

#SaveOurEducation



Save the Children

BUILD ~~BACK~~

FORWARD

BETTER

How the global community must act now
to secure children's learning in crises

Save the Children exists to help every child reach their potential.

In more than 100 countries, we help children stay safe, healthy and keep learning. We lead the way on tackling big problems like pneumonia, hunger and protecting children in war, while making sure each child's unique needs are cared for.

We know we can't do this alone. Together with children, partners and supporters, we work to help every child become whoever they want to be.

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We refer in a number of places in this report to education in Afghanistan. Please note, however, that this report was written before the recent escalation in conflict there.

Some names, including those marked with a *, have been changed to help keep children and parents safe.

The \$ symbol is used throughout to refer to US dollars.

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Cover photo: Taslima, 10, attends class at a community school in Sylhet, Bangladesh.
(Photo: Tom Merilion/Save the Children)

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Children at a village early childhood education centre supported by Save the Children outside the city of Sikasso in Mali.

Executive summary

“Because we dream of a better future, because we want to succeed, we want your support to make our voices heard and our demands realised. Be with us to create a strong and effective generation.”

Mya, a girl from Lebanon

Education is a fundamental right for every child.¹ It's crucial for their learning and development. It is the foundation for delivering upon all the Sustainable Development Goals.

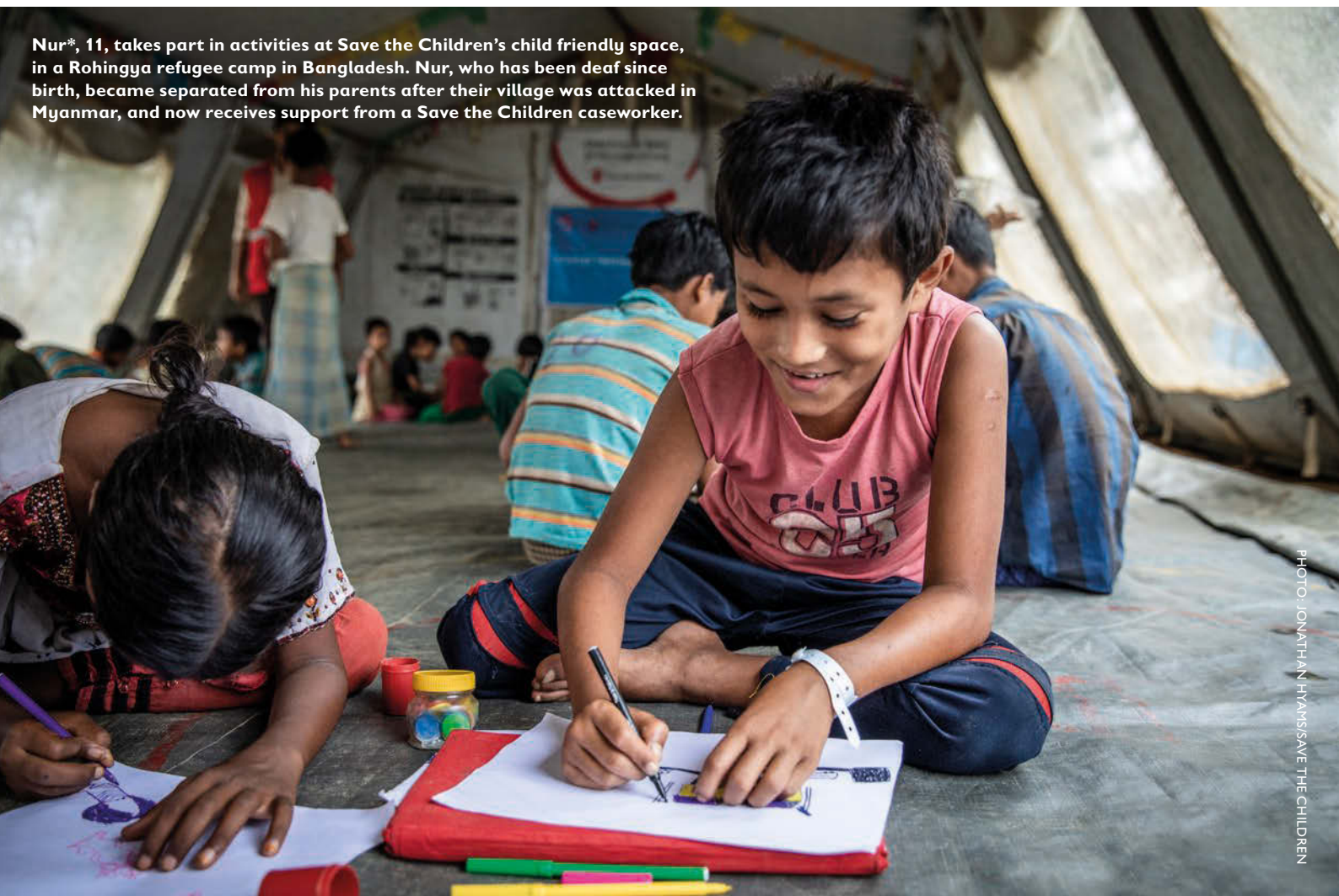
Education protects children from poverty, violence, exploitation and abuse. It helps them learn, play, eat and grow.

Even before the Covid-19 global education emergency, 258 million school-aged children – one child in six – were already denied their right to

education.² Now, even more children are caught in this learning crisis. **Particularly in low-income, fragile and conflict-affected countries, with weak education systems, the pandemic has compounded the education challenges, inequalities and discrimination so many children face.**

Almost two years since Covid-19 first disrupted schooling in parts of Southeast Asia, no national education system worldwide has got back to 'normal'.

Nur*, 11, takes part in activities at Save the Children's child friendly space, in a Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh. Nur, who has been deaf since birth, became separated from his parents after their village was attacked in Myanmar, and now receives support from a Save the Children caseworker.



In June 2021, nationwide school closures due to the pandemic were in place in 19 countries and hundreds of millions of children were still out of school.³ Some schools in parts of West Africa, for example, which shut because of the pandemic, have remained closed due to the additional threat of insecurity. This has devastating impacts for children's learning, protection and wellbeing.

In many countries, fluctuations in Covid-19 cases have meant schools have reopened and then had to close numerous times. Where schools are open, safety restrictions – such as physical distancing, mask wearing, Covid-19 testing, shifts, and a mix of online and face-to-face learning – are still widely in place.

In the face of huge challenges, children have demonstrated remarkable resilience and agency. But the pandemic has had a devastating impact on their learning and wellbeing – for many different reasons. Children have felt isolated and anxious about the future. Many have lost people they love. With families thrown into crisis, some children have witnessed or experienced distressing events, including being separated from their family. For many children, support from their family and community has been severely weakened.

With new data coming in, the full global and national impact of the pandemic on children – both in the short- and the long term – is still being assessed. However, in South Sudan we have already seen more children dropping out of school, and in some districts of Uganda child pregnancy rates have increased.

It is estimated that, purely as a result of the economic effects of Covid-19, at least 10–16 million children are at risk of not returning to school. Girls are less likely to return to school than boys. Young children will have missed out on vital early childhood care and development, reducing their school readiness – with a potentially long-term impact on their learning.

The global reach of this crisis has generated a shared understanding of the impact of crisis on children's right to education. This understanding can be used to build back better and radically transform children's chances. From Canada to Cambodia and Japan to Jordan we are all witnessing how a crisis

exacerbates pre-existing inequities, tensions, and challenges. Families have faced a myriad of issues – illness, loneliness and the difficulties of managing childcare and children's home-learning.

Throughout the world, and right across the social fabric – from individuals to households to government policy-makers – the pandemic has led to greater appreciation of the importance of schools and learning spaces for children's wellbeing, development and safety. Children whose schools were closed reported rates of violence in the home that were more than double those of children whose schools were physically open to attend in person.⁴

We have further recognised the inter-dependencies between education, protection, health, nutrition and poverty in children's lives. And as a result, Save the Children adapted quickly to the impact of Covid-19 on children's learning and wellbeing, by working across the education, protection, nutrition and health sectors in an integrated way. This has increased our impact for children and we have learned lessons about how to respond holistically to crises.

BUILD BACK BETTER – AND DIFFERENTLY

In July 2020, we started the Save Our Education global campaign⁵ to push children's learning and wellbeing up the global political agenda – and put education at the heart of the pandemic response and recovery. The campaign has three pillars:

1. Keep learning alive while schools are closed
2. Prepare for the safe return to school
3. Build back for better learning.

'Building back better' has long been used in response to crises globally – and is being used frequently today. However, given the scale of the learning crisis that existed before the pandemic, which has now become even more severe, it's vital that we do not limit our ambition to building 'back' to how things were. Now it's imperative we build forward better and differently. We must question the foundations of the systems that have proven so fragile in the face of this level of disruption. And we need to recognise that this crisis is an opportunity for hope and positive change.

The climate emergency, conflict and displacement, poor nutrition and a mental health crisis are already affecting education systems and economies in some countries. Our analysis suggests that if, as predicted, an additional 2.6 million children become stunted as a result of the pandemic, this could equate to 4.4 million lost years of schooling.⁶

The likelihood is that the incidences and length of these kinds of crises are increasing.⁷

Our new analysis examines which countries' school systems are most vulnerable to existing risks and future crises. We identified eight countries – Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Somalia, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Sudan, Mali and Libya – at extreme risk of ongoing and future crises disrupting education.

This report explains what Save the Children and others have learned from the response to this pandemic. And what needs to happen now to ensure that education systems are better prepared, resilient and inclusive as they respond to future crises.

We will not reach Sustainable Development Goal 4 in 2030 – inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all – unless we act now to learn and recover from the Covid-19 education emergency and prepare more effectively to the risk of future crises.

A child's right to an education does not end in times of emergency.

OUR 8-POINT PLAN TO BUILD FORWARD BETTER

- 1. COVID-19 RECOVERY:** Ensure children can return to school safely and get their learning and wellbeing back on track.
- 2. PREPAREDNESS AND ANTICIPATORY ACTION:** Every country must have an integrated preparedness plan to secure children's learning and wellbeing in future crises.
- 3. TARGET OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN:** Ensure children facing discrimination and who were out of school before the pandemic can access safe learning opportunities.
- 4. KEEP LEARNING SAFE:** Protect learning from violence and attacks, and from the impact of the climate emergency.
- 5. SCALE UP AND ADAPT FINANCING:** Urgently fill the education financing gap and adjust financing modalities to enable anticipatory action.
- 6. GET THE DATA RIGHT:** Collect more and improved data, and continuously share data widely for agile decision-making on preparedness and anticipatory action and policy-making.
- 7. FOCUS ON EQUITY AND CHILD PARTICIPATION:** Reach the children most affected by inequality and discrimination, and include children in designing, implementing and evaluating programmes.
- 8. SHIFT POWER:** Move decision-making power and resources into national and local civil society.

1 The status of global education

Every child has a right to a good education, as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Yet, even before the Covid-19 pandemic began in early 2020, there was an existing global learning crisis.

WHY DOES EDUCATION MATTER?

Good-quality education can enable children to develop a range of capabilities, such as literacy and numeracy, critical thinking, and communication and cooperation skills. It can transform unequal power relations and discriminatory norms. It lays the foundations for children to obtain secure and productive livelihoods of their choice, achieve economic independence, and have healthy social relationships. Education is also vital to progress towards the other Sustainable Development Goals.

THE LEARNING CRISIS BEFORE COVID-19

In 2019, in spite of the 2030 global goal of a good-quality education for every child, education projections were dire. A total of **258 million children and young people remained out of school – around one sixth of the global school-age population**.⁸ Despite some progress in early-years education, nearly 40% of all preschool-age children globally were not enrolled in preschool. The proportion in low-income countries was 80%.⁹ Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, UNESCO predicted there would be almost no progress on reducing the number of children who are out of school by 2030.¹⁰

To achieve the goal of universal secondary completion by 2030, all children of primary age needed to have been enrolled in school in 2018,¹¹

but in the following year 64 million children were out of primary school.¹² For a decade, progress in reducing the number of children missing out on basic education had stalled, with no progress since 2008 in reducing the number of out-of-school children.¹³

Among children who were in school, the trends in learning were also alarming. In 2019, learning rates were forecast to drop by almost a third in West African countries and to stagnate in middle-income countries.

With so many children missing out on a good-quality education, it is forecast that **globally, in 2030, 20% of young people aged 14–24 and 30% of adults will be unable to read**.¹⁴ Girls face some of the greatest barriers – and from a young age, with 9 million primary school-aged girls likely to never set foot in a classroom, compared with 3 million boys.¹⁵

“For some, a girl’s only place is at home near her mother to learn how to do housework, prepare meals, do laundry, etc. to be able to manage her marital home in the future. A girl who goes to school will know how to read and write and will not always be dependent on others. Nowadays, we can see girls becoming journalists, lawyers, teachers, doctors or even president of the republic; and it is thanks to school that they have these functions in society. Schooling is a fundamental right for all girls of school age to become someone important in today’s and tomorrow’s society. For it is said in Africa that if a girl is well educated, a whole generation will be well educated.”

Aduna, a girl from Senegal

FIGURE 1.

Why does education matter?

Protection



In emergencies, education saves lives and protects children. Out-of-school children are at greater risk of violence, abuse and exploitation, in particular forms of sexual and gender-based violence (such as rape and child marriage), harmful work, recruitment into armed groups and other life-threatening activities.

Education in safe and supportive learning spaces can provide children with life-saving information and skills related to sexual and gender-based violence, landmine awareness, hand-washing, and other skills necessary in a specific context.

Trained teachers can identify children who have not returned to school or who may be vulnerable or distressed. Teachers can provide them with emotional support or refer them to specialised child protection and mental health and psychosocial support services.

Better physical health



Maternal education is a key determinant for children's health and nutrition. Around half of the under-five mortality reduction between 1970 and 2009 was attributable to increases in education levels for women.¹⁶ Among children of less educated mothers, the malnutrition rate is 39%, compared with 24% for educated mothers.¹⁷

Reduced conflict



In low- and middle-income countries, the probability of conflict almost tripled from 3.8% to 9.5% when the level of educational inequality doubled.²²

Increased human capital



More children attending pre-primary and primary education improves human capital, especially in countries with an above-average share of disadvantaged children.²³ Overall, each year of schooling raises earnings by 10%.²⁴

Improved mental health



Good-quality education supports children's holistic wellbeing, including their mental health. Children need to be able to play with their friends, identify and express their emotions, and know who to turn to for help. Research shows that children who are stressed cannot learn.¹⁸

Global citizenship



Education which develops skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and social and emotional learning can help build young people's resistance to extremist narratives and equip them with the ability to spot 'fake news' and conspiracy theories. Citizenship skills – such as the ability to make decisions collectively and democratically – are vital to children's development in society.

Gender equality



Millions of educated girls means more working women, with the potential to add up to \$12 trillion to global growth.¹⁹

Boys and men who have completed secondary education and higher tend to hold more gender equitable attitudes. They report less use of violence and have higher rates of participation in care work.²⁰

Anti-racism



If education authorities, school leaders and teachers can interrogate how colonial legacies, biases, and racial and ethnic discrimination continue to exist and play out in classrooms, curricula, campuses and teachers' professional development, they are more likely to act against racism.²⁵

Action on the climate emergency



The higher an individual's level of education, the more likely they are to express concern over the environment. A person who has completed secondary education is 10 percentage points more likely to be concerned and engaged in political actions than an individual with only primary education.²¹

Education is also important for finding innovative ways to adapt to climate change impacts, therefore reducing vulnerability.

Preparedness



Children who can access education about what to do and how to keep themselves and their caregivers safe have been able to tell their families and communities how to prepare for a crisis.

What's more, even when children were enrolled in basic education, many were not staying in school. Almost half of children in low-income countries dropped out before the last grade of primary school.²⁶ And among those who stayed in school, many did not achieve good learning outcomes. **The World Bank estimates that of the 720 million primary school-aged children, 382 million – more than half – are 'learning poor', either out of school or below the minimum proficiency level in reading.²⁷ The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic means, rather than coming down, the number of children whose learning has been impoverished could actually increase by an additional 72 million children.**

While there is growing pressure to expand education provision upwards into secondary and tertiary levels, there is a crisis in basic education, with less than half of children in low-income countries completing primary school. Meanwhile, the wealthiest children are far more likely to access higher levels of the education system. A singular focus on expansion upwards, without strategies to make basic education available to all, therefore risks further entrenching poverty and inequality.

These global numbers paint a stark picture of how far off-track we were from meeting the global education goals even before the pandemic, particularly for the children most impacted by inequality and discrimination. However, what the global picture does not illustrate is the extent of the problem in regions and countries where children are hardest hit by the learning crisis – namely sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and fragile and conflict-affected countries.

Of the 63 million primary-age, out-of-school children worldwide, more than half live in sub-Saharan Africa. The countries with the highest out-of-school rates include South Sudan (68%), Liberia (62%) and Eritrea (57%).²⁸

Sub-Saharan Africa also has the highest rate of children who are not learning. In 2017, nine out of ten children aged 6–14 were not meeting minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics.²⁹

It's not only in countries in sub-Saharan Africa where children are at the sharp of the global learning crisis. In Yemen, 8 million girls and boys – out of 10 million primary-age children – need education-in-emergencies assistance. In Pakistan, close to 45% of children – nearly 22.5 million – are out of school, 5 million of whom are primary school-age.³⁰

SHOCKS TO EDUCATION ARE NOT NEW

Crises, conflicts and emergencies are, of course, not new. Nor is the devastating threat they pose to children's learning and wellbeing.

Within the last three decades, there have been more than 100 systemic banking crises, 20 health epidemics, and thousands of climate-related shocks and food crises. In 2018 alone, there were more than 50 active state-based armed conflicts.³¹ Even before the pandemic, hunger levels were already at record global highs. Now they are rising exponentially. Despite huge progress in tackling hunger in recent decades, a catastrophic combination of Covid-19, conflict and climate change is pushing millions of people to the verge of starvation.

Children feel the full impact of these shocks. In terms of their learning and wellbeing, different crises affect children in different ways. The same is true for national education systems and budgets.

Immediately prior to the pandemic, in crisis-affected countries, 127 million primary and secondary school-age children were out of school – almost half of the global out-of-school population.³² And children in these countries were 30% less likely to complete primary school and 50% less likely to complete lower secondary compared with children in countries not affected by crisis.³³

Millions of children around the world, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, are bearing the brunt of a changing climate and this is denying them their right to learn. When resources are scarce, girls are often the first to be pulled out of school to help alleviate domestic burdens. And as the financial strains on households increase, so do the risks to girls of child marriage – and most likely, losing the chance to continue their education. In Ethiopia, following the droughts in 2010–11, an increase in the rates of child marriage was reported, with some families who were struggling to cope with extreme drought giving their daughters in marriage in exchange for livestock.³⁴ Drought can also mean girls are more likely to miss school when on their periods due to the lack of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities.³⁵

Disruptions to everyday life during crises prevent many young children attending early childhood

education. As a result, they may be entirely reliant on their caregivers for nurturing care, early learning and meeting their developmental needs.

COVID-19 HAS EXACERBATED EXISTING INEQUALITIES

“Covid-19 put every area of life in limbo, and education was a fundamental element because it is failing for many boys and girls in my country, and in the world. All of this has become quite routine: get up, put the computer on, start studying, study, study, study. In the end, the teachers are only a means, we are the ones who are going to be able to study. If we lose motivation, it will be quite difficult for us to continue learning. It is important to motivate everyone (parents, students, teachers, school head teachers) so that they can do their work in the best way possible, and so that we don’t lose out, or become afraid to study or go to our classes and end up learning nothing.”

Statement from Paula from Colombia, Nicole from Guatemala and Ana from Peru. All three girls are part of our Regional Advisory Group of Children and Adolescents in Latin America.

In April 2020, mass school closures right across the world meant that for the first time in history more than a billion children were out of school.³⁶ At least a third of the world’s schoolchildren were unable to access remote learning.³⁷ The amount of time schools have been closed since then has varied widely from region to region.

We know that the impact of a ‘missing year’ of education will be worst for the poorest children in low-income countries. Children in richer countries attend school for 12 or 13 years; in some low-income countries it is less than five years. That means that, if their schools were closed for the same amount of time, children in poorer countries have lost 66% more of their lifetime number of school days during the Covid-19 pandemic than their peers in richer countries. On average, girls in poorer countries missed 22% more days in school than boys. In Afghanistan, children have lost over 13% of their total lifetime of school days, with boys missing 9% of their school days, and girls missing 21%.³⁸

Our analysis shows that when children experienced long periods of school closure, their mental health tended to suffer. Among



In Venezuela, siblings Maria, 15 and Juan Pablo, 12 have been out of school for almost 11 months now due to Covid-19 school closures.

those whose schools were closed for one to four weeks, 62% of children reported an increase in negative feelings, and for those whose schools were closed for 17 to 19 weeks, it was 96% of children.³⁹

“I would be happy to go back to the school again, because at school I can get together with my friends and teachers again.”

Chenda, Cambodia

Half of the total number of learners kept out of the classroom by the Covid-19 pandemic – some 826 million out of 1.6 billion students – do not have access to a household computer and 43% (706 million) have no internet at home. This is at a time when, in most countries, digital distance learning is enabling children to continue their education. **Disparities in digital access are particularly acute in low-income countries: in sub-Saharan Africa,** 89% of learners do not have access to household computers, 82% lack internet access and 28 million live in locations without a mobile network.⁴⁰

Education has been disrupted for many children, but especially girls. Gender norms in several countries and cultures can further restrict girls’ access to the internet and technology. Parents may fear online sexual harassment and violence, as well as unsupervised interaction with boys. Girls with disabilities living in villages, rural indigenous communities, and households with no or very limited access to the internet, or with a lack of access to digital devices with affordable data, are at greater risk of being left behind because of the pandemic. They often lack support for remote learning and lack access to remote learning materials.⁴¹

The impact of the pandemic has put millions more children at risk of not reaching their developmental potential. It has weakened health systems, reduced access to health and nutrition services, eroded family livelihoods and savings, closed schools and early childhood centres, led to an increase in domestic violence and child and maternal abuse, and affected the wellbeing of caregivers. It is predicted that by 2022 Covid-19 could result in an additional 9.3 million wasted children and 2.6 million stunted children– with devastating consequences for their education.^{42, 43}

As well as increasing poverty and inequality within countries and communities, the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated global inequality. Recent estimates show that Covid-19 school closures are likely to lead to a reduction in global economic growth equivalent to an annual rate of 0.8%, with losses in national income projected to be greater in low- and middle-income countries than in high-income countries.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, throughout the pandemic, conflict has continued to blight children’s education.

Despite Covid-19 school closures in the central Sahel between late March and May 2020, reports indicate that attacks on education here continued. There were more than 90 attacks on education in the first seven months of 2020 – a similar rate to the previous year. Burkina Faso experienced the highest number of reported attacks on education in the region in the first seven months of 2020, with over 40 reported incidents, including the burning and looting of schools and abduction, threats, or killing of teachers; of these incidents, nearly half took place in June and July when schools were open.⁴⁵

SAVE OUR EDUCATION

For more analysis of the impact of Covid-19 on children’s learning and wellbeing worldwide, case studies on Save the Children’s response and recommendations to respond effectively, including the funding required, see our *Save Our Education* report⁴⁶ (July 2020) and *Save Our*

Education Now briefing⁴⁷ (January 2021). For a full range of guidance, toolkits and materials produced in response to the pandemic to aid children’s safe return to school, see our Resource Centre.⁴⁸

THE CATASTROPHIC GAP IN EDUCATION FINANCING

One of the key reasons we were not achieving the fundamentals of access and learning in basic education, even before the pandemic hit, was the dire global financing gap. A

pre-Covid estimate of the financing gap to reach Sustainable Development Goal 4 in low- and lower-middle-income countries was \$148 billion annually.⁴⁹

The overall annual spend on education for all countries is \$4.7 trillion. Of that, \$3 trillion (65% of the total) is spent in high-income countries and just \$22 billion (0.5% of the total) is spent in low-income countries – even though the two groups of countries have roughly equivalent numbers of school-age children.⁵⁰

Additional costs due to Covid-19-related school closures risk increasing the financing gap by up to one-third, or \$30–45 billion.

But investing now in remedial and re-enrolment programmes could reduce this additional cost by as much as 75%.⁵¹

DOMESTIC FINANCING

“I think more funds are needed from the fiscal budget to support our educational system.”

Wesley, Zimbabwe

Most of the burden of financing education will be borne by countries themselves. To achieve this, governments in low- and middle-income countries need to expand their domestic tax base to at least 20% of gross domestic product (GDP), as set out in the *Incheon Declaration*. And they need to increase the share of spending on education to at least 20% of budgets, in line with the internationally agreed target in the *Education 2030 Framework for Action*.⁵²

Government spending on education in low- and middle-income countries has been broadly maintained during the pandemic. Even in cases where fiscal conditions have been extremely challenging, such as in Nigeria, education has been prioritised and protected from deeper cuts. This is welcome news and governments should rightly be praised. **However, as the pandemic continues to take a toll on economies, fiscal positions are set to be constrained for years to come, offering less potential to significantly scale up domestic public spending on education.**

This outlook presents a major challenge to meeting Sustainable Development Goal 4, particularly given the increased costs in getting children safely back to school and learning,⁵³ which are widening the already substantial gap⁵⁴ between resource needs and availability.

Recent estimates suggest that the cumulative external financing gap – the shortfall between available domestic expenditure and what is needed to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 by 2030 – could increase by between \$150 billion and \$460 billion compared to pre-Covid-19 estimates. This takes into consideration the effects of slower GDP growth on government budgets and increased financing needs for remedial education, re-enrolment and catch-up classes, as well as infrastructure costs. In the likeliest scenarios, this means that countries face an annual financing gap of between \$178 billion and \$193 billion for the 2020–2030 period.⁵⁵

Even before the pandemic, the distribution of domestic education spending was highly inequitable. Public budgets did not prioritise the lower levels of education and poorest and most marginalised learners. Evidence from 42 countries shows that, on average, only 16% of public education spending goes towards the poorest 20% of children in school, compared with the 26% that goes towards the wealthiest 20% of children in school.⁵⁶ Disparities become even more evident during humanitarian and financial crises.

To ensure education systems are crisis-sensitive, ministries need to budget for disaster risk reduction and preparedness in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.⁵⁷ They should allocate the necessary resources, including finance and logistics, as appropriate, at all levels of administration for the development and implementation of disaster risk reduction strategies, policies, plans, laws and regulations in all relevant sectors.

GLOBAL AID TO EDUCATION

While domestic resources will be required to cover the majority of the costs of education, international financing will continue to play a critical role. The pandemic is already putting significant pressure on aid budgets. As a result of falling government revenue and increased demands for public spending, many countries saw their budget deficits increase significantly in 2020. This has had

knock-on effects – for example the UK, which was meeting the 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) aid target saw the aid budget decline as GNI declined as a result of the pandemic. In 2021 the UK reduced its aid budget to 0.5% of GNI to “respond to domestic needs”. The UK government reduced its aid to girls’ education by at least 25% in 2021.

Even if we assume that education does not become a lower priority in total aid, squeezed budgets could translate into a fall for aid to education of up to \$2 billion by 2022 – at precisely the time when more, not less, is needed. **It may be six years until 2018 levels are reached again.** Covid-19 therefore poses a serious threat to aid to education. Difficult trade-offs will need to be made.⁵⁸

To secure the needed increase in international financing, all OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors and selected non-DAC donors should allocate 0.7% of GNI to aid and 10% of their Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) to basic and secondary education.

In response to the world’s growing number of prolonged crises, humanitarian support for education has increased in recent years. The increase is not only the result of greater volumes of humanitarian aid but also of an increase in the share given to education. **Education’s share in global humanitarian aid has tripled from 1% in 2014 to 3% in 2019, but we remain a long way from the 10% target – and far from what’s needed.**⁵⁹

FROM CRISIS TO OPPORTUNITY: ACCELERATE ACTION NOW

There is no doubt that Covid-19 has disrupted education systems across the world and that they will take time to recover. **Yet education can also be the key to recovery from this pandemic.** Education creates the health workers, teachers, entrepreneurs, scientists and politicians crucial for creating a more resilient world for the future. **Protecting and upholding the right to education is the key to building forward better. And we must be better prepared and resourced to respond to ongoing and new emergencies if we are to safeguard children’s learning and wellbeing.**

This moment provides the chance to recommit to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 in 2030. We can use this opportunity to agree actions that make a difference.

We have already seen some promising recent commitments by UN member states. At the Global Education Meeting (GEM) in October 2020, they committed to the 2020 GEM Declaration,⁶⁰ which included promises to increase or maintain the share of public expenditure on education towards the international benchmarks of at least 4–6% of GDP and/or 15–20% of public expenditure. However, even with additional investment in education, if there is not a budget or funding stream for preparedness and anticipatory action, education systems won’t necessarily be better prepared to mitigate hazards and shocks. This is clear from countries that have well-financed education systems that were not prepared for the pandemic.

In June 2021, the G7 leaders committed to a new Declaration on girls’ education: recovering from Covid-19 and unlocking agenda 2030.⁶¹

This declaration recognises that timebound targets help to galvanise international action. It called on the international community to work towards two new milestones:

- 40 million more girls in school by 2026 in low- and lower-middle-income countries
- 20 million more girls reading by age 10 or the end of primary school in low- and lower-middle-income countries by 2026.

Commitments were made to several promising actions aimed at helping achieve these milestones. Yet without urgent funding, an implementation plan and accountability mechanism, these commitments will become empty promises.

In July 2021, the Global Partnership for Education held its Global Education Summit with the target of raising \$5 billion in donor pledges, as well as strong domestic financing and policy pledges. **Disappointingly only \$4 billion was pledged by donors. However, developing country partners stepped up, committing \$196 billion for their own education systems over the next five years.**



Mary*, 16, in her classroom with her daughter at school in a refugee settlement in West Nile, Uganda.

2 The impact of crises on children's learning and wellbeing

Children's right to learn and be protected is under severe threat from conflict, displacement, the climate crisis, environmental emergencies, hunger and health crises. The children most affected by inequality and discrimination are at greatest risk.

There, in a nutshell, is both the crisis and the opportunity. A crisis or shock may lead to children being denied the chance to learn. But at the same time, after an emergency, education is vital to help children rebuild their lives and restore a sense of hope.

Multiple, compounding crises and failed recovery have knock-on economic effects that trap children in a cycle of educational marginalisation. Economic crises put pressure on budgets for systems that underpin sustainable development. As a result, poor and disadvantaged children are robbed of the learning opportunities that could help lift them out of poverty.

That is why it is critical that education systems are strengthened to prepare for and withstand shocks. Otherwise the impact of current and future crises on children's learning, wellbeing and protection – and on the future economic and social development of nations – will be devastating.

"It's not that I want to go out to school to be a nuisance, but going out brightens you up, being cooped up puts something ugly inside you. Many of my classmates have a more negative view of things, they no longer see the point in studying, and many are saying, 'I can work'. Many have lost motivation and have decided to drop out of school and not continue their studies, because they can see that their goals will not be met."

Paula from Colombia, Nicole from Guatemala and Ana from Peru

Those experiencing the worst impacts of conflict, climate change, hunger and health crises have done the least to cause them.

Rich countries must acknowledge the enduring links between their wealth and the poverty of low-income countries; otherwise we risk portraying the inequalities driven by climate change, conflict and other crises as geographical or biological and,

from the perspective of wealthy nations, solely a matter for international aid.⁶² It is critical that, as rich countries, we acknowledge how we may be implicated in the socio-political and economic causes of crises and our role – beyond humanitarian aid – in addressing them.

For example, of all the world's countries, the wealthiest 50% are driving the climate crisis, emitting 86% of global CO₂ emissions.⁶³ Climate change is exacerbating the causes of conflict, including increasing competition for resources that become scarcer as temperatures rise. The socioeconomic impacts of conflict and climate disaster in turn create the perfect conditions for diseases and pandemics to flourish.

In efforts to build forward better, high-income countries must take steps to address the underlying, systemic causes of inequality, climate change, conflict and insecurity.

NEW ANALYSIS: COUNTRIES WITH THE GREATEST RISKS TO EDUCATION

Our new **Risks to Education Index** ranks countries by the vulnerability of their school system to hazards, vulnerability and deficiencies in preparedness. This enables us to make a holistic assessment of the risks to education. It suggests which national education systems require increased attention and resources from national governments and international actors to mitigate crises.

It is important to note that high vulnerability and exposure to hazards does not always mean high risk. A country can have high-risk exposure, but with good preparation this reduces the overall net risk.

The index includes nine risk indicators grouped into the following six dimensions.

1. **Vulnerability to climate change** in combination with its readiness to improve preparedness.
2. Humanitarian factors – including **the scope and scale of attacks on education and the number of internally displaced children**.
3. Percentage of **youth unemployment**.
4. Factors related to **learning outcomes and percentage of school-aged children with an internet connection at home**.
5. Percentage of **out-of-school primary school-aged children**.
6. **Covid-19 vaccination coverage** among the population, and **whether teachers are prioritised for the vaccine**.

While all children face risks to their education, the table ranks countries according to where girls and boys face the greatest risks. The following table demonstrates the eight countries with extreme risks to schooling. The data has also been gender disaggregated. (See full methodology and 50 countries with highest risk in the Appendix, page 61.)

OUTBREAKS, EPIDEMICS AND PANDEMICS

Unlike conflicts or climate-related disasters, the Covid-19 pandemic did not destroy schools. But it has weakened many education systems, tested their resilience and ability to respond to this crisis, and entrenched exclusion. Millions of children were left with no access to formal education during school closures. **Our global survey of 25,000 children and caregivers found four in five children learned little or nothing while out of school. Girls are at greatest risk, due to an increase in household chores and caregiving responsibilities.**⁶⁴ The economic impact of the pandemic has plunged millions more into poverty,⁶⁵ increasing the risk of child marriage, forced labour, violence, abuse and exploitation – leading to more children being likely to drop out of school.⁶⁶

Good nutrition is vital for cognitive development. However, an estimated 2.6 million children may be left stunted by the impacts of the pandemic, which will have huge implications even if schools are open and resourced.⁶⁷ Malnourished students will learn less, no matter what happens in the classroom.

Sadly, the potential for future pandemics is vast. Experts argue that they are set to happen more frequently, spread more rapidly, and be more deadly than Covid-19.⁶⁸

TABLE 1: THE EIGHT COUNTRIES WHERE CHILDREN'S EDUCATION IS AT EXTREME RISK

	All children	Boys	Girls
1	Democratic Republic of Congo	Democratic Republic of Congo	Democratic Republic of Congo
2	Nigeria	Nigeria	Libya
3	Somalia	Somalia	Nigeria
4	Afghanistan	Afghanistan	Syria
5	South Sudan	South Sudan	Iraq
6	Sudan	Sudan	Afghanistan
7	Mali	Mali	Somalia
8	Libya	Syria	Sudan



Children at school in Mozambique continue their education after cyclone Idai.

PHOTO: SAMAM SAIDI/
SAVE THE CHILDREN

Epidemics such as Ebola, influenza and SARS are difficult to manage amid increasing conflict, fragility and migration, in countries with already weak health systems. Rising temperatures, urbanisation, and a lack of adequate sanitation and water create breeding grounds for fast-spreading disease outbreaks. Among the many devastating effects will be a significant impact on already weakened education systems, unless there is significant investment in preparedness.

THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

The climate emergency is posing a growing risk to children's ability to access education and learn. It has potentially life-long consequences, undermining their opportunities to transform their lives.

In a 'normal' year, 75 million children have their education disrupted. For around half of them, this is the result of climatic and environmental threats – such as cyclones, typhoons, floods and drought.⁶⁹ Schools are often damaged or even destroyed. In Mozambique in 2019, Cyclone Idai damaged or

destroyed more than 3,400 classrooms.⁷⁰ Where schools remain open and accessible in an emergency, they may not be able to offer regular lessons or have the materials they need.

Climate-related events have already contributed to over 50 million children being forced from their homes, migrating across borders, or being displaced within their own countries.⁷¹ And climate-induced displacement is projected to increase. **The World Bank suggests that more than 143 million people could be internally displaced by 2050 in just three regions due to the slow-onset impact of climate change.⁷² This will threaten children's protection, wellbeing and access to good-quality education.**

The impact of disasters on different groups of children is unequal, with girls less likely to return to school after a disaster. If current trends continue, by 2025 the climate emergency will be a contributing factor in preventing at least 12.5 million girls from completing their education each year.⁷³ They are at increased risk of early marriage due to the economic impact of climate-related shocks on households. Child marriage

can result in prolonged absences from school or dropping out altogether. In 2010, heavy monsoons led to devastating floods that destroyed 11,000 schools in Pakistan. Once schools reopened, fewer girls re-enrolled than boys.⁷⁴

Climate change is likely to cause an increase in the incidence and prevalence of many disabling impairments including disease, injury, malnutrition, and physical and psychological disability. Children living with disabilities are often invisible and overlooked in emergency relief operations. Inaccessible healthcare and education facilities and severe communication barriers, which are exacerbated during and after climate-induced disasters, prevent children with disabilities from accessing the services they require.

Disaster risk reduction practices are critical to strengthening the physical and bureaucratic

infrastructure of education systems. Stronger education systems should be part of governments' national climate adaptation plans and strategies. They should recognise the role of strong, flexible and inclusive systems in supporting children to continue learning, during and after displacement or migration.

CONFLICT

Conflicts are becoming more frequent, dangerous, protracted and fragmented. At the same time, compliance with international law is declining, leading to record high levels of killing and maiming of children, and rising displacement.⁷⁵ Over the last three decades, the number of children living in conflict zones has nearly doubled – reaching 415 million in 2018.⁷⁶



Kadidia, 14, and her friend Mariam studying after school at her home in Mopti region, Mali

“With the outbreak of the conflict, my parents said they didn’t want me to stop going to school. I didn’t want to stop school either. That’s why they brought me here.”

Kadidia now attends a Save the Children-supported school, which is helping children caught up in the violence.

The relationship between conflict and education is complex. Conflict both creates and exacerbates education exclusion. Our study in the Democratic Republic of Congo found that financial barriers to education may be exacerbated due to the negative income shocks of conflict on household income.⁷⁷ Children enrolled in school were found to have come from households with double the income of those who never enrolled or dropped out. Education inequality can in turn increase the likelihood of conflict.⁷⁸

Prior to the pandemic, nearly one-third of out-of-school children – an estimated 104 million – lived in countries affected by war or natural disasters.⁷⁹ Girls affected by conflict and forced displacement are more than twice as likely to be out of school than boys.⁸⁰

Around the world, education continues to come under attack. Students are deliberately or indiscriminately killed, raped and abducted. Schools are occupied, bombed and destroyed. **Globally, between 2015 and 2019 there were more than 11,000 reports of attacks on education or of the military use of educational facilities.**⁸¹ These incidents harmed more than 22,000 students, teachers and education staff. Attacks on schools are a grave violation against children. While reported attacks on education appeared to decline overall during this period, incidents increased in certain countries, and emerged in additional countries.

In May 2021, as girls were leaving their lessons in Kabul, Afghanistan, an explosion killed at least 70 people, including many schoolgirls, and dozens more were wounded.⁸² In some countries, children are shockingly abducted from their schools – at least 600 children in Nigeria from January to June this year alone.⁸³ Between 10 and 21 May 2021 in Gaza, 54 schools were damaged in Israeli airstrikes, impacting 41,897 children. Three further schools were reportedly damaged in Israel by rockets originating in Gaza. In Gaza, 58,000 displaced people have been driven to use schools as shelters after losing their homes in airstrikes.⁸⁴

Attacks on education kill and injure students and teachers, and lead to school dropouts, teacher shortages and extended school closures. These attacks on places where children go to learn reduce the quality of their education, threaten their wellbeing, weaken education systems, and have a devastating wider social impact.

Discriminatory gender norms and beliefs lead to additional risks for girls, such as sexual violence, violent repression of their education, recruitment by armed forces or groups, abduction, and forced marriage – which may cause them to drop out of school permanently.⁸⁵

DISPLACEMENT

Armed conflicts, persecution and the impacts of climate change are causing record high numbers of refugees and internally displaced people.⁸⁶ Globally, nearly 33 million children were forcibly displaced at the end of 2019.⁸⁷ Refugees have some of the lowest access rates to education globally, with almost half of school-age refugee students out of school.⁸⁸ Only 63% of refugee children attend primary school – compared with 91% of children globally.⁸⁹

Refugee, asylum seeker and internally displaced children are frequently unable to access education due to discrimination, financial and legal barriers, and conflict. Displaced girls also face heightened risk of trafficking, child marriage, early pregnancy and gender-based violence. Even when in school, many displaced children are not receiving a good-quality education, putting their development, learning and wellbeing at risk and leading to high dropout rates.

The education needs of displaced students are multifaceted. **Safe schools and non-formal learning spaces are some of the most beneficial environments for children during a period of uncertainty caused by displacement.** They may require socioemotional learning (SEL) opportunities and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), which are proven to protect children from the negative effects of disasters. They create stable routines, provide opportunities for friendship and play, foster hope and reduce stress. They make it possible to refer children experiencing acute distress to specialised support services.

Refugees may have already missed years of schooling and be unfamiliar with the local curriculum and the language of instruction.⁹⁰ Children with disabilities who have been displaced often miss out on education opportunities because of the stigma and discrimination they face in the places they now live. In addition, the support that makes education accessible to children with a disability, such as

braille or sign language teachers, can lead to them staying home, putting them at further risk of protection concerns.⁹¹

“The number of teachers who know sign language is very low. Family members need to know sign language so that they can help children with disabilities with their education.”

Mohammed, Sudan

If current trends continue, millions more displaced children will have their education disrupted due to conflict, violence and climate-disasters. Education systems must address the barriers to displaced children’s inclusion in education and ensure robust preparedness plans are in place that consider their specific needs.

COMPOUNDED CRISES IN LEBANON

Lebanon is facing multiple crises, including an economic crisis, food insecurity, political instability, a refugee crisis, Covid-19, and the lasting impact of the blast in Beirut in August 2020. Although public schools re-opened in May 2021, with around 60–70% offering hybrid learning, a significant number of second shift learners – Syrian refugee children, who are scheduled to learn in the afternoon – are not able to make it back to schools for economic reasons.⁹² Prior to this, the poorest and most marginalised children were already affected

by inequality in educational attainment. There can be up to four years’ difference between attainment levels, depending on a child’s socioeconomic status. Refugee children face additional barriers to education, including a lack of available spaces, not knowing the language of instruction, not having the legal documentation and certification required for enrolment, long distances to travel or lack of transportation to school. It is estimated that nearly 45% of Syrian refugee children in Lebanon were out of school altogether in the 2019–20 academic year.⁹³

Siraj, 13, preparing his schoolbooks ahead of a new school day in Bekaa Valley, Lebanon where he has been living in a tented informal refugee camp for the past five years.

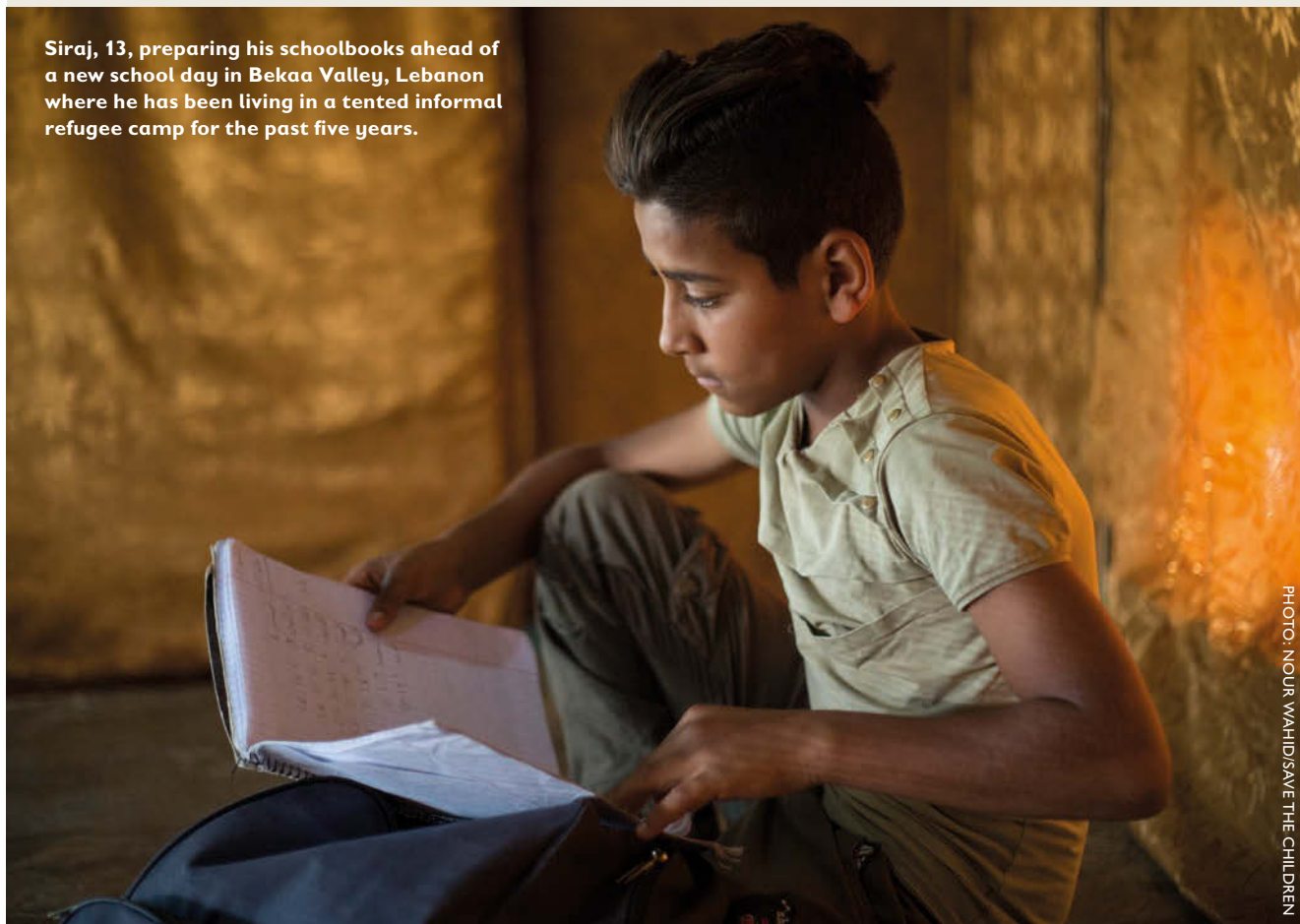


PHOTO: NOUR WAHID/SAVE THE CHILDREN

3 Ten lessons for crisis-sensitive education planning

Emergencies already affect children's learning, protection and wellbeing. The likelihood is that over the coming decades, countries will be at increased risk of hazards that – without investment in national education systems, preparedness and anticipatory action – pose an even greater threat to children's right to a safe, inclusive and quality education.

As the pandemic has shown, building resilient education systems in all countries is critical, and even more so in crisis-prone and low-income countries. As part of an emergency response, education is life-saving and life-sustaining. And we know it's what children and parents want: our research in 2019 showed that, even when overwhelmed by crisis and displacement, nearly one-third of children (29%) identified education as their top priority.⁹⁴

Save the Children has decades of experience in keeping children safe and delivering learning opportunities in rapid-onset emergencies and protracted humanitarian crises, as well as undertaking research and advocating to governments and donors. Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have worked with partners, children, parents and communities to capitalise on our experience. We have continued to innovate and created effective distance learning programmes to keep children safe, support their wellbeing and help prepare for their safe return to school.

TAKE AN ANTICIPATORY APPROACH THROUGH CRISIS-SENSITIVE PLANNING

Every ministry of education, whether in a high-, middle- or low-income country, needs to be better prepared to respond to crises – to ensure that learning can continue and children's rights to education are fulfilled. Evidence shows that in response to the pandemic, the education systems that were best prepared and that were agile and adaptable were the most effective.

The pandemic has thus highlighted the need for iterative planning that is flexible enough to allow for anticipatory action based on forecasted or real-time data. For example, Sierra Leone's response plans for Covid-19 showed lessons had been learned from the Ebola outbreak, with a clear understanding of the impacts of school closures on learning outcomes and equity issues. The country's Teacher Service Commission drew on experience from the Ebola crisis by launching an educational radio programme within one week of school closures.⁹⁵

SNAPSHOT OF OUR EDUCATION RESPONSE IN 2020⁹⁶

In 2020, Save the Children worked across 80 countries reaching **12 million children directly through education programming, including our response to Covid-19 school closures. This included reaching 6.8 million children in humanitarian crises in 77 countries with education support –**

contexts where the impact of Covid-19 compounded ongoing crisis.

In addition, through our role as co-lead of the Global Education Cluster, we helped coordinate responses with national and local organisations that reached 17.2 million children (January to June 2020).⁹⁷

DEFINITION OF ANTICIPATORY ACTION

Anticipatory Action is an approach which systematically links early warnings and triggers to actions designed to protect families, communities and public services, including national education systems, ahead of a hazard. Acting before a disaster is crucial – **it can safeguard lives and livelihoods, build resilience to future shocks, and ease pressure on strained humanitarian resources.** An anticipatory action framework has three elements: Forecast and decision-making rules (the data driven model), pre-agreed action plans (preparedness and delivery) and pre-arranged finance (the money).

Today, we can predict with increasing confidence the occurrence and potential impact of certain climatic shocks, political and conflict dynamics, and communicable diseases. Neither the shock nor the impact on communities without early action should come as a surprise. The available data can help decision-makers agree to release pre-arranged funds for pre-agreed interventions that take place before such shocks occur, in order to mitigate their impact. **By taking this anticipatory approach – using analysis of risk as well as need – education ministries, along with the humanitarian community, can better meet learning and wellbeing needs.**

Given their primary responsibility for education provision, ministries of education should promote risk reduction efforts in the education sector. This involves institutionalising risk reduction and management in education planning processes – a process known as *crisis-sensitive education planning*. Technical and financial partners should support a country's ministry of education, aligning short-term interventions with the ministry's medium- and long-term objectives and activities. Additionally, ministries of education should collaborate with child protection services and disaster management authorities, as well as education, child protection and health clusters or national school safety coordination structures if activated.

Crisis-sensitive planning in the education system aims to strengthen education planning and delivery before, during and after a crisis.⁹⁸ It reduces the negative impact of crises on the delivery of education services, while promoting the development of education policies and programmes that will help prevent future crises.⁹⁹

This process involves analysing all existing and potential crisis risks and understanding their links with education by answering two key questions:

- How do these risks impact on education systems?
- How can education systems reduce their impact and occurrence?

By highlighting the interactions between identified risks and vulnerabilities, strategies can be developed to address them at all stages of education planning.

The inclusion of crisis risks and measures to respond to them can be included in national education sector plans and/or education transition plans. This must include a participatory process, involving all organisations working in the field of education and related sectors. It should include both development and humanitarian organisations, children, teachers, and their communities. **Through this participatory approach, crisis-sensitive education planning plays an important role in strengthening humanitarian development coherence, through greater alignment and complementarity of the interventions and a reduction in duplication.**

Participatory crisis-sensitive education planning can help address inequalities and exclusion in the education sector by paying attention to the risks and vulnerabilities faced by children who may be left out of education policies. These children can include internally displaced populations, out-of-school and over-age children, refugees, asylum seekers, girls, children with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

10 LESSONS FOR CRISIS-SENSITIVE EDUCATION PLANNING

The following section outlines the lessons we have learned from our experience in delivering education in emergencies before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. It explains where action is needed by ministries of education, donors, civil society and the private sector to ensure that national education systems are better prepared to respond more effectively and inclusively to ongoing and future crises.

At the same time, the 258 million children who were out of education before the pandemic need the chance to go to school safely and to learn. Many of the actions set out here are relevant to reaching these children too.

10 lessons for crisis-sensitive education planning

1. Strengthen data collection to ensure marginalised children are visible.
2. Expand good-quality distance-learning modalities.
3. Plan integrated responses to create safe learning environments.
4. Plan and budget for mental health and psychosocial support within the education system.
5. Plan to get learning back on track.
6. Provide non-formal pathways to formal education.
7. Scale up teacher recruitment, training and wellbeing support.
8. Include early childhood development.
9. Reform the curriculum to ensure it is relevant to children's lives.
10. Involve parents and communities.

CRISIS-SENSITIVE EDUCATION PLANNING IN SOUTH SUDAN

South Sudan, a new country, has a struggling economy, extreme poverty, lack of infrastructure, food insecurity, climate crises and renewed conflict. These realities underline the urgent need to mainstream crisis-sensitive planning into the process of developing an education sector analysis (ESA) and education sector plan (ESP).

An evaluation¹⁰⁰ of the process in South Sudan showed that participation of all education stakeholders was key, as was Ministry of Education, Science and Technology ownership. Representatives from all ten states participated in the process, as well as from the humanitarian and development community, the donor community and civil society. The availability of education data from the country's education management information system (EMIS), and the availability of crisis-related data, greatly facilitated the analysis process.

The need to obtain funding is a driving factor for the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. South Sudan's second ESP was therefore prepared with the intention of securing international funding. Stakeholders also viewed

the ESA/ESP process as an opportunity to improve the coordination of education actors.

The government, in collaboration with others and building on its existing ESP, developed a National Education Sector Covid-19 response plan. 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 have provided strategic leadership and guidance to the government on the response to school closures and safe school reopening.

In 2019, Save the Children and UNICEF-hosted cluster coordinators helped Education Cluster partners co-design a \$30-million Education Cannot Wait-funded multi-year resilience programme (MYRP) with a particular focus on supporting a localised response. Over a period of three years, this programme will increase access to education for internally displaced children, returnee children and host community children, including children with disabilities.

1. STRENGTHEN DATA COLLECTION TO ENSURE MARGINALISED CHILDREN ARE VISIBLE

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated an already alarming gap in the collection, analysis and availability of enrolment and learning data. In rapid-onset emergencies and protracted humanitarian crises, accurate data is even less available.

Refugees and displaced communities are largely invisible in national and global education statistics.¹⁰¹ In large-scale, national education management information systems (EMIS), not only are marginalised groups often excluded from the data, the process of collecting EMIS data often consists of an *annual* national census of school information. As a result, it often does not reflect changes in student and teacher attendance or capture the nuance of crisis-affected populations.

Consequently, national education policies, which are informed by EMIS systems, often exclude refugee and internally displaced children's education data – limiting the ability of the government and partners in the international community to establish specific preparedness measures that cater to their specific needs. If we do not know which groups of children are at risk of dropping out of school or have low attendance, we cannot properly tailor anticipatory action to support them before they drop out of education.

During the Covid pandemic, global data on school closures and affected children has lacked the detail and nuance required for governments and education actors to respond to the needs of children. For example, UNESCO reports on the number of 'enrolled' children affected. This leaves out the children who were already out of school before schools closed, and for whom it is even more difficult to get back to learning now. Similarly, global tracking does not account for situations where some schools are open and others are closed, or where schools are officially open but remain closed due to conflict or

another crisis. For example, UNESCO shows that schools in Yemen officially re-opened after Covid-19 school closures in October 2020. However, this does not take into account that 2,507 of Yemen's schools are reported destroyed, damaged or used for non-educational purposes. Two million of the country's children are out of school, and 80% of school-age children require emergency assistance.¹⁰²

Furthermore, education teams in humanitarian contexts – government schools or NGO educational programmes involving multiple schools or non-formal learning spaces – lack efficient tools to track and use attendance data to improve interventions to assist students and teachers.

Based on these challenges, Save the Children is working with partners and governments to strengthen school and learning space data systems so that education teams can practically, and with ease, use real-time data to inform education, child protection, mental health and psychosocial support, and health interventions. This data can ultimately be fed data into national EMIS systems and contribute to a system able to support and represent all children's right to education.

We have developed an *Enrolment and Absence Monitoring Systems Toolkit*¹⁰³ to support education teams' understanding of existing attendance tracking systems and how to select and use a system that meets contextual needs. This toolkit is rooted in operational practice and is being piloted in Colombia and Lebanon (see box on p19).

In Indonesia, we have developed a student absence and wellbeing management system called *Waliku* – meaning 'my guardian' in Indonesian. This creates a digital nest for school communities to support children's learning.¹⁰⁴ *Waliku* starts with a digital absence tracking system where teachers can immediately identify and respond to those missing school for health or other reasons. Add-on digital features and complementary workflows in *Waliku* give teachers and schools the necessary information and community connections to act on student wellbeing.

INNOVATION IN DIGITAL ATTENDANCE TRACKING IN COLOMBIA AND LEBANON

In response to increasing displacement in Colombia, Save the Children has developed a digital attendance tracking system that allows school communities to monitor children based on displacement status, gender or disability. This data is used to identify attendance patterns and provide targeted education, child protection, mental health and health interventions to prevent drop out. This system also supports monitoring of the re-enrolment of children after school closures due to Covid-19. We are working closely with the government to learn from this pilot and see how it can support national change.

In Lebanon, Syrian refugee children encounter numerous barriers to formal education. Using a digital attendance tracking system, we and our partners aim to provide systematic evidence of enrolment, attendance and attainment of academic milestones to support transitions from non-formal education centres into formal schools. Additionally, by supporting improved non-formal education data management, international NGOs can better advocate for and support inclusive government policies.

DATA ON ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS

Attacks on education¹⁰⁵ are often under-reported, leaving a critical gap in information about their prevalence and the number of students and school staff killed, harmed or out of school as a result.”¹⁰⁶ When collected and analysed systematically, qualitative and quantitative data on attacks on schools helps local and international NGOs, governments and the United Nations to plan, resource and coordinate child protection and education in emergencies efforts that respond in real-time to children’s needs.

The data can also support the longer-term ‘build forward better’ agenda. When verified, this data can be included in the UN Secretary General’s annual report on children and armed conflict.¹⁰⁷ This resource identifies perpetrators of attacks on education and other grave violations and holds them accountable. For example, advocates in Sudan note that their government’s endorsement of the *Safe Schools Declaration*¹⁰⁸ (see box below) was partially motivated by a desire to advance their delisting in the UN Secretary General’s report. Verified reports can form a foundation for future legal investigations into human rights violations, war crimes or crimes against humanity.

THE SAFE SCHOOLS DECLARATION

The *Safe Schools Declaration* is a voluntary political commitment to better protect education from attack and restrict the use of schools for military purposes. As of August 2021, 110 states have endorsed the declaration, representing a growing community of states committed to respecting the civilian nature of schools and sharing good practice in protecting schools during armed conflict. By endorsing the declaration, countries commit to collect or facilitate the collection of data on attacks on

education, to investigate and prosecute war crimes involving education, and to aid victims. They also commit to restore access to safe education and to develop education systems that are conflict-sensitive and promote respect between social or ethnic groups. Good evidence has already emerged across different regions that implementation of the declaration can lead to tangible improvements in protecting education, which need to be central to efforts to build forward better.¹⁰⁹

Covid-19 restrictions have caused gaps and challenges for the reporting, monitoring and verification of attacks on education.^{110, 111} **As communities and governments look to**

build forward better, innovations in remote monitoring strategies that Covid-19 has spurred should continue.

REPORTING INCIDENTS IN NORTH-WEST SYRIA

Save the Children has co-developed a surveillance system for attacks on education. A network of observers has been trained to collect information, confirm details and report incidents as an automatic standard procedure.

An initial alert is sent within hours of the attack. After confirming the details, an incident report is finalised and circulated, usually within 24 hours of the attack. The surveillance system covers our operational areas in north-west Syria. Discussions are ongoing to expand the system further.

FIGURE 2. EXAMPLE OF AN INCIDENT REPORT

School name:	<input type="text"/>
Date:	04-11-20
Time:	0750 hrs
Town/village:	<input type="text"/>
Subdistrict code:	<input type="text"/>
Type of attack:	shelling, explosive weapon, ongoing conflict
School level:	1st to 4th Grade
Capacity:	200–300
Aftermath:	school wall sustained damage, shrapnel spread across the school yard
No. of students affected:	unknown
No. of education personnel:	unknown

The above report was circulated within two hours of an attack. Initial reports like this one can lack information, such as the number of students affected. Six hours later, follow-up information on this attack was reported, confirming 159 girls had left the classrooms five minutes before the attack.



Hashem, 14 years old, was displaced from a village in northern rural Hama in Syria following the escalation of violence in the area in 2018. Hashem sustained head injuries and now receives support from Save the Children's partner organisation Syria Relief.

PHOTO: SYRIA RELIEF/SAVE THE CHILDREN

THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT IN DATA COLLECTION

Inadequate SDG4 indicator measurement is a result of serious underfunding. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics has calculated that it would cost on average \$1.4 million per year per country to produce data on all the SDG4 indicators (or an overall global investment of \$280 million per year).¹¹²

Currently, the amount spent on SDG4 monitoring is an estimated \$148 million per year, with the majority spent by upper-middle- and high-income countries.¹¹³ To meet the shortfall, external funding in low-income and lower-middle-income countries must be increased by up to \$60 million per year over current levels through to 2030, and all countries must increase domestic expenditure on SDG4 monitoring.¹¹⁴ The financing would cover multi-purpose school and household surveys (25%) and learning assessments (75%) that would generate data on multiple indicators.¹¹⁵

This investment makes financial sense given that better data would lead to a minimum 10% gain in efficiency on average in most countries.¹¹⁶ This efficiency saving could take various forms, from quantity to quality of resources. In return for an investment of \$1.4 million per year in education data in the average country, that country could save \$143 million a year in the running costs of its education system. Additional funding would then be available to build the resilience of education systems, through increasing spending on teachers, better classrooms and learning materials and through reaching children from low-income households and those who are discriminated against.¹¹⁷

This investment also makes sense because better data both helps countries to plan and prevents them from masking inequality. For example, data disaggregated by sex, age and disability – at a minimum – is necessary to reveal discrepancies in education for children most at risk of not completing their education.

“In Zimbabwe, people tend to forget about children with special needs when they talk about access to education for children. For example, the television lessons which are being provided do not have subtitles and there is no sign language box to assist children with hearing disabilities.”

Vanessa, Zimbabwe

2. EXPAND GOOD-QUALITY DISTANCE LEARNING MODALITIES

Distance education has developed significantly over the last 70 years¹¹⁸ and has often been deployed to engage children in hard-to-reach locations.¹¹⁹ However, never have so many education systems and their students and parents had to engage in learning at home – and at short notice. **It was clear that when Covid-19 forced school closures across the world, far too many national education systems and their partners in the global education community were ill-prepared to deal with the challenges of providing good-quality learning opportunities in a timely manner.**

“Distance education is a big problem that children face, and it may lead to children dropping out of schools, so solutions must be found, including teachers to explain lessons in a better way, find alternative means for distance education, provide the internet for children, secure phones and computers for children, facilitate the curriculum to fit with distance education, and train children to divide their time.”

Rafaf, Lebanon

Governments across the world looked to technology-enabled modalities to facilitate their distance learning work.¹²⁰ In many lower-income countries, a wide range of technologies for delivering distance education was deployed, including radio, SMS, interactive voice response (IVR), and paper-based resources. **Despite these efforts, an estimate in May 2020¹²¹ showed that 500 million children did not have access to distance learning.**

As co-lead of the Global Education Cluster and as members and/or coordinators of the Education Clusters in-country, we have supported and led the roll-out of national education responses that include shifts to blended learning – digital, radio-based and paper-based lessons. Save the Children convened actors from across multiple agencies to contribute to a set of guidance on the use of Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) for the sector and quickly adapted social emotional learning materials for use over the radio.

As research has consistently demonstrated, inequalities common in the non-digital world frequently migrate into the digital world.¹²² **The digital divide¹²³ is often narrowly viewed in**

terms of a binary access to technology, but researchers have consistently demonstrated that there is a divide in the ability to use technology.¹²⁴ School closures demonstrated that a lack of digital accessibility and literacy to support distance education provision was a barrier for teachers, parents¹²⁵ and children.¹²⁶ To varying degrees, the crisis forced governments to think beyond the binary of access to technology and evaluate the barriers that impacted engagement in terms of infrastructure and financing (such as the availability of mobile data), as well as social and cultural norms that can inhibit access to technology¹²⁷ – for example, the often gendered nature of technology access.¹²⁸

To overcome these barriers, the World Bank has recommended that use of technology should be guided by a clear purpose and focus on educational objectives: to reach all learners; to empower teachers, parents and caregivers to coordinate with and support the duty-bearers; to engage local partners; and to use data rigorously and routinely to learn what strategies, policies and programmes are effective to maximise student learning and wellbeing.¹²⁹

Despite the challenges of technology access, there was important learning concerning the move to multi-modality approaches to distance learning that could **offer countries a supplement to traditional education provision in the long term.** This is particularly useful for children in crisis-affected and low-income countries who are out of school and hard to reach, and for whom low-tech and no-tech solutions are often required. Early in the pandemic, Save the Children prioritised paper-based solutions, interactive radio and audio instruction, and small-group in-person support, in addition to digital modalities where appropriate and where teachers and parents could actively lead (eg, SMS messaging and WhatsApp video files). In Nigeria, we provided a range of distance-learning modalities – including solar-powered radio learning and, in areas without a signal, paper-based materials.

It is important governments are supported to **measure the impact of their approaches to distance learning on children's learning and wellbeing.** This information is critical to recouping lost learning and preparing for future shocks to service delivery. It is also important that governments, as duty-bearers of children's right to access quality education, evaluate the level of access marginalised groups, including displaced communities, have to distance learning provision and what can be done to support these communities better in the future.

“Schools closed and we attended online but the internet in Sudan is not good enough for online school. Some can't afford buying devices for online school and schools don't have resources for that. Some states don't have available internet access and cannot work online. Schools started TV school because they don't have online school. This did not work because there was lack of continuous electricity supply.”

Mina, Sudan

Some distance-learning modalities present increased security risks for children. For example, girls are particularly vulnerable to online sexual exploitation and abuse, making up the vast majority of children in online films, photos and other material featuring child sexual abuse.¹³⁰ All distance-learning modalities should therefore include a risk assessment for child safeguarding.

Though new technologies have a significant role to play, governments must not discount the value in engaging with approaches that have been proven to be of use throughout the Covid-19 crisis – such as paper-based packs, radio, TV, and small-group learning opportunities. Governments and the global education community should build on the significant experience from the pandemic to ensure that when the next major shock to education provision occurs, we are collectively better placed to respond.

“The government should focus on children in remote areas. These children have been neglected.”

Mohammad, Sudan

3. PLAN INTEGRATED RESPONSES TO CREATE SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

“If there is violence at home, you feel safer at school. It was always quite safe at the school I was in before because we had a psychologist. But where I am now there are not enough teachers, and the school environment is not 100 percent. I have heard that in some places the teachers insult the children, shout at them, in a disrespectful way. I don’t think that’s the way to talk to students.”

Paula from Colombia, Nicole from Guatemala, and Ana from Peru

Covid-19, like many crises that affect children’s schooling, has had a multifaceted impact on children’s rights, affecting education, child protection, children’s mental and physical health, and nutrition. **However, a siloed approach is an inadequate response to the complexity of children’s needs.** Governments and agencies should strive to ensure a holistic approach that puts the child at the centre of the response and pulls in each sector (education, child protection, health, social protection, etc) in an integrated way. Save the Children has developed an *Integrated Community-Level Case Management Model* that combines evidence of what works in child protection and economic programming, with a holistic case-management and cash-assistance offer. For vulnerable children who are out of school, links between education, protection, mental health and psychosocial support, nutrition and health can be made.

With climate disasters, food insecurity, conflict and displacement all on the rise, integrated approaches to creating safe learning environments are key to ensuring safe, uninterrupted access to good-quality education, and building forward better in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

For example, in north-east Syria, Save the Children and our partners supported displaced children and their families with a joined-up water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and education approach. This included improving handwashing and disinfection facilities in learning spaces, supporting child-led hygiene promotion, supplying students’ families with essential hygiene supplies, and conducting a mass ‘Safe Back to School’ campaign through radio and YouTube.¹³¹

Recognising the diverse threats to children’s right to education, protection and survival, we developed an all-hazards *Safe Schools Common Approach*.¹³² It aims to protect children in and around schools from violence, conflict, and natural and everyday hazards. The approach brings together evidence from decades of education, child protection and disaster risk reduction programming. In two years **since it was launched in April 2019, more than 50 countries have implemented integrated Safe Schools programmes – often with local partners in complex crises.**

When Covid-19 hit, we capitalised on this strong foundation to quickly respond to the new multi-sectoral risks posed by the pandemic and subsequent school closures. **Within a six-week timeframe, technical experts in education, child protection, MHPSS, WASH, school health and nutrition, disability, disaster risk reduction, gender, child participation, and advocacy drafted the *Safe Back to School: A Practitioner’s Guide* (‘the Guide’).**¹³³ This draft was reviewed and supplemented by UNHCR, UNICEF, UNESCO-IIEP, the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) and others. The Global Education Cluster and the Child Protection Area of Responsibility co-endorsed the Guide, which was launched globally in May 2020.

The Guide focuses on several practical checklists for supporting children’s learning and wellbeing, and getting children and teachers safely back to school. Since its launch, the Guide has been translated into at least six languages, and 14 global and regional inter-agency launch events have reached more than 19,900 technical experts. As of December 2020, the Guide had been accessed online by more than 20,000 unique viewers from 145 countries.¹³⁴ At least 11 countries (Afghanistan, Colombia, Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Liberia, Mozambique, Nepal, the occupied Palestinian territory, Pakistan and Yemen) have developed local adaptations. With contextualised versions being adopted by governments and coordination mechanisms worldwide, the Guide has paved the way for building forward better in a truly integrated way.

ADAPTATIONS OF THE SAFE BACK TO SCHOOL GUIDE

In Liberia, Save the Children used the Guide to adapt programmes to deliver take-home rations directly to children's communities in order to replace the school meal that would have otherwise been provided. Literacy components were adapted for home-learning packages, and a simple pictorial guide was developed for non-literate parents to support children's continued learning. A set of 11 'safe school stories' to raise awareness of the national *Teacher Code of Conduct* and to prevent violence against children were adapted for radio.

In Nepal, in November 2020, the Education Cluster, together with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, reviewed the Guide and **endorsed the 'School Operation Framework-2020, in the context of COVID-19' in November 2020.**¹³⁵ This framework presents the preparations necessary for the reopening of schools as well as the minimum activities to be carried out by the provincial and local government during school reopening to ensure children's safety in and around schools. **Save the Children also developed a checklist based on this framework to help school communities assess their readiness for safe reopening, which has been used to assess 535 schools. The findings of these assessments have been used to inform**

discussions with duty-bearers on actions needed to ensure children's safe return to school.

In Afghanistan¹³⁶ and Yemen, the Guide has been adapted to ensure that the sensitivities of working with communities affected by long-term conflict are adequately addressed. In Yemen, for example, the military has been present outside of schools that are being used as health centres. This means teams must be equally ready to assess the health risks of reopening a school as the protection risks. In Afghanistan, the contextualised version of the Guide has been endorsed by the Education in Emergencies Working Group; Yemen is pursuing cluster endorsement too.

In Colombia, we organised the adaptation of the Guide through a collaborative process with students, teachers and education authorities. **The resulting protocol¹³⁷ will be used by all schools in the Catatumbo region, with ambitions for national endorsement.** The Spanish translation of the Guide was adapted for an online learning module on Covid-19 that is being delivered through an e-course in School Health and Nutrition, reaching Save the Children staff, government workers, and international NGO and UN workers across Latin America.

4. PLAN AND BUDGET FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT (MHPSS) WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

"Covid-19 was a surprising and frightening issue because they (governments, schools and communities) did not have enough information about it. All the schools were closed off and social life was hindered. When schools were closed off, children were prone to sexual violence, their brothers and other men were home, so prone to sexual violence. There were also psychological problems because they were far away from their friends and there was no direct support."

Yolago, Ethiopia

Safe learning spaces and schools do much more than support children to achieve academic learning outcomes. They also play a critical role in children's social, emotional and physical development and wellbeing.

Our global survey of children and parents showed that most children (83%) and parents/caregivers (89%) reported an increase in negative feelings due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Just under half of parents and caregivers (46%) reported observing signs of psychological distress in children.¹³⁸ Children affected by sudden school closures experienced increased instability through loss of daily routines, less opportunities for teachers to identify signs of distress, and reduced access to friends – another

social support. This lack of structure puts children at greater risk of isolation and negative feelings, which can have severe effects on their mental health and their learning outcomes.^{139, 140}

According to the children's participatory survey conducted in eastern Ukraine, children are in need of psychosocial support after eight years of

the conflict. Our Healing and Education Through Arts (HEART) programme is being used in eastern Ukraine to help meet these needs.

Safe schools and good-quality education also provide girls and boys with the time, space and support to play. When schools were closed, our research shows that playing less

PROTECTING LEARNING FROM CRISIS BEFORE COVID-19

In Zimbabwe, with accelerated funding support from the Global Partnership for Education for the Cyclone Idai response (in March 2019), Save the Children trained gender and child safeguarding staff and established gender-sensitive and disability-inclusive accountability, complaints and feedback mechanisms across schools. Teachers received targeted professional development, including in disaster risk reduction, and schools were provided with water, sanitation and hygiene facilities to help prevent the spread of Covid-19.

In Mozambique, 3,400 classrooms were destroyed or damaged by Cyclone Idai, interrupting education for more than 305,000 children.¹⁴¹ With support from Education Cannot Wait, we rehabilitated damaged and destroyed schools, distributed learning materials and set up temporary

learning spaces to support children to catch up on education and provide a safe space to play and recover from the distressing experiences they faced.

In Mali, we provided psychosocial and protection support to conflict-affected children through a child resilience approach, with an emphasis on learning and education. **The programme has helped establish mechanisms for community preparedness, alertness and reaction to different levels of threat to the local education system.** Thanks to the efforts of local communities, the project has set up 11 temporary learning centres, which have benefited 296 children, including 131 girls, who were out of school and early school leavers. In cooperation with the Ministry of Education, the programme successfully integrated 255 children, including 111 girls, into the formal education system.¹⁴²



Elsa, 14, Zimbabwe has stayed at home whilst schools are closed. Her disability means she is particularly at risk of missing out on learning without the additional support she would usually receive in the classroom.

PHOTO: SOPHIE HAMANDISHESAVE THE CHILDREN

often made children three times more likely to feel less happy, less hopeful and less safe. Keeping in touch with friends made them twice as likely to feel happier, safer and less worried.¹⁴³ The closure of schools meant many children lacked access to psychosocial support and mental health services provided in schools or through referrals. As schools prepare to reopen, children, parents and teachers may experience fear, anxiety and uncertainty. It is critical that these concerns are swiftly addressed in order to support children's wellbeing and ensure they feel safe and supported returning to the classroom.

Evidence shows that increased wellbeing leads to better learning outcomes. There is a direct relationship between teachers' own social and emotional competence and psychosocial wellbeing, and that of their students.¹⁴⁴ Teachers therefore need to be supported in their own wellbeing as well as in modeling social emotional learning (SEL) skills in the classroom, particularly in emergency settings.¹⁴⁵ This includes the provision of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) that addresses stigmatisation and supports children and their families in coping with adversity.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the necessity to invest in educational staff who provide psychosocial support (PSS) to students – and who can refer children to more specialised services if needed. Teachers, parents, caregivers or siblings can provide PSS support, including remote delivery of psychological first aid and home-based PSS kits.¹⁴⁶ In Uganda, PSS kits were developed that include games, activities and messages on how families can cope with distress. Where possible, house-to-house visits were conducted to encourage children and their parents to engage in these activities. In Myanmar, we continued to provide one-on-one emotional support through an online text/chat platform called *Mee Pya Tike*. Support sessions covered loneliness, stress, relationships with friends, peer pressure and careers.

There should be a clear policy framework for training teachers in psychosocial support. And every school should have referral mechanisms for more specialised support services. Pre-service teacher education programmes should stress the importance of age- and gender-sensitive SEL and a pedagogical approach that focuses on student wellbeing. These steps may help to mitigate the worst effects of a crisis in the immediate term and address ongoing protection and safety issues in the community in the long run.

5. PLAN TO GET LEARNING BACK ON TRACK

When crises occur and children are out of school, their levels of lost learning differ as a result of a myriad of factors. These include length of time out of school, whether they have accessed distance learning, and whether the distance learning was appropriate and children and parents/caregivers were able to engage with it. It will also depend on whether they have received the mental health and psychosocial support they needed and how resilient their households and communities have been to the shock.

Ensuring that crisis-sensitive education planning includes methods to both measure (quantitatively and qualitatively) learning loss and recover it will be integral to children being able to re-enter and stay in school effectively. There are many initiatives, tools and resources that have been accessed during the Covid-19 response to support children and young people.

Catch-up programmes must address social and emotional learning, as these skills contribute to children's wellbeing and resilience, as well as academic learning outcomes. Teachers also need to be able to identify children who are vulnerable or experiencing distress, and who need additional support, including their mental health.

Accelerated education – a range of alternative education options including condensing seven or eight years of a primary curriculum into three or four years – is a tried and tested way of supporting out-of-school and ‘over-age’ girls and boys to get a basic education. In Uganda, in 2018, together with the national Accelerated Education Working Group, we worked with the Ministry of Education to adapt a competency-based primary-level accelerated curriculum. This has been successfully delivered in schools and accelerated education centres. **When schools were closed due to Covid-19, we provided technical guidance and financial support to the National Curriculum Development Centre to help design and develop paper-based home learning packs for each grade to ensure that children without access to the internet, phones or radio were supported.** Packs were distributed on a community rather than school-enrolment basis, ensuring a wider reach, and including children not previously attending schools supported by our existing projects.

We have created catch-up clubs (CUCs), which will help children catch up on their education in the wake of Covid-19 school disruptions and reduce their likelihood of dropping out. CUCs are a highly targeted, data-driven and cost-effective intervention that can be implemented and scaled up rapidly. **The three key components of our approach are community-based remedial reading and maths, child protection case management, and financial support to families.** CUCs identify learning facilitators within local communities and support them to provide remedial, accelerated activities in basic reading and maths for those children most at risk of falling behind or dropping out of education entirely. Child protection case workers ensure that the most vulnerable children are referred from CUC learning facilitators and teachers to case management services, so that they can receive the timely individual services and psychological support they need to succeed.

In Pakistan, we worked in collaboration with the Legal Rights Forum and the Sindh Education and Literacy Department to deliver an accelerated learning programme for girls, with a focus on gender and inclusion. The model has been delivered through 70 alternative learning centres, but they adapted the model to distance learning, using a combination of pre-recorded videos and audio messages over the phone, group and one-on-one instruction for teaching and learning, and hotlines to support wellbeing. Existing messaging around early marriage and girls’ education was complemented with information on Covid-19 prevention. Facilitators monitored student progress through regular check-ins with individuals and small group discussions.

The examples above show how to prepare alternative needs-based approaches that help children get their learning and wellbeing back on track based on their needs. The *Safe Back to School: A Practitioners’ Guide*¹⁴⁷ includes a comprehensive overview of the ways schools and communities can work together to support and encourage children to return to school and support their remediation.

As students return to school, teachers will need to be able to monitor learning to understand the process of remediation and the degree to which students are finding it difficult to catch up with their peers. Save the Children is engaged with Pratham Education on the Teaching at the Right Level model, including a range of tools and resources to address learning loss.

MEASURING CHILDREN'S LEARNING REMOTELY IN THE PHILIPPINES

In the Philippines, the Covid-19 pandemic has caused massive disruption to children's education, wellbeing and access to basic needs and services. Save the Children responded to these emerging needs with the development of Project ARAL (in Filipino 'aral' means to study) or Access to Resources for Alternative Learning.

We worked with parents, teachers and local government units to ensure children's continued access to learning and development opportunities through:

1. helping families transition to home-based learning
2. supporting the implementation of the Ministry of Education's distance learning modality
3. facilitating children's safe return to schools.

This was done through providing learning materials, creating family education session materials delivered in multiple formats (print, audio, video), and giving close technical support to government agencies on education and early learning. To monitor the learning and development of children during school closures, we used an adaptive approach and a tool to measure children's outcomes and the level of parent/caregiver support at home.

Save the Children's *HALDO* tool measures the literacy, numeracy, and social and emotional learning of children aged 4 to 12 years affected by conflict and crisis. The tool has been translated into Tagalog, and several items on the tool were adapted to the Philippine context. This was complemented by a parent/caregiver survey that establishes existing forms of support and characteristics of a child's home learning environment, including parent/caregiver wellbeing. During the pandemic, enumerators of the HALDO tool held video calls on Facebook Messenger with parents and caregivers at their homes. The video-call format allowed interviewers to observe children's non-verbal cues.

The data was used to validate which elements in the ARAL implementation should be retained or strengthened to boost children's learning. Results were also presented to the Ministry of Education and local government units to help decision-makers prioritise education responses, policies and investments, and to encourage discussions with local communities and donors.



Aisah, 10, studies in a Save the Children temporary learning centre after her school was destroyed during the conflict in Marawi City, the Philippines.

PHOTO: HANNA ADCOCK/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Shaima*, age 6 (wearing a pink shirt), with her siblings, cousins and case worker. Shaima has been getting psychosocial support after conflict in Kirkuk, Iraq forced her and her family to flee their home.



6. PROVIDE NON-FORMAL PATHWAYS TO FORMAL EDUCATION

The Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced the critical importance of having multiple education pathways to meet children's varying developmental and wellbeing needs. When children's education is disrupted, the formal education system may no longer be a good fit, or children may be denied

access to formal schools. For example, some host governments do not allow refugees to access services or they require certification refugee children tend not to have. The longer a child is unable to access education, the less likely they are to ever return.

As governments all over the world have adapted to remote and distance learning, the importance of

NON-FORMAL PATHWAYS TO FORMAL EDUCATION FOR GIRLS IN AFGHANISTAN

Save the Children's Steps Towards Afghan Girls' Success (STAGES) project (2017–21) delivers community-based education to marginalised girls in 16 provinces of Afghanistan. STAGES contributes to the learning and transition of 22,731 girls enrolled in primary- and lower-secondary community-based education and accelerated learning programmes. It has a focus on girls with disabilities, girls who do not speak the language of instruction and girls from poor households.

Activities include training teachers in community-based education and in government

schools; supporting and training school management councils; renovating classrooms and supplying school equipment, facilities, infrastructure and learning resources; and providing female-teacher apprenticeships and flexible school grants. The programme has made a significant contribution to enrolling girls in school; supporting their learning, retention and attendance; building the professional capacity of teachers; and increasing community acceptance of and support for girls' education.

(Before recent escalation)

setting standards for teaching and learning, remote attendance, teacher engagement, examinations, grade completion, registration, and eligibility to move from non-formal education to formal school have all become even more important. Developing and implementing policies to ensure transparent, equitable and safe access to education for all children is of critical importance.

For children who were not enrolled in school before the pandemic – many of whom were already affected by conflict, displacement or natural disasters – getting into school for the first time is vital. It is also more difficult.

The barriers these children face to attending school are even bigger than they were before Covid-19 – for example, child marriage, food insecurity and attacks on schools are increasing globally. Ensuring strong, well-resourced, age- and gender-sensitive child protection systems that are closely linked to education and community systems is key to identifying children who may be at risk of not accessing education and matching them to the support services they need. Our *Integrated Community-Level Case Management Model* helps with this.

Alternative education modalities and non-formal education are one way to meet the learning and wellbeing needs of out-of-school children. **As more children globally, given the disruption to their education, may need access to non-formal education programmes, we have a real opportunity to strengthen the pathways between non-formal and formal education, and to support greater integration of MHPSS into both non-formal programmes and formal school systems.** Given the flexible nature of non-formal education programmes, infusing elements of safety, child protection, psychosocial support, and social and emotional learning is often easier in these settings than when operating within the formal school system.

7. SCALE UP TEACHER RECRUITMENT, TRAINING AND WELLBEING SUPPORT

“Many of my teachers have lost family members in the pandemic. Many teachers do not know how to handle the (online) platforms; and if it is difficult to understand face-to-face lessons, virtual ones are much more difficult. I can’t say it’s the teachers’ fault that we don’t learn, you have to put yourself in their shoes. If we get frustrated, so do they: being in front of a screen with nobody responding to you.”

Paula from Colombia, Nicole from Guatemala, and Ana from Peru

Teachers are one of the most influential and powerful forces for equity, access and quality in education, and key to sustainable global development.

However, their training, recruitment, retention, status and working conditions remain ongoing concerns, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected countries.

In 2016 it was estimated that 69 million new teachers were needed to provide good-quality universal primary and secondary education by 2030.¹⁴⁸ Sub-Saharan Africa faces the largest teacher gap. In many displacement settings, safety concerns, gender-based violence and gender inequality result in a shortage of female staff.

With the pivot to online learning, teachers have been called upon to deliver education in a format to which they were not accustomed. And they have had greater responsibility for supporting student wellbeing, while also managing their own. **Save the Children adapted existing tools and resources for teacher training, pared down many of them and adjusted them for distance learning.** Training sessions have been delivered in small group sessions, over WhatsApp and using pre-recorded video. Some of the modalities and tools developed for the pandemic can be integrated into a suite of tools to support continuous professional development.

The way in which teachers receive professional development has changed during the pandemic. Technology and new ways of communicating were particularly important. **The digital divide has also impacted teachers’ ability to continue to access professional development**

programmes.¹⁴⁹ However, inventive ways to ensure the continuation of such programmes have been created throughout the pandemic.

Technology allowed teachers to stay connected and learn from one-another. In Afghanistan, WhatsApp allowed teacher learning circles to continue. Similarly, in Jordan, teachers used Microsoft Teams to stay in touch and work together. Save the Children also provided mobile phones and credit top-ups to teachers in Afghanistan and Myanmar to ensure that they could make phone calls to discuss their teaching practice. In Somalia, we supported application-based education, prepared online streamed sessions, and procured and delivered radio and MP3 sessions across the country to enable children to continue their education during school closures. We also worked with the Ministry of Education to introduce a WhatsApp programme to support teacher professional development. 95% of teachers said taking part in training through WhatsApp gave them new skills and 77% said discussions with fellow teachers in the group enabled them to understand concepts, increase their confidence and gain new teaching skills.

The content of teachers' professional development programmes has also shifted. Save the Children's flagship professional development programme, *Enabling Teachers*, has produced a range of materials to better support teachers with these new needs. Newly developed professional development modules include child safeguarding during school closures, supporting learner and teacher wellbeing, and how to adapt pedagogy when teaching remotely. These modules have been used in a range of countries where we operate. For example, we provided training to teachers in Nepal to support them with remote teaching and the use of technology in delivering lessons. Education systems should promote gender-transformative, inclusive pedagogy through the professional development of teachers.

With the pandemic also creating a whole new set of challenges for teachers, the significant added value of continuous professional development has been highlighted to help them cope and respond to new challenges.^{150, 151}

With the additional stress and uncertainty placed on teachers, and the relationship between teachers' own social and emotional competence and psychosocial wellbeing and that of their students,¹⁵² teachers' wellbeing needs to be supported. In this way they can model social and emotional learning skills in the classroom. To support this, Save the Children has adapted part of our *Safe Schools* programme to support teachers affected by school closure to better understand, identify and respond to stress, and to examine the relationship between teacher and student wellbeing. **This teacher professional development module on teacher wellbeing¹⁵³ has been rolled out in several countries over the past year to help teachers adapt to their new reality. It provides them with strategies to continue supporting their own and their students' wellbeing, even during school closures.** For example, after teacher wellbeing was identified as a top priority by teachers in Myanmar, modules focusing on teacher wellbeing were provided through online and offline platforms via smart phones. In addition, in the occupied Palestinian territory, Lebanon and Iraq, WhatsApp groups have been launched to allow teachers to share concerns, tips and tools. These have proven effective in helping teachers manage stress and cope with the challenges they face.

8. INCLUDE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Even before Covid-19, at least 175 million pre-primary children – nearly half of all children in this age group globally – and eight out of ten children in low-income countries were missing out on early childhood education. UNICEF estimates that, as of September 2020, Covid-19 had already disrupted childcare and education services for at least 40 million children about to start school.¹⁵⁴ We even have anecdotal data that some ministries of education – including in Uganda and Afghanistan – have deprioritised early childhood development in their reopening strategies. **This will have negative impacts on children in both the immediate and long term. Investment in multisectoral early childhood development, strengthening pre-primary**



Children attend a session in a child friendly space in Bekaa, Lebanon.

education systems, and supporting parent and caregivers to apply positive parenting strategies is needed to achieve progress on the SDGs, decrease inequalities and drive economic growth.

Evidence collected by Save the Children demonstrates the efficacy of home-based early learning when caregivers are supported – and that it can be even more impactful than centre-based learning. Much of the research in this area was conducted prior to the pandemic, but remains very relevant to the current and future contexts.¹⁵⁵ Improving the quality of home-based early learning and supporting parents and caregivers can go a long way towards promoting young children's development. This can be done through:

- establishing a caregiver wellbeing system to set the foundations for early learning and development, applying stress management and positive parenting strategies
- strengthening the capacity of caregivers to support young children's learning
- providing semi-independent learning opportunities
- advocating with key actors to include early childhood development (ECD) in response efforts.

Policies should foster a shift in thinking around how enabling parents and caregivers can protect childhoods and mitigate learning loss in emergency contexts.

Most caregivers of young children are women, and their childcare tasks often leave them unable to contribute to the family's finances. Several measures have been implemented in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis, primarily in higher income countries, to offset and reduce the costs of childcare. These could and should be replicated in all countries in response to future crises.¹⁵⁶ Measures include the expansion of leave benefits, special dispensations for frontline and essential workers, including flexible work arrangements, and access to social protection.

Play is one of the most important ways in which young children gain essential knowledge and skills. Opportunities and environments that promote play, exploration and hands-on learning are at the core of effective ECD and pre-primary programmes. We joined with other organisations in the UK to push for a 'summer of play' in 2021 to help repair some of the mental and physical damage caused to children by the impact of the Covid pandemic.

"Children's wellbeing has not been priority in the current situation, which is affecting children's mental health. Thus, we must work on solutions to address this issue. The solutions can include the integration of play with education, finding recreational places for children, building playgrounds inside schools, providing schools with social guides, and finally, providing recreational trips to children in safe places."

Wassim, a boy from Lebanon

INTERACTIVE ECD RADIO IN MALAWI

In Malawi, Save the Children launched *Tiyende Interactive Radio Instruction* in 2013. It is targeted at 3–5-year-olds and sessions are broadcast to community-based childcare centres (CBCCs) where trained facilitators deliver lessons in rural districts. The programme includes more than 100 pre-recorded lessons that align with the ECD national curriculum, and has been scaled up nationally with the collaboration of the Malawian government.

When Covid-19 closed CBCC centres, we worked with partners and the government to adapt materials to support parents and caregivers not formally trained in facilitation skills and who often have low levels of literacy.

We focused on improving children's and parents' wellbeing and resilience and on Covid-19 prevention. Community radio stations broadcast the lessons, with each episode including a plenary for caregivers and parents, and conducted parental phone-ins every second week to monitor uptake and student progress. As a complement to the radio content and to encourage play, we devised tactile games and resources grounded in home-based games.

This example could be replicated in other countries and included both in emergency contingency planning and in education sector planning to support young children and parents more broadly.



PHOTO: PETER MORUSAVE THE CHILDREN

Anna, 12, attends a primary school in Napak, Uganda: "I am happy that Save the Children provided us with the home learning packs. I also listen to the radio programme learning sessions because my parents have got a radio. When the lessons start other children come to gather to listen. These have helped us learn during the lockdown."

9. REFORM THE CURRICULUM TO ENSURE RELEVANCE TO CHILDREN'S LIVES

There is no question that school closures have set back children's academic learning. Nevertheless, as schools re-open, addressing the adverse impact of school closures on children's development of holistic skills must be prioritised. **As education systems continue to shift and adapt in response to Covid-19, it is vital policy-makers integrate social and emotional learning (SEL) into crisis-sensitive planning and into school practices, policies and curricula.**

Globally, governments have recognised the value of education based in developing children's holistic skills, with commitments to this kind of learning in the Incheon and GEM Declarations, as well as in national strategies mapped by *Skills for the Changing World*.¹⁵⁷ **However, implementation is limited for a number of reasons – a lack of consensus in the education community; a lack of resources, teacher training and methodology; and over-emphasis on academic knowledge.** Genuine change will need commitment from policy-makers, teachers, teacher trainers, parents, community leaders, and children across age groups and contexts.

The curriculum should also include the emerging skills and information needed to keep children safe from risks – everything from teaching children to swim in areas increasingly prone to flooding, to hygiene and sanitation messaging to prevent communicable diseases, to education about the risk of landmines in conflict-affected areas.

Holistic skills have been incorporated into Colombia's National Early Childhood Care strategy *From Zero to Always (De cero a siempre)* since 2010, and in 2016, the strategy became Law 1804 or the *National Policy for the Comprehensive Development of Early Childhood from Zero to Forever*. It is recognised that in early education the pedagogical processes must be based on different strategies such as play, art, exploration of the environment and literature. The difficulty in Colombia is not the acceptance of the importance of holistic skills development, as there are extensive studies on the subject. Rather, the challenge is in implementing the policy nationally, particularly in rural and vulnerable areas, and developing pedagogical approaches beyond traditional views of academic achievement towards a more holistic approach to learning.

More globally, through instituting school-wide practices of mindfulness, integrating SEL, and supporting teachers and students to practice coping mechanisms and stress management techniques, children and teachers will develop skills that can help maintain their wellbeing in the face of future adversity.¹⁵⁸ Teachers must be provided with training and support so they can consistently implement good-quality SEL interventions,¹⁵⁹ and integrate them into their daily teaching practice.

Distance learning modalities have historically been used to deliver academic learning content for children and young people in crisis contexts, yet rarely have they included SEL.¹⁶⁰ **To support teachers and facilitators to integrate SEL into distance learning programmes, Save the Children developed a *SEL Distance Learning Activity Pack*, designed to complement formal or non-formal education where SEL is not adequately included in the curriculum.**¹⁶¹ The materials provide an easy way to integrate SEL into distance learning. These activities can continue to be used as schools and learning spaces reopen in places where SEL has not yet been integrated into the national curriculum or non-formal education programme.

Any curriculum reform should focus not only on the subjects offered, but on the way in which learning is promoted. Options should be considered for skills-based primary and secondary education content and delivery, including innovative approaches, multiple pathways and IT-enabled learning; additional opportunities for accreditation; and recognition of experiential learning. The goal is not only for children to secure employment after completion but to acquire the skills and knowledge for success.

Curriculum reform should also prepare learners for a green economy. Specific transformative capacities that should be promoted include business skills; data analysis; entrepreneurship; environmental and ecosystem knowledge and management; finance; information technology; marketing; project management; research and gender empowerment.¹⁶²

10. INVOLVE PARENTS, CAREGIVERS AND COMMUNITIES

“I believe that the involvement of our parents is more important now than ever before. Their involvement is fundamental because the support of knowing they are behind you is enough to make you want to continue. If we’re talking about mental health, if I don’t have the support of my parents, I’m not going to want to study and stay at school.”

Paula from Colombia, Nicole from Guatemala, and Ana from Peru

The role of parents, other family members and communities has always been important for children to learn and flourish. But in times of crisis, their role can be both more challenging and more significant.

Globally in response to the pandemic, teachers, school leaders and NGOs have built on existing relationships with local communities and parents to provide tools, guidance and materials so that they can continue to support children’s wellbeing and learning. Community support activities developed during the education response have included:

- health and safety in multiple languages
- guidance on securing community input on the contextualisation of the *Safe Back to School: A Practitioners’ Guide*¹⁶³
- translation of guidance for parents to support their children’s learning and wellbeing – and for their own wellbeing
- positive parenting messages.

At a global level, as part of integrated Safe Back to School campaigns, social behavioural change experts combined key messages that are already used with different audiences so that they can be used for risk communication and community engagement work. This integrated set of key messages is designed to support teachers, community leaders, parents and caregivers to respond to concerns, fears and rumours surrounding children’s safe return to learning.

Distance learning activities are more effective with caregiver or community support for students, and back-to-school campaigns that are community led have proven to be effective. **In Rwanda, for instance, by January 2021, following school closures in 2020, community-driven back-to-school campaigns that especially targeted vulnerable children had led to 95% of students returning to school.**¹⁶⁴

We have always recognised that when communities are approached as partners and with clear expectations, they play a fundamental role in building and sustaining children’s learning opportunities. Increased meaningful engagement of and reliance on the contribution of communities is consistent with the move towards challenging the power dynamics inherent in the international development sector and promoting the localisation agenda. Wherever they are in the world, communities must have a prominent role in decisions that affect them.

Beyond these interventions, there are many other ways communities must be involved in an inclusive recovery from the pandemic and in helping to mitigate the impact of future crises affecting education:

- **Awareness-raising.** Community members are best-placed to communicate information to their own communities and to identify the most appropriate approaches for different groups.
- **Needs assessments.** With limitations on travel during the Covid-19 crisis, it has been difficult for teams of trained staff to conduct assessments. In Yemen, community members were supported to carry out assessments and feedback the results to central teams.
- **Data collection, monitoring and surveillance.** Community members are in a key position to monitor progress and identify needs.
- **Early warning systems.** Communities are best-placed to identify their own risks and hazards, and to relate those risks to the appropriate leaders and decision-makers at the local, district and regional levels. Communities can detect increases in child protection risks, in crime, in tension between groups, in drop-out rates, in the likelihood of violence, in illnesses presenting symptoms of particular contagious viruses, and in the impacts of climate change. Early warning systems should be reflected in school emergency plans, as well as contingency plans for the wider community.
- **Better links with schools and learning.** During the pandemic, the potential of schools to serve as community hubs that give children and families access to essential services and information – and when possible, that gather information – has become even more apparent.

- **Home learning environments.** Parents and caregivers are essential to developing a home environment that supports children's learning and wellbeing – ranging from reading and talking with their children to creating time and space for play.
- **Providing cash-based transfers.** Social protection measures are key to supporting communities to recover from the effect of crises. They should be provided liberally to reduce the barriers that prevent children from accessing education and from families supporting their basic needs.

WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES IN NIGERIA

In north-east Nigeria, Save the Children has been working with parents and caregivers to help them support children's wellbeing at home. To promote children's continued social and emotional learning, even during the closure of their non-formal learning centres, we developed *Supporting Children's Social Emotional Learning at Home: A guide for parents and caregivers*.

In this guide, parents and caregivers learn techniques for practicing social and emotional learning skills at home, strategies for creating safe and supportive home environments through using positive discipline and conflict resolution

practices, and ways to identify and manage their own stress.

Parents and caregivers participated in a series of community sessions to work through this guide, and then began applying what they learned at home.

Anecdotal feedback from a number of parents and caregivers confirms that, after participating in these community sessions, parents thought more about how they acted, and started to view daily interactions as opportunities to develop social and emotional learning skills.

Bako, 15, lives in Maiduguri, Nigeria. He has been accessing learning by radio since schools closed, but says he misses being in the classroom.



PHOTO: UBANGARI DONALD/SAVE THE CHILDREN

4 How can we practically accelerate action?

To better anticipate and respond to crises that disrupt children's learning and wellbeing, greater collective action is needed, in line with the ten lessons learned outlined in the previous chapter.

In this chapter we explore the changes needed in how we work to bring about this shift:

- strengthen humanitarian–development coherence
- reach the most marginalised children first and use a social justice lens
- shift power and resources to national and local civil society
- act on children's demands
- make links between the climate emergency and education
- improve coordination
- invest more and better
- prioritise localisation, inclusion, equity and foundational learning
- reform the global education architecture.

STRENGTHEN HUMANITARIAN–DEVELOPMENT COHERENCE

Humanitarian–development coherence entails working over multiple years towards collective outcomes, based on the comparative advantage of a diverse range of actors.¹⁶⁵ **This approach is critical to ensure that all children affected by crises have access to a safe, uninterrupted, good-quality education that supports their resilience and overall development. Humanitarian action is expanding because of limited investment in preparedness and an increase in the number of risks which have not been planned for within multi-year planning and strategy.** At the same time, the longer-term planning orientation of development action can support preparedness and responsiveness to the education needs of children and young people during a crisis. Sequencing humanitarian and development approaches in this way is key to building more resilient education systems.

Humanitarian–development coherence in complex settings requires a balance between principled humanitarian action and development objectives. While the mandates and structures of humanitarian and development organisations need to be respected to enable principled humanitarian action in complex emergency settings, a range of current global, regional and national policy commitments, frameworks and standards – including the *Global Compact on Refugees* and the *Safe Schools Declaration* – can be powerful tools to convene partners around collective outcomes and find complementary ways of working.¹⁶⁶

Education actors in crisis contexts should align with and – led where possible by national actors and government – build on humanitarian response plans, refugee response plans, education cluster strategies, comprehensive refugee response frameworks, education sector plans, and transitional education plans. To harmonise the efforts of different education actors, their plans and programmes should be coordinated on joint needs assessments, data, and strategies. This means ensuring that national education sector plans address the needs of children in crisis contexts, and that humanitarian plans align with national priorities and processes. **This is the best way to ensure that all education partners are working towards multi-year collective outcomes, drawing on their respective comparative advantage, to ensure continuity of education for all children.**

Although good progress on humanitarian–development coherence has been made, more systematic cooperation around planning is needed between humanitarian and development partners to ensure that plans and processes are linked, streamlined and aligned. Examples of good practice include the *Lebanon RACE II*¹⁶⁷ and the *Uganda Education Response Plan*.¹⁶⁸

FINANCING HUMANITARIAN–DEVELOPMENT COHERENCE

Greater child-centred financing is needed to realise children’s learning and wellbeing outcomes – focusing on their education, protection, mental health, nutrition and health needs. But as donors channel more bilateral and multilateral funding into support for children in crisis, coordination efforts will similarly need to grow.

In crises, there is alignment between Education Cannot Wait’s focus on education in emergencies and the Global Partnership for Education’s focus on building stronger and more inclusive education systems. In 17 countries, both funds provide support through different channels. Education Cannot Wait mainly funds UN agencies and civil society organisations; the Global Partnership for Education supports governments. **In seeking to strengthen humanitarian–development coherence, it is critical that Education Cannot Wait and the Global Partnership for Education continue to enhance coordination of their approaches to education sector funding and advocacy, where it makes sense to do so. This will help avoid duplication, enhance value for money and ensure programmes are effectively implemented and monitored at national level.**

The Global Partnership for Education and Education Cannot Wait have worked collaboratively with the government of Bangladesh to enable Rohingya refugee children to access informal education. Education Cannot Wait delivered first-response emergency programmes while the Global Partnership for Education negotiated with the government to create a dialogue around this issue. The Global Partnership for Education channelled \$3 million to Education Cannot Wait for the implementation of education activities for Rohingya refugees.

At the 2019 Global Refugee Forum, the World Bank, the Global Partnership for Education and Education Cannot Wait committed to improve collaboration, coordination and financing of global efforts to support education for refugees.¹⁶⁹ At the High-Level Officials Meeting of the 2021 Global Refugee Forum we look forward to seeing an assessment of progress on this commitment.

REACH THE MOST MARGINALISED CHILDREN FIRST AND USE A SOCIAL JUSTICE LENS

“Children face a big problem, which is their inability to access education due to several factors, including discrimination, difficulty in accessing school, the difficult economic situation, which increases child labour and ignorance. Therefore, solutions to this problem must be found, including compulsory and free education for all children of all nationalities, non-discrimination between children in schools, equipping schools for people with disabilities, and opening schools in remote villages, making it easier for children to access education. The decision-makers must implement these recommendations, namely the Minister of Education, United Nations organisations and civil society organisations.”

Sara, Lebanon

School closures caused by the pandemic have exacerbated existing educational inequalities, with children who face discrimination and who were already at risk of being excluded from a good-quality education worst affected. One in five children were already out of school, with those facing multiple disadvantages – such as gender discrimination, low family income, malnutrition, living in a rural location, disability, living in a conflict-setting, displacement, or belonging to a minority ethno-linguistic or religious group – most likely to miss out.¹⁷⁰ The UN Special Rapporteur on Education warned states that exclusion prior to and during the pandemic exists “against a backdrop of entrenched, recognised structural inequality”.¹⁷¹

When schools across most of the world closed because of the Covid-19 pandemic, inequities in the roll-out of distance learning meant that not all children could participate on an equal basis.¹⁷² As schools re-open and/or deliver remote or online learning, our *Guide for Supporting Inclusive and Equitable Learning of the Most Marginalised Children*, drawing on our experience delivering education in emergencies, provides practical guidance for tailoring education responses to ensure marginalised and excluded children have access to safe learning opportunities that meet their individual needs.

In education responses to current and future crises, governments should focus on mitigating the disproportionate impacts on those children who already experience

barriers to accessing good-quality education or who are at greatest risk of exclusion.

They should recommit to the principle of *Leave No One Behind*, tackling existing structural inequality in education systems. And they should use school re-openings as an opportunity to ensure that children who did not previously have access to education can be supported to enter school.

GRID, Save the Children's child inequality tracker, helps identify groups who are being left behind, monitor their progress, and build public and political understanding about the importance of reaching them. The GRID tools show inequalities in selected children's wellbeing indicators across health, education and child protection. It draws on more than 400 household surveys for more than 100 low- and middle-income countries. It gives a visual and interactive representation of the inequalities that persist between different groups of children (see Figure 3). All data is presented free and is publicly available.

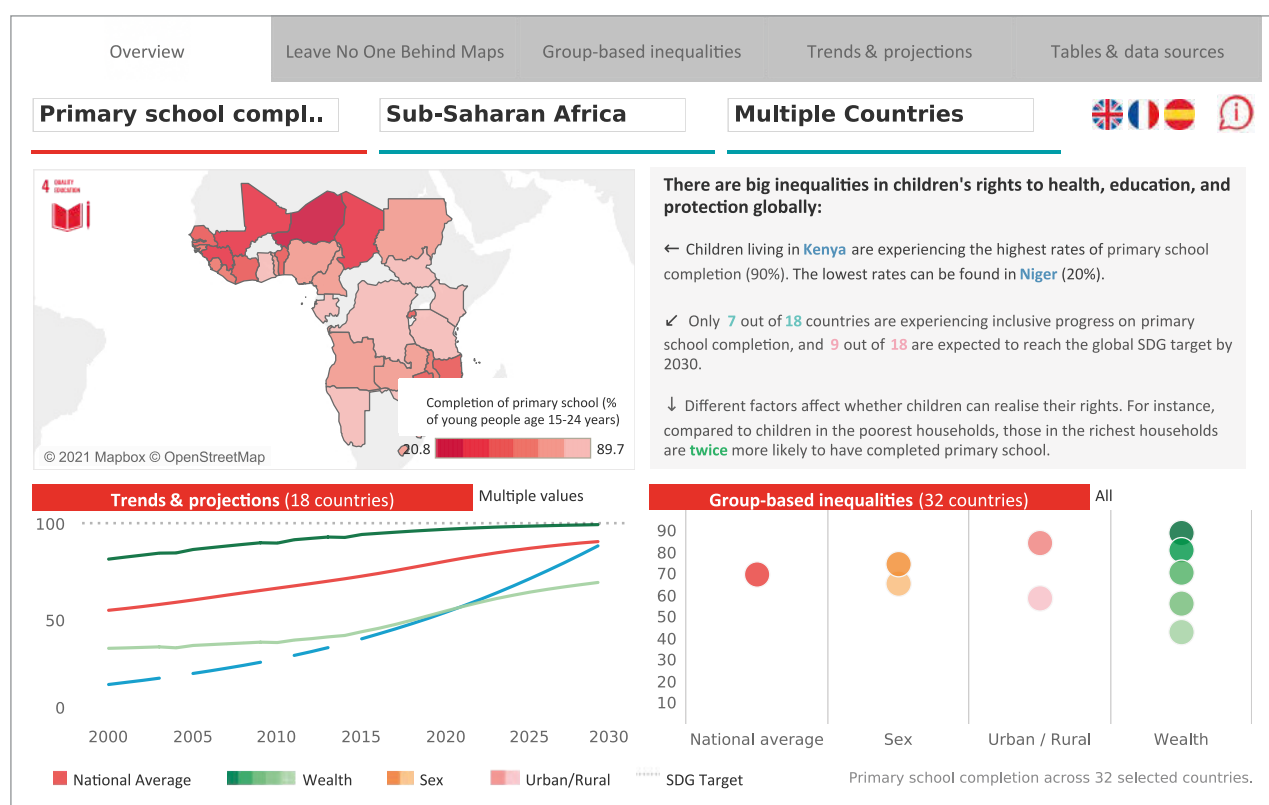
In 2020 and 2021, questions of gender, race, identity, equality and climate justice have won more global attention and prioritisation than ever before. As we

build forward with better education systems during and following the global Covid-19 pandemic, we should act on inequity and social justice.¹⁷³

Within Save the Children, we have begun a journey to increase our understanding of the harm caused by racism and of intersectionality. We recognise here our debt to the work done by the #AidToo, #CharitySoWhite and #BlackLivesMatter movements, and the often high emotional and personal cost to those individuals who have raised the alarm. We acknowledge the institutional racism that exists within our organisation, the charity sector, in humanitarian action and in education systems, and we affirm our commitment to using our role to tackle racism, abuse, misogyny and climate injustice. We acknowledge there is a long way to go in rethinking the way we approach all our education work.

We encourage ministries of education, donors, international agencies, civil society and the private sector to examine issues of power, knowledge and justice as they relate to the intersections of education, humanitarianism and decoloniality.

FIGURE 3. THE GRID TOOL: SAMPLE PAGE SHOWING INEQUALITIES IN PRIMARY SCHOOL COMPLETION RATES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



REACHING THE MOST MARGINALISED GIRLS IN AFGHANISTAN

Following school closures as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, Afghanistan's Ministry of Education launched an alternative education plan, which focused on distance learning via television, radio, the internet and home-based educational materials. However, many of Afghanistan's most vulnerable children – given limited or complete lack of access to television, radio and the internet in remote and rural areas – were at risk of missing out.

In response, as part of Save the Children's *Steps to Afghan Girls' Educational Success* (STAGES) project, we harnessed innovative mobile phone technology to deliver remote training and

peer support to teachers. We also distributed low-tech printed learning materials to help girls continue learning during lockdown. One-to-one support was provided by teachers and *shura* (school community council) members, on the telephone where possible, to ensure that girls remained engaged in education. **In an assessment conducted to evaluate lost learning, only 3% of girls in the programme were not active in learning and had dropped out of education due to school closures, and most students scored highly in foundational literacy and numeracy.**

(Before recent escalation)

SHIFT POWER AND RESOURCES TO NATIONAL AND LOCAL CIVIL SOCIETY








Governments are mainly responsible for providing education and must be at the forefront of ensuring educational continuity during the pandemic. However, humanitarian and development actors have an important role to play in meeting rising needs and ensuring access to good-quality education for the most excluded children in society.

As with earlier epidemic responses,¹⁷⁴ the role of national and local civil society in supporting educational continuity has been significant. However, the extent to which the pandemic has accelerated a meaningful shift in power is less clear. Here we use the

Start Network's *7 Dimensions of Localisation*¹⁷⁵ (Figure 4) to reflect on the extent to which Covid-19 has led to systemic change in the role of national and local civil society in education provision in crisis contexts.

Funding: There is widespread recognition of the role of national and local civil society. But funding has not followed to local and national NGOs in line with the Grand Bargain commitment to fund local and national NGOs as directly as possible. Estimates show that only 0.1% of Covid-19 funding for health and education for example, which has been primarily channelled through the UN system, has been funnelled to local actors.¹⁷⁶ **Unfortunately, these overall trends are mirrored in the education sector. Education Cannot Wait, the most**

FIGURE 4. SEVEN DIMENSIONS OF LOCALISATION

FUNDING	PARTNERSHIPS	CAPACITY	PARTICIPATION REVOLUTION	COORDINATION MECHANISMS	VISIBILITY	POLICY INFLUENCE
						
25%	Less sub contracting	Institutional development	Of crisis affected communities	National actors greater presence and influence	Roles, results and innovations by national actors	National actors greater presence and influence in international policy debates
As directly as possible	More equitable	Stop undermining	Gender, age, disabilities...			
Better quality						

Source: Start Network, *The Seven Dimensions of Localisation*

significant multilateral fund for education in emergencies, disbursed an impressive \$152 million to 122 grantees in 2020. But only \$2.5 million of this was given directly to national NGOs – less than 1.5%, down from 2.7% in 2019.¹⁷⁷ The pandemic has increased pressure on economies which has decreased aid budgets in some countries, less risk appetite and a consolidation of donor portfolios. This has led to a redirected focus on organisations headquartered in donor countries. While the commitment to increase the volume of funding going as directly as possible to local and national NGOs has been loud, ultimately the amount of money received directly and indirectly by national and local civil society operating in contexts affected by compounded crises has stagnated or reduced.

Partnerships: While direct funding is a core element of localisation, many local and national NGOs emphasise that the quality of partnerships is just – if not more – important. **However, where new partnerships were established to respond to urgent emerging needs, many partnerships have been formed quickly and without the foundations of trust and mutual respect necessary, leading the relationships to be contractual in nature.** Two national NGO representatives working on the education response in South Sudan and interviewed for this report confirmed this picture, explaining that partnerships between international actors and national NGOs are structured as subcontracting relationships, in which national NGOs are limited to engaging in specific activities determined by their international partners. This restricts national NGOs' leadership and the full application of their complementary capacity and expertise.

Capacity: While Save the Children is still building our own capacity as a principled partner, we recognise that communities and local and national actors are – and always have been – at the forefront of humanitarian response and sustainable development at large. We know they are the best placed to directly consult with and respond to children's needs because they bring specific skills, knowledge, presence and ability to adapt to the local context. However, during the pandemic many opportunities for supporting sustained local capacity were not realised. Funding shortages resulting from Covid-19 have had a negative impact on the capacity of local and national actors to independently design and deliver humanitarian action.

Participation: While early commentators saw a unique opportunity to accelerate localisation because of the Covid-19 pandemic, there is to-date limited evidence on the extent to which the response has allowed for a greater diversity of organisations to engage in education provision for the children most profoundly affected. The role of disabled people's and women's organisations in the education sector has not been well documented, and it is unclear whether Covid-19 resulted in growing space for participation of a range of organisations or not. The importance of children and young people themselves participating in education response efforts is covered in greater depth in the following section (page 42).

Coordination: In our role as co-lead of the Global Education Cluster, Save the Children has prioritised the role of national and local actors in coordination.¹⁷⁸ For example, the Iraq Education Cluster prioritised the inclusion of local and national actors in both the 2021 Humanitarian Needs Overview and the *Humanitarian Response Plan*, in which local actors were able to participate in and influence humanitarian coordination at the country level.¹⁷⁹ Nevertheless, unequal power dynamics continue to undermine the influence of local actors on humanitarian coordination. To address these barriers, the Global Education Cluster and Child Protection Area of Responsibility have released guidance documents – including a *Tip Sheet for Integrating Localisation into the COVID-19 Humanitarian Needs Overviews and Humanitarian Response Plans*.¹⁸⁰

Visibility: There has been some progress during the Covid-19 pandemic in amplifying local actors' voices, allowing them to demonstrate the work they have done in the absence of international actors. The shift to remote events and consultations has also been an enabling factor. In early 2020, at the UN Humanitarian Partnerships Network Week, and before Covid-19 travel restrictions were in place, Save the Children, together with the Global Education Cluster and Child Protection Area of Responsibility, supported the participation of a national NGO representative from the Humanitarian Forum Indonesia – the only civil society guest speaker on the panel on localisation in coordination. In 2021, the event was fully online, with thousands of participants globally. There are clearly new possibilities for connection and dialogue in this Covid-19 world. However, it remains to be seen whether opportunities to participate in the proliferation of webinars translate into shifts in power in day-to-day work.



Jonathan*, 15, takes part in a Child Rights group meeting to discuss issues affecting children in their community in Uganda.

Policy influence: Power shifts relating to policy influence are hard to measure. However, if the quantitative evidence on where emergency education funding has been spent is taken as a proxy for shifts in power relating to policy decisions, the gap between national and local civil society and their international counterparts and the UN system is still very wide.

For significant progress to be made in this sphere, and across the seven dimensions, the opportunity presented by Covid-19 to support local civil society action must be made a deliberate priority of international actors, including Save the Children, that extends beyond the pandemic.

ACT ON CHILDREN'S DEMANDS

The principle of children's right to participate in public decision-making and monitoring processes is enshrined in the UNCRC. It acknowledges that children are entitled to be involved in decision-making in all matters that affects their lives, while taking into consideration children's evolving capacity and best interests.

We have developed a tool – *The Nine Basic Requirements for Meaningful and Ethical Children's Participation* – for ensuring genuine child participation.¹⁸¹ We encourage all actors to use these requirements to ensure meaningful, safe

and respectful engagement with children. Child participation is at the heart of our work. Our recent mapping¹⁸² of child participation initiatives across 14 countries found that there should not be a one-size-fits-all approach. Measures should be in place so that all children can participate. To keep children safe before, during, and after participatory processes, barriers related to gender, economic status, rurality or urbanity, disability, or other factors must be considered. Children themselves should be supported to identify and protect themselves from risks that they may face because of expressing their views and participating in programmatic, public or political processes.

Children's participation in developing an anticipatory approach to responding to education crises will assist governments and other implementers to design interventions that are relevant for children and allocate resources effectively. Children are the experts on the challenges they face in realising their right to a safe, inclusive and good-quality education. They want and have the right to have their voices heard and to be able to hold governments and other bodies to account for their commitments. The positive impact of involving children in decision-making also hugely benefits children themselves, as they develop and improve their confidence, skills, networks and leadership.

Through dedicated guidance and tools on how to integrate child participation in joint education needs assessments, the **Global Education Cluster** supported clusters in **Yemen, Burkina Faso (see box below) and Sudan**. It helped those clusters to consult children on their views and priority

needs, and to understand what education organisations should do to reopen schools safely after **Covid-19 closures**. These initiatives should be scaled up so that children are systematically included in the assessment, design and monitoring of education programmes.

CHILD PARTICIPATION IN BURKINA FASO

Findings from a participatory assessment of children's education in a crisis

Even before the Covid-19 pandemic hit in early 2020, forcing schools to close, education in Burkina Faso was already in crisis. Since 2015, attacks on education by armed groups have been growing, leading to school closures, destruction of school infrastructure, and violence against students and education staff. Weak health systems, inadequate infrastructure and limited access to basic social services makes Burkina Faso highly vulnerable to a cross-country epidemic, with children especially at risk.

“Threats from non-governmental armed groups make children afraid of going to school.”

13-year-old boy

To generate up-to-date data for emergency planning interventions, considering the Covid-19 pandemic and growing security crisis, the Burkina Faso Education Cluster initiated a joint education needs assessment in September 2020. The child participation component, led by Save the Children in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and civil society partners, **explored children's perceptions of barriers to accessing education, their experience of distance education during school closures, their priorities for schools' reopening, and how out-of-school children can be supported to return to school.**

continued on next page

Armed men forced Samira, 15, from her village in Burkina Faso during the violence sweeping Africa's Sahel region. She missed out on two years of school. Girls in this region of Burkina Faso are often forced into early marriage, but Samira is determined to continue her studies.



PHOTO: ADRIEN BITBAT/SAVE THE CHILDREN

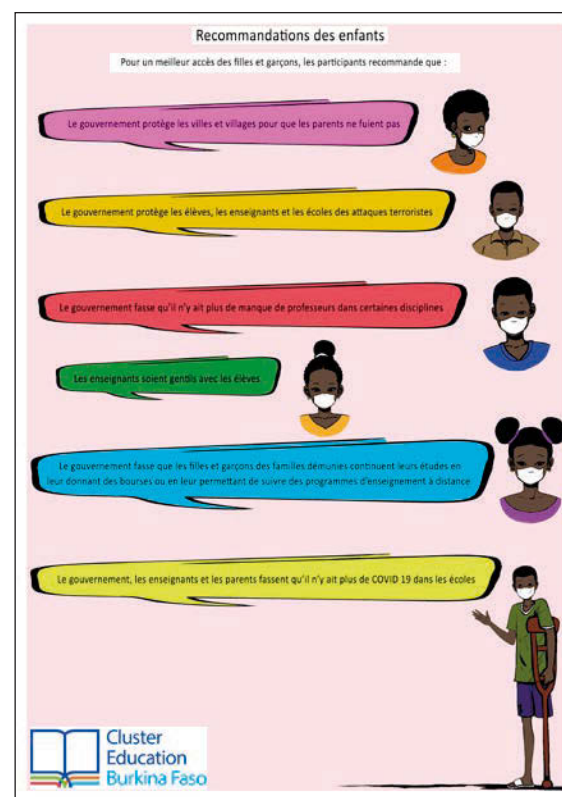
CHILD PARTICIPATION IN BURKINA FASO *continued*

Focus-group discussions were held in six locations with 302 out-of-school boys and girls aged 6–12 and 13–15 years in schools in urban areas. The participants were a mix of host and internally displaced populations. The analysis found that children see the major obstacles to accessing education as **poverty, domestic work, paid child labour and insecurity**. Girls reported an increase in domestic work since Covid-19, while boys reported taking on more paid labour. Many children found distance learning difficult due to a lack of resources at home (pens, paper and books), irregular support from parents, and a lack of support from teachers. **Nearly all the children said they wanted to return to school when it opened, to see measures in place to protect them from the spread of Covid-19 and a safe school without terrorist threats.**

These findings, along with the recommendations made by children, have been an important advocacy tool in high-level meetings with government, Education Cannot Wait and partners involved in a multi-year education programme in Burkina Faso.¹⁸³ The findings also contributed to the Education Cluster report into the impact of Covid-19 on education.¹⁸⁴

Ensuring children see the results of their participation is a key standard for quality child participation. A child-friendly report and colouring sheet (see Figure 5), with the

FIGURE 5. SAMPLE PAGE FROM FEEDBACK REPORT FOR CHILDREN



key findings and recommendations from the children themselves, was developed and shared with the children and communities in the study locations.

“Girls help their mothers with the housework. They sweep the house, do the laundry and the dishes.”

13-year-old girl

MAKE LINKS BETWEEN THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND EDUCATION

The world must address climate injustice head on, deliver on the promises made to children – irrespective of who they are and where they live – in the SDGs and the UNCRC and the goals set out in the Paris Climate Agreement. This includes taking ambitious and urgent action now to limit warming to a maximum of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

At the same time, we know that the climate emergency and the impacts of Covid-19 will lead to increased food insecurity and malnutrition, unless there is investment in national systems and preparedness. Children cannot learn if they are hungry. **In international and national climate-related frameworks and policies, governments, donors and international institutions must put children and their best interests at the centre of their climate change mitigation and adaptation actions – including**

a consistent focus on children and their rights, especially those from the most marginalised and deprived groups.

Children should have access to age- and gender-appropriate information and education on the climate and environmental crisis. This is necessary to help them gain skills and knowledge to build their resilience and adaptive capacity – and to empower them to influence, promote and create a more sustainable future. Governments must ensure that all children access safe learning environments where school safety, risk reduction and resilience are mainstreamed.

Education has a pivotal role to play in helping to mitigate the effects of climate change by building adaptive capacity. Good-quality education makes communities less vulnerable to climate change. We must ensure the continuity of educational provision in all crisis-affected contexts, not only because it is a basic right, but because it will contribute to children and their communities' resilience and has the potential to reduce CO₂ emissions over the long term.

In 2019, the UN General Assembly¹⁸⁵ recognised Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as a model for rethinking learning to achieve the SDGs. ESD is rooted in the idea that education gives learners the tools to tackle the problems of the present and future, to fight the climate crisis and to transform society.¹⁸⁶ A recent UNESCO study looking at some of the achievements and gaps in climate change education showed countries have heavily emphasised cognitive over social and emotional learning, even though the latter includes crucial tools to empower learners and make change happen.¹⁸⁷ Only half of national education documents studied by UNESCO made reference to environmental themes including sustainability, climate change and biodiversity. Less than half of those documents mentioned climate change and only 19% referred to biodiversity.¹⁸⁸ **ESD should be incorporated into the curriculum on a systematic basis.**

At the same time, to avoid placing the burden of mitigating the impacts of climate change on children in low-income countries, who bear the least responsibility for CO₂ emissions, green education must be coupled with efforts to tackle the root causes of the climate crisis.

IMPROVE COORDINATION

The Covid-19 crisis has underlined that effective coordination within and across sectors has never been more critical. In contexts with existing humanitarian responses, education clusters and education in emergencies working groups were challenged in new ways to coordinate country-wide responses and, in close collaboration with governments and other sectors, to ensure whole-system responses. In non-humanitarian contexts, national/local government coordination mechanisms, such as local education groups (LEGs), were expected to take on an emergency response coordination role, highlighting the importance of preparedness and collaboration between humanitarian and development coordination mechanisms.

Coordination is central to ensuring that humanitarian responses are evidence-based, efficient with resources, and aligned with and complimentary to national and governmental plans; that actors do not duplicate services and work in the best interest of the most vulnerable people; and that responses make use of the collective capacities of all stakeholders to best meet the education needs of communities in crisis. Coordination bodies also have a role in advocating for education in emergencies to be included as an essential part of humanitarian responses. This is especially critical in pandemic responses where attention and funding is focussed on health.

Save the Children has made a global commitment to support humanitarian coordination, as a cluster lead agency and member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, along with national and local stakeholders (including national and local authorities, civil society, and communities) to improve the collective impact of humanitarian response. This leadership role brings significant opportunity and responsibility to influence and help deliver coordination that promotes quality and accountability throughout humanitarian response – through, for example, child safeguarding, accountability to children and localisation agendas. This all results in more effective and sustainable approaches to coordination and ultimately contributes to better outcomes for children.

The Global Education Cluster and Child Protection Area of Responsibility have committed to strengthen their inter-sector coordination. They will foster integrated approaches, enhance the quality, coverage and accountability of humanitarian response, and together reach more children in need.

They developed the *Child Protection-Education in Emergencies Collaboration in Coordination Framework*¹⁸⁹ to generate predictable and coherent collaboration around the Humanitarian Programme Cycle.

Country-level clusters have worked across sectors to develop integrated response frameworks. These work to get children the good-quality services they need in a coherent and efficient way. It includes education actors working with the WASH sector to put in place the materials and develop the knowledge to reopen schools safely and hygienically.

These examples should be fully funded, scaled up and pre-prepared so that children receive a holistic response to their needs, delivered in an efficient and effective way. To facilitate this work, donors should enhance their support to and funding of integrated programming. And coordination groups and practitioners must break through silos, innovate in the design and delivery of programming, and share best practice in coordinating integrated responses.

As crises evolve to become more complex and long-lasting, our coordination efforts must also evolve to anticipate and address education needs. Coordination mechanisms in several complex humanitarian crises have successfully broken sector silos and adapted to specific contexts. These include learning from refugee responses to address internal displacement responses; strengthening connections between local, national and regional education stakeholders through a whole-of-society approach; and enhancing coherence and assistance between humanitarian and development aid, linked to both community-level and national education systems. Despite these successes, much remains to be done to remove systemic barriers that disconnect the main global, national and local education coordination systems.

INVEST MORE AND BETTER

As explained in section one of this report, there is a massive global education financing gap, which has increased because of the pandemic.

To build forward better, more funding for education is urgently needed. And the way this funding is spent must be improved through:

- investing in an anticipatory approach
- increasing domestic and international funding for education
- prioritising localisation, inclusion, equity and foundational learning
- more and improved education financing data collection.

INVESTING IN AN ANTICIPATORY APPROACH

Recent research indicates that 55% of humanitarian funding is used for responding to crises that are predictable and a mere 1% is used for preparedness and early action.¹⁹⁰

Anticipatory action can help save lives and reduce human suffering; offset some of the economic impacts of disasters; improve the effectiveness of emergency preparedness, response and recovery efforts; and reduce reliance on ad hoc, slow and costly humanitarian aid after a disaster.¹⁹¹

Anticipatory actions are intended to mitigate the impact of a crisis and enhance sector readiness towards an improved response. This requires preparedness to be a key priority for national governments, international and national organisations, and donors. With investment in predictive analysis and early warning systems, the education sector is able not only to respond once a crisis occurs, but also to take action before a crisis occurs in response to forecasting and early warning information. Education-sector preparedness should therefore be focused on readiness both to act before a crisis takes place and to respond during and after it has occurred.

Further work is needed to define the education and crisis-specific data, triggers and early action activities depending on risks – including seasonal risks; underlying risks for rapid onset disasters; and monitoring of other data to identify possibilities of conflict, political instability and epidemic outbreaks. **Anticipatory action will require flexible and forecast-based funding to allow for no-regrets action at scale.**



Aaistha, and Nita, both 8, look over their homework. Nita was born with a disability that has left her without mobility in her legs and is carried to school by her mother, neighbours, and cousins each morning and afternoon.

PHOTO: VICTORIA ZEGLEN/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Anticipatory action in the education sector must build on efforts already well underway to strengthen education-sector preparedness to deliver education from day one of a crisis. It should be shaped by ongoing community-led risk reduction approaches.

First, work on more systematised rapid response mechanisms for education currently being tested in Yemen, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, as well as through a global research and capacity development project by the Global Education Cluster (funded by ECHO), will inform anticipatory approaches to crisis. One lesson is already emerging: where possible, early action and rapid response must be integrated with other child-focused services, such as child protection and MHPSS, to ensure the holistic needs of children and communities are met. A second key area that must inform anticipatory action in the education sector is our work on safe schools – an all-hazards approach to keeping children, teachers and education personnel safe in and around schools. Using this approach will ensure that anticipatory action is informed by school-level participatory processes to identify risks, with early action planned and delivered to enhance rather than undermine existing community-led risk reduction and resilience activities.

INCREASE DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL FUNDING FOR EDUCATION

To fill the large and increasing funding gaps for education, national governments should meet the international target, agreed in the Incheon Declaration, to spend 15–20% of total expenditure on education, or 4–6% of GDP. And they should increase their investments in children, including in education, through expanding their tax base to increase their domestic revenues. This should be done through progressive taxes that are redistributive and gender sensitive. Recognising that multinational companies rarely make investment decisions based on tax incentives alone, governments should analyse their taxation of multinational companies to ensure it is fair. And the international community should double down on reform of the international tax system to prevent tax avoidance.

Donors should allocate 15% of their annual budget to education with 6–10% from the humanitarian budget dedicated to education in emergencies and protracted crises.

Following the Global Partnership for Education Summit in July 2021, it is vital that all the donor pledges are tracked and fulfilled. Donors must commit to an early and significant replenishment

of the World Bank International Development Association (IDA20), at least in tune with previous replenishment rounds.

The G20 should work with partners **to strengthen debt relief initiatives**, including ensuring private creditor participation, expanding eligibility to countries that need it, and enhancing transparency. National governments that are granted debt suspensions or debt relief should document increased investments that this allows in child welfare, including education, in line with their domestic plans to achieve the SDGs. **Following the International Monetary Fund's new US\$650 billion issuance of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs), there is an urgent need for richer countries to recycle at least 75% of their allocations to benefit poorer countries. This should include fully supporting the IMF Poverty Growth and Trust Fund and seek ways to increase financing to education, such as through the World Bank's international Development Association. Any reallocation of SDRs countable as aid must be additional to existing commitments and be part of a package that increases international public resources available to developing countries.** This reallocation of SDRs must not count towards official aid targets, but rather should lead to an increase of resources available to developing countries.

Education Cannot Wait needs to raise an additional \$400 million to bridge its funding gap for the period 2021–23 and ensure that an additional 4.5 million children – including 2.7 million girls – affected by conflict, climate change and Covid-19 receive an education over the next three years.

Reaching this funding target means that Education Cannot Wait can provide seed funding for multi-year resilience programmes in at least 26 countries over the next three years, while enabling it to leverage an additional \$1 billion towards the outcomes of the programmes. The seed funding provides certainty and predictability to partners delivering education in the world's most complex and protracted crises, building resilience, and establishing a foundation for longer term scale and impact. Education Cannot Wait will also keep its First Emergency Reserve replenished to respond rapidly to new and escalating humanitarian emergencies.

MORE AND IMPROVED EDUCATION FINANCING DATA COLLECTION

Only half of the world's economies report government spend on education as a proportion of GDP. This is in stark contrast to the health sector: since 2000, 186 countries have compiled detailed health-financing data each year.¹⁹²

Education financing data often completely misses household expenditure, even though this makes up a significant proportion of financing for education, particularly in low-income countries. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics has recently begun to collect information on private education spending. It has data on private household education spending as a percentage of GDP per year on average between 1999 and 2015 for only 34 countries.¹⁹³

The education financing data that is collected is not always credible. There are discrepancies in reporting across data sources and actors, many of whom collect ad hoc data not bound by standard classifications or methodologies.¹⁹⁴ Financing data disaggregated by gender, age and immigration status, for example, is hard to come by, as is donor financing data for education in emergencies.

The data that is collected is also not stored in one place, which creates challenges in trying to form a complete picture of education financing. Domestic spending on education is collated by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, whilst the OECD collates international financing. In addition, humanitarian funding for education is kept by UNOCHA's Financial Tracking System.

It does not have to be this way. The challenges highlighted above are in stark contrast to the health sector and its Global Health Expenditure Database. An open access database, it is updated annually by World Health Organization member states to provide internationally comparable data on all health spending for close to 190 countries from 2000 to 2016.

Education could benefit from establishing a similar initiative to capture education financing data in one place. It would support better tracking, highlight key gaps and begin using financing data to consider correlations between financing and inputs, outputs and outcomes in education.

PRIORITISING LOCALISATION, INCLUSION, EQUITY AND FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING

As a sector we must refocus efforts to prioritise localised response capacity – the children, parents, teachers, communities, local civil society and government actors who are most affected by crisis, and best positioned to respond.

Save the Children and the Humanitarian Leadership Academy (HLA) offer the sector-facing accredited Education in Emergencies Professional Development Programme¹⁹⁵ in partnership with IKEA Foundation, the University of Geneva and others. The aim of the programme is to equip education-sector staff with the knowledge and skills required to initiate, design, implement and coordinate high-quality education responses in any emergency, including for refugees. The programme offers blended learning opportunities, including an open-access self-directed online Education in Emergencies course¹⁹⁶ and facilitated fundamentals and advanced courses (university accredited) delivered regionally through hubs in Africa and the Middle East. The programme is open to all implementing organisations and individuals,

and actively supports the participation of local and national organisations (such as governments), including through scholarships.

The low levels of domestic and international funding for basic education – despite its importance in ensuring equity and learning across the education system – are a clear indication that it has not been enough of a priority. Domestically, more is spent on secondary education than primary. Between 2000 and 2018, 15 out of 34 countries increased the share of secondary education budget while spending on primary schooling declined.¹⁹⁷ In low-income countries, on average around 46% of public education resources are allocated to educate the 10% most educated students.¹⁹⁸

Key donors are also neglecting to prioritise basic education – it receives only 45% of total aid to education, with 55% going to secondary and upper secondary.¹⁹⁹ This weighting does not make sense given the importance of basic education in securing learning and access in higher levels of the education system, and the large needs that exist at primary level. 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

Peter, 15, studies at home in a refugee settlement in West Nile, Uganda during school closures.



PHOTO: ESTHER RUTH MBABAZI/SAVE THE CHILDREN

and imputed costs for students from developing countries to access tertiary education.²⁰⁰

The neglect of pre-primary education is again reflected in its gross underfunding at both domestic and international levels. UNICEF's analysis reveals 38% of countries with available data (56 of 147 analysed), many of which are low- and lower-middle-income countries, invest less than 2% of their education budgets in pre-primary education. This is significantly below the internationally recommended benchmark of 10%.²⁰¹ An average of only \$76 million per year of education aid – less than 1% – is spent on pre-primary education in contrast to the \$3.6 billion in aid spent on post-secondary.²⁰²

Once again, tracking the money reveals the lack of prioritisation for the countries most in need of aid. Levels of aid to education have grown by only 1% per year on average since 2009 and, despite huge gaps between the world's richest and poorest countries in out-of-school rates and learning outcomes, the share of education aid going to the poorest countries is trending downwards, falling from 36% in 2002 to 22% in 2016.²⁰³

REFORM OF THE GLOBAL EDUCATION ARCHITECTURE

The international architecture for global education consists of the international agencies and institutions that receive international resources to progress SDG4 and countries' educational development. For this international architecture to play its part in helping to deliver SDG4, it needs urgent reform.

In particular, its key functions of global leadership accountability and the creation of knowledge through global public goods need strengthening.

STRENGTHEN LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY

To deliver on ambitious global education commitments in the next nine years, strong leadership of the sector is needed to:

- establish a clear and collective agenda for change
- build consensus for the direction of travel
- hold key stakeholders to account for delivery.

Currently, this leadership is lacking and in urgent need of reform.



Rima*, 13, writes on the blackboard at her school in Bethlehem in the occupied Palestinian territory.

UNESCO is the UN body mandated to lead the Global Education 2030 Agenda. Its main mechanisms for SDG4 include the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee. The Committee's primary objective is to support member states and partners to achieve SDG4 and the education-related targets in other goals of the overall 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

However, UNESCO's ability to provide strong leadership for the education sector is hindered by several factors. It is criticised for being overly politicised and stymied by cumbersome governance procedures, in part due to its 'one country, one vote' system.²⁰⁴ Its ability to deliver decisively is also impeded by the multiple projects it oversees, which aren't confined to the education sector.²⁰⁵ Finally, UNESCO is weakened by its inadequate budget: in 2014–15 UNESCO's spending on education was about 3% of the World Health Organization's spending on health in the same period.²⁰⁶

We welcome the commitment in the 2020 Global Education Meeting for a multi-stakeholder reflection process to review and reform the global education cooperation mechanism and strengthen the role of the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee in supporting the acceleration of countries' progress towards SDG4. We strongly encourage

wide participation throughout the consultation process with civil society.

Other key multilateral agencies, including the Global Partnership for Education, Education Cannot Wait, UNICEF, the World Bank and the Education Commission, have certain leadership and convenorship functions. **However, they have not explicitly defined a coordinated or collective leadership vision and therefore there remains a vacuum in the sector.**

The education sector lacks effective accompanying accountability systems, holding governments, donors and international agencies accountable for their progress and support. The Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR) is the main sectoral monitoring and accountability tool. However, it is hampered by the dearth of good-quality data, as already highlighted, and the lack of investment it receives.

The Global Partnership for Education's recent initiative, the Education Out Loud fund,²⁰⁷ is a promising step towards strengthening transparency, accountability and civic participation in education. It aims to enhance civil society capacities to engage in education-sector planning, policy dialogue and monitoring, and to promote transparency and accountability of national education sector policy.

CREATING A GLOBAL ACTION PLAN FOR EDUCATION

In 2018, 12 global health organisations came together to develop the *Global Action Plan for healthy lives and well-being for all*.²⁰⁸

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.

Establishing an equivalent Global Action Plan for Education could be a critical step towards achieving SDG4. Recent efforts have built momentum for such an initiative and provided practical recommendations that can inform key pillars of the plan. Most recently, UNESCO's 2019 report *Meeting Commitments: Are countries*

on track to achieve SDG4? called for a Global Action Plan for Education and specifically detailed six areas for joint action between governments and international partners that could frame the data component of such a plan.

Similarly, the Save Our Future White Paper, *Averting an Education Catastrophe for the World's Children*,²⁰⁹ issued by 14 key players within the education sector, and endorsed by hundreds more, agreed language around seven actions.

While this White Paper was specifically in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and did not include clear commitments or an accountability framework to delivering upon the actions, it is the closest the sector has yet come to agreeing a Global Action Plan for Education.



Ibrahim, 14, smiles in his teacher's office in Venezuela. He has been out of school for 11 months now due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"We cannot attend school anymore which makes me feel bad, because it is more complicated to have virtual lessons," he explains. "For me, it is better when we go to face-to-face lessons. I feel I understand better, and the teacher explains better, too."

It also seeks to create a stronger global and regional enabling environment for civil society advocacy and transparency efforts in education.

A transparent accountability framework building on the SDG indicators and monitoring frameworks is needed. It could outline the responsibilities of developing countries and the international community for education, and it could include independent reporting against the framework. Reporting against this framework should include producing a dashboard reflecting the key measures countries must take to get all children learning, including the SDG indicators, as well as policies and actions in equity, inclusion, systems strengthening, financing and accountability.

A key promising platform that may initiate the collective leadership that is so badly needed is the Global Education Forum.²¹⁰ The forum was established during the UN General Assembly in 2019 under the auspices of the UN Deputy Secretary-General. Its members include heads of UN agencies working in education (UNESCO, UNICEF, UNHCR), heads of global education organisations (Global Partnership for Education, Education Cannot Wait), representatives of multilateral development banks and ministers of major education donor countries.

A key objective of the Global Education Forum is to strengthen coordination and collaboration between global education actors to accelerate the timetable to achieve SDG 4. It therefore provides

a central platform for establishing collective action in the sector. **A key outcome for the forum, in collaboration with a strengthened UNESCO SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee, could be agreement on the development of a global action plan for education in 2021. This would lay out education priorities for action among its members to accelerate progress to achieve SDGs by 2030.**

The Global Education Forum²¹¹ should be a platform to address concerns visibly and specifically about fragmentation in the sector. It should continue to lay the groundwork for impactful collaboration, from resource mobilisation to delivery. The forum should take urgent steps to make sure aid recipient countries are represented and fully involved in the discussions. The Secretariat for the forum should act transparently, sharing agendas and outcomes publicly, and include a feedback loop with civil society organisations. By acting in this way, the education sector would demonstrate that it is prepared not just to create new ways of raising money, but also its commitment to use the money it receives wisely and in the service of a shared purpose.

NEW GLOBAL PUBLIC GOODS

Global public goods enable accelerated progress as they are "institutions, mechanisms and outcomes that provide near universal benefits, reach across borders and extend across generations".²¹² We are not able to accelerate progress towards SDG4

because global public goods in education – such as data, research, knowledge-sharing and networks – are in “short supply, poorly funded and rarely coordinated”.²¹³ In 2013, it was estimated that only 3% of aid to education (or \$242 million) was spent on global public goods, compared with about one-fifth of aid to health (or \$4.7 billion).²¹⁴

Such poor investment in global public goods for education has resulted in a paucity of research on what works. Most of the research on raising learning outcomes and developing skills – including social and emotional skills – needed globally for sustainable development happens almost exclusively in high-income countries.²¹⁵ As a result, it is often not relevant to low-income and conflict-affected countries – yet they are the countries that need this evidence the most and most urgently.

Even when relevant data and research is available, poor capacity development and limited networks mean the knowledge does not translate to impact on the ground. Global public goods in education must therefore be integrated with capacity development and networks to disseminate knowledge, so that practitioners can adapt and use them effectively.²¹⁶

The Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) is leading the sector in terms of global knowledge creation and dissemination. Its strategic objectives include

providing, curating and organising knowledge to inform policy and practice, and strengthening capacity to deliver good-quality, safe, relevant and equitable education for all. INEE’s action has propelled the development of many resources and key tools in use today.

The Global Partnership for Education’s recent initiative, the Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX), is a promising step towards advancing global public goods in education.

With a budget of close to \$63 million, KIX is the largest fund solely dedicated to meet global public-good gaps in education, and will focus on six thematic areas: early childhood care and education, learning assessment systems, gender equality, strengthening data systems, equity and inclusion, and teaching and learning.

The new Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel (GEEAP), co-hosted by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and the World Bank, and convened by the Building Evidence in Education (BE2) global working group, aims to provide much-needed guidance to help policy-makers make sense of the evidence. The GEEAP’s first recommendations were on the ‘smart buys’ in education for low- and middle-income countries. These are helping to inform countries’ decisions about where to allocate their budget and reform efforts.²¹⁷



A Save the Children worker leads pupils in play at a school supported by Save the Children in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia after the earthquake in 2018.

5 An 8-point plan to build forward better

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated existing inequalities in education provision worldwide. To move effectively towards long-term recovery and to achieve our promises in 2030, we must tackle the pre-existing challenges, including the hundreds of millions of children who were not in school before the pandemic, and those not learning while in school.

All actors must recognise that education is protective, life-saving and life-sustaining during climate-related disasters, conflict, displacement and in hunger- and health-related emergencies. It is central to ensuring a sustainable future for all. Governments and donors must therefore work with communities, developing-country partners, other key stakeholders and children themselves to make education a core part of Covid recovery plans, strengthen education's role in responding to future crises, and prepare learners to contribute to inclusive societies and a healthy planet.

If funding is allocated urgently, the impact could be transformative for the learning of many children affected by the pandemic. For low- and lower-middle-income countries to achieve SDG4 there is an annual financing gap up to 2030 of \$148 billion. Additional costs that governments face due to Covid-19-related school closures risk increasing this financing gap by up to one-third – \$30–45 billion. But investing now in remedial and reenrolment programmes could reduce this additional cost by as much as 75%.²¹⁸

Rohingya refugees AK, 17, and Mohammad, 18, during a history class at their school in south India.



Learning must prepare students of all ages to find solutions for the challenges of today and the future. Education should be transformative. It should allow us to make informed decisions and take individual and collective action to change our societies and care for the planet. Education for Sustainable Development is recognised as an integral element of SDG4 on quality education and a key enabler of all other SDGs.

In the coming months, there are several major global opportunities for collective action, where new agreements, commitments and funding pledges can and should be made on the above, to build forward better education systems.

“Governments should ensure they implement the Agenda 2030 aspirations and Children’s Charter to ensure the rights of children are advanced.”

Wesley, a boy from Zimbabwe

8-POINT PLAN

The following 8-point plan brings together recommendations from our ten lessons learned from the Covid-19 integrated response and the shifts needed in the way we work in order to deliver them (chapters 3 and 4).

This plan should urgently be adopted by low-and-middle income governments, donor governments, international agencies and funders, civil society, private sector and philanthropy to build forward better education systems.

- 1. COVID-19 RECOVERY:** Ensure children can return to school safely and get their learning back on track.
- 2. PREPAREDNESS AND ANTICIPATORY ACTION:** Every country must have an integrated preparedness plan to secure children’s learning and wellbeing in future crises.
- 3. TARGET OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN:** Ensure children facing discrimination and who were out of school before the pandemic can access safe learning opportunities.
- 4. KEEP LEARNING SAFE:** Protect learning from violence and attacks and from the impact of the climate emergency.

5. SCALE UP AND ADAPT FINANCING:

Urgently fill the education financing gap and adjust financing modalities to enable anticipatory action.

- 6. GET THE DATA RIGHT:** Collect more and improved data, and continuously share data widely for agile decision-making on preparedness and anticipatory action, and policy making.

7. FOCUS ON EQUITY AND CHILD PARTICIPATION:

Reach the children most affected by inequality and discrimination first, and include children in analysing, designing, implementing and evaluating programmes.

- 8. SHIFT POWER:** Move decision-making power and resources into national and local civil society.

In more detail:

1. COVID-19 RECOVERY: Ensure children can return to school safely and get their learning and wellbeing back on track.

Ministries of education and donors should fully fund the following interventions, using the *Safe Back to School: A Practitioner’s Guide*:

- **Effective, flexible and inclusive distance learning programmes while schools are closed**, including digital learning, interactive radio instruction and printed learning materials, with a focus on reaching the most marginalised children.
- **Child protection and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services for children, young people and teachers**, linking to additional services when necessary and where available.
- **Cash transfers** to families most in need so they can afford to send their children back to school once they re-open.
- **Food to children who normally rely on school meals**, whether by take-home rations, vouchers or cash schemes – particularly in light of increased hunger levels because of Covid-19.
- **Every child should have a holistic learning and wellbeing assessment on their return to school and catch-up classes.**
- **Gender-sensitive water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities in schools, and ventilation** to reduce the risk of Covid-19 transmission.

- **National back-to-school communication campaigns** to inform communities of school reopening plans, including the support available to children and measures being taken to make schools safer through non-pharmaceutical interventions and WASH measures.
- **Effective gender-sensitive training for teachers**, including in distance learning, communicating about the pandemic and the changes within the school to keep everyone safe.
- **Ensure all teachers and school staff are prioritised as essential workers to receive the Covid-19 vaccine**, once frontline health workers and high-risk populations are vaccinated, in line with the World Health Organization's SAGE roadmap.

2. PREPAREDNESS AND ANTICIPATORY ACTION: Every country must have an integrated preparedness plan to secure children's learning and wellbeing in future crises.

Ministries of education, with support from **donors**, should develop and implement an integrated preparedness plan.

- **Conduct wide-ranging consultations** with children, parents, education authorities, school leaders, teachers and school staff to learn lessons from Covid-19 and other crises, and put these lessons in the plan.
- Review and evaluate the practice of distance learning during school closures. **Establish ongoing national distance learning programmes** that are flexible, accessible, inclusive and gender responsive. They should align with curricula, complement school-based learning, and be designed to be scaled up rapidly in the event of future school closures.
- **The full breadth of school services should be taken into consideration to ensure an integrated response that fulfils children's needs.** Services include WASH facilities in schools, child protection reporting, referral and monitoring systems, school meals, sexual and reproductive health, and rights programming, as well as training to address stigma and that specifically targets gender-based violence, and provision of MHPSS services.

- **Fully integrate global citizenship, climate change and environmental and conflict-sensitive education into curricula and teacher training**, as set out in the Paris Agreement, the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, to better prepare children to live in a rapidly changing climate.
- **Work with national teacher unions and organisations to develop and implement new inclusive and flexible strategies to provide professional development and wellbeing support for teachers** so that they can adapt to new circumstances in schools in response to ongoing and future crises. This should include training in distance-learning teaching methods to address issues that may be specific to female teachers.
- Improve the recruitment, retention and attendance of qualified and gender-sensitive female and male teachers and ensure teaching is gender-transformative and inclusive.
- **Parental and community resources must be harnessed to support learning.** This includes ongoing efforts on hygiene, psychosocial support, child protection (against human trafficking, violence, exploitation and sexual abuse) and home-based learning to help education to continue when shocks occur.

3. TARGET OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN: Ensure the children most affected by inequality and were out of school before the pandemic can access learning opportunities.

Ministries of education, donors, international agencies and civil society must make additional efforts to:

- **Use multi-modality approaches to distance learning** to provide children who are out of school and hard to reach in crisis-affected and low-income countries with learning opportunities – including low-tech and no-tech solutions.
- **Remove policy and practical barriers that exclude children** from the formal education system, for example, by establishing an inclusive, flexible registration system that allows students to enrol in school even if they lack the usual documentation and by providing cash transfers. This also includes removing gender-based barriers and limits on time spent out of education.

- **Enact policies that provide access to accredited, good-quality, innovative non-formal accelerated learning opportunities** – with clear pathways into the formal system so that children can move when ready. Non-government and community-based organisations should be supported to provide these learning opportunities to fill the gaps in public provision.
- **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 the safe opening of schools, as well as initiatives to support the most marginalised children to return to school. Ensure campaigns include learners who were forced out of education by attacks on schools, insecurity or displacement. And that they address social stigma and shame associated with teenage pregnancies or marriage, and stereotypes or superstitions about people who have been infected – or are assumed to have been infected – by Covid-19.

4. **KEEP LEARNING SAFE: Protect children, schools and learning spaces from violence, from attacks and from the impact of the climate emergency.**

Ministries of education, social protection, health and climate change, donors, international agencies and civil society must make additional efforts to:

- **Take an inclusive, all-hazards approach to keeping children safe in and around schools** through strong policies and systems for school safety and protection, and through teachers and children having the knowledge, skills and behaviours to keep themselves protected in and around school.
- **Provide sexual and reproductive health and rights programming** that includes the safe distribution of menstrual hygiene kits and supports girls' autonomy; strengthens girl-friendly school facilities; and improves school-related gender-based violence prevention, reporting and response through gender-responsive school codes of conduct.
- **Ensure that child protection reporting and referral systems can be adapted for times of school closure.**

- **Ensure that curricula and learning materials promote gender equality.** Where possible, create safe spaces for girls to have positive discussions about gender with female role models, and support female leadership within the school and community.
- **Prioritise 'climate proofing' of educational infrastructure**, conducting school infrastructure vulnerability assessments and supporting the adaptation and construction of safe schools, with consideration for the most vulnerable children, to protect them from the impacts of climate-related disasters, as well as slow-onset changes. Make climate change a core curriculum subject within national climate change learning strategies.
- **Ensure that nationally determined contributions to climate action commit to making education systems gender-equal and resilient** so that the most marginalised children, including girls, do not drop out of or miss school due to climate-related events.
- **Identify mechanisms that enable governments to better coordinate agencies responsible for climate change adaptation and mitigation** with the health and education sectors, and incentivise multi-sectoral approaches to localise, coordinate and implement this agenda.

Ahead of the Fourth International Conference on Safe Schools hosted by the government of Nigeria in 2021, governments must:

- Endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration to ensure that all students and educators, male and female, can learn and teach in safety. Avoid using schools and universities for military purposes, including by implementing the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*. Strengthen monitoring and reporting of attacks on education, systematically investigate them and ensure perpetrators are prosecuted.
- Develop and implement gender-responsive risk assessments and school safety plans to prevent and mitigate the impact of attacks on education before, during and after the reopening of schools.

- Vacate schools occupied during the pandemic, make repairs and conduct risk assessments to ensure safe education can occur on reopening.
- Ensure that teachers and administrators are not pressured to reopen schools in insecure areas unless appropriate safety measures are in place. Employ alternative or distance learning measures where schools cannot safely reopen.
- Encourage strong regional cooperation and peer-to-peer exchange of good practices and lessons learned implementing the *Safe Schools Declaration*. Enhance regional efforts to monitor and report on attacks on education and the military use of schools.

5. SCALE UP AND ADAPT FINANCING: Urgently fill the education financing gap and adjust financing modalities to enable anticipatory action.

Governments, bilateral and multi-lateral donors should take an anticipatory approach to investments.

- **Donors should take a coherent approach to end the cycle of vulnerability, funding interventions that address urgent, humanitarian needs, as well as contribute to longer-term development and peace outcomes.** Donors should maintain robust funding for education via official development assistance and, rather than waiting for humanitarian response plans, they should frontload funding to strengthen education systems now in order to be resilient to ongoing and future crises. And having frontloaded funding, donors should then be prepared to top-up funding as needed.
- **Governments and donors should maintain and increase education funding from their 2019 budgets. Donors should dedicate 6–10% of their humanitarian budget to education in emergencies and protracted crises.**
- **The G20 should work with partners to strengthen debt-relief initiatives,** including ensuring private creditor participation, expanding eligibility to countries that need it, and enhancing transparency.
- **The IMF should proceed as quickly as possible with a new issuance of special drawing rights,** and richer countries must commit to recycling at least 75% of these to benefit poorer countries.
- **Donors should fully fund Education Cannot Wait** with \$400 million to its global fund and \$1 billion in-country to support multi-year resilience programmes by the end of 2022.
- **A strengthened UNESCO SDG4 Steering Committee together with the Global Education Forum should address fragmentation of the international financing architecture for education** and continue to lay the groundwork for impactful collaboration, from resource mobilisation to delivery.
- UNESCO, working with other relevant partners, should establish a **centralised and publicly accessible education financing platform** to capture, in as close to real time as possible, overall education financing from all sources.

6. GET THE DATA RIGHT: Collect more and improved data, and continuously share data widely for agile decision-making on preparedness and anticipatory action and policy making.

- **UNESCO should collect sub-national, national and regional data on the potential and actual impact of climate change on children's learning and wellbeing** to be used for policy-making, planning and budgeting at all levels. It should integrate this information into its Institute for Statistics' Global Education Database. This data should be disaggregated by gender, disability, age, migration status and indigeneity, race, and ethnicity. And it should be integrated into the work underway by the Global Initiative for Comparable Data by 2030.²¹⁹
- **Governments and stakeholders should ensure that regular formative and summative learning assessments** are embedded in education systems and that data is used to inform policy and practice to support children's learning.
- **Governments should ensure regular collection and publication of disaggregated data on school enrolment, attendance, and exam and test participation.** Where robust attendance-tracking systems are not in place, plan the selection and rollout of sustainable



Mongrath, 7, at school in Kampong Cham, Cambodia.

Mongrath participated in Save the Children's First Read early years education programme before starting primary school. Her teacher, Vongsun Vath says: "The children who experience home learning or pre-school are confident and I hope in the future they will be clever and brave and have a better job when they grow up."

education and child protection management information systems.

- **To support accountability, governments must make data and other public information freely available in a timely manner**, disseminate it broadly, and convert it into formats that are easy to understand and use by practitioners, policy-makers and non-experts alike, while also protecting the privacy and safety of individuals and groups.
- **National and international NGOs and UN agencies undertaking education programming should align their data-collection systems with the national Education Monitoring Information System (EMIS)**, and advocate for the national EMIS to combine and share all data rapidly and effectively so that decision-making in response to a crisis can occur quickly.
- **Donors, academics, NGOs and the private sector should undertake rigorous research on how best to support children's learning and wellbeing in a range of emergency and protracted crisis situations and refugee contexts:** what works, how, for whom, under what conditions and at what cost. This research should be disseminated widely as a global public good.

7. FOCUS ON EQUITY AND CHILD PARTICIPATION: Reach the children most affected by inequality and discrimination first and include children in analysing, designing, implementing and evaluating programmes and policies.

Low- and middle-income governments, donor governments, international agencies and funders, civil society, the private sector and philanthropy should:

- **Prioritise the engagement of children most impacted by inequality and discrimination in each context**, then address the systemic barriers that prevent their engagement within civil society and education, and their access to protective services.
- **In line with obligations in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children must be empowered and supported to exercise their rights to expression, association and peaceful assembly with meaningful and safe opportunities** – online and offline – to participate in decisions taken by their schools, communities and national government on their safe return to school and learning.

- **Recognise that children are agents of change.** All programming and advocacy efforts should advance children's right to be heard and support their participation in decision-making, analysis, design and evaluation in a genuine and inclusive way, and support inter-generational co-leadership. Where possible, peer-to-peer learning and support should be explored. This should include opportunities for children to influence the Education 2030 Steering Committee / Global Coordination Mechanism.
- **Provide adequate and flexible funding for child-led networks,** create opportunities for them to set their own priorities and lead their own campaigns, and strengthen their capacity to claim their rights and to hold others to account (including national policy-making processes).

8. SHIFT POWER: Move decision-making, power and resources into national and local civil society.

Localisation is fundamental to changing the international aid system (development and humanitarian) to be better fit for purpose and address structural challenges internally and where we work.

- **All international actors must recognise that communities and local and national actors are – and always have been – at the forefront of sustainable development and humanitarian response.** Shift power including resources, capacity and ownership to national and local actors, to ensure a more timely, appropriate and effective outcome for children.

- **Financing must flow as directly as possible to local and national actors.** Donors need to eradicate barriers that hinder national actors from accessing funding directly. They need to include institutional capacity building funding in grants as standard to help national and local partners address any organisational gaps. All donors and international organisations partnering with local and national actors should commit to providing **10% additional resourcing beyond project direct costs, with 7% to support partners' indirect costs** and 3% to support capacity strengthening, based on sector best practices.
- **Leadership and coordination arrangements** in the humanitarian and development sector need to shift so that local and national actors are not only represented but also directly involved in decision-making on response prioritisation and financial allocations.
- **Use the Start Network's 7 Dimensions of Localisation**²²⁰ (page 40) **to reflect** on the extent to which progress is leading to systemic change in the role of national and local civil society in providing education in crises. **Shift capacity, resources and ownership to national and local civil society.** Bilateral and multilateral donors, UN agencies and INGOs should **regularly report on localisation efforts and share best practices.**

Appendix: Risks to Education Index

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The Risks to Education Index ranks countries by the vulnerability of their school system to existing **challenges and future crises and preparedness, enabling us to make a holistic assessment of the risks to education. The index consists of nine indicators of risk, grouped into six dimensions.**

The table below provides an overview of each indicator's definition, source, coverage and measures of disaggregation. The index is disaggregated by sex where data is available for indicators. The index considers the most recent available data point for each indicator, although the last year for which data is reported may vary between indicators.

The index is built in multiple steps. First, all indicators are normalised between 1 and 0 using a min–max approach, with 0 being the desired value and 1 the maximum value observed for each indicator in each country and sex group. In the following steps, the index is computed for each dimension using the arithmetic mean of each available indicator. Index values are expressed between 0 and 1, with 1 as the least desirable outcome and 0 as the target, representing no risk in each dimension.

In the next step, the arithmetic mean of the available dimensions is used to compute the Risks to Education Index. The index is computed for a country only if data is available for at least four dimensions, for a total of 178 countries. The overall index follows the same interpretation as the dimension-specific index values, namely 1 as the least desirable value and 0 as no risks across all dimensions.

A value of 0 would mean a country is not vulnerable to climate change and/or has the readiness to improve resilience, there are no attacks on schools, there are no internally displaced children, there is no youth unemployment, harmonised testing scores are as high as they can be, all children live in households with connectivity to engage in remote learning, all children of primary school age are in school, the population has received at least one dose of the Covid-19 vaccine, and teachers have been prioritised in vaccination campaigns.

Countries are grouped into five levels of risk based on their index value: low (index below 0.1), reduced (index between 0.1–0.299), moderate (0.3–0.499), high (0.5–0.699), and extreme (0.7 and above). Under these criteria, the distribution follows a bell curve: most countries (53%) are moderate risk, around 20% of countries are either reduced or high risk (20% and 22% respectively), and below 5% of countries are extreme or low risk (4% and 1% respectively).

TABLE 3. THE SIX DIMENSIONS OF THE RISKS TO EDUCATION INDEX

Dimension	Indicator	Definition	Source	Coverage	Sex disaggregation	Range
1. Climate change	ND-GAIN country index	A country's vulnerability to climate change and other global challenges in combination with its readiness to improve resilience	Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative	Global	No	0–100%
2. Humanitarian	Attacks on schools	Severity of attacks on schools based on number of incidents and people harmed	Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (2020 data provided in advance of publication)	Global	No	Scale 0–4
	IDPs (children)	Number of internally displaced children	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre	Global, relevant countries	No	Number
3. Labour market participation	Youth unemployment	Percentage of total labour force aged 15–24 who are unemployed ²²¹	World Bank (from International Labour Organization)	Global	Yes	0–100%
4. Learning	Harmonised learning outcomes	Harmonised test scores	World Bank (from Human Capital Index dataset)	Global	Yes	Number
	School age digital connectivity	Percentage of children in a school attendance age (approximately 3–17 years old depending on the country) who have internet connection at home	UNICEF	Global	No	0–100%
5. Out of school	Out-of-school rates for primary school	Percentage of children of primary school age who are not in school	UNESCO UIS and WIDE	Global	Yes	0–100%
6. Vaccines	Covid-19 vaccination rate	People vaccinated with at least one dose per 100 population	World Health Organization	Global	No	Number
	Prioritisation of teachers for vaccination	Whether teachers are prioritised for Covid-19 vaccination	Covid-19 global education recovery tracker	Global	No	Binary (0–1)

TABLE 4. THE 100 COUNTRIES THAT ARE THE HIGHEST IN THE RISKS TO EDUCATION INDEX

	All children			Boys			Girls		
	Country	Index	Risk	Country	Index	Risk	Country	Index	Risk
1	Democratic Republic of Congo	0.782	Extreme	Democratic Republic of Congo	0.788	Extreme	Democratic Republic of Congo	0.778	Extreme
2	Nigeria	0.771	Extreme	Nigeria	0.773	Extreme	Libya	0.770	Extreme
3	Somalia	0.744	Extreme	Somalia	0.743	Extreme	Nigeria	0.769	Extreme
4	Afghanistan	0.736	Extreme	Afghanistan	0.731	Extreme	Syria	0.764	Extreme
5	South Sudan	0.720	Extreme	South Sudan	0.720	Extreme	Iraq	0.760	Extreme
6	Sudan	0.716	Extreme	Sudan	0.703	Extreme	Afghanistan	0.750	Extreme
7	Mali	0.706	Extreme	Mali	0.694	High	Somalia	0.747	Extreme
8	Libya	0.701	Extreme	Syria	0.673	High	Sudan	0.741	Extreme
9	Syria	0.687	High	Libya	0.672	High	South Sudan	0.741	Extreme
10	Yemen	0.672	High	Yemen	0.657	High	Mali	0.718	Extreme
11	Haiti	0.659	High	Iraq	0.647	High	Yemen	0.710	Extreme
12	Iraq	0.655	High	Namibia	0.643	High	Egypt	0.694	High
13	Central African Republic	0.631	High	Haiti	0.642	High	Algeria	0.681	High
14	South Africa	0.626	High	Sierra Leone	0.642	High	Haiti	0.681	High
15	Pakistan	0.624	High	Algeria	0.631	High	Central African Republic	0.664	High
16	Niger	0.614	High	Central African Republic	0.627	High	Namibia	0.647	High
17	Malawi	0.612	High	South Africa	0.626	High	Saudi Arabia	0.640	High
18	Burkina Faso	0.606	High	Pakistan	0.610	High	Pakistan	0.636	High
19	Mauritania	0.599	High	Burkina Faso	0.603	High	South Africa	0.628	High
20	Guinea-Bissau	0.597	High	Niger	0.602	High	Niger	0.626	High
21	Ethiopia	0.596	High	Egypt	0.599	High	Sierra Leone	0.620	High
22	Eritrea	0.590	High	Guinea-Bissau	0.597	High	Burkina Faso	0.609	High
23	India	0.576	High	Mauritania	0.597	High	Ethiopia	0.608	High
24	Zambia	0.565	High	Tunisia	0.590	High	Mauritania	0.607	High
25	Gabon	0.565	High	Madagascar	0.588	High	Guyana	0.603	High
26	Botswana	0.561	High	Ethiopia	0.585	High	Tunisia	0.599	High
27	Nicaragua	0.555	High	Eritrea	0.583	High	Eritrea	0.598	High
28	Colombia	0.555	High	Benin	0.581	High	Guinea-Bissau	0.597	High
29	Eswatini	0.554	High	India	0.577	High	Madagascar	0.585	High
30	Cameroon	0.551	High	Zambia	0.576	High	Gabon	0.584	High
31	Liberia	0.548	High	Guyana	0.574	High	Benin	0.582	High
32	Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.538	High	Togo	0.572	High	India	0.577	High
33	Algeria	0.532	High	St Vincent and the Grenadines	0.561	High	Zambia	0.574	High
34	Senegal	0.532	High	Myanmar	0.560	High	Botswana	0.573	High

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	All children			Boys			Girls		
	Country	Index	Risk	Country	Index	Risk	Country	Index	Risk
35	Chad	0.529	High	Malawi	0.558	High	Colombia	0.569	High
36	Republic of Congo	0.526	High	Botswana	0.552	High	Nicaragua	0.567	High
37	Guinea	0.526	High	Nicaragua	0.551	High	St Vincent and the Grenadines	0.564	High
38	Sierra Leone	0.526	High	Gabon	0.550	High	Cameroon	0.562	High
39	Namibia	0.520	High	Samoa	0.549	High	Malawi	0.561	High
40	Egypt	0.518	High	Liberia	0.547	High	Eswatini	0.559	High
41	Uganda	0.516	High	Colombia	0.545	High	Togo	0.559	High
42	Mozambique	0.515	High	Uganda	0.542	High	Chad	0.558	High
43	China	0.509	High	Eswatini	0.542	High	Myanmar	0.553	High
44	Bangladesh	0.507	High	Cameroon	0.541	High	Samoa	0.551	High
45	Lesotho	0.506	High	Senegal	0.539	High	Liberia	0.549	High
46	Djibouti	0.504	High	Congo, Rep	0.537	High	Guinea	0.548	High
47	Comoros	0.504	High	Saudi Arabia	0.532	High	Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.547	High
48	Philippines	0.500	High	Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.532	High	Uganda	0.538	High
49	Turkey	0.497	Moderate	Albania	0.527	High	Argentina	0.533	High
50	Tunisia	0.497	Moderate	Argentina	0.518	High	Fiji	0.527	High
51	Angola	0.494	Moderate	Fiji	0.516	High	Senegal	0.524	High
52	Madagascar	0.494	Moderate	Mozambique	0.513	High	Lesotho	0.521	High
53	Ghana	0.492	Moderate	China	0.512	High	Bangladesh	0.519	High
54	Guyana	0.492	Moderate	Guinea	0.506	High	Mozambique	0.517	High
55	Benin	0.492	Moderate	Djibouti	0.504	High	Republic of Congo	0.515	High
56	Turkmenistan	0.491	Moderate	Bangladesh	0.502	High	Sri Lanka	0.512	High
57	Honduras	0.489	Moderate	Philippines	0.502	High	Turkey	0.509	High
58	Burundi	0.486	Moderate	Chad	0.501	High	Albania	0.509	High
59	The Gambia	0.480	Moderate	Comoros	0.499	Moderate	Comoros	0.507	High
60	Bolivia	0.478	Moderate	Zimbabwe	0.498	Moderate	Costa Rica	0.506	High
61	Thailand	0.476	Moderate	Burundi	0.496	Moderate	China	0.506	High
62	Togo	0.475	Moderate	Turkmenistan	0.495	Moderate	Djibouti	0.505	High
63	Papua New Guinea	0.472	Moderate	Angola	0.495	Moderate	Zimbabwe	0.504	High
64	Paraguay	0.472	Moderate	Ghana	0.493	Moderate	Belize	0.502	High
65	Myanmar	0.470	Moderate	Peru	0.493	Moderate	Honduras	0.501	High
66	Lao PDR	0.469	Moderate	Lesotho	0.491	Moderate	Philippines	0.501	High
67	Equatorial Guinea	0.469	Moderate	Turkey	0.491	Moderate	Brunei Darussalam	0.499	Moderate
68	Lebanon	0.468	Moderate	Brunei Darussalam	0.490	Moderate	Peru	0.497	Moderate
69	Trinidad and Tobago	0.467	Moderate	Georgia	0.486	Moderate	West Bank and Gaza	0.496	Moderate
70	Venezuela	0.465	Moderate	Honduras	0.484	Moderate	Angola	0.493	Moderate

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	All children			Boys			Girls		
	Country	Index	Risk	Country	Index	Risk	Country	Index	Risk
71	Saudi Arabia	0.463	Moderate	Morocco	0.482	Moderate	Georgia	0.491	Moderate
72	Timor-Leste	0.462	Moderate	The Gambia	0.481	Moderate	Ghana	0.491	Moderate
73	Cuba	0.462	Moderate	Costa Rica	0.480	Moderate	Kyrgyz Republic	0.488	Moderate
74	Samoa	0.459	Moderate	Thailand	0.478	Moderate	São Tomé and Príncipe	0.486	Moderate
75	São Tomé and Príncipe	0.457	Moderate	Bolivia	0.477	Moderate	Paraguay	0.484	Moderate
76	Solomon Islands	0.453	Moderate	Kazakhstan	0.476	Moderate	Turkmenistan	0.484	Moderate
77	Armenia	0.453	Moderate	Sri Lanka	0.475	Moderate	Morocco	0.481	Moderate
78	St Vincent and the Grenadines	0.450	Moderate	Trinidad and Tobago	0.471	Moderate	The Gambia	0.481	Moderate
79	Côte d'Ivoire	0.443	Moderate	Papua New Guinea	0.470	Moderate	Iran	0.481	Moderate
80	Ukraine	0.443	Moderate	Equatorial Guinea	0.470	Moderate	Mauritius	0.480	Moderate
81	Sri Lanka	0.441	Moderate	Lao PDR	0.469	Moderate	Venezuela	0.479	Moderate
82	Albania	0.439	Moderate	Lebanon	0.467	Moderate	Bolivia	0.479	Moderate
83	Argentina	0.438	Moderate	Kyrgyz Republic	0.464	Moderate	Lebanon	0.476	Moderate
84	St Lucia	0.435	Moderate	Paraguay	0.463	Moderate	Thailand	0.476	Moderate
85	Cabo Verde	0.435	Moderate	Cuba	0.462	Moderate	Papua New Guinea	0.476	Moderate
86	Kenya	0.434	Moderate	Timor-Leste	0.462	Moderate	Burundi	0.475	Moderate
87	Vietnam	0.434	Moderate	Malaysia	0.459	Moderate	Kazakhstan	0.470	Moderate
88	Fiji	0.432	Moderate	Solomon Islands	0.459	Moderate	Lao PDR	0.469	Moderate
89	Suriname	0.428	Moderate	Venezuela	0.458	Moderate	Equatorial Guinea	0.468	Moderate
90	West Bank and Gaza	0.425	Moderate	Mauritius	0.452	Moderate	Armenia	0.467	Moderate
91	Jordan	0.423	Moderate	Iran	0.452	Moderate	Timor-Leste	0.463	Moderate
92	Peru	0.416	Moderate	Kenya	0.451	Moderate	Trinidad and Tobago	0.462	Moderate
93	Zimbabwe	0.416	Moderate	St Lucia	0.447	Moderate	Cuba	0.462	Moderate
94	Brunei Darussalam	0.413	Moderate	Tajikistan	0.447	Moderate	Malaysia	0.459	Moderate
95	Jamaica	0.412	Moderate	Ukraine	0.446	Moderate	Côte d'Ivoire	0.456	Moderate
96	Costa Rica	0.409	Moderate	São Tomé and Príncipe	0.445	Moderate	Jordan	0.454	Moderate
97	Georgia	0.408	Moderate	Armenia	0.443	Moderate	Cabo Verde	0.450	Moderate
98	Bhutan	0.402	Moderate	Belize	0.442	Moderate	Solomon Islands	0.446	Moderate
99	Morocco	0.401	Moderate	Vietnam	0.435	Moderate	Suriname	0.444	Moderate
100	Kazakhstan	0.397	Moderate	Côte d'Ivoire	0.431	Moderate	Kenya	0.443	Moderate

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BUILD BACK

FORWARD

BETTER

How the global community must act now to secure children's learning in crises

'Build back better' has long been a rallying cry of crisis responses – and is being used frequently today. However, given the scale of the global learning crisis even before the Covid-19 pandemic – with one child in six denied their right to education – it's vital we don't limit our ambition to building 'back' to how things were.

Now it's imperative we build *forward* better – and differently.

There's no denying the scale of the challenge. But there's also cause for hope. The global reach of the Covid-19 crisis has generated a shared understanding of the impact of crisis on children's right to education. This understanding can be used to build forward better – and radically transform children's chances.

Build Forward Better presents new analysis on which countries' school systems are most vulnerable to existing risks and future crises. And it sets out what the global community needs to do to support ministries of education in those countries to prepare now. So that, even during emergencies, education systems can provide all children with good-quality, safe and inclusive opportunities to learn.