where they can find support in their community.



## TOO MUCH TOO YOUNG

Kadiatu, 18, lives in a densely populated fishing community of makeshift homes built with mud and corrugated metal sheets. During the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone, she became pregnant, aged just 13, with a boy from a better off family.

*“My family and I were desperate,” says Kadiatu. “We hardly had enough money for food. I even got blurred vision from the hunger. When I asked my mother for food, she would tell me that I’m a big girl, so I should find ways of bringing in money to feed the family.”*

*“Some girls are going through the same thing [now]. There is no food. Girls need money. What they do not get at home they will likely get from the ‘big man’ on a corner. For those coming up now, they should not make the same mistakes we made. And the parents who allowed us to make these mistakes, we need to tell them to stop it. I was lucky to give birth safely at such a young age. I worry for some of these children because they might not be so lucky.”*

Kadiatu, 18, Sierra Leone

## FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

The United Nations Population Fund has warned that the pandemic could lead to an extra 2 million girls worldwide being cut in the next decade as the crisis halts global efforts to end female genital mutilation (FGM).<sup>62</sup> In Somalia, which has the world's highest FGM rate of 98%, Plan International has reported that families are taking advantage of school closures to carry out FGM so that the girls have time to recover, which can take weeks. At the same time the economic downturn in the country caused by COVID-19 has spurred cutters to tout for more business, while restrictions on movement during lockdown make it harder to raise awareness in communities of the dangers of FGM.<sup>63</sup>

Every girl and woman should have the autonomy and necessary knowledge to be able to make free and informed decisions about her body. It is vital that protection and sexual and reproductive health services remain central to the COVID-19 response. Being in school is one of the best ways to prevent FGM, both by keeping girls safe and also through specialist support mechanisms.

## SEPARATED CHILDREN AND THOSE WHO HAVE LOST CAREGIVERS

During the Ebola crisis in West Africa, more than 30,000 children were orphaned in the three most-affected countries – Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. When children were separated from

their parents or moved to different locations due to changes in family circumstances, this put them at risk of various forms of abuse.<sup>64</sup> Save the Children provided essential psychosocial support to children to help them recover from their experiences during the Ebola crisis, referring children for further assistance where necessary, and provided protection and support to children who lost their caregivers.

In many low-income countries children are cared for by grandparents who are most at risk of the COVID-19 virus, which may result in children experiencing both grief and neglect. During the pandemic, we have been closely involved with the development of an interagency technical note on supporting children at risk of separation or in alternative care.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

As children with disabilities may need additional care compared with other children, families who are not used to having a child with disabilities at home full-time may struggle, which can put the child at risk of abuse, neglect and violence. Abrupt and unforeseen changes in primary caregivers and safety networks can cause further psychological harm to the child.<sup>65</sup> Governments and agencies must together identify vulnerable disabled children and young people most at risk and refer them to inclusive essential services.

**Maher, 8, is from a village in north-west Syria. When he was 5, his home was hit by shelling and he was injured by shrapnel in his stomach and in his foot. The family was displaced and had to move from one displacement camp to another. They are now living in a camp area in Idlib province.**



PHOTO: HURRAS NETWORK/SAVE THE CHILDREN

## SPOTLIGHT ON KOSOVO

Despite some improvements in recent years, the education system in Kosovo continues to face many challenges. Across the country, there is a lack of sufficient school infrastructure, poor teacher performance and an insufficient education budget. Despite education being free and mandatory in Kosovo, nearly 5% of 4–15-year-olds are out of school.<sup>66</sup> This is often due to the lack of inclusion in schools of the most marginalised children, including children with disabilities.

The quality of education is low and results in poor learning outcomes among students. On average, a child can expect to complete 12.8 years of pre-primary, primary and secondary school by age 18. However, if this is adjusted for the quality of learning, this is equivalent to 7.7 years – a learning gap of over five years. Further, in a study carried out by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 15-year-old students consistently performed below average across reading, maths and science.<sup>67</sup> The low quality of learning can cause children to drop out before completing their education, and denies children the chance to reach their full potential.

Although enrolment rates across Kosovo have improved, this is not the case for children with disabilities. In 2019, it was estimated that just 5,300 children with disabilities were in school, with 38,000 children with disabilities not in school denied their right to an education.<sup>68</sup> Children with disabilities can be excluded from school due to social norms that stigmatise people with disabilities, and a lack of disability-friendly facilities, transportation, and trained assistants and teachers.

The first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Kosovo on 13 March 2020. Following this, all education institutions were closed to mitigate the spread of the disease. In order to ensure that children can continue to learn, the Ministry of Education partnered with Save the Children and UNICEF to develop and launch online platforms to support early and inclusive distance learning platforms to support children and caregivers with home learning. We have partnered with a technology company to develop an online platform to provide children with a space to learn and voice their concerns to key experts and duty-bearers.

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Save the Children delivered 323 packages with teaching material, toys and hygienic supplies in ten rural areas in Kosovo for children registered at the Early Childhood Care and Development Centres.

PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN

## SPOTLIGHT ON KOSOVO *continued*

Despite these efforts, the most marginalised children continue to miss out on education, often due to a lack of internet access and equipment, including power cuts. In addition, a lack of technological capacity or knowledge among teachers and parents contributes to the disruption of education for the most marginalised children, especially children with disabilities, who often need support from caregivers to access platforms and for online education

activities. School closures will affect the most disadvantaged children, widening existing learning inequalities. Already, the learning gap between the poorest and richest students is 1.5 years of schooling. As students from poorer backgrounds are more likely to experience challenges in accessing distance learning tools during the pandemic, this learning gap is set to increase.

## MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

School closures, fear of COVID-19, and the social and economic disruptions that accompany the pandemic will increase stress within the family and could lead to negative mental health consequences such as anxiety and depression, including among children and young people. Children respond to stress in different ways. Common responses include difficulties sleeping, bed-wetting, stomach pain or headaches, fear of being left alone, becoming angry or withdrawn, and feelings of uncertainty, fear, loss and sadness.

During the Ebola pandemic in Sierra Leone, children reported higher levels of isolation and lower

levels of happiness.<sup>69</sup> In recent surveys by Save the Children of more than 6,000 children and parents in the USA, Germany, Finland, Spain and the UK, up to 65% of children were found to struggle with boredom and feelings of isolation as a result of COVID-19 and school closures.<sup>70</sup> In Thailand 46% of children and young people reported they have experienced stress caused by being quarantined in their houses.<sup>71</sup> And in Lebanon, our recent survey found that 40% of children aged 15–18 years old said that the situation is taking a toll on their mental health.<sup>72</sup> Initial rapid assessments of children's rights we conducted in Bangladesh indicate a similar trend in the increase of corporal punishment in the home.



PHOTO: ETINOSA YVONNESAVE THE CHILDREN

**Before the pandemic Save the Children carried out our HEART programme in a child-friendly space in Northern Nigeria. We have adapted this programme for the home.**

Save the Children has produced guidance and tools, including *Stress Busters*,<sup>73</sup> and helped to develop the MHPSS Collaborative's *Tips for parents and caregivers during COVID-19 school closures: Supporting children's wellbeing and learning*.<sup>74</sup>

Male and female caregivers should be supported to recognise how their own stress and frustration is transferred to children and can have a noticeable

effect on their children's wellbeing, learning and behaviour. It is important that any support for caregivers encourages the use of stress reduction techniques and links them to livelihood opportunities, cash vouchers or other social services. Social and emotional learning, play-based learning, and support for parental engagement are critical for the youngest learners during this time of adversity.

### **Reaching young children through radio**

We have produced a radio series in Uganda called *Ready to Learn* with play-based learning and basic reading and counting activities designed for three to six year olds to do together with their parents or caregivers. The series is being translated for use in rural areas and refugee settlements, and includes songs and messages to engage and inform young children about COVID-19.

As stress levels increase within homes during lockdown, we have also adapted our social emotional learning programme HEART (Healing and Education through the Arts) into a radio series with short activities for children and caregivers to do together or alone to help relieve stress during lockdown. The activities are designed to be done in small homes and at no cost, and are broadcast on national and local radio and recorded with children themselves to encourage others to take part.

### **Supporting parents of young children in Bangladesh**

We are supporting parents' and caregivers' wellbeing by training frontline early childhood care and development staff in psychosocial first aid. They will then use interactive mobile phone messages to contact parents and caregivers to discuss social-emotional education, self-care, child stress and positive parenting. Parents and caregivers will also be given the opportunity for phone consultations with professional counsellors and the opportunity for referrals. We have contributed educational resources for teachers,

parents and caregivers to the national e-learning materials hub.

### **Peer-to-peer youth mental health support in Albania and Georgia**

We have facilitated young people to do their own campaigning on mental health support, through peer-to-peer campaigns. Albania's youth network have been using the campaign #ProductiveAtHome to support each other, and members of a child-led network in Georgia have been sharing videos with other children about how they are keeping busy and mentally well at home during lockdown.

### **Journey of Hope for children in Australia**

We are adapting Save the Children's in-school post-disaster recovery programme, Journey of Hope, for virtual (online) delivery in communities that were devastated by the unprecedented 'Black Summer' bushfires of 2019–20. Many of these communities also suffered extended drought or major flooding over the same period. School closures left many children unable to access psychosocial support to process their distressing experiences, which for many included displacement from their homes, separation from family members, disrupted education, and anxiety associated with the effects of climate change on the fires and their own futures.

As schools reopen following the pandemic, Journey of Hope will also be delivered face to face to support children's recovery from the compounding harm of the bushfires and COVID-19.

## SPOTLIGHT ON LEBANON

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, school systems across Lebanon were already weak, with an out-of-school rate for primary education of 11%, and only 52% of primary children continuing into secondary school.<sup>75</sup> Education is highly privatised across the country, with fewer than a third of school-aged children – often children from the poorest families and refugees – enrolled in public schools.<sup>76</sup> Public schools in Lebanon suffer from under-qualified teaching staff and an inadequate learning environment and equipment, so that schooling for the poorest children is insufficient.<sup>77</sup>

The weak public school system was not equipped to handle the influx of refugees from Syria into the country.<sup>78</sup> There are more than 660,000 school-age Syrian refugees in Lebanon.<sup>79</sup> More than half of these children are out of school.<sup>80</sup> 69% of 6–14-year-olds and 22% of 15–17-year-olds are enrolled in school.<sup>81</sup>

Refugee children are often out of school because of extreme poverty, inability to afford transport costs, lack of remedial classes, bullying and discrimination. Unofficial figures estimate around 18,000 young Syrian refugees are engaged in child labour, preventing them from accessing education.<sup>82</sup> The child marriage

rate among Syrian refugees is officially 6% – though this figure is thought to be a significant underestimate as many cases are unregistered in Lebanese courts.<sup>83</sup>

To attempt to combat these problems, the government of Lebanon is enrolling refugees in public schools using a two-shift system, with an afternoon shift specifically for refugee and non-Lebanese children. However, the economic crisis and the public protest that has gripped the country since October 2019 have added to the problem, with children previously enrolled in private schools being moved to the state system, increasing the burden on state schools.<sup>84</sup> This could result in refugees being moved to a later shift, or see them drop out altogether.

Schools were closed nationwide in early March 2020 in response to COVID-19, affecting more than 1,360,000 learners. Schools will remain closed until the end of the academic year, with official exams cancelled.<sup>85</sup> Schoolchildren across the country had already lost two months of this school year in October and November 2019 due to nationwide protests, meaning that they have lost over half of their school year.

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**Save the Children's teams in Bekaa, Lebanon, are distributing learning kits to ensure children have access to basic learning materials during this crisis while practising physical distancing measures.**



PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN

## SPOTLIGHT ON LEBANON *continued*

The Lebanese government has developed an online curriculum to allow for distance learning – however, a Save the Children study found that all children surveyed reported difficulties in studying online, and children who do not have internet access are missing out on their education.<sup>86</sup> Further, it has been reported that online distance learning has not been made available to refugee children, who as a result will be left behind.

As the pandemic hits families' finances, it is possible that many children will not return to school and that families will turn to child marriage and child labour to try and ease their economic difficulties.

Save the Children is responding to this disruption in education by providing learning activities with pre-school children, school-attending students, and out-of-school children. This includes distributing remote learning kits and training teachers and staff members on remote-teaching practices to ensure some form of learning for children during this period. We have also established WhatsApp groups for caregivers and students to get regular messages and tips on home schooling.

## CONTINUE SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMMES

Meals and snacks provided at school are usually a lifeline for the most vulnerable children, keeping them free from hunger, as well as ensuring they have the energy to fulfil their potential at school.

The World Food Programme estimates that 352 million children globally (47% of them girls) are missing out on school meals because of COVID-19 school closures.<sup>87</sup> 72 countries have brought in alternative solutions to reach children with school meals, with 50 countries providing take-home rations, 11 countries making cash transfers to families and 11 countries using mixed methods. However, it is unlikely that these will be rolled out at sufficient scale to replace the enormous reach of regular school feeding. In 134 countries data on alternative school feeding is not available.<sup>88</sup>

**“Before the COVID-19, the school fed us meals each school day, but now the school feeding programme has stopped. I hope it will start again soon.”**

*Nassir, 12, 4th grade student in the Somali region of Ethiopia*

India has the biggest school feeding programme in the world; now, as a result of school closures, 90 million girls and boys are no longer receiving them. The central government has committed to reach vulnerable school-aged children with alternative school feeding, but how this will be delivered – by cash transfers or delivering uncooked grains or meals – has been left to each state to decide.<sup>89</sup>

### Distributing ‘lunchbox’ food rations in Guatemala

Save the Children worked with the Ministry of Education to action an emergency policy to ensure school feeding rations could be taken home during school closures. At 300 schools, working through parent–teacher associations, we have distributed 15-day, take-home lunchbox rations. We prepared food distribution

protocols for health and hygiene standard procedures, and staff received training on safe food handling and specific COVID-19 prevention protocols. Other members of the Education Cluster are now doing the same, adapting existing school feeding programmes to make sure children do not go hungry.



PHOTO: LEI TAPANG/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Aldrin is a construction worker in the Philippines but because of the COVID-19 quarantine, his work has stopped leaving the family without a source of income.

Save the Children provided the family with a hygiene kit, food packs and child-friendly learning materials.

In the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, the closure of temporary learning centres not only means children are not learning, but many will not be receiving critical daily, healthy, safe and nutritious meals. Lack of access to alternative school meals could have a devastating impact on the development of the most vulnerable children, who are harder to reach and may have already experienced stunting.

Each percentage point drop globally in aggregated gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to result in an additional 700,000 stunted children.<sup>90</sup> Stunting not only affects a child's health, making them more susceptible to disease and infection, but also impairs their mental and physical development – meaning children who suffer from stunting are less likely to achieve their full cognitive potential as adults. Globally, before COVID-19, 47 million children were classified as 'wasting' and these numbers are expected to grow rapidly as a result of children missing out on daily school meals on which they usually rely.<sup>91</sup>

School feeding programmes are frequently a vital component in how poor families meet their needs. While achieving good nutrition requires a multisectoral response, children can be helped to avoid hunger and improve their diets through complementary interventions such as healthy school meals, nutrition education and cash transfers. They can also develop healthier food practices at school and extend these to their families and communities.<sup>92</sup>

Save the Children has scaled up safe food distributions and cash transfers for food in multiple countries.

### Distributing food during school closures in Zambia and Liberia

We worked with the government of Zambia to adapt the existing school feeding programmes that respond to droughts, distributing food rations to homes. Standard operating procedures were developed to guide food distributions to ensure physical distancing and safe distribution, with hand washing facilities provided and protective personal equipment given to food distributors. 214 schools with 41,000 children receive food rations on a daily basis.

In Liberia, after schools were closed in mid-March 2020, we have been distributing food in four counties to 47,620 households with children at primary school. Save the Children was asked by the Minister of Education to distribute take-home rations as part of the LEARN (Liberia Empowerment through Attendance, Reading, and Nutrition) project, funded by the United States Department of Agriculture under its Food for Education programme. LEARN targets 220 schools with interventions for school feeding.

## SPOTLIGHT ON COLOMBIA

Colombia has received an accelerating influx of migrants from Venezuela; by December 2019, approximately 1.8 million Venezuelans had arrived in the country. Colombia has taken a leading role in adopting an open borders policy and implementing good practice in the provision of education, health and employment services and humanitarian assistance to Venezuelan migrants and returned Colombians.

Education has been a stated government priority in recent years but public funding is insufficient to achieve set objectives for early childhood and basic education. While Colombia has made some progress in creating better educational opportunities for rural children and young people, there is still a long way to go.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the government implemented an early set of response measures. It declared a state of emergency, closed the country's borders and imposed a mandatory quarantine. The government announced a fiscal stimulus package of 14.8 trillion Colombian pesos – 1.4% of GDP.

When the mandatory quarantine began, the government announced the modification of the academic calendar throughout the national territory, with the purpose of preserving the health of Colombians, in harmony with the right

to education. Following three months of virtual and distance education practices, the Ministry of Education has developed a set of guidance as part of the next stage of its response. The document outlines ways to ensure education can be continued from home and methods that will allow for a safe, gradual and progressive return to school for children. Through this planning and preparation phase, plans for how to monitor safety will be considered. Territorial governors will lead this process with support from both Ministries of Health and Education.

Save the Children continues to deliver programmes on health; water, sanitation and hygiene; education in emergencies; and child protection. We are providing:

- guidebooks for teachers (including guidance on reading, writing and arithmetic), along with access to virtual training materials
- food kits to children who attend temporary learning spaces
- information on the importance of hygiene and health education at home
- play- and movement-based activities through adapting the TeamUp programme (this includes information delivered through radio channels, podcasts, instant messaging networks such as WhatsApp, and loudspeakers).



PHOTO: MARCELA CAMPOS/SAVE THE CHILDREN

**In Colombia we support children in maths and Spanish at school and provide training and support to teachers. During the pandemic we have adapted these programmes for distance learning.**

## CHILDREN AFFECTED BY CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT

Even before the COVID-19 school closures, more than 75 million children across the world's crisis and conflict-affected countries urgently required support to access a good quality education. Research by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack found a systematic pattern of attacks on education in 37 countries, and military use of schools and universities in 34 countries, over the last five years. In June 2019, more than 9,290 schools in West and Central Africa were already closed due to insecurity, affecting 2 million children and 44,000 teachers. Millions of forcibly displaced people are living in overcrowded, under-resourced refugee and internal displacement sites with poor hygiene and sanitation facilities, and limited access to learning opportunities.

Further, evidence suggests that an economic downturn of 5% can lead to a 0.5% increase in

the likelihood of conflict in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>93</sup> With a global recession likely as a result of the pandemic, the region may face yet more conflict and displacement.

Access to safe, good-quality learning opportunities plays an important role in mitigating the harmful impact of conflict on children, reducing the risk of violations such as sexual violence and recruitment into armed forces or armed groups. Finding additional means to protect and support the most vulnerable children and young people is an urgent priority.

The closure of schools as a result of COVID-19 means that vacant schools are at risk of being used by a range of non-education actors. This may include the use and/or occupation of schools by non-state armed groups and the military, increasing the risk of armed attack. The resulting damage to school infrastructure may prevent schools from safely reopening and increase the amount of time

Kulsum, 16, is a Rohingya refugee who lives with her mother and siblings in a camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. They fled their home in Myanmar because of the violence. Kulsum likes to learn and wants to go to a school so she can be an independent woman like her mother in the future. But she has to take care of her younger siblings while her mother looks for a job to support the family.



PHOTO: SONALI CHAKRA

children are out of school. The UN Policy Brief on the impact of COVID-19 on children<sup>94</sup> highlights the potential risks of schools being used for military purposes, occupied, looted or destroyed by parties to conflict during the global pandemic. As countries focus on their response to COVID-19, it is fundamental that they ensure that students and educational facilities are protected from attacks and from military use. Schools and universities should not be used for military purposes, and should be available for education upon re-opening, in line with the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools & Universities from Military Use*.<sup>95</sup> Endorsement and implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration remains critical.

In some cases, the authorities may use the COVID-19 emergency to introduce restrictions targeting displaced people, especially those already facing stigma on the basis of their ethnic, religious or political affiliation, arbitrarily limiting their rights. Such measures may also entail displacement camps being turned into de facto detention centres.

Restrictions on movement and delays in deliveries of learning supplies, as well as concerns about the safety of staff working in displacement camps, may hamper the ability of humanitarian organisations to provide continuity of learning during school closure. Yemen is a case in point: a donor described the operational environment for humanitarian actors there as “among the most restrictive in the world.”<sup>96</sup>

It is important that governments, supported by donors where necessary, provide an equal distribution of education services to refugees and internally displaced people. And this education response must address these children’s needs through accessible distance learning in the appropriate language of instruction.

Humanitarian exemptions to restrictive measures should be retained, including access to life-saving or otherwise critical care, and to family reunification for people who are highly dependent on others and require help with everyday tasks.

### **Calling for safe schools in Mali**

With the support of Save the Children, the National Technical Committee of the Safe Schools Declaration initiated an advocacy letter to the Minister of Defence to strongly call for the prevention of any military use of schools in conflict areas during this pandemic.

### **Expected surge in children recruited into armed forces in DRC**

The combination of conflict and Ebola in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) already made the humanitarian response extremely challenging. We are working with Umoja and Geneva Call to campaign against an expected surge in recruitment of children into armed groups during the COVID-19 school closure period.

### **Supporting children forced to return to El Salvador**

We have assisted children and families who have been forced to return from neighbouring countries and the United States, and who have been held in quarantine centres. Our teams have provided children with hygiene kits, food kits and play materials.

### **Push for refugee and migrant children to be included in South Africa**

The National Interagency Working Group on Unaccompanied, Separated and Migrant Children is actively advocating for the inclusion of refugees, displaced and migrant children in the COVID-19 response.

## SPOTLIGHT ON THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, the education system in the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT) was weak. Across OPT, the primary out-of-school rate is 6%, rising to 10% for lower secondary. Weak education infrastructure, conflict and violence, and high rates of poverty are among the factors preventing children from realising their right to a safe, good quality education.

Education infrastructure across OPT lacks funding and suffers from a shortage of schools and classrooms. Strict building restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities prevent more schools being built, and many school structures have been demolished. It is estimated that 2,000 new classrooms are needed in East Jerusalem alone to keep up with demand.<sup>97</sup> The shortage in classrooms has resulted in two-thirds of schools in Gaza having to operate in double or triple shifts, reducing children's learning hours.<sup>98</sup>

The Israel-imposed blockade and violent conflicts often severely disrupt Palestinian children's education, preventing them from learning. In 2019, 12 schools were damaged by airstrikes, affecting 9,000 children.<sup>99</sup> In a Save the Children survey carried out in the West Bank, children cited military operations and settler-related incidents as key barriers to their education, due to the risk of injury, detention or disruption.<sup>100</sup> Fear of violence and harassment on the way to and from and at school can result in parents taking their children out of school, often disproportionately affecting girls.<sup>101</sup>

The humanitarian situation in OPT has resulted in over 29% of Palestinians living below the poverty line.<sup>102</sup> There is a risk of school dropouts, as families cannot afford basic education supplies

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**A picture drawn by Rania, 16, illustrating her experience of living through conflict in the occupied Palestinian territory.**



## SPOTLIGHT ON THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY *continued*

and transport costs to and from school. Further, some families resort to child marriage and child labour to reduce their economic burden. The child marriage rate is 15%, is most common in urban and camp areas,<sup>103</sup> and is often driven by poverty, displacement and the oppression of girls.<sup>104</sup>

Following COVID-19 cases being confirmed in OPT, all schools were closed in early March. This includes the closure of 3,037 schools, of which, 2,300 are in the West Bank and 737 are in Gaza, along with 2,017 kindergartens. It has affected 1,430,000 children. In response, to support children to keep learning, the Ministry of Education has included distance learning in the National Response Plan for COVID-19, and has launched both an online e-learning portal and radio broadcasts that include lessons for all grades.<sup>105</sup> However, there are concerns that the response is not coordinated across the West Bank and Gaza, creating issues on distance learning, exams, and mental health and psychosocial support.

In response to the school closure, Save the Children has taken a key role in the coordinated humanitarian response plan, working with partners to support the Ministry of Education's response. We have helped to meet the immediate needs of the most vulnerable and affected children, providing hygiene kits and recreational

materials to children in quarantine centres, and providing stationery, education kits and laptops to children most in need.



PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN

**Mariam, 14, lives in the occupied Palestinian territory with her family. She says COVID-19 has made the world like the city of the dead and hopes to return to school and see her loved ones. Mariam attends programmes run by Save the Children and our partner Ma'an. She took this selfie during the COVID-19 lockdown.**

## Recommendations

### Keep learning alive during school closure through inclusive distance learning:

- Provide effective, flexible and inclusive **distance learning programmes**, including digital learning, interactive radio instruction and printed learning materials, with a focus on reaching the **most marginalised children, including girls, the youngest children, children with disabilities, internally displaced children and refugees**. These programmes should support early learning, mental health and psychosocial support, child protection and public health objectives, and address harmful gender norms.
- Ensure that distance learning strategies include **support for parents' and teachers' roles in children's learning at home** through developing and promoting tips, resources and activities.
- **Provide food** to children who normally rely on school meals – through take-home rations, vouchers or cash schemes.
- **Provide sexual and reproductive health and rights programming which includes the safe distribution of menstrual hygiene kits to girls, as well promoting empowerment, addressing stigma and targeting gender-based violence.**
- **Ensure that child protection reporting and referral systems can be adapted for times of school closure**, ensuring that providers of specialist social services and mental health and psychosocial support services have adequate equipment to support children if needed.
- Ensure the **continued payment and incentives of teachers** and school staff during and after school closures to retain existing teachers. Ensure teachers are adequately supported and trained to support distance learning programming with the right resources and guidance.



Shaif, our Coordinator for Emergency Child Programmes in Yemen, demonstrates handwashing to children.

CREDIT: SAMI JASSAR/SAVE THE CHILDREN

# 3 Prepare for a safe return to school

While we must remain mindful of the risks presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential that children are able to get back to school and to resume learning as soon as they can do so safely. Balanced decision-making is needed to consider, on one hand, the risks school closures pose to children’s learning, wellbeing and health and on the other, the potential risks to children in the process of reopening schools.

Some countries are tentatively reopening their school doors to children again. However, as of mid-May 2020, 100 countries had not yet announced a date for schools to reopen, 65 had plans for partial or full reopening, while 32 will end the academic year online.<sup>106</sup> Many learners around the world will end the school year early without returning to school. This means that when children return they will have missed many months of schooling and will experience lost learning.

Governments and the international community need to plan now for the safe reopening of schools. Where schools have already reopened, ongoing support to mitigate the impact of closures and

to prepare for possible future closures is essential. Interest in going back to school may be much lower for vulnerable or struggling children and young people if they feel they will not be able to catch up and if schools do not offer extensive support for accelerated learning.

To assess the risks that affect children in their own context, all education authorities should continue to:

- adhere to the *Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention and Control in Schools*,<sup>107</sup> released by UNICEF, the World Health Organization and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and endorsed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee



**“I miss learning, writing notes from the blackboard and swinging from the *muzande* [swing] at break time. When school reopens I will be happy to learn with my friends again and play together at the *odebe* [child-friendly space].”**

Florence, 10, lives in a refugee settlement in Uganda.

In the photo, Florence receives a home learning kit.

- review the *Technical Note: Protection of Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic*<sup>108</sup>
- use the Global Education Cluster/Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility *Safe Back to School: A practitioner's guide*.<sup>109</sup>

Children also have a right to be heard in processes that affect them and should be considered fully-fledged actors in decision-making, particularly in regard to returning safely to school. This includes providing support for girls' safe and meaningful participation and consultation in all decisions about their own lives. The voice of teachers is also critical within this process and will ensure more motivated and engaged teachers to support successful re-opening of schools.

Government decisions on school openings must be guided by ministries of health and education, and health partners. Decisions must be based on reliable public health information that takes into

consideration the wider package of interventions, such as physical distancing, home quarantine and the preparedness of the school to reopen.

There are four key areas that governments need to address in order for children to be able to return to school and continue learning:

- work with school administration, local government and communities to ensure schools are safe spaces;
- target the most marginalised groups of children, especially girls, displaced children and children with disabilities, in order to reduce school dropout and improve inclusion
- consider the different learning, protection and wellbeing needs of children and put plans in place to make up for lost learning – including blended learning during the phased return
- provide support and information to teachers around safety, wellbeing and professional development.

## KEY PRINCIPLES FOR SAFE RETURN TO SCHOOL

1. **An integrated approach:** COVID-19 has a multi-faceted impact on children's rights, affecting education, protection, MHPSS, health, nutrition and other sectors. As schools prepare for reopening, a coordinated and integrated approach is critical to address children's holistic needs.
2. **Children and young people's participation:** Children have a right to be heard in processes that affect them and should be considered fully-fledged actors in decision-making. Child participation should be inclusive and accessible for all children. Young people can play a key role in community mobilisation and in dissemination of accurate information.
3. **Gender, inclusion and accessibility:** Children may face barriers or have different needs in returning to school because of age, gender, disability, ethnicity, refugee/asylum-seeker status, socioeconomic status, or other factors. All efforts during school reopening must be inclusive and accessible for all children. This is a unique opportunity to bring all children – returning students and children previously out of education – into school.
4. **Whole school community:** Engage the whole school community – including children, caregivers, teachers, school administration, the local community and local government – in an inclusive and accessible way at all stages of the school reopening process.
5. **Build on existing structures:** School communities should capitalise on their many existing capacities during the school reopening process. These may be existing children's clubs, student councils, Parent Teacher Associations, youth-led groups, child protection committees or family networks.
6. **Build back resilient:** The school reopening process provides an opportunity to strengthen existing education, health, protection and disaster preparedness systems, making them more accessible, inclusive, participatory and protective. By applying lessons learned from COVID-19, governments and whole school communities can better prepare themselves and reduce risks of future crises related to health, to natural and everyday hazards, and to violence and conflict.

Source: *Safe Back to School: A practitioner's guide*<sup>110</sup>

### A glimpse into school reopening in China

We are conducting a piece of qualitative research in schools supported by Save the Children in China to document the reopening process. Preliminary insights gained from interviews with headmasters indicate that conducting simulations prior to school reopening helps test changes in daily routines, identify potential problems and improve the school reopening plan. Clear communications to students prior to school

reopening on changes in the routine was also found to be helpful to ensure compliance. Some schools are identifying positive outcomes: for example one school principal reported that the relationship between schools and families had been strengthened as a result of COVID-19, and that team spirit among school teachers and staff had also been enhanced.

## ENSURE SCHOOLS ARE SAFE SPACES

First and foremost, schools need to be safe spaces to return to, and continued prevention and control of the spread of the virus must be a priority. Our understanding of this virus is still limited and there is currently insufficient evidence on risks of transmission. What is clear is that school reopening will not mean a return to normal school life. A number of measures will need to be put in place to ensure that children and teachers are safe at school. In addition, schools that have been used as quarantine or treatment facilities during the pandemic must undergo proper disinfection before they can be used for learning. In Yemen, schools have been repurposed as quarantine sites and isolation centres across the country. There is also a growing concern around the military targeting these sites, given the presence of military personnel in and around them.

In Denmark, schools reopened for the youngest children in April 2020. Some of the measures put in place were:

- clear guidelines and information for parents on how children can return to school (ie, around school drop offs)
- hand-washing stations and extra rooms, such as tents, to divide children into smaller groups

- a maximum number of children that can be together and in fixed groups
- playgrounds divided to provide guidance on physical distancing
- shorter school days, allowing two shifts through the day.

There was also a strong plan for engagement with parents and teachers to build buy-in for reopenings and provide reassurance that schools were safe for children to return to.

## ENSURE HEALTH AND HYGIENE FACILITIES ARE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL AT SCHOOL

Schools can spread health messages and good practices, such as hand-washing and good hygiene, that help prevent the spread of the virus. But many schools do not have sufficient facilities – in 2016, only 53% of schools were reported to have basic hygiene services (defined as a hand-washing facility with water and soap).<sup>111</sup> Less than a quarter of schools in sub-Saharan Africa had any hand-washing facilities.<sup>112</sup> This means that 620 million children do not have decent toilets at school and around 900 million are not able to wash their hands properly.<sup>113</sup>

Governments should increase hand-washing facilities to adhere to national standards, including ratios of learners to hand-washing stations,

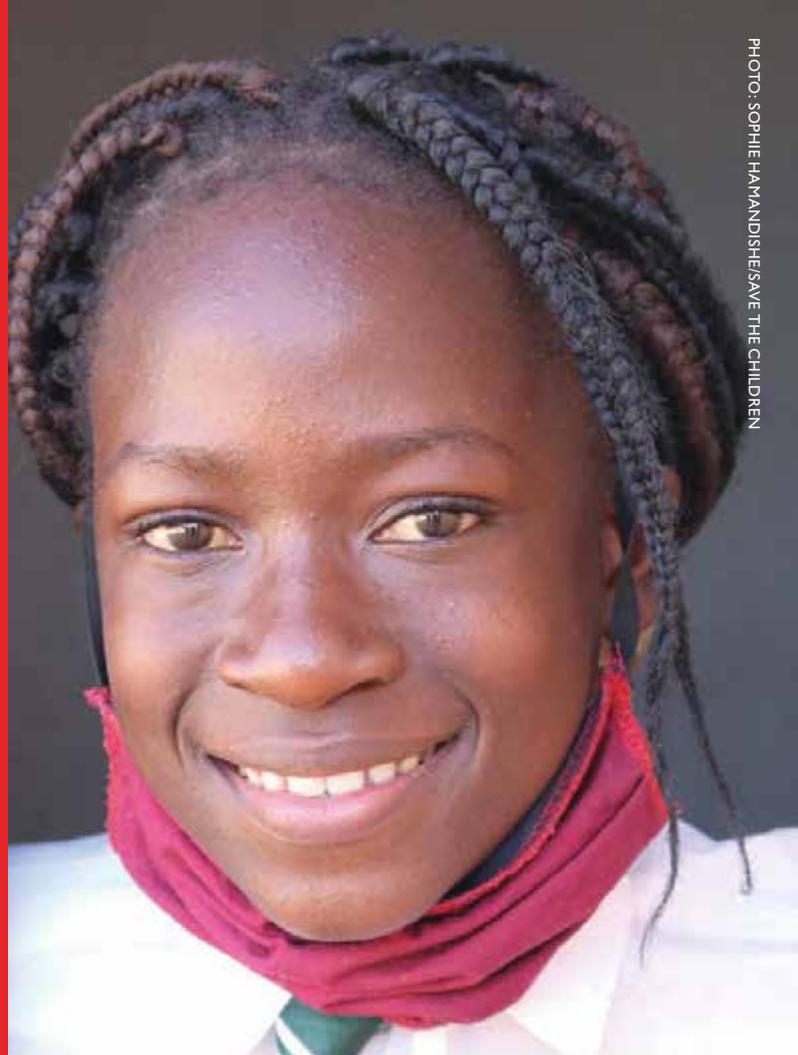
**“What should be done at my school after COVID-19 to ensure that we are all protected? Preventative measures must be maintained. They should increase staff, ensure that the school has water, and build more rooms to reduce the numbers of students in the classrooms.”**

Teresa, 14, Manica Province, Mozambique

**“I know how to protect myself from Coronavirus. I wash my hands with soap and water, I stay indoors, I also wear a mask when I have to go out. The only time I go out is when my mother sends me to the shops. I really miss school. It’s bad that we cannot go to school but we have to stay at home so that we do not get sick. I make sure I do my school work at home so that I do not forget what I learned at school.”**

Shamiso, 10, Zimbabwe

Shamiso and her young brother Eddie are among 650 children from their rural area who received hygiene kits from Save the Children.



toilets and drinking water stations. These should be age-appropriate, low-cost, low-maintenance facilities, with eco-friendly designs, and accessible to children with disabilities. Teachers, educational and cleaning staff should be trained in school hygiene practices and disinfection.

Evidence from school reopening after the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone demonstrated that a well-communicated focus on improving in-school hygiene practices – including training teachers – appeared effective in encouraging parents to

send their children back to school. It meant that schools could reopen before Ebola was totally eradicated.<sup>114</sup>

Menstrual hygiene materials are also essential components of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) kits. Girls and female staff need access to menstrual hygiene materials and provision for their non-infectious disposal. Toilets need to be kept clean, lockable from the inside, and sex-segregated. Hand-washing stations should be available for all and accessible for children with disabilities.<sup>115</sup>

### **Supporting safe hygiene in schools**

In the Philippines, Save the Children is supporting schools to prepare for reopening, through providing hand-washing facilities, hygiene supplies, cleaning and disinfection kits, and information, education and communication materials. Children will play an active role in promoting and monitoring safe practices. We are providing similar supplies to schools

in China and Vietnam. All these countries have solid school health policies and structures to build these activities on.

In Burkina Faso, we have provided 100 schools with soap, hand sanitiser and distributed 20,000 masks for children resuming school.

## Helping schools in Papua New Guinea prepare for return

In Papua New Guinea, Save the Children, in partnership with the East Sepik Provincial Division of Education, has visited 13 elementary schools to deliver public health messages – teaching children the importance of physical distancing, hand washing and letting the teacher know if they are feeling unwell. Staff construct

a Tippy Tap (a hands-free tap), which is gifted to the school, and find out from teachers if any other WASH materials are missing. Those materials are then procured for the school as part of making schools safe for children to return.

In some countries children and families have very limited access to public health guidance – schools are a vital source of information for these families and may be the only link to government advice. Save the Children is using our strong community networks to reach remote schools with vital pandemic public health messages and to help resource them with hygiene equipment.

### PUT IN PLACE PROTOCOLS ON PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Keeping physical distance between people is one of the recommended measures by the World Health Organization to prevent the spread of the virus. As schools reopen in a world where the virus is still present and to date there is no vaccine, physical distancing will need to remain a public health strategy, including in schools. This is to help prevent the spread of the virus among children and, crucially, among teachers and other education staff – including those who may be at greater risk of catching the virus, or whose health will be at greater risk if they do so, such as older teachers.

However, we know that in many contexts, physical distancing in schools and communities is near impossible. European primary schools have an average of one teacher per 13 students; meanwhile in low-income countries each teacher is responsible for 40 children and in some refugee contexts class sizes can be as large as 120 children. Small, crowded classrooms mean that it simply may not be possible to keep children 1–2 metres apart.

There are particular risks for refugee and internally displaced children living in camps, where physical distancing will often be extremely challenging. Reopening schools and learning spaces in camps and camp-like settings may require specific considerations to keep educators, children and their communities safe (see *Safe Back to School: A*

*practitioner's guide*).<sup>116</sup> In many crisis settings where schools are oversubscribed and classrooms crowded, schools have already adopted a double or triple shift.

Strategies that schools can use to implement physical distancing for the safety of students and teachers include:

- considering staggered schedules within the school day
- reducing or amending class sizes
- providing additional school supplies so that students do not need to share equipment
- providing clear guidance and information to school personnel and students about physical distancing measures (see *Safe Back to School: A practitioner's guide*).<sup>117</sup>



PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN

**María, 10, demonstrates good hand washing. She came from Guatemala to Mexico with her family in search of political asylum in the United States. Their court date has been postponed because of the pandemic.**

## SPOTLIGHT ON INDIA

In India, the education system has made remarkable progress in enrolling children in schools with the enactment of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009.<sup>118</sup> But big challenges remain. Children from the most deprived and marginalised communities, including those from the lowest castes and tribes, from religious minority groups, and girls, do not have an equal chance of completing their education. Dropout rates among these groups are high.<sup>119</sup> Issues such as child marriage, child labour, girls engaged in domestic work<sup>120</sup> and financial constraints prevent children from attending school.

The standard of public education in India is weak. Schools lack basic facilities, including functional computers, appropriate WASH facilities and access to menstrual hygiene management, along with weak school management systems.<sup>121</sup> Further, teachers often do not have adequate qualifications, and there are often gaps in teaching positions at all levels of education. The poor standards of education and school facilities affect children's learning levels and dropout rates. Learning assessments taken at the end of primary school indicate 54% of children do not achieve minimum proficiency levels in literacy and numeracy.<sup>122</sup>

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PHOTO: RAJAN ZAVERI/SAVE THE CHILDREN

**Nani, 10, in his classroom in a small rural village in Andhra Pradesh in southern India before the pandemic.**

**He would have dropped out of school had it not been for the intervention of Pala, a Save the Children worker. Nani now attends regularly instead of working in the cotton and chilli fields.**

## SPOTLIGHT ON INDIA *continued*

The first case of COVID-19 in India was confirmed on the 30 January 2020. Schools across the country have been closed since 24 March, affecting more than 320 million learners. Following this closure, the Indian government recommended moving to online distance learning. While some schools have adapted to this, many students and teachers are unable to access online learning. A National Sample Survey Report for 2017–18 found that only 23.8% of Indian households have access to the internet, (14.9% of rural households and 42% of urban households).<sup>123</sup> Further, only 12.5% of students have access to smartphones.<sup>124</sup> Children who do not have access to the internet – often those who are poorest and/or live in rural areas – will miss out on access to learning, thereby reversing progress in education in India.

To address this digital gap, as part of our COVID-19 education response plan, Save the Children is:

- providing education kits and play materials for use at home
- giving guidance to parents and caregivers on hygiene and responsive caregiving
- promoting early childhood development for children using low-tech and no-tech solutions by sharing videos with parents on how to integrate early learning in household activities
- promoting mobile libraries and reading buddies.

Further, we have drafted guidelines for the safe reopening of schools and other educational institutions, which is being launched across states in India. Since the lockdown, we are also advocating with the government, along with education-based networks, to ensure an effective response to the most marginalised children.

## REDUCE SCHOOL DROPOUT BY TARGETING THE MOST MARGINALISED CHILDREN

When schools do reopen, there is a significant risk that some children will not return to the classroom. As described in Section 2, children face many risks that may disrupt their learning while out of school – at a time when we know poverty is on the rise, they may be required to take on extra caregiving responsibilities or forced into child labour to help increase family finances. Girls face an increased risk of gender-based violence, teenage pregnancy and forced marriage. Some families may not be able to afford the fees involved with schooling, and others may be fearful of sending their children to school while the virus remains a health risk.

All these issues mean that when schools reopen, many children – particularly those who are poorest and most marginalised – may not return. Before the pandemic, poor and marginalised children were the most likely to be out of school, most at risk of dropping out of school, and most likely not to be learning while in school. If adequate measures are not put in place to ensure that the most

marginalised groups of children return to learning, progress towards SDG4 will not only stall, but go into reverse.

### BACK TO SCHOOL CAMPAIGNS

After the Ebola crisis, many parents did not know about the reopening of schools and the implementation of strict protocols to ensure their safety. In Liberia, an assessment found that parents prevented their children from returning to school because of continued concerns about Ebola. To motivate parents to send their children back to school, the community needs to feel confident that the right COVID-19 health and safety protocols are in place for all students and education personnel.

As schools reopen, strong, nationally directed, community-led back-to-school campaigns are needed. This is vital to ensure that progress made on universal access to education is not lost. Special attention should be paid to ensuring that lack of space and challenges in applying physical distancing do not lead to some children being discriminated against and dropping out as a result. Special efforts will need to be made to ensure those children

Save the Children's case worker Josette pays door-to-door visits as part of the 2018 Back to School campaign in Bekaa Valley, Lebanon.



PHOTO: NOUR WAHID/SAVE THE CHILDREN

who were already out of school prior to the crisis, especially girls, are brought into school.

The key messages in back-to-school campaigns must be child-friendly, age-appropriate, accessible to and inclusive of people with disabilities, and available in the relevant local languages. They must specifically address the barriers facing girls and others less likely to return to school. To help reach all audiences, messages should be shared through different modalities (eg, loudspeaker, radio, TV –

with captioning, subtitles or sign language interpreter for those with hearing difficulties – and posters with images and simple text for those less literate). Children and young people should have the opportunity to shape the campaigns themselves and participate in the activities. These should include key messages on the following:

- **Facts about school reopening:** reopening date; any steps that caregivers/children and young people must take to prepare for reopening.

### Back to School Bangladesh

In preparation for schools reopening in Bangladesh, Save the Children will carry out a Back to School campaign in partnership with the Ministry of Education. In our target areas, we will deliver messages to parents through loudspeakers advocating for girls to return to schools. We will install hand-washing stations in 120 schools and provide posters and stickers on how to keep safe in school. To boost girls' confidence, during the pandemic we published a book, *My Hero is You*,<sup>125</sup> in the local language and distributed it to girls in our target areas.

### Back to School Lebanon

In Lebanon, we will expand on our previous experience of Back to School campaigns, which had a whole school community approach.

This component focuses on community-based monitoring to identify and target outreach to vulnerable, marginalised, children in the community, including children who were out of school before the COVID-19 closures. Outreach and mobilisation activities will be conducted at household, school, community and national levels, sharing tailored information and messages on school reopening for children, caregivers, teachers and policy decision-makers. This will be supported by large-scale messaging – through different channels and including child-led messages – to ensure that children return to school and to reassure caregivers and community members that schools are safe places for their children.

- **Steps school is taking to be a safe space:** disinfection; physical distancing rules; procedures for health checks; etc.
- **Facts about COVID-19:** how it spreads; how to protect yourself from it.
- **Facts about preparing your child:** ensuring they understand that a school that is protected from COVID-19 is different from the school they last saw, with new rules such as physical distancing.
- **Facts about the value of education:** getting those children who are at greatest risk of not returning to school requires targeted messaging to address social norms that deter parents from supporting their children's education, particularly the education of girls, children with disabilities and those in poorer households.

### FINANCIAL AND NON-FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

We need to ensure that when schools reopen, children and families do not face disincentives to return to learning. This can include putting in place financial and non-financial incentives.

#### Emergency cash-transfer programmes

Cash and voucher assistance can mitigate the impact of the pandemic on household income and livelihoods. It can help economically vulnerable children go back to school and prevent dropout. Further, there is substantial rigorous evidence

from cash transfer programmes globally that they increase the number of children able to attend school, even when that was not the main objective of the programme.

Cash can be spent on transport, clothing, uniforms, supplies, books – or whatever is needed to ensure children can attend school. Transfers are particularly important at the start of the school year when families face the highest expenditures. In light of COVID-19, back-to-school grants could help ensure the majority of children return to school. A particular focus on the most vulnerable groups may be required – for example, adolescent girls, who often face particular challenges in returning to school, and in some cases adolescent boys at risk of recruitment from armed groups.

Cash and voucher assistance can be used to pay school fees directly, through cash grants to schools.<sup>126</sup> Evidence from an evaluation of a USAID Ebola cash transfer programme in Liberia and Sierra Leone found that transfers were increasingly spent on schooling, and in focus group discussions with families in both countries, payment of school fees was one of the top three financial priorities.<sup>127</sup>

Save the Children has developed COVID-19 guidance on delivering cash and voucher assistance to inform the decision-making for our education programming.



PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN

**Migrant families in Venezuela who are affected by the COVID-19 crisis receive cash transfers.**

### Waive school fees and other costs

Given the expected economic consequences of the pandemic, waiving school fees and other costs of education that are often covered by households, particularly in low-income countries, can be an effective way of ensuring that children return to school.

Sierra Leone responded to the challenge of re-enrolment (and indeed, trying to increase enrolment to above pre-Ebola levels) by waiving school and examination fees for two years, as well as by providing school feeding for primary students and through community mobilisation and targeted support to vulnerable groups.<sup>128</sup>

### School feeding programmes

Government authorities dealing with school feeding should be planning for the resumption of these programmes ready for schools reopening, as they are often a lifeline for the poorest families and could encourage re-enrolment.

UNICEF, the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization recommend that decision-makers at the national and subnational level:

- request schools, localities and suppliers to take stock of school feeding challenges and opportunities experienced during the emergency
- compile and document such challenges and opportunities
- keep track of areas that did not manage to continue school feeding in any form

- draft a plan with specific benchmarks, for gradual reestablishment of school feeding, nutrition and WASH programmes
- prepare teachers, staff, parents, students and the community for schools reopening and the continuation of school feeding, health and nutrition services.<sup>129</sup>

### Eliminate other barriers to entry to maximise re-enrolment rates

Some children and families who have been exposed to COVID-19 may be stigmatised in the community, including the school community, preventing them returning to school.

During school closures, some girls may have become pregnant or given birth and be struggling to attend school due to breastfeeding and childcare needs. Schools must ensure that these girls are supported to return to school, including removing any policies that ban or expel pregnant girls. In Sierra Leone, the UK Department for International Development's Ebola recovery programme found that the provision of special education for pregnant girls, supported by a comprehensive teacher training programme, was effective in exceeding enrolment targets. The government of Sierra Leone set up a transition back to school programme in July 2015 and 3,000 girls who had become pregnant during the Ebola epidemic benefited.<sup>130</sup>

Safe spaces for pregnant girls within schools – such as girls clubs, involvement of older girls and provision of counselling on sexual and reproductive health – can encourage girls to return and stay in school.<sup>131</sup>

### Supporting vulnerable girls back to school in Malawi

In Malawi, the support available to girls who are most likely to not return or drop out is multifaceted. First, they are given a special peer mentor or 'buddy'. Girls are matched with other girls who have successfully returned to school after pregnancy or after having been away for another reason. Girls identified as at risk of dropping out are provided bursaries and special interactive life skills training. Schools have female

teacher role models who provide additional support in classes. And in the community the REAL Fathers' and mothers' groups (see page 21) have been trained to help these vulnerable girls return to school. We plan to increase these activities once schools reopen and we are preparing safer training of community members using decentralised methods.

## SPOTLIGHT ON BANGLADESH

The government of Bangladesh has taken several measures to limit the transmission of the COVID-19 virus. There has been a nationwide lockdown since late March 2020, with all educational facilities closed in mid-March. Schools may remain shut until September 2020.

The lockdown has pushed many families below the poverty line, forcing them to rely on financial and food support from the government and other institutions. The new reality is significantly increasing the vulnerability of already vulnerable girls and their families in several ways. While schools are closed, many girls are not receiving proper learning support at home, which is widening the learning gap.

When parents and caregivers have no income, the health of all household members is at risk due to lack of food and nutrition. Many of the poorest caregivers have very little formal education, which means they often lack knowledge of good hygiene behaviour. Parents/caregivers are experiencing significant levels of mental stress due to the lack of work and uncertainty about the future. This, in turn, affects the wellbeing of the girls, who may be exposed to violence within their home and community.

Many schools lack proper hygiene facilities, including hand-washing stations. Teachers lack knowledge about safe school practices. Stress caused by uncertainty due to the pandemic is likely to affect the mental health of teachers and students.

As a result, there is a high possibility of an increased dropout rate among girls due to child labour, early marriage or caregivers keeping girls at home because of concerns about safety within schools.

Save the Children has initiated awareness-raising text and voice messages on COVID-19 and girls' education for targeted parents and teachers. Voice messages are sent to targeted parents about how they can keep themselves and their children safe during the pandemic, how to support children's mental wellbeing, and why children should continue their education and get back to school when they reopen. Leaflets with similar messages have also been distributed. Distance learning is provided to girls over the phone and through sessions delivered by education facilitators in outside spaces wearing

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PHOTO: TOM MERILION/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Taslima, 10, at a community school in Sylhet, Bangladesh.

## SPOTLIGHT ON BANGLADESH *continued*

personal protective equipment. These programmes are being carried out in Jamalpur and Kurigram districts, which are characterised by high rates of poverty, illiteracy, early marriage and girls dropping out of school.

### EDUCATION FOR ROHINGYA REFUGEES

Bangladesh has been home to over 1 million Rohingya refugees since August 2017, when they fled violence and human rights abuses in Rakhine state, Myanmar. There are more than 500,000 children living in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. For almost three years they have had extremely limited access to life-saving services, including education. Teaching material is restricted to lower grades, covering only basic subjects, and children only attend school for two hours a day. As a result, over 95% of Rohingya children over the age of 15 are in no form of school whatsoever. The government of Bangladesh restricted formal learning for Rohingya children since their arrival, however, in January 2020, in a decision celebrated by the

Rohingya community worldwide, the government of Bangladesh approved the use of the Myanmar national curriculum in the camps.

Save the Children, in partnership with UNICEF and UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, has been leading the development of Myanmar Curriculum Pilot Project – which was scheduled to begin in April 2020 with the aim of reaching 10,000 children by the end of 2020. However, in a bid to prevent COVID-19 reaching the camps, the government of Bangladesh shifted all service provision to 'essential' and then 'critical only'. This change closed all child-friendly spaces and temporary learning centres, leaving half a million children without access to any learning opportunities or services that could provide vital support in times of crisis. In addition, an internet ban that has been in place in the camps since September 2019 means that piloting remote forms of mental health support or educational activities is extremely challenging, and, in many cases, impossible. These key services must urgently be reestablished.



Save the Children supports the Wilberforce young mother's support group in Sierra Leone

## HELP CHILDREN MAKE UP FOR LOST LEARNING

When children are out of school, their learning does not just stop but is likely to regress. At this stage in the crisis, it is difficult to quantify how much learning will be lost from school closures – countries shut their schools at different times and it is unclear how long schools will remain closed. In the poorest communities, a child who has not gone to school for more than a year is likely never to return to the classroom.

Literature on ‘summer learning loss’ measures how much each student knows about maths or reading at the end of each school year, and again after two and a half months, at the beginning of the following school year. On average, over all studies and all grades, children from low socioeconomic backgrounds lose the equivalent of three months learning. Analysis from studies examining learning loss from school closures due to teacher strikes found similar results, as did learning loss between grades in Malawi.<sup>132, 133</sup> A recent study of learning loss during a three-month transition period from an accelerated education programme to formal education for disadvantaged children in Ghana found 20–35% loss in annual learning gains for each month that students are out of school.<sup>134</sup>

Studies in low-income countries show that gaps in schooling lead to dropouts at critical transitions between educational levels and can impede the progression of the most disadvantaged children through the school system. Research in Rwanda<sup>135</sup> shows school closures at primary level can have severe cumulative effects, lowering chances of secondary completion and reducing earnings in the

labour market many years later. New research by the World Bank offers starkly different scenarios for learning loss globally during COVID-19.<sup>136</sup>

## SUPPORT ALL CHILDREN TO GET BACK TO SCHOOL

To help children return to school after closure, schools should consider an introductory programme and learning assessments.

### Introductory programme

Given the time spent out of the school, and the varied experience of girls and boys during the crisis, it is recommended that during the initial reopening period, before launching back into academic learning, there is a focus on reestablishing relationships and routines, on arts and play-based learning, and on children’s wellbeing. This might include sharing one another’s experiences during school closures, addressing individual concerns, and simple MHPSS activities. As schools move into a fuller schedule of academic classes, it is recommended that teachers continue to include MHPSS and social and emotional learning activities in the regular class routine.

### Learning assessments

When schools reopen, formative assessment conducted by teachers can identify learning gaps and inform remedial programming and learning opportunities so that all children catch up to grade level rapidly. Currently, many education systems administer summative learning assessments at the end of the primary school cycle, and this is often the first time a child’s learning is assessed and national data collated. As a result, education

**“It’s been two months that the schools are empty  
Let the benches begin to wrinkle  
A big delay is coming  
A desperate look on his face  
Wishes are lower  
The learning stops  
Let’s review our lessons and do our assignments  
In order to better adapt to the opening of classes.”**

Poem by Diaminatou Kanounté, a 16-year-old advocate from Mali



PHOTO: JONATHAN HYAMS/SAVE THE CHILDREN

**Community mobilisers ran Saturday classes in Freetown, Sierra Leone to help children catch up on their education after the Ebola epidemic school closures.**

systems lack concrete data and are not able to identify and respond to challenges at an early enough stage. Save the Children has developed a leading assessment of early childhood development – International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA) – covering motor development, emergent language and literacy, emergent numeracy, and social-emotional development.<sup>137</sup> It is essential that tools like IDELA and other learning assessments (such as the People’s Action for Learning Network’s *International Common Assessment of Numeracy*<sup>138</sup>) are used on the return to school in order to identify learning gaps and provide appropriate catch-up assistance.

### **SUPPORTING CHILDREN TO CATCH UP ON LOST LEARNING**

To enable children to catch up on lost learning – including those who were out of school at the onset of the crisis – and to get targeted ongoing remedial support where required, a combination of alternative education models will need to be adopted. The models chosen will vary according to the needs in each context. The models below have been defined by the global Accelerated Education Working Group.

#### **Catch-up classes**

Catch-up classes are short-term transitional education programmes for children and young people who:

- had been attending school until a disruption to their education
- are at the expected grade for their age
- have missed out on a year or less of school.

Catch-up classes provide students with the opportunity to learn content they missed and support students’ re-entry to the formal system. Given the anticipated length of school closures – likely between five and nine months – catch-up classes are likely to be the most appropriate accelerated education programme.

#### **Remedial programmes**

If, once schools are open and catch-up classes have been completed, some learners are struggling, a remedial programme should be provided. The remedial programme can be concurrent with regular classes, for girls and boys who require additional, targeted, short-term support with content or skills in order to succeed in regular formal classes.

### Accelerated education programmes

For children who have not been to school or who dropped out of school before the COVID crisis and missed more than a year of learning – and as a result are over the expected age for their grade – a fuller accelerated education programme will be needed. Equally, if school closures last for more than a year, then these programmes will be needed for all affected children.

Accelerated education programmes are flexible and age-appropriate, providing a basic education in a condensed format (for example, an eight-year primary curriculum in four years), using teaching and learning approaches that match young people’s level of cognitive maturity.

After Ebola, the government of Sierra Leone developed and implemented an accelerated curriculum, which was rolled out to teachers in all schools and designed to help students catch up.<sup>139</sup>

### Social and emotional learning

Without adequate support for their mental health and social and emotional wellbeing, children will not be able to learn effectively when they return to school. Children and young people may be feeling apprehensive about whether their return to school is safe, and they might be conscious of the amount of learning they have missed and worried about falling behind their peers. In some cases, children may be experiencing grief due to the loss of a family member or friend from the virus or trauma due to experiences of stress and violence during lockdown.

This pandemic has highlighted how important mental health and psychosocial support services are as well as the gaps in provision. Innovations and expansion of MHPSS services during school closures must be maintained and increased further. All schools should use MHPSS messaging, promote peer-to-peer discussions and include social-emotional activities. Teachers should be trained to support children’s wellbeing and how to refer children needing specialist MHPSS support.

#### Our Accelerated Education Programmes

Following the Ebola epidemic in Sierra Leone in 2014, this project gave marginalised girls and boys the chance to learn. In 2019, 95% of a cohort of 197 pupils (109 girls, 88 boys) passed the national exams.

In Uganda, through one Accelerated Education Programme, we enabled refugee girls and boys

to gain access to learning. In 2019, 79% of a cohort of 508 pupils passed the national exams. With support from Save the Children and other NGOs, the Ugandan government has formalised and endorsed the Accelerated Education Programme curriculum.

### ACCELERATED EDUCATION PROGRAMME PRINCIPLES

Many donor agencies, NGOs and governments have set up accelerated education programmes. There is a wide variety of programmes of differing quality and effectiveness.

The inter-agency Accelerated Education Working Group has developed and piloted good practice guidelines, now published as

*Accelerated Education: 10 principles for effective practice guidance.*

Rather than minimum standards of practice, the principles are intended as aspirational goals. The principles and action points must be contextualised to suit the operating environment.

## SPOTLIGHT ON JORDAN

In recent years, Jordan has made great progress in increasing access to education, with nearly universal primary enrolment, gender parity in schools, and a 98% adult literacy rate.<sup>140</sup> However, many challenges remain: schools are overcrowded and in varying states of disrepair; teachers receive limited training and support; and learning outcomes remain low.<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, the growing population of Jordanians and the influx of refugees have placed additional pressure on the public education system, and children and young people who fall out of the system lack opportunities to get back on track.

Learning outcomes are poor throughout basic and secondary education. 70% of students in grades 2 and 3 are reading without comprehension.<sup>142</sup> Students consistently perform poorly in international standardised tests, including in maths and science. Secondary education is neither free nor compulsory, and enrolment rates are 81.3%. Also, there are limited opportunities for early childhood development, with just 13% of three-to-four-year-olds and 59% of five-to-six-year-olds in kindergarten.<sup>143</sup>

Further, Jordan is one of the countries most affected by the crisis in Syria, hosting the second-highest share of refugees per capita in

the world. According to UNHCR, as of June 2020, there were 657,287 registered Syrian refugees in Jordan, of whom 233,000 were school-aged children.<sup>144</sup> UNHCR estimates that 83,920 of these children are out of school and not enrolled in any education system.

Educational challenges are compounded for refugee children, as they often struggle to enrol in a school because they do not have the required documentation. Further, a 2015 UN assessment found that 97% of school-aged Syrian children were at risk of non-attendance because of their families' financial hardship. Nearly 90% of Syrian refugees live below the Jordanian poverty line of \$95 per person per month.<sup>145</sup> Many families therefore cannot afford the costs of school fees, school uniform, books, equipment and transport to and from school. Families living in poverty often turn to negative coping mechanisms, including child labour and child marriage. In Jordan, the child marriage rate is 10.6%; however, it is believed to be much higher among refugee populations. Child marriage in itself can be a barrier to education, with girls not being allowed to continue their education after being married.

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**Maya, 14, is from Syria and lives in Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan with her mother and two brothers.**

**Maya used to be very shy, but after taking part in Save the Children's Coaching for Life project before COVID-19, she built her confidence and made new friends.**



PHOTO: SHERBEL DISS/SAVE THE CHILDREN

## SPOTLIGHT ON JORDAN *continued*

On 2 March 2020, Jordan confirmed the first case of COVID-19 in the country. To manage the spread of COVID-19, the government closed all schools on 15 March, affecting more than 2.3 million learners nationwide. In order to enable distance learning, the Ministry of Education launched an online education portal and televised lessons that are broadcast daily. The distance learning tools are available to all students, including refugees.<sup>146</sup> However, many refugees do not have access to relevant electronic devices or have limited access to the internet, making it difficult for them to benefit from the distance learning resources.

In order to strengthen the education system in Jordan, Save the Children is supporting the development of teachers at all levels, including their social and emotional wellbeing and the quality of teaching practices. Further, we are supporting early childhood care and development by operating early education centres across the country, and working with the government to develop a national quality assurance system for kindergarten providers. We are also working to ensure that children receive a basic education by providing remedial education support for out-of-school children, and supporting their enrolment and retention in education systems.

## SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS

A competent and skilled teacher is one of the most important components in every education system. In times of emergency and crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the critical role that teachers play is amplified. Yet in these circumstances teachers face the most challenging teaching conditions, receive limited support, and may face personal difficulties coping with the crisis.

In reopening schools, all teachers and school staff will need to play an important role in creating safe learning environments, adjusting curricula and assessments, and supporting marginalised learners to catch up. In designing support for teachers as schools reopen, policy-makers should review *Supporting Teachers in Back-to-School Efforts: Guidance for policy-makers*<sup>147</sup> and the accompanying toolkit for school leaders,<sup>148</sup> which were developed by the International Taskforce for Teachers for Education 2030, the International Labour Organization and UNESCO.

Even before the pandemic, the Education Commission estimated that 69 million teachers<sup>149</sup> needed to be recruited globally by 2030 to meet SDG4. The impact of school closures and potentially reduced education budgets could result in a severe reduction in teaching capacity. All efforts must be made to keep teachers connected to the education system through involving them in decision-making, professional development, appropriate pay and incentives, and support for their wellbeing.

## INVOLVE TEACHERS IN DECISION-MAKING AND PLANNING

It is vital that teachers' perspectives are included when planning for the safe opening of schools and in developing teaching practices to mitigate post-pandemic learning loss. Teachers' voices will be critical as countries and institutions plan short-term approaches to assessment, remedial classes and safety protocols, and long-term solutions, such as blended EdTech and classroom practices.

## PROVIDE EFFECTIVE TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Lack of training and support for teachers as schools reopen will put the learning opportunities of the students in jeopardy, and could reduce teacher motivation. Teachers should be trained in how to communicate the COVID-19 pandemic and the changes being undertaken within the school to keep everyone safe.

The increasing use of internet-enabled devices during school closure in many contexts and the likely continued use of some technology as schools reopen mean that teachers will need ongoing training in alternative teaching methods, not least if this technology is to be sustainable. Teacher training institutes should play a role in enhancing training and tools that reinforce teachers' capacity for pedagogical innovation, including digital literacy, information and communications technology, and child-centred teaching skills.

In some contexts, technology is already being used to deliver teacher professional development quickly in low-income settings. Programmes run by the Education Development Trust in Kenya and Rwanda use smartphones and SD cards loaded with videos of teaching practices to support training, coaching and communities of practice. This use of technology to train teachers during school closure could be blended with face-to-face training when schools reopen.<sup>150</sup>

As part of the education system recovery effort in Sierra Leone following the Ebola epidemic, in-service teachers were allocated to illiterate or poorly trained teachers in rural schools. Similar efforts could be rolled out as part of the COVID-19 recovery efforts in many countries.<sup>151</sup>

Save the Children has developed a self-study (and/or face-to-face) Teacher Professional Development module specifically on COVID-19, including how to talk to children about the pandemic, what needs to be considered and child protection. This is being implemented in the DRC, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

### SUPPORT TEACHER WELLBEING

Evidence shows that when teachers are able to manage their stress and find the support they need, they are better prepared to create a protective, safe and constructive learning environment where children can achieve positive learning outcomes.<sup>152</sup>

Recent studies in a range of contexts document the link between teachers' unsatisfactory

working conditions and high levels of stress, poor socioemotional and physical health, poor motivation, low levels of job satisfaction, burnout and low retention in the profession.<sup>153</sup> This trend seems particularly evident for particular groups of teaching professionals, such as female teachers. In humanitarian and protracted emergency contexts, these conditions, levels of stress and impact are exacerbated.<sup>154</sup> The COVID-19 crisis could further increase the strain on teachers as they find themselves personally affected by the virus on multiple levels.

Our COVID-19 teacher training and support includes components on teachers managing their own stress and wellbeing. In Niger and Syria we are building on or establishing peer learning and support networks – either remotely or in small, socially distanced groups.

#### Helping teachers in Jordan build supportive online teams

In Jordan, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, we are promoting teacher wellbeing through online channels. Across three regions, we have equipped and built the capacity of teacher task teams to transfer their usual face-to-face workshops to the virtual sphere and to adapt workshop materials and activities to this context.



Basel, a teacher in Idlib, Syria, is currently holding virtual classes due to school closures.

PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN

## Recommendations

**Support every child to return to school when it's safe to do so:**

- **Minimise the use of schools as health facilities and quarantine sites** where possible.
- **Ensure that schools are safe environments for children to return to**, including health and safety infrastructure and protocols, gender-responsive WASH facilities, menstrual hygiene management kits, additional classrooms, and staffing to enable physical distancing requirements. Develop preparedness plans in case schools need to close again due to localised outbreaks.
- **Create targeted interventions and expand social protection to help keep children in school**, particularly the most marginalised groups of children who are at highest risk of dropping out. Scale up coverage and types of social protection, including cash transfers, school feeding, school grants, freezing school fees, increasing block grants to schools with the most marginalised student population, and ensuring safe transportation to and from school. Coverage of these programmes must be gender-responsive and include the most marginalised and deprived children, progressively working towards universal child benefits over time to protect from future shocks to children's education, including climate change.
- **Create inclusive and gender-sensitive Back to School campaigns**, including community mobilisation and support for girls' education, to raise awareness of and community confidence in safe school opening, as well as initiatives to support the most marginalised children to return to school.
- **Provide every child with a learning assessment on their return to school** to inform blanket and targeted interventions – **including catch-up classes, remedial programmes, and accelerated education programmes.**
- **Provide professional development and support for teachers** so that they can adapt to new circumstances in schools as part of the frontline of response and recovery.
- **Provide mental health and psychosocial support services for children and young people**, and link children to additional services when necessary and available.
- **Address gender-related barriers to education**, including laws, policies and harmful social norms that prevent girls from continuing their education if they are pregnant, married or child mothers.



Kabukabu, 9, with her teacher at her primary school in Zambia before schools closed.

PHOTO: MALAMA MWILA/SAVE THE CHILDREN

## 4 Build back for better learning

As this report has demonstrated, a number of actions need to be taken by governments, donors and the international community to get children back to school and enable them to catch up on the learning they have lost. But that will not be enough; we must go further. We need to make sure that these actions lay the groundwork that will allow us to build back more inclusive and resilient education systems. In doing so, we will finally live up to human rights obligations to provide free and compulsory education and keep the 2030 Agenda promise to leave no one behind.

Investing in education matters for our recovery from this crisis. When children lose out on education, it has an impact on a myriad of different elements of their life – including their future earning potential. A forecast of the economic cost of school closures has found that lost earnings could be up to \$1,337 per student; globally, this equates to approximately \$10 trillion in lost economic output over the coming generation.<sup>155</sup>

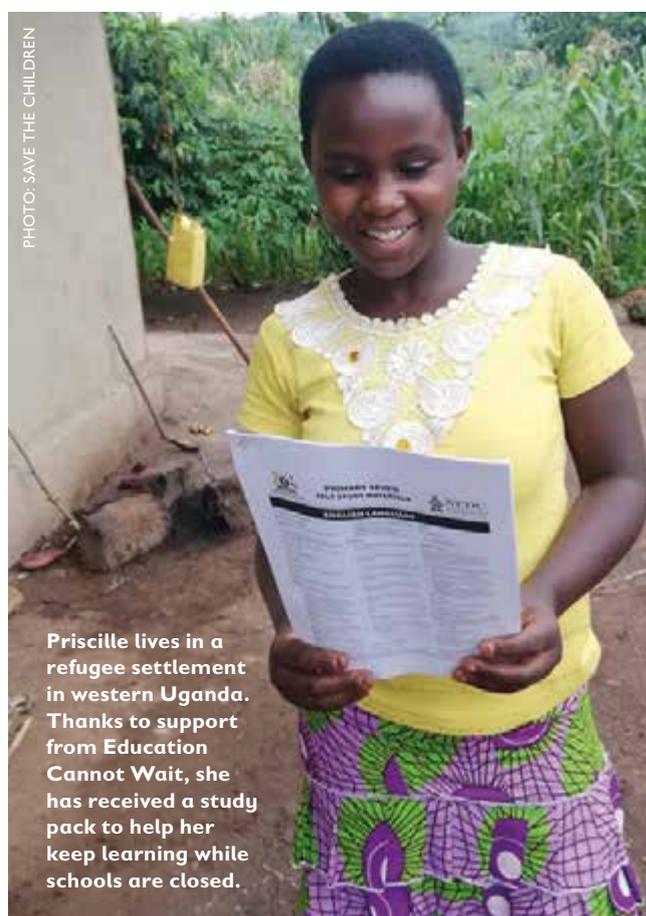
**Yet to date, the international community has not sufficiently recognised the huge learning crisis the pandemic has caused and how important education is for the recovery. This has resulted in limited action and so far a shocking lack of investment in education.**

The World Bank has made available \$160 billion over 15 months to assist countries with the health, economic and social shocks caused by the pandemic.<sup>156, 157</sup> But it is unclear what proportion of this has or will be allocated for education as it depends on country demand. UNHCR, in its global COVID-19 response, has only committed 3% of funding to education<sup>158</sup> (in addition to maintaining funding for teacher salaries across multiple refugee-hosting countries). Education Cannot Wait has called on donors to fund its emergency response fund to a total of \$50 million, but to date it has received just over half of this amount. Given the stakes for millions of children around the world, these are worrying indications of a failure to respond with the urgency merited.

This funding shortfall comes on top of an existing financing crisis for education. One of the key reasons we are not achieving the fundamentals of

access and learning in basic education is the dire financing gap for education. Fulfilling our promise to get every child learning will require total spending on education across all low- and middle-income countries to rise from \$1.2 trillion per year today to \$3 trillion by 2030.<sup>159</sup>

In order for countries to respond to this immediate crisis, recover, and build back better, more and improved investment in education is urgently needed.



Priscille lives in a refugee settlement in western Uganda. Thanks to support from Education Cannot Wait, she has received a study pack to help her keep learning while schools are closed.



Anika, 12, who lives in Kolkata, India, has been attending Save the Children's mobile learning centre for three years.

PHOTO: CLARKESAVE THE CHILDREN

A greater coordinated effort is required from the international community to strengthen the global education architecture and implement an urgent plan of action that will respond to the COVID-19 emergency and the broader learning crisis.

This section sets out why investment in education is such a crucial part of the response to COVID-19 and to building back better. It also examines how the global education architecture can be strengthened and lessons learned from this crisis to get children's learning back on track and accelerate progress towards SDG4.

## DOMESTIC INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION BEFORE COVID-19

The responsibility for providing education for all children lies first and foremost with national governments. They have an obligation to fulfil the right to education for all children. This includes the responsibility to ensure equity and quality in education and respect for children's cultural identity, language and values.<sup>160</sup>

Domestic public spending is by far the most important and sustainable source of finance for education. **The Education Commission projected in 2016 that approximately 97% of the funds required to fill the education financing gap need to come from national governments.**<sup>161</sup> In order to reach that target, two things need to happen. First, governments need to increase the share of the budget spent on education. Second, they need to expand their revenue base.

There are vast disparities between governments in spending on education – from 0.9% of total government expenditure in South Sudan in 2018 to 28.8% in Ethiopia the same year.<sup>162</sup> The international target, agreed by education ministers in the Incheon Declaration, is to spend 15–20% of total expenditure on education, or 4–6% of GDP.<sup>163</sup> But even if all countries did this tomorrow it would not be enough. If the total national budget is small, the share allocated to education will also be small. In order to fulfil the right to education, as well as the other human rights obligations of the state, many countries need to expand their revenue base.

## SPOTLIGHT ON SOUTH SUDAN

South Sudan gained independence from Sudan in July 2011 as an outcome of a 2005 peace deal that ended Africa's longest running civil war. However, the country was plunged into a crisis in 2013 which has left it devastated and has seen the deterioration of an already weakened education system.

At least 2.2 million South Sudanese children were estimated to be out of school in 2018.<sup>164</sup> Girls drop out of school at high rates due to child marriage, with 52% getting married before their 18th birthday.<sup>165</sup> School completion rates in South Sudan are among the lowest in the world – on average, a child receives just five years of education.<sup>166</sup>

With attempts being made to respond to the threat of COVID-19, many parts of the country have faced multifaceted threats to their safety; both due to the pandemic and also to outbreaks of inter-communal violence. The delay in creating visible forms of local leadership, along with increased violence breaking out over scarce resources, has resulted in huge challenges for humanitarian actors like Save the Children to access those who are worst affected. Children living in such situations are more likely to be further left behind in accessing basic services like education.

As schools closed in response to the pandemic, an estimated 1.9 million children (43% girls) will have lost learning opportunities and

35,000 teachers and volunteers are at risk of losing their jobs.<sup>167</sup> This is in addition to the 2.2 million children already out of school.<sup>168</sup>

The government, in collaboration with others, has developed a National Education Sector COVID-19 response plan. In collaboration with development partners the government put together learning resources for communities to access through radio and online platforms. However, many children do not have access to these platforms.

Save the Children sits on the National COVID-19 Taskforce for Education and we have been able to provide strategic leadership and guidance to the government.

- Through policy briefs and children's consultations, we have continued to highlight the risks to children's rights during this pandemic
- Through existing programmes we are actively engaging with families to advocate for the change in behaviours required to minimise the impact of the virus.
- We are working to provide access to education for children through an approach that blends the use of technology and conventional approaches to reach those who are most marginalised or in hard-to-reach areas.
- We are providing guidance and training for teachers on how they can best plan lessons for children in line with social distancing measures.



Children attend a primary school in Waat, South Sudan, run by Save the Children.

PHOTO: CHRISTENA DOWSETT/SAVE THE CHILDREN

## COVID-19 COULD REDUCE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION FINANCING

Even with large existing funding gaps in education, the COVID-19 pandemic poses a great threat to education financing. The global lockdown has had, and is likely to continue to have, a significant impact on global economic growth. Pandemic-related consequences – such as a decrease in foreign investment, plummeting commodity prices,<sup>169</sup> and a fall in tourism revenues and remittances – have severely affected the global economy, with the IMF in June 2020 projecting a 4.9% decrease in the global economy.<sup>170</sup>

This global economic recession is a serious threat for the right to education in many countries. First, national budgets are shrinking. And second, in response to the pandemic, there is an urgent need to increase spending on health and social protection, including the progressive realisation of universal child benefits to help protect families from future shocks and keep children in school. As a result, in low- and middle-income countries the pandemic may tempt governments to reduce planned increases in education spending for 2020, or, worse, to reverse the growth in education spending since 2000.

**New analysis by Save the Children for this report examines what we expect the likely impact of COVID-19 to be on education budgets.** We used GDP growth projections and government expenditure estimates from the World Bank and IMF for low- and middle-income countries.

Our projections use as a benchmark the education spending planned for 2020 before the COVID-19 pandemic. We then compared this benchmark with a number of different possible scenarios. The optimistic scenario, assumes that government expenditure on education as a percentage of overall expenditure remains constant, with adjustments caused solely by revenue losses as economic growth slows. The pessimistic scenario assumes that, along with the revenue adjustment, the share of government expenditure allocated to education drops by 10% due to a reprioritisation of spending towards other sectors (see Annex 2). Between these extremes we chart a mid-case scenario.

Taking the optimistic scenario first, education expenditure remains constant. Indeed, with many countries projected to see a significant increase in government spending as a response to the pandemic (even after taking into account reduced GDP growth), there is the potential in most countries – though not lower-middle-income countries – for education spending to increase slightly compared with the business-as-usual scenario without COVID-19.

The mid-case scenario assumes that additional budget resources will mostly be spent on health and other sectors with no increase in education spending in 2020 (compared with 2019). This assumption is in effect equivalent to a 4.3% decrease in the share of budgets governments allocate towards education. In this scenario, the economic and fiscal consequences of the pandemic will reduce government spending on education by \$22 billion in 2020 across the 98 low- and middle-income countries in the sample. This gap could widen to \$55 billion in 2021. Most of the projected losses would occur in lower-middle-income countries. Our projections examined education spending for 2020 if the COVID-19 pandemic had not happened, and compared this with a number of different possible scenarios, ranging from an optimistic scenario, which assumes that government expenditure on education remains constant at pre-crisis levels as a percentage of overall expenditure, to a pessimistic scenario, which assumes that a share of government expenditure allocated to education drops by 10% due to a reprioritisation in spending towards other sectors (see Annex 2).

In the pessimistic scenario, we assume a 10% drop in the share of budgets governments allocate towards education (equivalent to a comparable analysis by the World Bank in May 2020<sup>172</sup>). **In this scenario, public expenditure on education could drop by more than \$83 billion in 2020 and \$109 billion in 2021 (see Annex 2 for full methodology).**



**Tala, 9, lives in a camp in Idlib, Syria where she usually attends a school supported by Save the Children's partner. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our partners have had to adapt their programming and now do virtual classes to support remote learning.**

## COVID-19 IMPACT ON HOUSEHOLD BUDGETS AND SCHOOL PAYMENTS

According to the Education Commission's report from 2016, households in low-income countries contribute more than one-third – 39% – of total education spending. This is an average, which means in some countries, household contributions are even higher.<sup>173</sup> Declining incomes may also lead to shifts in enrolment from private schools to public schools, as described in the Lebanon country spotlight (pages 29–30), adding to pressure on government education budgets. The poorest households bear a relatively heavy burden of household spending on education. For many of these families, the economic downturn and loss of income will mean that they won't have the money to keep sending their children to school, and some children will need to spend their days on income-generating activities.

The pandemic and its consequences will affect millions of girls and boys negatively and cuts in

education budgets can have detrimental impacts on children's learning worldwide. Governments must actively ensure that children continue to learn throughout and after COVID-19. Target 1.3 of the SDGs requires countries to “implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors”, which can help countries prepare more effectively for shocks to children's education, such as the COVID-19 crisis, and make sure domestic investments in education are upheld and increased in the medium to long term to be able to build the education system back better.

As governments respond to the pandemic, difficult choices will need to be made about government spending. The virus is causing a significant strain on health systems. National lockdowns are being implemented to prevent the further spread of the virus, which is resulting in many people being unable to go to work, risking a rise in unemployment and dependency on social welfare programmes.

## SPOTLIGHT ON NIGERIA

Even though primary education is officially free and compulsory in Nigeria, about 10.5 million school-age children are out of school, the highest number in the world.<sup>174</sup> Only 61% of 6–11-year-olds regularly attend primary school. In the North the picture is bleaker, with a rate of 53%. Girls across the country face further barriers due to cultural and traditional practices such as child marriage.

Following the first recorded case of COVID-19 on 27 February 2020, the Ministry of Education ordered the closure of schools, which affected more than 46 million children. The impact of these school closures extends beyond disruption to education. For low-income families, children will be pressured into working and caring for family members who contract the virus. This could result in millions more staying out of school in the long term. Within an already weakened state, COVID-19 will only serve to compound pre-existing education inequalities.

The Ministry of Education created an effective response strategy, with aims to mitigate the impact on children's education through the

dissemination of information, guidance and resources including access to remote learning tools. All states have made arrangements for school feeding programmes to resume and some states have begun to reopen schools to try to catch up on missed lessons.

However, there have been growing concerns that policy measures have been too vague and have not addressed the learning needs of those who are most vulnerable and disadvantaged. Furthermore, due to huge disparities in wealth and access to technology many households have been unable to access the resources required to engage children in effective remote learning via radio and television channels.

Save the Children is advocating for the government response to focus on ensuring the protection of the livelihoods and income of the poorest and most vulnerable, including girls and refugees.

- Alongside UNICEF, in their capacity as a Cluster Lead, we have led the development of Nigeria's education sector COVID-19 **response strategy** in the North East.
- We are supporting the COVID-19 committee on the aim to initiate **long distance radio interactive learning** whilst schools are closed and have procured **1,450 solar powered radio handsets** to be distributed to the most vulnerable children within targeted communities, to enhance their ability to participate in radio home learning programmes.
- We are working with education authorities to **develop paper-based resources** for children who are unable to access radio signals.
- We are supporting the development of **guidance for schools planning to reopen** after the pandemic subsides, which will be shared with the Ministry of Education.
- As part of our previously designed **Girl's Education Campaign** we are continuing our efforts to ensure that the impact of this pandemic is minimised by continuing to gather evidence, raise awareness and mobilise communities while also elevating child-led advocacy engagement opportunities at the Federal and State levels.



PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN

Aisha, 16, is a member of the Katsina State Children's Parliament, supported by Save the Children, which advocates on children's rights.

## HOW TO FINANCE THE CRISIS AND BUILD BACK BETTER AND MORE RESILIENT EDUCATION SYSTEMS

### NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

Governments in low- and middle-income countries need to **expand their tax base** and increase their tax-to-GDP ratio to at least 20%.<sup>175</sup> Tax revenues are the most reliable and sustainable source of income for a national state. Expanding the tax base and closing tax loopholes should be a priority for all countries. In countries with a low tax-to-GDP ratio it will not be enough to increase the spending share to education; the overall budget also needs to increase. While difficult in the immediate COVID-19 economic crisis, this remains the single most important financing priority for governments seeking to put education on a sustainable footing.

**Tax policies should be progressive** to make sure that the financial burden is not carried by people who are poor and/or marginalised. Governments should strive to introduce taxes that are redistributive and gender-sensitive, such as taxes on property, land, inheritance and wealth. Fair taxation on multinational corporations should also be prioritised. Many developing countries offer tax holidays and other tax incentives to multinational corporations in order to attract investments, even though research shows that the decision to invest is not primarily guided by tax incentives. Tax reforms should be guided by transparent processes, with citizen representation, and be open for scrutiny.

### Equitable spending

To reach the most marginalised children, governments must build and invest in education systems that ensure that no child is left behind, which includes targeting investments towards progressive interventions such as pre-primary and basic education, to ensure that existing inequalities are tackled and not exacerbated. In low-income countries, the poorest 20% of people receive only 10.3% of education resources.<sup>176</sup>

Making equitable education budgets and prioritising resources towards those groups and geographical areas that need it the most requires collection of and access to good quality data. Governments must systematically collect and report data on household spending on education, including all direct, indirect and informal fees that may be borne by all social and economic groups. This data is crucial to inform

targeting of finance and to identify group-specific costs that must be taken into account.

### Illicit financial flows

Governments must expand their national tax base in order to secure funding for education, but global action is required to tackle illicit financial flows (IFFs) and tax avoidance and to strengthen international tax cooperation. IFFs originate from crime and corruption and involve money being taken out of a country through tax evasion, money laundering, bribery and other criminal acts, as well as from mispriced goods.

Governments must take concrete measures to crack down on tax havens by getting all jurisdictions to move towards automatic exchange of tax information and to implement public registers of the true owners of companies and trusts. Each country should also require public country-by-country reporting by multinational companies on financial information, including key data on profits, taxes paid, subsidies received, turnover and number of employees.<sup>177</sup>

### Corruption

Many countries struggle with a high level of corruption and mismanagement of funds, and studies suggest that corruption is widespread in the education sector. Public expenditure tracking surveys have found that a quarter to a half of funds meant for education budgets do not reach schools.<sup>178</sup> This damages children's learning outcomes – the Education Commission found a clear negative relationship between corruption and student maths and reading scores.<sup>179</sup>

There is a need to strengthen accountability in education financial management to end this. Transparency in budgeting and spending throughout the education system is needed to be able to follow the money from national budgets to spending in schools. National, district and school budgets need to be published in detail, and confidential complaint channels are essential to enable people to report suspected corruption without fear of retaliation.<sup>180</sup>

### Debt

Debt repayments still take up a sizable portion of developing country governments' revenue, money which could otherwise be used to respond to and counteract the health and economic crises. Even before the COVID-19 crisis, 34 out of 73 low-income

countries were already in or at high risk of debt distress. With sharp reductions in incomes coupled with sharp increases in borrowing costs since late February 2020, this picture may only get worse.<sup>181</sup>

Global actors and donors must work together to ensure debt relief that can unlock funds in developing countries' budgets. Additional finance in the form of lending in response to COVID-19 should not put low- and middle-income countries at higher risk of debt distress.

Borrowers and lenders share responsibility for preventing unsustainable debt situations and should agree sustainable long-term solutions to the debt crisis. The social and human costs of the pandemic are huge and demonstrate the need for reform of international financing. Debt sustainability assessments should move beyond the narrow focus on repayment capacity to also consider the state's financial capacity to fulfil human rights, including the right to education.

The Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) is a step in the right direction in this time of crisis. The Initiative, agreed by the G20 in April, 2020 after prompting by the IMF and World Bank, provides for a suspension of debt payments by official bilateral creditors in 74 IDA-eligible countries. Commercial creditors – sovereign bond holders, banks and commodity trading companies – were requested by the G20 to provide comparable terms.

However, bilateral creditors account for just \$6bn of the \$45bn owed by countries eligible for the DSSI during 2020. Scheduled repayments to private creditors are twice this amount – around \$14bn – yet private creditors have so far failed to provide comparable debt relief.

What is needed is a comprehensive debt relief framework. In the case of the DSSI countries the case for bold action would be strengthened

by measures that convert debt liabilities into investments in children, including education. If the COVID-19 crisis deepens, it has to be recognised that: debt restructuring may be necessary, along with debt cancellation for the countries that need it most; more countries must be covered by the moratorium; and all creditors must take part – including multilateral, bilateral and private creditors. These short-term measures must be linked to a more comprehensive and long-term approach to debt crisis resolution. To make debt restructuring more efficient, equitable and successful we need a systematic, comprehensive and enforceable process for sovereign debt restructuring, created through the UN system.

### **Austerity and cuts to public sector wage bills**

The IMF has made welcome efforts to put planning for the SDGs at the heart of its policy analysis. However, there are still concerns over the gap between policy statements and policy advice. Recent research has highlighted cases in which a concern to reduce inflation appears to have trumped other considerations, including those related to the SDGs.<sup>182, 183</sup> A large number of low- and middle-income countries are advised on austerity measures that in many cases lead to governments being unable to employ enough teachers, doctors, nurses or care workers.<sup>184</sup>

Strict inflation targets squeeze countries' capacity to spend more on priority services, such as education, and policies that restrain public sector wage bills make it difficult to recruit more teachers or to pay existing teachers better. Governments should determine the number of teachers that are needed to achieve the goals set out in SDG 4 – the IMF could help support this process by working with governments to establish the fiscal targets needed to achieve the goals.

## SPOTLIGHT ON UGANDA

There has been significant progress in Uganda, with school enrolment almost tripling since the government introduced universal primary education in 1997. However, enormous gaps remain and there are signs of progress stalling. More than half of children who enrol in primary school drop out before completing it; many schools are overcrowded and lack basic resources; and most children do not attain grade-level proficiency in reading and numeracy. Uganda hosts more than 1.4 million refugees – the third largest number globally – and this creates further need. Just to meet current enrolment of refugee children, an additional 2,290 teachers and 3,864 classrooms are needed.

Yet the percentage of Uganda's national budget allocated to education has decreased every year for the past five years. Primary education expenditure is \$105 per child, which is 81.5% below average in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>185</sup> The costs for refugee education are mostly borne by international donors and local communities.

Schools were closed in late March as a result of COVID-19 and remain closed indefinitely. 15 million children are out of school, including 600,000 refugees. We are already seeing a rise in abuse and violence against children, as well as increased cases of child labour and other harmful practices as families are driven further into poverty.

Many children are in areas with no or limited phone, TV and internet coverage, and even radio does not reach many of the most vulnerable. The Ministry of Education and Sports, with support from UN and NGOs including Save the Children, quickly developed an Education Preparedness and Response plan, including self-study materials for all primary and secondary school learners. The materials are being distributed to homes and used to deliver lessons on TV and radio. However, with limited budgets, many children risk being left behind. More than 57% of refugee children, for example, have still not received any home learning materials.

*continued on next page*

**Ivan, 7, and his grandmother learning from home in north-east Uganda**



PHOTO: PETER MORU/SAVE THE CHILDREN

## SPOTLIGHT ON UGANDA *continued*

Save the Children is supporting the government-led response, through health, education and child protection programmes in 24 districts.

- We have worked with the National Curriculum Development Centre to develop home study materials for national use, in line with the curriculum. We have included these in **home learning packs** which we have so far distributed to 105,000 children nationwide.<sup>186</sup>
- We have produced and broadcast **radio learning programmes** for pre-primary and primary-aged children. In remote rural areas and refugee settlements we have set up 'community radio' with a mast and loudspeaker on which lessons are broadcast, and distributed handheld radios.
- In partnership with a leading independent school we produce a weekly one-hour **TV learning** programme with teachers giving interactive lessons.
- We lead the Education Consortium, made up of 15 organisations working together to mobilise resources to keep refugee children learning and provide mental health support.

## GLOBAL ACTORS

### International financing of education

Significant support will be required from international donors to respond to the COVID-19 education emergency. While the majority of financing for education comes from national governments, international aid plays a critical role in low- and middle-income countries. Aid to education reached the highest amount ever recorded at \$15.6 billion in 2018, an increase of 9% from the previous year. From one year to the next, aid to basic education increased by 6%, aid to secondary education by 7%, and to post-secondary education by 12%.<sup>187</sup>

Despite these climbs, recent estimates from UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report suggests that global aid is likely to decline by up to \$2 billion by 2022 as a result of COVID-19 – entailing a 12% drop in international support for education.<sup>188</sup>

The Education Commission recommended in its report that the share of all aid that goes to education should rise from 10% to 15% – about the same level that went to health in 2016.<sup>189</sup> This would mean that overall official development assistance (ODA) devoted to education would be just 0.07% of the total GDP of OECD countries in 2030.

However, we are currently a long way off this, and COVID-19 is likely to make it worse. Education's share of global ODA rose for the first time since 2009, from 6.9% in 2015 to 7.6% in 2016. However, in comparison, the share for health rose from 15% to 18% and for infrastructure from 24% to 31%.

Basic education is not prioritised by key donors, receiving only 45% of total aid to education with 55% going to secondary and upper secondary education.<sup>190</sup> This weighting does not make sense given the greater needs in basic education, as well as the importance of basic education in securing learning and access to higher levels of the education system. Pre-primary education receives \$76 million per year – under 1% – of education aid, in contrast to \$3.6 billion spent on post-secondary; in 2015 the amount of aid disbursed on scholarships was 26 times that spent on pre-primary.<sup>191</sup> Aid disbursements are also not allocated to the countries most in need. The share of basic education aid to low-income countries fell from 36% in 2002 to 22% in 2016.<sup>192</sup>

Germany and France are two of the top three donors to education. However, 58% of Germany's and 69% of France's aid is directed at scholarships and costs for students from developing countries to access tertiary education.<sup>193</sup> We are calling for ODA for scholarships to be excluded from the OECD Development Assistance Committee definition of ODA.

What's more, our 2019 report *Walk the Talk?: Review of financing for education in emergencies, 2015–18*<sup>194</sup> found that, while the amount of humanitarian aid allocated to education doubled between 2015 and 2018 (from \$284 million to \$565 million), **the current global average of 2.24% of humanitarian funding allocated to education is well below the 4–10% Save the Children recommends.** This funding should increasingly be channelled through **multilateral mechanisms** in multi-year increments to ensure maximum impact.

An example of good practice is the European Union's commitment to education in emergencies, which has increased the percentage of its annual humanitarian budget spent on education to 10%.

We strongly encourage donors to maintain their level of ODA, but it is likely that some ODA budgets will shrink as a result of the pandemic and economic recession. For example, the ODA budget of some donor countries – the UK, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Sweden – is connected to their gross national income. When reviewing ODA spending, donors must ensure they target investment on fighting poverty and increasing essential services, including education.

### The World Bank

The World Bank has a critical role to play in multiplying aid. Now more than ever is the time for it to step in to help the poorest children in the poorest countries through providing support to education.

At its last replenishment in 2019, the International Development Association (IDA) – the part of the World Bank that focuses on the world's poorest countries – received \$82 billion in funding from donors.

In its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Bank announced \$160 billion has been made available in financing, tailored to the health, economic and social shocks that countries are facing, including over \$50 billion of IDA resources on grant and highly concessional terms. However, this IDA financing is being provided by frontloading existing funding commitments, rather than from new and additional resources which are needed for responding to this crisis.

G20 economies allowed the world's poorest countries to suspend repayment of official bilateral

credit on 1 May 2020. Eligible countries include all IDA countries and all least-developed countries that are currently on debt service to the IMF and the World Bank. In principle, all these countries would be free to ask for a suspension of debt payments, but each beneficiary country will be required to commit to use the created fiscal space to increase social, health or economic spending in response to the crisis. However, only a small number of countries have actually asked for a suspension of debt payments.

Responding to this education crisis for the poorest children requires additional financing, on top of existing funds. The World Bank's shareholders should provide a supplementary IDA budget of around \$35bn over the next two years, with at least \$10bn in grant financing. The global education emergency is one element in a wider crisis which could lead to a wholesale reversal in progress achieved for children. To its credit, the World Bank has frontloaded IDA-19 spending – but frontloading is not a substitute for new and additional finance. The World Bank should also be leveraging its balance sheet through bond issues and donor credit guarantees, potentially including the International Finance Facility for Education (IFFEd). The World Bank should also work with UNICEF and national governments to create a facility that converts suspended debt service payments into investments in children. This would ensure that money freed up from debt savings is invested in priority areas, such as education.

### The Global Partnership for Education (GPE)

The GPE is the largest source of multilateral funding for education. GPE's mission is to mobilise global and national efforts to contribute to the achievement of equitable, quality education and learning for all. The partnership has a unique role – agreeing standards for education planning and policy-making, and mobilising development financing from public and private donors around the world to support and monitor the implementation of national education plans.

On 1 April 2020, the GPE unlocked \$250 million to help developing countries mitigate both the immediate and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on education. On 1 June, to respond to strong demand from partner countries, GPE increased the COVID-19 response window to

\$500 million. This financing will support distance learning programmes and school re-opening, prioritising the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, including girls, children with disabilities and special needs, and children without access to electricity and internet connection.

GPE says that its COVID-19 fund will help to sustain learning for up to 355 million children in 67 countries. However, this funding requires donor support, which should be separate from and in addition to replenishment funding. At this year's UN General Assembly the GPE will issue its new Case for Investment for replenishing funds for the next strategic period (2021–25). It is critical that bilateral donors step up with new funding at the replenishment conference in 2021.

### Education Cannot Wait (ECW)

ECW is the only global fund dedicated to education in emergencies and protracted crises. Since it became operational it has invested \$309.9 million across 29 countries, reaching 2.6 million children affected by crises with good-quality education and training more than 41,000 teachers.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, ECW has acted quickly to disburse \$42 million across 36 countries already affected by humanitarian crises. The duration of grants varies between six and 12 months. Grants focus on:

- ensuring continuous access to education, including online and radio learning
- information campaigns, risk communications and community engagement in local languages
- mental health and psychosocial support
- child protection
- water and sanitation facility upgrades in schools and learning centres.

To fulfil ECW's funding gaps for the COVID-19 response and for the remainder of its strategic period up to the end of 2021, it requires **an additional \$300 million** to its global fund and **\$2 billion** in-country to support ten multi-year resilience programmes (in Bangladesh, the occupied Palestine territory, Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Chad, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and Uganda).

### The International Financing Facility for Education (IFFEd)

The International Financing Facility for Education is a forthcoming mechanism in the education financing architecture. It was proposed by the Education Commission after their analysis showed that achieving the recommended spending on education through bilateral, domestic and multilateral channels would still leave a \$10 billion education financing shortfall by 2020, and a gap of over \$25 billion by 2030.

The IFFEd aims to blend ODA with new, additional money for education by creating a consortium of public and private donors and international financing institutions (including the World Bank and regional development banks). Using credit guarantees provided by donors, the multilateral development banks would use their 'Triple A' rating to borrow capital on the international markets at reduced interest rates and mobilise funds that are otherwise not available for education. Multilateral development banks would then provide loans at a lower interest rate than the beneficiary countries could obtain in the private market. These funds would be blended with donor grants, which would subsidise loans, effectively making them available at an even lower interest rate.

IFFEd has a potentially significant role to play in the response to this crisis. As we have highlighted in this report, many lower-middle-income countries face the prospect of deep cuts in education spending. IFFEd's focus is to target lower-middle-income countries, which are ineligible for the vast majority of existing education ODA grant financing, as the primary beneficiaries. These countries house the greatest numbers of people in absolute poverty and have large, chronic and unmet financing needs for education. Three of the five nations with the largest number of people living in extreme poverty are lower-middle-income countries – India, Nigeria and Bangladesh.

Nearly half of the world's 1.4 billion school-age children live in lower-middle-income countries (compared with 200 million in low-income countries), including the majority of out-of-school children – more than 150 million – as well as half of all refugee and displaced children and young people. Despite these critical needs, lower-middle-income countries face chronic funding shortfalls in

education. By 2030, they will account for nearly 80% (more than \$70 billion) of the global shortfall in international funding for education, even taking into account ambitious domestic budget increases and more efficient spending. Even if lower-middle-income countries put in place measures to mobilise

more resources domestically – notably from reforming their tax systems – they would still rely on external financing. Nevertheless, ODA financing for IFFEd should come on top of donors' ODA for education, and not at the expense of aid to low-income countries.

## THE INTERNATIONAL FINANCING FACILITY FOR EDUCATION: SAVE THE CHILDREN'S PRINCIPLES FOR THE DESIGN AND OPERATIONS OF IFFEd<sup>195</sup>

### PROGRESSIVE UNIVERSALISM

The international community is dangerously off track to reach SDG4, and we are particularly failing the most marginalised children. The COVID-19 crisis further exacerbates this. IFFEd should, therefore, be a financing mechanism that helps fill the education financing gap for those children left furthest behind. We must see a stronger requirement, not just a recommendation, for borrower countries to spend IFFEd financing on the most marginalised children. This requires practical support to countries to understand and assess equity needs, as well as stepping stone equity targets to be a core requirement in any investment case to apply for IFFEd funding. Furthermore, it requires accountability mechanisms to be in place to honour these targets and a degree of transparency allowing public scrutiny of funding and policy implementation.

### ADDITIONALITY

For IFFEd to have the value-added effect that is so sorely needed, IFFEd financing must come on top of donor countries' aid to education, and be additional to borrower countries' domestic

spending on education. This must be a clear requisite for IFFEd financing. A financing gap cannot be covered by taking funds allocated to the poorest countries, and transforming these into loans for lower-middle-income countries. IFFEd should not accept aid that would otherwise have benefited the poorest countries.

### DEBT SUSTAINABILITY

When relying on the multilateral development banks' own assessments of debt sustainability, countries risk borrowing more than they can cope with. Even if undertaking an exhaustive analysis, countries at moderate risk of debt distress are not necessarily safe from going straight to debt distress (as three of the last four countries in debt distress have done). All multilateral development banks should adhere to the UN Conference on Trade and Development principles for responsible lending and borrowing and the IMF's updated framework of debt sustainability for low-income countries, which includes contingent liabilities and private debt. Loans should not be given to countries at moderate or high risk of debt distress, or in debt distress.

## FINANCING FOR REFUGEE EDUCATION

Our 2018 report *Time to Act: A costed plan to deliver education to every refugee child*<sup>196</sup> showed that to deliver good quality pre-primary, primary and secondary education to 7.5 million refugee children aged 3 to 18 in low- and middle-income countries over five years would cost \$21.5 billion. Not all refugee hosting countries have the same level of need for external assistance. Taking this into account, we estimated that \$11.9 billion should be provided by the international community. This equates to just \$320 per child per year.

The education area of focus 'stole the show'<sup>197</sup> at the first-ever Global Refugee Forum in December 2019, with hundreds of policy and financial pledges made in support of the Global Framework on Refugee Education.<sup>198</sup> This momentum must continue with progress on pledges reported on a regular (at least annual) basis.

At the Forum, the World Bank announced up to \$2.2 billion will be available in a dedicated sub-window for refugees and host communities over the next three years. This is part of the recent replenishment of the International Development Association.<sup>199</sup> Given the need for financing that looks beyond traditional humanitarian appeal sources, this new funding is a vital and welcome development and a significant part of it should be allocated to education for refugees, particularly to help it recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Also at the Global Refugee Forum, the World Bank, the GPE and ECW announced a joint pledge to improve collaboration, coordination and financing of global efforts in support of education for refugees and host communities. These funds committed as a first step to publish, by no later than mid-2020, a plan about how this commitment will be operationalised. We eagerly await the publication and implementation of this plan.



PHOTO: JONATHAN HYAMS/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Mariam, 11, stands near her home in a camp for Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

## STRENGTHENING THE GLOBAL EDUCATION ARCHITECTURE

Writing in preparation for the Sustainable Development Summit at the 2019 United Nations General Assembly, UN Secretary-General António Guterres called for a commitment to a decade of delivery and called for greater ambition, urgency and a focus on solutions that would move the world “from commitments to actions and onwards to results”.<sup>200</sup> This perfectly encapsulates the task facing both the global education sector and the wider international community in addressing the challenge of delivering SDG4 – now made more urgent than ever due to COVID-19.

The global education sector could be strengthened in a number of ways. Issues it faces include a lack of agreed leadership, under-resourced coordination, lack of technical capacity and financing, and an absence of clear accountability mechanisms.

Bilateral and multilateral donors must be coordinated and must be complementary. Conversely, too many donors and funding mechanisms operating simultaneously in a sector can lead to duplication and other cost inefficiencies. It is therefore important that these mechanisms are adequately resourced.

Different agencies, such as the GPE, ECW and forthcoming IFFEd have complementary mandates, and all offer different comparative advantages in closing the education financing gap. But to avoid donor fatigue and risks of confusion over the purpose of different sources of funding, it is critical that the education sector explicitly defines mandates, roles and responsibilities to clarify to donors, developing country governments and wider stakeholders how both the existing and emerging education aid architecture works.

While the health sector is by no means perfect, education could learn a lot from it in establishing collective leadership and action. For example, in 2018, at the suggestion of Germany, Ghana and Norway, 12 global health organisations came together to develop the *Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All*.<sup>201</sup> The plan commits the 12 organisations to align and coordinate their work better, to accelerate progress in global health through seven cross-cutting areas, and to strengthen accountability by developing a common framework for assessing and reporting on results.

Save the Children is the only NGO Global Cluster Lead Agency, jointly leading the Global Education Cluster with UNICEF and leading/co-leading national education clusters in 21 of the 25 education clusters at country level. Save the Children also has a leadership role in at least 23 national education in emergencies working groups – and participates in many other national coordination mechanisms. These coordination mechanisms play a critical role in ensuring that education responses are timely, predictable and effective. In addition, as a child-focused, international, civil society actor, Save the Children can leverage its unique cluster role to promote the voice of children on important international commitments, such as the Grand Bargain.

### Improving financing efficiencies

The COVID-19 crisis has affirmed the critical need for efficient and effective education funding mechanisms and efficiencies within education systems. With the uncertain nature of the pandemic, not only are countries responding in different ways, but their responses evolve on a daily and weekly basis as the pandemic advances and changes.

We need flexible and responsive funding mechanisms that ensure funding reaches the most vulnerable children faster, and that will enable governments and technical specialists to make quick and decisive adaptations to address the ever-changing challenges and context to protect every child’s learning.

Donors and multilateral funds need to work towards aligned funding and reporting processes that enable stretched government staff and programming teams to focus on rapid, good quality delivery. The onerous demands of different processes and reporting timeframes and structures can compete with critical and urgent needs, especially of those who are most vulnerable. Working towards aligned processes that complement one another and ensure the flexibility and speed of responses is essential. Increasing flexibility for current or new funding will also support faster and more effective programming. Exploring different funding models that enable greater flexibility but maintain accountability would support programming teams and governments to adapt and flex to evolving demands as part of this crisis.

For example, ECW responded quickly to the crisis and this resulted in a relatively efficient release

of critical funding to ensure rapid responses and necessary adaptations to existing programming. Lessons learned from this success should be consolidated and where possible replicated to ensure a greater amount of the critical funding reaches the country responses faster.

Exploring specific funding for marginalised groups, girls, children with disabilities, refugees and internally displaced people may also be necessary to ensure targeted funding can reach the most vulnerable much more quickly. The government of Sierra Leone's immediate response to reach and protect girls when school closures began, through community campaigns and nutrition provision, is one such example. This initiative models a rapid preventative measure to the longer term ramifications of a crisis like COVID-19 on girls' education, before the severest implications of the crisis have taken hold and resulted in irreversible consequences.

## BUILD BACK BETTER EDUCATION SYSTEMS

This report has highlighted some of the risks that COVID-19 school closures pose to achieving SDG4. The world was already dangerously off track in meeting its promise of a quality education for all children by 2030. Now there are serious risks that the progress that has been made will be put in reverse.

However, we believe that lessons can be learned from this crisis and that if the right investments are

made and policies put in place, we could instead accelerate progress – particularly for the most marginalised children – as the world begins to reopen its schools. As countries, donors and other stakeholders work to build back improved and resilient education systems, they should be informed by gender equality and social inclusion analysis to ensure girls and other marginalised children return to and remain in school.

There will be a lot to learn from this crisis, and more research is required to understand these lessons and how they can help accelerate progress towards SDG4. This report does not explore these lessons in detail, but suggests the following areas as key issues for further exploration, with a strong gender equality and social inclusion analysis:

1. **Get out-of-school children connected to learning:** As schools reopen and countries begin the process of rebuilding after the pandemic, one of the biggest opportunities is for governments to complete the challenge of getting out-of-school children connected to learning. Increasing investments should be made in blended learning models using both remote and classroom learning in case schools are partially opened, need to close again due to COVID-19 or other crises, or if vulnerable children cannot safely return to school straight away and/or they have adapted classroom schedules. Where getting children physically into school is not possible, we should learn lessons from the remote learning models put in place while all schools were closed. These should be used to support the hardest-to-reach children, including flexible support for girls due to social and cultural restrictions.



Early childhood development teacher Simon during a class in Kenya.

PHOTO: JORDI MATAS/SAVE THE CHILDREN

**Mariam, 15, in Malawi, has been blind since she was six years old. She says “Since the textbooks are very few, sometimes I do not get to have someone to specifically read for me in cases where the textbook is not available in Braille. I love school. I feel good here and I feel safe.”**



PHOTO: JONAS GRATZER/SAVE THE CHILDREN

2. **Continue and build on connections made with parents and caregivers:** During the COVID-19 crisis, new tools and guidance have been developed to assist parents and caregivers to home school their children and support their wellbeing. These efforts should be capitalised on and scaled, as evidence shows that the more parents and caregivers are involved in their children’s education the more children learn and relationships within the family improve.
3. **Invest in pre-primary education:** One of the strongest interventions for supporting a child’s development, learning and readiness for school, regardless of income levels both nationally and at household level, is attending a pre-primary programme. 90% of a child’s brain development takes place before their fifth birthday. Children who do not receive adequate health, nutrition, protection, care and stimulation in their early years are more likely to do poorly in school and earn less income, entrenching a lifetime of unfairness and poverty. Pre-primary education is a critical intervention for achieving equity and ensuring the poorest and most marginalised children have the same chances in school as their better off peers.
4. **Maintain and scale up innovative teacher professional development and wellbeing support:** Maintain and scale up innovative ongoing teacher professional development resources and activities created during COVID-19 school closures, such as online professional development, coaching, or use of tutors to help bring capacity development efforts to scale more rapidly. Particular efforts should be made to increase recruitment, training and career development for female teachers.
5. **Build resilient education systems that are prepared for hazards and risks:** Apply lessons learned from COVID-19, so that governments and whole school communities can better prepare and reduce risks of future crises such as climate-related disasters, slow-onset climate impacts and displacement, including through improved infrastructure and safe routes to school.
6. **Increase provision of protection, mental health and psychosocial support services in schools:** These should address gender-based violence, stigmatisation and discrimination and support children and their families, as well as promote wellbeing through the use of socioemotional learning activities with links to youth-friendly and fully accessible referral mechanisms.
7. **Reform curriculums to ensure they are relevant to children’s lives:** Review and revise the national curriculum to be gender transformative and to ensure children and young people have the knowledge and skills for the environmental, social and economic reality post-COVID-19, including Education for Sustainable Development.
8. **Develop and scale up effective data management systems:** National governments with support from the international community must develop Open Education Management Information Systems to collect and manage data to help inform decision-making from classroom to school to local and national levels. At a minimum, data must be disaggregated by gender, age, disability and language/mother tongue.

## SPOTLIGHT ON AFGHANISTAN

The education infrastructure in Afghanistan has been devastated by over four decades of conflict. However, some progress has been made in recent years. In March 2019, the Law on the Protection of Child Rights was passed, which guarantees children's equal access to education.<sup>202</sup> But many challenges remain. 50% of primary school-aged children are not enrolled in school<sup>203</sup> – approximately 3.7 million children. Investment in education is low. Across public schools, just \$196 is spent per primary school-aged child, which is 78% below the average for the South Asia region.<sup>204</sup> This number is even lower for community-based education. Over half of the teachers in the country do not have the appropriate qualifications. As a result, 93% of late primary school-aged children are not proficient in reading.<sup>205</sup>

Girls, in particular, are affected by poor education infrastructure. Of the 3.7 million children that are out of school, 60% are girls. For older children, education is often delivered along gender lines, with mixed-gender schools being rare. However, just 16% of Afghanistan's schools are girls-only, and only one third of teachers are female.<sup>206</sup> Without female teachers, most families will not send their girls to school. Girls can also often feel stigmatised for continuing their education. In a Save the Children study, 51% of girls reported that they feel unsafe on their way to school, often due to sexual harassment.<sup>207</sup> This hinders their school attendance.

All children in the country have been born and raised in a state of conflict. In 2019, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan verified 70 incidents affecting access to education, including attacks targeting or incidentally damaging schools, the killing, injury, and abduction of education personnel, and threats against education facilities and personnel.<sup>208</sup> Further, in 2019, 722 schools across Afghanistan were forcibly closed due to insecurity, affecting around 328,000 children.<sup>209</sup>

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the government of Afghanistan announced school closures on 14 March 2020, affecting more than 10 million learners. No policy has yet been established by the Ministry of Education to ensure that distance learning reaches all affected children. Our research shows that across six Afghan provinces, just 28.6% of children can access distance learning programmes through TV, 13.8% through radio programming, and 0.2% through the internet.

In response to the disruption in education, we are advocating to ensure that the Ministry of Education makes a broader range of distance learning modalities available to reach the most marginalised and deprived children. We are coordinating with partners to design and implement distance learning materials appropriate to various contexts to ensure that no child is left behind. This includes developing paper-based materials for teachers to distribute in communities and radio materials.



PHOTO: STEFANIE GLINSKI/SAVE THE CHILDREN

**Hemat, 10, attends a school set up by Save the Children in Kabul province. He loves going to school but he faces many threats on his way there and back, and is afraid of kidnappings, suicide bombers and attacks.**

# 5 Recommendations: keep learning alive in the COVID-19 pandemic

With the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), the global community committed to realising the right to quality education for all children and adolescents. The COVID-19 crisis puts this promise into more jeopardy than ever before. Yet education could play a critical role in the COVID-19 response to protect public health, keep children safe, and promote mental health and psychosocial wellbeing. Now more than ever is the time for that promise to be honoured.

While some countries are better prepared for providing learning continuity for children during school closures than others, it is likely that the most marginalised girls and boys in all contexts are struggling to access distance learning, and are not getting the support they need. Many national education systems already face considerable challenges as a result of conflict and displacement, environmental emergencies and a lack of funding. COVID-19 further compounds these challenges. Countries are under huge pressure in responding to the pandemic, and already insufficient education budgets risk being reduced. The poorest and most marginalised groups are most at risk of never returning to school and instead face being forced into child labour and/or child marriage.

**The impact of schools closing on a generation of children will be immense. This is an education emergency that requires action today.**

**The world needs to come together and protect education during this time of crisis, as it is at the very heart of the global recovery effort.** Governments and donors must act on the following five areas to overcome this crisis and build back better towards achieving SDG4 in 2030.

## 1. PLAN: AGREE AND IMPLEMENT A GLOBAL COVID-19 EDUCATION ACTION PLAN

This global education emergency requires a coordinated global education response that is well-planned, adequately monitored and accountable. An ambitious, but tangible global COVID-19 education action plan should be urgently developed focusing on making progress on the three priority needs set out within this report for the coming one to two years to overcome this crisis:

- Keep learning alive during school closure through inclusive distance learning.
- Support every child to return to school when it's safe to do so.
- Build back better and more resilient education systems

It should focus on assessing the current needs in order to secure learning outcomes in pre-primary and basic education. In the spirit of the Leave No One Behind principle, it should target action for the furthest-behind countries and for the poorest and most marginalised children. Particular activities should be aligned to progressing enrolment and learning outcomes of refugees and internally displaced children, girls, and children with disabilities. The action plan must align and accelerate efforts towards SDG4 and allocate responsibilities for its delivery and key accountabilities to developing countries and to the international community.

## 2. INVEST: COMMIT TO INCREASED FUNDING FOR EDUCATION

We call on governments and donors to protect the learning and wellbeing of a generation of children and youth and address the deepening education crisis that is a result of COVID-19 by committing funding to ensure the global education action plan has the resources required to implement it.

The plan should set out the funding required to respond to the crisis and to work towards achieving SDG4. This would provide a unified global education investment case. A global high-level meeting should be convened this year, where political and financial announcements in support of the plan can be announced.

While the majority of funding for education should come from domestic resource mobilisation, it is unlikely that low- and middle-income countries will be able to vastly increase spending on education during a likely global recession. Significant support will be required from international donors.

### INTERNATIONAL FINANCING

- **World Bank and the multilateral development banks:**
  - **The World Bank’s shareholders should provide a supplementary IDA budget of around \$35bn over the next two years, with at least \$10bn in grant financing.** The World Bank should also be leveraging its balance sheet through bond issues and donor credit guarantees, potentially including IFFEd.

- **The World Bank should work with the IMF to strengthen the Debt Service Suspension Initiative to secure a freeze on \$48bn of debt service payments during 2020/2021.** Faced with an education emergency, rising child poverty and worsening nutritional conditions, the 73 countries covered by the DSSI should prioritise domestic spending over debt repayments. All public and private creditors should participate, with private creditors suspending \$14bn on scheduled debt payments in 2020.
- **The World Bank should work with UNICEF and national governments to create a facility that converts suspended debt service payments into investments in children.** This would ensure that money freed up from debt savings is invested in priority areas, such as education.
- **Global Partnership for Education:** G7 and other OECD donors should contribute at least \$10 million per country to GPE to assist in funding its emergency response to COVID-19. This should be separate and in addition to funding for their 2021 replenishment.
- **Education Cannot Wait:** To fulfil the funding gaps for the COVID-19 response and for the remainder of its strategic period up to the end of 2021, it requires from donors an additional \$300 million to its global fund and \$2 billion in-country to support multi-year resilience programmes.



PHOTO: TIM MUIR/SAVE THE CHILDREN

**Ruba and her cousin do homework together in the occupied Palestinian territory. Ruba is part of Save the Children’s remedial learning programme, designed to help disadvantaged children whose lives have been devastated by conflict to keep up in the classroom.**



PHOTO: ROBIC UPADHAYASAVE THE CHILDREN

Students enjoying study time at school in Nepal before the pandemic.

- **The International Financing Facility for Education:** The IFFEd could prove an important source of education financing for lower-middle-income countries. By using the 'Triple A' rating of multilateral development agencies it provides a vehicle through which investments in education could be financed by borrowing. IFFEd funding must: be equitable by making the principle of progressive universalism an absolute requirement; and adhere to the strictest debt sustainability framework, providing a strong degree of concessionality to avoid unsustainable debt burdens; it must not come at the cost of ODA to low-income countries or other education support.
- Private sector foundations should step up funding for the education response and provide technical advice and access to innovative education solutions.
- Donor governments and the international community should support efforts to mobilise domestic revenues **by tackling illicit financial flows and tax avoidance and by strengthening international tax cooperation.** Specifically, governments and institutions should support efforts to introduce automatic exchange of tax information, public registries of beneficial ownership, and public country-by-country reporting on relevant financial information by multinational companies.
- International institutions and their member governments should urgently **establish a comprehensive debt resolution mechanism** that bases analyses of debt sustainability on the borrower country's ability to fulfil human rights, and assesses the legitimacy of the debt.

### DOMESTIC RESOURCE MOBILISATION

- **National governments should seek to increase their domestic revenues by expanding their tax base** – with the purpose of increasing their investments in children including in education. This should be done by progressive taxes that are redistributive and gender sensitive. Governments should analyse their taxation of multinational companies and remove harmful tax incentives such as tax holidays.

### DEBT RELIEF

- National governments that are granted debt suspensions or debt relief **should document increased investments in child welfare, including education.**
- All creditors – both official and commercial – **should offer an immediate cancellation of all principal, interest and charges for the remainder of 2020**, in particular to IDA countries, and call on private creditors to do the same.

- **The G20 should support moves by any country to stop making payments on debt to private external lenders**, and key jurisdictions, especially the UK and New York, should pass legislation to prevent any lender suing a government for stopping debt payments in 2020.
- **International financial institutions must protect education budgets** when they advise structural reforms, so as not to propose or demand cuts to the education sector or teacher salaries, or promote other harmful conditions or policy advice that counters domestic policies.

### 3. LEARN: INTERVENTIONS SHOULD ENSURE THE MOST MARGINALISED CHILDREN ARE LEARNING

National governments should produce and implement national COVID-19 education response and recovery plans with targeted action to ensure the most marginalised children are able to keep learning.

#### KEEP LEARNING ALIVE DURING SCHOOL CLOSURE THROUGH INCLUSIVE DISTANCE LEARNING BY:

- Providing effective, flexible and inclusive **distance learning programmes**, including digital learning, interactive radio instruction and printed learning materials, with a focus on reaching the **most marginalised children, including girls, the youngest children, children with disabilities, internally displaced children and refugees**. These should support early learning, mental health and psychosocial support, child protection, and public health objectives and address harmful gender norms.
- Ensuring that distance learning strategies include **support for parents' and teachers' role in children's learning at home** through development and promotion of tips, resources and activities.
- Ensuring the **continued payment and incentives of teachers** and school staff during and after school closures to retain existing teachers, and provide training and support for distance learning programming with the right resources and guidance.

#### SUPPORTING EVERY CHILD TO RETURN TO SCHOOL WHEN IT'S SAFE TO DO SO BY:

- **Creating inclusive and gender sensitive 'Back to School' campaigns**, including community mobilisation and support for girls' education, to raise awareness of and community confidence in safe school opening, as well as initiatives to support the most marginalised children return to school.
- **Providing every child with a learning assessment on their return to school** to inform blanket and targeted interventions **including catch-up classes, remedial programmes, and accelerated education programmes**.
- **Create targeted interventions and expand social protection to help keep children in school**, particularly the most marginalised groups of children who are at highest risk of dropping out. Scale up coverage and types of social protection – including cash transfers, school feeding, school grants, freezing school fees, increasing block grants to schools with the most marginalised student population, and ensuring safe transportation to and from school. Coverage of these programmes must be gender-responsive and include the most marginalised and deprived, progressively working towards universal child benefits over time to protect from future shocks to children's education including climate change.
- **Addressing gender-related barriers to education**, including laws, policies, and harmful social norms that prevent girls from continuing their education if they are pregnant, married, or child mothers.
- **Providing professional development and support for teachers** so that they can adapt to new circumstances in schools as part of the frontline of the response and recovery.

#### 4. PROTECT: ENSURE ALL CHILDREN ARE HEALTHY, SAFE AND WELL WHILE OUT OF SCHOOL AND WHEN THEY RETURN BY:

- **Providing food** to children who normally rely on school meals, whether by take-home rations, vouchers, or cash schemes.
- **Providing sexual and reproductive health and rights programming** that includes the safe distribution of menstrual hygiene kits to girls, as well as empowerment, addressing stigma and specifically targeting gender-based violence.
- **Ensuring that child protection reporting and referral systems can be adapted for times of school closure.**
- **Providing mental health and psychosocial support services for children and youth** and linking them to additional services when necessary and available.
- **Minimising the use of schools as health facilities and quarantine sites** where possible.
- **Ensuring that schools are safe environments for children to return to,** including health and safety infrastructure and protocols, gender responsive WASH facilities, menstrual hygiene management kits, additional classrooms and staffing to enable physical distancing requirements. Develop preparedness plans in case schools need to close again due to localised outbreaks.

#### 5. TRACK: PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN AND FINANCE COMMITTED TO ACHIEVING IT NEEDS TO BE TRACKED

It is important the education community urgently meets to coordinate action and lead on tracking progress on the three priority needs for the COVID-19 education response. A public website should track and report on progress regularly.

This process could be led by UNESCO, and needs to include members representing a diverse set of mandates and perspectives, as well as including young people. It could include low- and middle-income governments, the World Bank, GPE, ECW, Global Education Cluster, Education International, UNICEF, UNHCR, some major donors and civil society.

Every government (of low-, middle- and high-income countries), as well as international organisations should report quarterly to the website on progress made towards national education COVID-19 response plans.

This data could then inform consolidated quarterly reports, and be used to analyse trends and course correct the plan as required. UNESCO should collate and scale learning and good practice from the education response to build better quality and resilient education systems.

Children play with a balloon at a reading club facilitated by an early years teacher, Jun Rey, in a rural village in Mindanao, Philippines.



# Annex 1: Vulnerability Index

We know that COVID-19 is likely to lead to an increase in the number of out-of-school children, either because children do not return to school when schools reopen, or they drop out because of the lost learning they have experienced while schools have been closed.

We looked at three critical vulnerabilities that we believe are likely to impact the likelihood of children dropping out of school:

Index dimension	Source	Comments
<b>1. Rate of children currently out of school (before COVID-19)</b>	UNESCO/GEM Report: World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE)	An overall out-of-school rate has been calculated weighting education level-specific out-of-school rates with school age population of this level. Latest available data 2012 or later.
<b>2. Equity gaps in out-of-school rates</b>	UNESCO/GEM Report: World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE)	We derive ratios from out-of-school rates according to wealth (poorest quintile/richest quintile) and gender (girls/boys). Both indicators within this index dimension have the same weight. Latest available data 2012 or later.
<b>3. Learning outcomes</b>	World Bank	We use learning-adjusted years of schooling.

All indicators are being normalised between 0 and 1 using a min–max approach, with 1 being the minimum value/worst outcome and 0 the maximum value observed for each indicator in any country.

Each index dimension has the same weight (1/3) in the calculation of the index.

Risks in the index are categorised based on the index values: countries with index values > 0.55 are “extreme risk”, 0.45–0.55 “high risk”, 0.35–0.45 “moderate risk”, 0.20–0.35 “reduced risk” and smaller than 0.20 “low risk”.

Country	Out-of-school rate, national	Out-of-school rate, poorest	Out-of-school rate, richest	Difference in out-of-school rate by wealth (relative)	Out-of-school rate, boys	Out-of-school rate, girls	Difference in out-of-school rate by sex (relative)	Learning-adjusted years of schooling	Vulnerability index	Risk
Niger	62.94	76.68	37.98	2.02	58.05	67.66	1.17	2.61	0.75	Extreme risk
Mali	53.31	78.04	21.88	3.57	50.83	55.90	1.10	2.74	0.69	Extreme risk
Chad	48.79	56.54	23.39	2.42	42.97	54.86	1.28	2.64	0.69	Extreme risk
Liberia	42.10	61.71	21.75	2.84	41.22	43.01	1.04	2.34	0.64	Extreme risk
Afghanistan	41.95	48.92	22.66	2.16	30.13	54.74	1.82	4.87	0.64	Extreme risk
Guinea	46.84	72.75	20.12	3.62	38.35	55.02	1.43	4.54	0.64	Extreme risk
Mauritania	44.48	62.97	19.45	3.24	45.04	43.97	0.98	3.42	0.61	Extreme risk
Yemen	27.50	48.67	11.37	4.28	19.98	35.08	1.76	4.13	0.59	Extreme risk
Nigeria	38.04	74.32	12.56	5.92	35.84	40.32	1.13	4.25	0.57	Extreme risk
Pakistan	38.32	66.16	13.59	4.87	33.52	43.58	1.30	4.78	0.57	Extreme risk
Senegal	44.19	65.19	23.43	2.78	44.03	44.30	1.01	4.78	0.56	Extreme risk
Côte d'Ivoire	32.81	48.87	21.73	2.25	27.76	37.93	1.37	4.21	0.56	Extreme risk
Sudan	29.72	46.73	5.76	8.11	28.11	31.32	1.11	4.42	0.53	High risk
The Gambia	36.28	42.98	20.72	2.07	34.54	37.97	1.10	4.84	0.52	High risk
Tanzania	38.96	53.37	31.07	1.72	39.51	38.42	0.97	4.82	0.52	High risk
Angola	23.26	43.82	6.51	6.73	21.24	25.17	1.19	4.11	0.51	High risk
Ethiopia	32.61	47.82	18.00	2.66	31.96	33.15	1.04	4.51	0.51	High risk
Benin	31.45	52.94	14.71	3.60	27.25	35.97	1.32	5.73	0.50	High risk
DRC	16.55	24.96	9.35	2.67	12.33	20.82	1.69	4.67	0.49	High risk
Sierra Leone	28.09	44.14	11.76	3.75	27.26	28.86	1.06	4.52	0.49	High risk
Cameroon	21.89	38.89	6.23	6.24	18.22	25.49	1.40	5.50	0.48	High risk
Rwanda	22.82	27.52	23.11	1.19	23.31	22.31	0.96	3.75	0.47	High risk
Uganda	23.32	31.35	19.85	1.58	22.27	24.23	1.09	4.45	0.46	High risk
Burundi	28.08	47.57	16.92	2.81	28.22	27.91	0.99	5.08	0.46	High risk
Ghana	30.22	33.36	23.59	1.41	29.60	30.86	1.04	5.70	0.45	Moderate risk
Togo	17.51	25.01	13.54	1.85	13.79	21.40	1.55	5.57	0.45	Moderate risk
Zambia	22.09	33.30	14.44	2.31	20.51	23.71	1.16	5.25	0.44	Moderate risk

Country	Out-of-school rate, national	Out-of-school rate, poorest	Out-of-school rate, richest	Difference in out-of-school rate by wealth (relative)	Out-of-school rate, boys	Out-of-school rate, girls	Difference in out-of-school rate by sex (relative)	Learning-adjusted years of schooling	Vulnerability index	Risk
Guatemala	22.31	31.93	7.39	4.32	19.40	25.22	1.30	6.29	0.43	Moderate risk
Comoros	18.39	32.09	9.95	3.23	17.59	19.03	1.08	5.30	0.41	Moderate risk
India	14.14	23.63	3.96	5.96	12.96	15.46	1.19	5.78	0.40	Moderate risk
Bangladesh	23.86	30.03	19.95	1.51	23.54	24.12	1.02	6.50	0.39	Moderate risk
Cambodia	25.98	34.21	16.85	2.03	25.90	26.00	1.00	6.90	0.38	Moderate risk
Zimbabwe	19.16	22.81	13.07	1.75	18.03	20.33	1.13	6.35	0.38	Moderate risk
Haiti	14.33	22.79	5.36	4.25	12.98	15.67	1.21	6.29	0.38	Moderate risk
El Salvador	17.45	27.14	7.46	3.64	16.88	18.01	1.07	6.55	0.36	Moderate risk
Namibia	13.98	16.66	8.53	1.95	13.75	14.24	1.04	5.82	0.36	Moderate risk
Egypt	10.96	16.17	3.81	4.24	9.83	12.07	1.23	6.34	0.36	Moderate risk
Myanmar	19.14	29.86	8.93	3.34	19.27	19.12	0.99	6.70	0.36	Moderate risk
Malawi	10.14	15.93	5.95	2.68	9.94	10.21	1.03	5.39	0.36	Moderate risk
Tunisia	13.34	25.24	3.13	8.07	14.02	12.62	0.90	6.27	0.35	Moderate risk
Nepal	16.26	13.93	7.40	1.88	14.93	17.40	1.17	6.89	0.35	Reduced risk
Eswatini	5.44	6.47	5.25	1.23	4.68	6.19	1.32	5.74	0.35	Reduced risk
Timor-Leste	12.73	21.83	5.01	4.35	13.59	11.82	0.87	5.86	0.34	Reduced risk
Tajikistan	10.15	11.89	7.80	1.52	8.05	12.30	1.53	7.67	0.33	Reduced risk
Lesotho	13.39	20.09	6.07	3.31	15.96	10.65	0.67	5.50	0.33	Reduced risk
Gabon	7.76	12.43	4.93	2.52	8.31	7.21	0.87	6.03	0.30	Reduced risk
Kenya	13.12	24.63	11.20	2.20	12.79	13.49	1.06	7.79	0.29	Reduced risk
Dominican Republic	8.16	14.47	3.56	4.06	9.12	7.09	0.78	6.33	0.29	Reduced risk
Algeria	9.48	16.14	4.36	3.70	10.08	8.89	0.88	6.84	0.29	Reduced risk
Guyana	11.35	14.77	5.94	2.49	12.61	10.09	0.80	6.69	0.29	Reduced risk
Mexico	9.74	14.78	4.42	3.34	9.22	10.29	1.12	8.64	0.26	Reduced risk
Brazil	5.19	6.12	2.52	2.43	5.43	4.96	0.91	7.63	0.24	Reduced risk
Costa Rica	10.72	17.61	4.28	4.12	11.59	9.81	0.85	8.58	0.23	Reduced risk

Country	Out-of-school rate, national	Out-of-school rate, poorest	Out-of-school rate, richest	Difference in out-of-school rate by wealth (relative)	Out-of-school rate, boys	Out-of-school rate, girls	Difference in out-of-school rate by sex (relative)	Learning-adjusted years of schooling	Vulnerability index	Risk
Peru	8.11	11.56	5.23	2.21	8.30	7.92	0.95	8.28	0.23	Reduced risk
Jordan	5.70	10.49	2.06	5.10	6.57	4.73	0.72	7.61	0.23	Reduced risk
Moldova	8.26	17.31	3.11	5.57	9.61	6.85	0.71	8.21	0.22	Reduced risk
Georgia	5.63	8.83	5.27	1.67	5.23	6.14	1.17	8.88	0.22	Reduced risk
Serbia	4.41	11.21	0.31	35.81	5.64	2.96	0.53	11.15	0.22	Reduced risk
Thailand	9.97	13.66	3.99	3.43	11.60	8.25	0.71	8.64	0.21	Reduced risk
Armenia	4.91	6.30	2.36	2.67	5.63	4.10	0.73	7.86	0.21	Reduced risk
Ecuador	5.48	6.83	3.03	2.25	5.44	5.51	1.01	8.86	0.21	Reduced risk
Colombia	6.38	9.96	3.18	3.14	7.13	5.60	0.79	8.46	0.20	Reduced risk
Vietnam	10.21	21.39	2.85	7.50	10.65	9.79	0.92	10.21	0.20	Low risk
Occupied Palestinian territory	6.80	8.58	3.81	2.25	9.57	3.89	0.41	7.50	0.19	Low risk
Montenegro	3.79	8.44	2.21	3.82	4.25	3.26	0.77	8.55	0.19	Low risk
Argentina	4.58	7.52	1.95	3.85	5.13	4.08	0.80	8.87	0.18	Low risk
Kyrgyz Republic	4.77	5.02	1.93	2.60	5.58	3.94	0.71	8.44	0.18	Low risk
China	7.63	11.44	5.38	2.13	8.33	6.74	0.81	9.67	0.17	Low risk
Mongolia	6.04	12.87	1.57	8.18	8.30	3.58	0.43	9.45	0.15	Low risk
Ukraine	3.67	3.30	5.18	0.64	3.84	3.51	0.92	10.20	0.13	Low risk
Kazakhstan	1.62	2.52	1.23	2.05	1.92	1.21	0.63	11.47	0.05	Low risk
Russian Federation	1.32	1.47	1.87	0.79	1.64	1.00	0.61	11.90	0.02	Low risk

# Annex 2: Financing gap

## ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC SPENDING ON EDUCATION IN LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

### METHODOLOGY

To estimate the shift in fiscal space and the consequences this may have on social spending, we need three sources of information:

1. gross domestic product
2. government expenditures
3. proportion of government spending towards education.

We rely on estimates and projections for three scenarios: a) before 2020, b) business as usual scenario assuming no pandemic in 2020/2021, c) COVID-19 affecting the global economy in 2020/2021 (with various assumptions).

### GDP

We use GDP estimates from the World Bank (measured in constant 2010 US\$) until 2018. We use projections of GDP growth for 2019 based on the World Bank's Global Economic Prospects from June 2020 and the IMF's World Economic Outlook from April 2020 to estimate the GDP in 2019.

To estimate a business as usual scenario without COVID-19, we use GDP growth projections for 2020 and 2021 from before the pandemic hit the global scene (World Bank's Global Economic Prospects from January 2020 and the IMF's World Economic Outlook from October 2019).

To estimate the impact of COVID-19 on countries' GDP, we rely on the most recent estimates of the World Bank's Global Economic Prospects from June 2020, which provides GDP growth projections for 2020 and 2021.

### Government expenditures

We use estimates by the IMF's World Economic Outlook from October 2019 to calculate government expenditure as proportion of GDP before 2020. We use comparable data from the World Bank's World Development Indicators for countries with missing data. For some remaining countries where data is still lacking, we use estimates from the World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook (June 2020) until 2019. If data series end before 2019, we extend estimates using the annual rate of change of the IMF data for countries in the same region and income group. This method provides estimates of government expenditures as share of GDP before 2020 as well as in a business as usual scenario (without COVID-19) for 2020 and 2021.

To estimate the effect of COVID-19, we use annual rates of change between 2019 and 2021 of government expenditure estimates from the World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook from June 2020 (based on the Global Economic Prospects of the same month) and apply those changes to the pre-2020 data series. For countries for which this data does not exist, we apply the annual rate of change of countries in the same region and income group.

### Proportion of government spending towards education

We use government expenditure on education measured as a percentage of total government expenditure as provided by the World Bank World Development Indicators/UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). We assume that this proportion does not change beyond the latest available data point. Similarly, we use the proportion of spending on primary and secondary education as a share of total education spending. We use data from UNESCO UIS on the school age population by level of education when weighting income level/regional averages or computing per child expenditures.

## Scenarios

Various scenarios have been simulated based on the data above.

1. Pre-COVID-19: Education spending in 2019.
2. Business as usual without COVID-19: This scenario provides estimates for a business as usual scenario in 2020 and 2021, and is based on projections made before the pandemic.
3. Optimistic COVID-19 scenario: This scenario takes into account the most recent GDP growth and expenditure estimates for 2020 and 2021, as explained above. It assumes that the share of government expenditures allocated to education remains constant at pre-crisis level.
4. Middle COVID-19 scenario: This scenario takes into account the most recent GDP growth and expenditure estimates for 2020 and 2021, as explained above. It assumes that governments do not increase spending on education beyond the 2019 level and use additional resources for health and other expenditures.
5. Pessimistic COVID-19 scenario: This scenario takes into account the most recent GDP growth and expenditure estimates for 2020 and 2021, as explained above. It assumes that the share of government expenditure allocated to education drops by 10% due to reprioritisation towards other sectors.

For per capita expenditure, the relevant school age population has been used as denominator. All expenditures are measured in constant 2010 US dollars. Our final sample includes 104 low- and middle-income countries. In order to derive an estimate for all low- and middle-income countries (excluding China), we use per capita values to estimate education spending for countries in the same income group if country-specific data is missing.

## PRELIMINARY RESULTS

The table on the next page shows the preliminary results for the five scenarios described above.

The optimistic scenario assumes that expenditure on education remains constant. As many countries are projected to see a significant increase in government spending as a response to the pandemic (even after taking into account reduced GDP growth), education spending could slightly increase for most countries – except for lower-middle-income countries – in comparison to the business as usual scenario without COVID-19.

However, it seems reasonable to assume that additional resources are mostly being spent on health and other sectors in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic and increased government budgets do not result in increased education spending (in comparison to 2019). This assumption is in effect equivalent to a 4.3% drop in the share of budgets governments allocate towards education. In this scenario, the economic and fiscal consequences of the pandemic will reduce government spending by US\$22bn in 2020. This gap could increase to another US\$55bn in 2021. Both in absolute as well as relative terms, lower-middle-income countries are particularly affected by fiscal consequences and subsequently their ability to spend on education would be reduced.

In the pessimistic scenario, we assume a 10% drop in the share of budgets governments allocate towards education (equivalent to a comparable analysis by the World Bank in May<sup>210</sup>). In this scenario, public expenditure on education could drop by more than 82bn in 2020 and 109bn in 2021.

PROJECTED SPENDING ON EDUCATION UNDER DIFFERENT SCENARIOS FOR LOW, LOWER-MIDDLE AND UPPER-MIDDLE INCOME COUNTRIES

Income level	Measure	Pre-COVID-19, 2019	Business as usual without COVID-19, 2020	Business as usual without COVID-19, 2021	Optimistic COVID-19-scenario, 2020	Optimistic COVID-19-scenario, 2021	Middle COVID-19-scenario, 2020	Middle COVID-19-scenario, 2021	Pessimistic COVID-19-scenario, 2020	Pessimistic COVID-19-scenario, 2021
Low income	Total education spending (in billion US\$)	14.7	17.1	17.8	17.9	18.6	16.7	16.8	16.1	16.7
Lower-middle income		228.9	265.4	279.2	260.6	280.4	252.3	254.9	234.6	252.3
Upper-middle income		453.2	552.5	563.7	557.7	536.3	544.0	533.9	501.5	482.3
All countries in sample		696.8	835.0	860.6	836.2	835.3	813.0	805.5	752.2	751.4
Low income	Per capita education spending (in US\$)	77	79	80	82	84	76	75	74	75
Lower-middle income		355	376	397	369	399	357	363	332	359
Upper-middle income		2,404	2,427	2,478	2,450	2,359	2,382	2,340	2,196	2,114
All countries in sample		679	696	718	697	698	705	699	627	628

# Annex 3: Estimating the increase in school dropout

Save the Children and UNICEF estimated the number of children living in monetary poor households<sup>211</sup> and analysed various scenarios of how the COVID-19 crisis could affect school dropout rates.

Our analysis revealed that even before the pandemic hit, 586 million children – almost one in three children in low- and middle-income countries – were living in families who could not make ends meet.

Taking into account the latest projections of economic growth from June 2020, we estimate that without urgent action to protect families, the number of children living in monetary poor households could soar to between 90 and 117 million in 2020, with a middle estimate of 105 million.

The increased number of children living in poor families is very likely resulting in additional children dropping out of school, adding to the more than 250 million children who were out of school in 2018 – a number that has remain largely unchanged in the last decade. Many different factors contribute to this – poor families might not be able to afford to send children to school, children may need to work or help with household chores, adolescent girls are at risk of getting married early or becoming pregnant. The experience from the Ebola crisis illustrates this challenge: there is evidence that an aggravated financial situation made it more difficult for families to send their children back to school.

In a heavily affected village in Sierra Leone, school enrolment rates for adolescent girls dropped by as much as one third.

To calculate the additional risk of school dropouts, we compare on a country-by-country basis the differences in dropout rates between the quintiles who were poor before COVID-19 and the quintile of children entering poverty because of COVID-19. We apply this difference – which represents that additional risk of school drop-outs in poor households – to the additional number of children in monetary poverty. Poverty data is based on the joint Save the Children/UNICEF analysis, and the regional average has been used for countries where data is missing. See Annex 1 for an explanation of the methodology we used. The sample does not include high-income countries.

We estimate that an additional 90 and 117 million children living in poverty could lead to between 7.0 and 9.7 million children dropping out of school. An increase in poverty by 105 million children (our middle estimate) could mean 8.5 million school dropouts. This is very likely to be a significant underestimate.

# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> UNESCO, (2019). *Meeting Commitments? Are countries on track to achieve SDG4?* <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/meeting-commitments-are-countries-on-track-achieve-sdg4.pdf>
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- <sup>12</sup> Digital Gender Gaps, (2020). *Measuring digital gender inequalities in real-time.* <https://www.digitalgendergaps.org/data/?report=2020-04-13>
- <sup>13</sup> Child Perception Survey on the Impact of COVID-19, Save the Children Bangladesh, May 2020. The study was conducted by phone with 121 children, both girls and boys aged between 10–18, including children with disabilities, from marginalised communities, including urban slums, tea gardens and deprived rural areas. <https://bangladesh.savethechildren.net/sites/bangladesh.savethechildren.net/files/library/Children%20Perception%20Survey%20on%20COVID19.pdf>
- <sup>14</sup> UNESCO, (2019). *UNESCO warns that, without urgent action, 12 million children will never spend a day at school.* <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-warns-without-urgent-action-12-million-children-will-never-spend-day-school-0>
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# SAVE OUR EDUCATION

## Protect every child's right to learn in the COVID-19 response and recovery

For the first time in human history, an entire global generation of children have had their education disrupted. In early April 2020, as the world tried to halt the spread of COVID-19, an estimated 1.6 billion learners globally were out of school.

This is a global education crisis. It requires urgent global action.

*Save Our Education* highlights the impact this pandemic will have on the poorest and most marginalised children. Our analysis suggests that almost 10 million children – likely a significant underestimate – are at risk of not returning to school.

On top of this, as governments shift spending towards the health and economic responses to the pandemic, education budgets are likely to come under extreme pressure. Our analysis estimates a potential education financing gap in low- and middle-income countries by the end of 2021 of \$77 billion.

The world must act now to protect education.

Drawing on global programme evidence – from Colombia to Bangladesh, and Ethiopia to Lebanon – this report sets out the action needed to keep education alive, prepare for school reopening, and to build back better. Because at the heart of the global recovery effort from the pandemic must be every child's right to learn.