

World Vision Policy  
Briefing for Global  
Education Summit  
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**MORE  
INVESTMENT  
BETTER  
SPENT FOR  
INCLUSIVE,  
EQUITABLE  
AND SAFE  
EDUCATION**



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**KEY MESSAGES**

The COVID-19 pandemic is the biggest disruption to children's education in recent history.



At its height, the outbreaks and lockdowns affected 1.6 billion children. Currently, 258 million children are not in education; the shockwaves of this global virus could leave an additional 11 million more children unable to ever return to school.

In rebuilding better economies in the aftermath of COVID-19, national governments must give priority to



inclusive, safe education systems as well as strong child protection systems. Violence prevention and response must also be incorporated into the education sector policies and budgets, and into school reopening plans.

Global Partnership for Education partner countries, national governments and donors must show bold and ambitious leadership.



Education and protection of children from violence must be placed at the centre of COVID-19 recovery efforts; an allocation of 20% of national budgets and 15-20% of ODA funding towards education as well as an across-the-board increase funding will address multisectoral barriers to education.

**INTRODUCTION**

The COVID-19 pandemic is the biggest disruption to education in recent history. At the pandemic's peak, it affected the schooling of 1.6 billion children – 743 million of whom were girls. Before COVID-19 spread across the world, 258 million children of primary and secondary school age were already failing to access education. As with most global shocks, the most vulnerable children, especially girls and children living in humanitarian settings, for whom accessing education and staying in school was already difficult, were the hardest hit. The pandemic has further increased these numbers. It is currently estimated that 11 million more primary and secondary school children, of whom are 5.2 million girls, are at risk of not returning to school at all.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UNESCO (2020). COVID-19 Education Response: How many students are at risk of not returning to school? <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373992>

## Girls' Education: Gains at Risk

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, 132 million girls were out of school. Many of these children live in regions with high levels of gender inequality, or their education was already affected by conflict or climate-related disasters.<sup>2</sup> The pandemic has further exacerbated these risks, leading to lower enrolment and higher school drop-out levels among girls. This compounds with existing problems, such as shortages of schools and female teachers, the high cost of education, harmful gender norms and gender-based violence to create a more difficult education environment for girls. UNICEF estimates up to 10 million more girls are likely to get married and leave school due to the pandemic. World Vision has also reported that policies and practices – particularly in sub-Saharan Africa – are blocking pregnant girls and adolescent mothers from returning to school and continuing their education.<sup>3</sup> Even before the pandemic, the risk of school-related violence and exploitation often prevented parents from educating their daughters and led many girls to drop out. It is estimated that at least 246 million girls and boys were impacted by school-related, gender-based violence, with girls being particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment, rape, coercion, exploitation, and discrimination from teachers, staff and peers.<sup>4</sup>

Violence against children at home, in communities and online has increased since the pandemic and this risk prevents children, especially girls, from enrolling or returning

to school. Even when girls do not fall victims to these harmful practices and circumstances, they are often still not able to take full advantage of educational opportunities, as shifting household demands driven by the crisis, deprioritise their education. For many households, lockdowns have seen incomes and savings disappear, meaning they cannot pay school fees and where they can, boys are often prioritised. Prolonged disruption in education and increasing poverty has also resulted in an increase in child labour, with both boys and girls being expected to contribute to family income, further interrupting their education.

School closures have also left many children without access to critical protection services and increased their exposure to other forms of violence (online or at home, as victims or witnesses).

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the interplay between violence against children and educational outcomes. Access to safe secondary education is among the most effective strategies to prevent child marriage or teenage pregnancy, but violence against children can be a significant barrier to ensuring girls enrol and stay in school in the first place. This is why violence against children – and its root causes throughout all layers of society – needs to be addressed as a part of efforts to increase access to education and improve learning outcomes of girls and boys, especially most vulnerable children.



Photo: Crislyn Felisilda ©World Vision 2016

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/education/girls-education>

<sup>3</sup> World Vision (2019), COVID Aftershocks Access Denied: Teenage Pregnancy Threatens to Block A Million Girls Across Sub-Saharan Africa From Returning To School

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO (2015), School-related gender-based violence is preventing the achievement of quality education for all

## Building Back Better from the Global Education Crisis

It has never been more important to increase access and quality of education whilst simultaneously addressing the structural barriers keeping many vulnerable children, especially girls, out of school. Governments must increase investments in children, their health, education and protection from rising threats of violence, if they are to effectively address the adverse consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this is not happening.

Budgets for funding services for children, including education, are increasingly shrinking as many governments divert public spending to health care and economic recovery. This reduction in domestic financing for education is worsened by prospect of a US\$2 billion drop in external aid to education by 2022.

The latest estimates from UNESCO show a dramatic increase in the financing gap for achieving SDG 4 in low- and middle-income countries to US\$200 billion annually.<sup>5</sup> While there are no statistics for the impact on funding for national child protection systems and initiatives to address the root causes of violence, exploitation and abuse, anecdotal information from practitioners suggests that funding is being significantly diverted.

To mitigate the COVID-19-related consequences of school closures, urgent action is needed to ensure education and protection financing is protected, increased and improved for long-term impact. The G7 recently announced a Girls' Education Declaration as a shared commitment to placing gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at the heart of COVID-19 recovery efforts.<sup>6</sup>

This is a good first step, but governments need to ensure that reopening of schools and resuming education is supported by adequate financing that will also strengthen equality and efficiency in education systems. To reach most vulnerable children, especially girls, this means making policy choices that will ensure quality, inclusive and violence-free education. The focus should be on addressing structural barriers to girls' education, such as gender-based violence, as well as on removing discriminatory policies – e.g. not allowing pregnant or married girls to enrol. Most importantly, this as an opportunity to implement policies that will reach children who were never in school, as well as those who dropped out due to the pandemic.

The outcomes are win-win. Such policy choices will both increase educational outcomes for children, especially girls, and contribute to achieving greater gender equality, improving maternal and child health, increasing women participation in the formal labour market and their income, decreasing violence against women and children, and ultimately reducing poverty.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Global Partnership for Education's (GPE) Global Education Summit is an opportunity to ensure the continuity of learning and support for all students, including the most marginalised, is prioritised for the next five years. World Vision calls on GPE partner countries, national governments and donors, to show bold and ambitious leadership that places children and their education at the centre of efforts to build back better after COVID-19. We are asking them to prioritise following actions:



### 1. Governments, especially of middle- and low-income countries, must maintain and increase domestic financing on education to 20% of their national budget through to 2025

Government resources are the most important source of education financing in low and lower-middle income countries, with education averaging about 18% of total government expenditure in 2019. The priority for these countries should be to first protect domestic finance for education to pre-COVID levels or to increase it to reach

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO (2021), [UNESCO warns that the funding gap to reach SDG4 in poorer countries risks increasing to US\\$ 200 billion annually due to COVID-19 if we do not take urgent action](#)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/g7-foreign-and-development-ministers-meeting-may-2021-communique/declaration-on-girls-education-recovering-from-covid-19-and-unlocking-agenda-2030>

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO (2020), [UNESCO warns that the funding gap to reach SDG4 in poorer countries risks increasing to US\\$ 200 billion annually due to COVID-19 if we do not take urgent action](#)

the 20% benchmark. They should also commit to allocating a significant part of their education budget to reach the most vulnerable children, especially girls. Prioritising investment in education now has a potential to reduce the costs of COVID-19 on education by 75%<sup>7</sup>.



**2. Donors should allocate 15-20% of ODA to education and increase funding to address multisectoral barriers, as well as pledge big at the Global Education Summit to reach the US\$5 billion investment goal**

The COVID 19 outbreak has shown the importance of strengthening public systems and social sector spending, including on education. As national governments struggle to finance recovery efforts, catalytic funding from donors is critical to ensure that education and protection systems have the necessary resources. Donors must follow through with commitments, such as those of the G7 Girls' Education Declaration and recognise the ways in which the COVID 19 crises have deepened the inequalities in education opportunities, including through restructuring and realigning existing programmes.



**3. GPE partner countries, donors and national governments, should use this Global Education Summit to publicly recognise the importance of addressing violence against girls and boys as a significant barrier to the education of the most vulnerable children, especially of girls**

Gender-based violence in and around schools, child marriage, child labour and bullying are among leading causes of lower enrolment rates, higher dropout rates and lower educational attainment among most vulnerable children, especially girls. As a part of their objective to build back better and more inclusive and safe education systems, GPE members should pledge to allocate part of their GPE commitments and education budget to ending violence against children in and around schools. These pledges should ideally be accompanied by measures to maintain and expand budgets and investments aimed at child protection and ending gender-based violence, and referrals between education, health and child protection systems.

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO (2020), [UNESCO warns that the funding gap to reach SDG4 in poorer countries risks increasing to US\\$ 200 billion annually due to COVID-19 if we do not take urgent action](#)



**4. National governments should incorporate violence prevention and response in their education sector policies, budgets and plans**

GPE members should ensure that violence prevention and response measures are part of school reopening plans, particularly for girls, children most at risk of not returning, and the 258 million children who were not learning before the pandemic. They should consider strengthening policies and provisions to ensure their access to safe, non-violent and inclusive learning environments independently of where they learn – at home, at school or online. This includes, for example:

- providing incentives to improve access, including the return and retention of most vulnerable children, in both primary and secondary schools, such as cash transfers or other social protection measures;
- removing discriminatory policies to allow girl survivors of gender-based violence, married and pregnant girls, and adolescent mothers to re-enrol and continue education;
- expanding accelerated learning programmes or 'catch-up' classes to help ensure all children, particularly girls, regain the same level of education as their peers as they return to school;
- promoting gender-responsive teacher training, recruitment, classroom management, and development of teaching and learning materials;
- delivering sexual and reproductive health education in a way that promotes health and well-being, inspires respect for human rights and gender equality and empowers children and young people to lead healthy, safe and productive lives;
- embedding violence prevention strategies and gender transformative approaches in curriculum-based activities for children;
- installing child-safeguarding policies, mechanisms and protocols in schools to respond to all forms of violence against children including bullying and sexual violence;
- building a safe school environment, including by increasing access to WASH facilities and promoting menstrual hygiene management;
- providing frontline mental health and psychosocial support to children experiencing violence;
- scaling up early learning programmes to ensure all girls secure strong foundations to their education and future well-being and prosperity; and,
- addressing harmful practices and norms that sanction child marriage and gender-based violence.

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. Inspired by our Christian values, we are dedicated to working with the world's most vulnerable people. We serve all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender.