

GLOBAL ANALYSIS

COVID-19: Impact on education

Worldwide school closures, alongside other secondary impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, are projected to have far-reaching implications in the short and the long term for children, their families, and their communities. Education is a particularly challenging issue in the context of the pandemic. On the one hand, school environments risk high rates of COVID-19 transmission, and closures are seen as necessary measures to protect public health. On the other hand, the linkages between schools and children's health, safety, and life prospects are significant.

Therefore, it is not a simple trade-off, but one requiring a nuanced consideration of how schooling benefits children, families, and wider society. Lost schooling is likely to compromise the benefits of education, including future earnings and better job prospects:

- losing access to school, as a protective space, **exposes children to abuse and trauma if their homes are unsafe**, putting both their physical and mental health at risk
- many families and children will **miss out on critical health services and information** that are usually available in schools and other learning spaces
- disruptions to school feeding programmes mean that millions of children **no longer have access to a regular, nutritious meal**
- the economic shock of the pandemic will **likely push many children into poverty**, increasing risks of malnutrition, stress, protection violations, and child labour – all factors that further restrict their future access to effective learning
- government and donor **cuts to education and aid funding** may further restrict recovery.

This report seeks to map out the linkages and relationships between education and its short and long-term impacts, and to provide analysis on how these impacts may develop. It uses the term 'short-term impact' to describe those impacts emerging in 2020, during the pandemic, and 'long-term impact' as those projected to emerge as consequences of the pandemic, from one year in the future up to the next generation. This report is complemented by region/crisis-level reports on COVID-19 and education.

Methodology and information gaps

The report is informed by a review of secondary academic and grey literature assessing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is subject to the limitations and potential biases of this literature. Most findings are anticipatory and provide various time windows for their projections that may not overlap succinctly with other projections. Further, they should only be considered as indicative as there may be major differences in the outcomes resulting from school closures, remote learning implementation, and the larger secondary effects of the pandemic between countries and regions, and within countries.

Key impacts of school closures



24 million
children projected to drop out of school, perpetuating intergenerational poverty and inequality



370 million
children missed out on free school meals



13 million
additional child marriages estimated by end of decade



80 million
children at risk of contracting vaccine-preventable diseases due to school immunisation disruptions



10 million
additional children under 5 will likely face acute malnutrition



96%
of children reported an increase in negative feelings when schools had been closed for 17-19 weeks

The impact of school closures as a COVID-19 measure

COVID-19 CONTEXT

Less access to healthcare



Loss of employment & financial stress for households



Increased domestic violence & exploitation



Reduced funding to education

When schools are closed LESS RISK of COVID-19 SPREAD

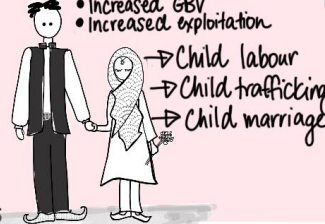
REMOTE LEARNING
Challenges & unequal opportunities to learn remotely mean that many children will miss out on education.

DRDP OUTS
The longer children are away from school, the less likely they are to return.

LOST LEARNING
→ lower incomes
→ less opportunities
→ more risk-taking behaviours

Children outside school are exposed to the consequences of lockdowns & economic shocks which include -

- Increased domestic violence
- Increased GBV
- Increased exploitation



Families no longer have access to a vital source of information, including information on COVID-19.

Spread of rumours & misinformation may increase.

The combination of growing economic stress (which could lead to food insecurity) and missing out on meals at school may mean some children go hungry.

When children are hungry, concentration becomes difficult, adding to the challenges with remote learning.

Longer-term, undernutrition hampers future learning.

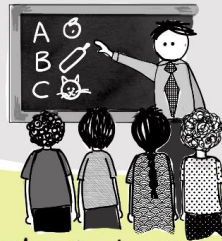
While closed, schools can not be used to deliver health services (e.g. vaccinations). At the same time other health services are harder to access.
→ Children may go without critical childhood immunisations risking disease outbreaks.
→ Child mental health may deteriorate in the absence of socialisation.



Schools have multiple roles & benefits

LEARNING

The primary purpose of schools is to provide children with education.



- Education is uninterrupted so there are fewer dropouts.
- Children complete education milestones.
- In the longer term there are benefits for the individuals & the society.

PROTECTION

For some children, schools are a place of protection & respite from unsafe situations inside & outside their homes.

Children in school usually face fewer protection risks.

Teachers can identify & support students experiencing domestic violence. They may prevent trafficking through early detection of risks.



INFORMATION

SCHOOL: Community hub
TEACHER: Respected & trusted community member.

Schools are a place to share, seek & receive information for children & adults.

Important information about COVID-19 can be shared -

- Directly to children
- Directly to parents
- Via children to other household members.

FOOD & NUTRITION

School meals & school feeding programs provide important additions to children's diets.

School feeding & meals would be able to continue (even while food may be scarce at home).

Programs often include interventions (such as deworming) also aimed at enhancing child health.

They also provide a platform which can be scaled up to include other types of support.

HEALTH

Schools are often used to provide basic child health services e.g. immunisations.

The social contact children experience at school benefits their mental health.

Schools remain a place where children can receive essential health care.

Schools provide an environment where children can interact, giving them a sense of normalcy even when other aspects of life have changed as a result of COVID-19.



When schools stay open INCREASED RISK of COVID-19 SPREAD

Executive summary

This thematic report is part of the ACAPS Education & COVID-19 series, which provides global and crisis-level analysis on the pandemic's impacts in key areas of humanitarian and development programming, such as learning, protection, health, and poverty outcomes. It aims to provide humanitarian decision-makers with an overview of how the pandemic has recently affected, and continues to affect, children's education worldwide.

It summarises **how education has been disrupted**, and how this will **challenge children's learning, health, and protection**. It finds that schools and education spaces are critical to supporting children's and adolescent's development, wellbeing, and future prospects; by disrupting access to these spaces, through containment strategies like school closures or through households losing livelihoods and therefore the capacity to pay for school materials, children and adolescents may no longer have access to de-worming or vaccination services, free school meals, safe spaces or peers, or adequate learning of key professional and social skills. During school closures many students have been exposed to increased stress levels, the loss of vital health resources that would usually be provided in school, and protection violations: **when schools close for long periods, female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriages increase, early pregnancies become more widespread, children are more likely to be recruited into armed groups, sexual exploitation increases, and child labour becomes more common**.

School closures could result in up to 24 million dropouts and US\$10 trillion in lost future earnings for the current cohort of learners (UN 08/2020; World Bank 18/06/2020). Economic shocks driven by the global pandemic, including reduced funding from governments and donors, may further restrict children's future capacity to attend school and learn, aggravated as household income losses increase risks of malnutrition and protection violations. Reduced demand for education due to the global economic crisis will also disrupt worldwide human capital accumulation, development, and people's welfare – notably children's current and future health and welfare.

These factors risk setting back decades of work that aimed to ensure education parity and reduce child poverty. Ensuring inclusive recovery of lost schooling and learning is crucial, particularly for those students coming from lower-income households. Education is a particularly complex issue in the context of the current global pandemic, as school environments risk high rates of COVID-19 transmission and closures are seen as necessary measures to protect public health. On the other hand, the linkages between schools and children's health, safety, and life prospects are significant.

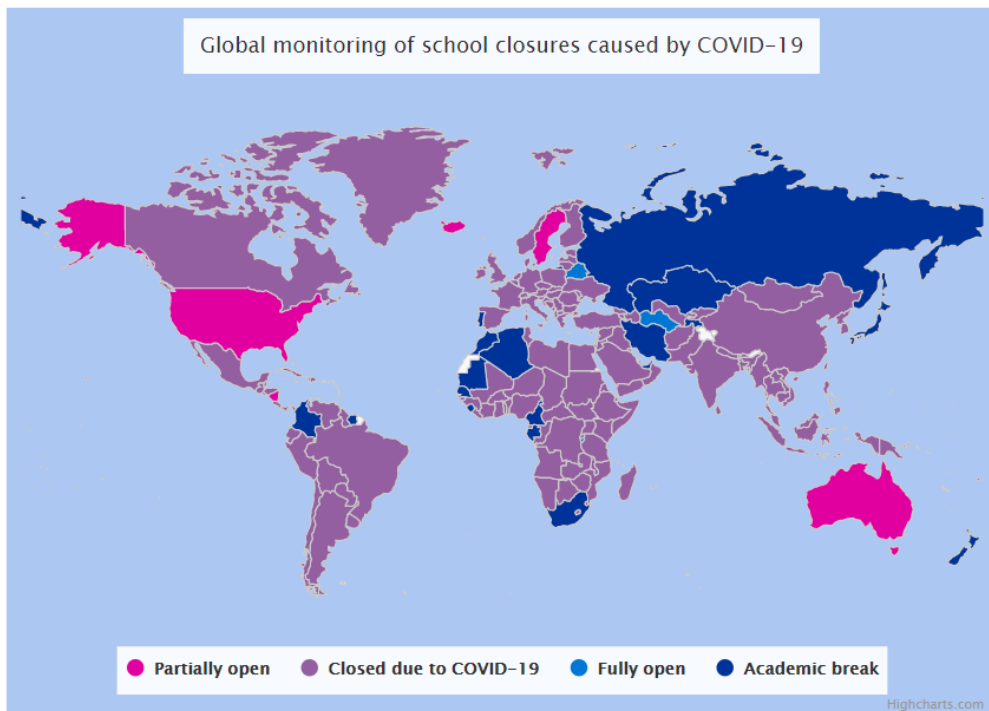
COVID-19 and global school closures

Almost every country in the world has at some point enacted some form of school closure as a containment measure to limit the spread of COVID-19. At its peak in April 2020, 184 countries implemented nationwide school closures (Education Cannot Wait 23/04/2020). By mid-April, the education of 94% of learners worldwide was disrupted by the pandemic, representing 1.58 billion young students in 200 countries (UN 22/08/2020). School closures are likely to have affected up to 99% of students in low- and lower middle-income countries (LICs and LMICs) in some way (UN 22/08/2020). As at 19 October 2020, schools in 110 countries remained closed and over 560 million learners continue to be affected (UNESCO last accessed 19/10/2020, WFP last accessed 13/10/2020).

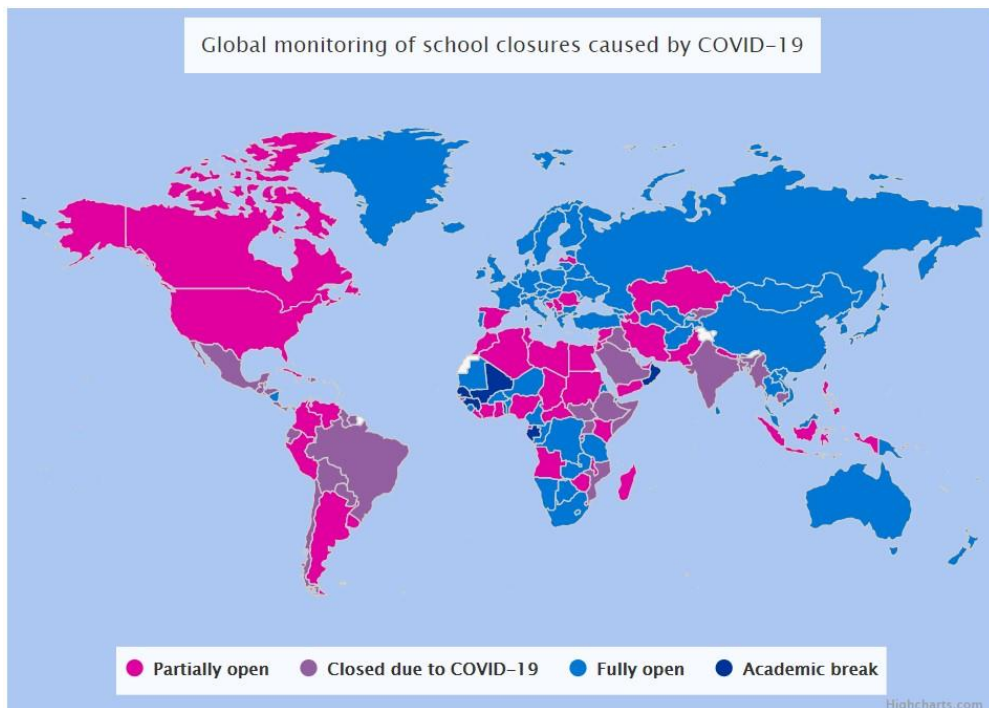
The first countries to close schools in mid-February 2020 were China, where the first outbreak of COVID-19 was recorded, and neighbouring Mongolia. A month later, most schools across the Americas, Asia and Europe had fully or partially closed. African school closures came slightly later, but by the end of March, all countries on the continent had enacted complete school closures. By early April, almost all countries had enacted partial or full school closures (UNESCO last accessed 19/10/2020).

As the new academic year was due to start for students across the world in September and October, there was a big push to get learners' education back on track. However, the transmission of COVID-19 in schools is a major concern as cases and deaths worldwide continue to rise and the school environment risks increasing transmission – although preliminary modelling and monitoring has shown that school closures may not be as effective as other social distancing interventions in limiting transmission (WHO 21/10/2020). **Further, additional disruptions to children's education will have significant and far-reaching implications for their health, safety, rights, long-term learning outcomes, and economic productivity.**





School closures peak, as at 2 April 2020.



School closures, as at 19 October 2020. Source: UNESCO last accessed 19/10/2020.

Learning and livelihoods

Challenges of school closures

In LICs and LMICs, school closures may not only disrupt access to education, but may also reduce the quality of education, as alternative learning mechanisms often are inadequate – although this is not exclusive to lower-income countries. School closures are likely to exacerbate already challenging learning and attendance issues, and risk deepening inequalities, not only in education, but in all facets of children’s futures. There is no comparison in recent history for this scale of disrupted education and its true impacts will only be adequately assessed in the years to come (UNESCO 07/2020). Nonetheless, if a full year of schooling is lost for most children, the short- and long-term effects – of lost learning, access to health services, and school meals – could resemble those of humanitarian crises (UNESCO 07/2020).

Should remote learning mechanisms not adequately replace face-to-face learning, school closures mean that children around the world will have lost several months of schooling. The vast majority of countries worldwide did not have contingency plans to ensure education continuity in the case of widespread school closures – so some learning time was lost during adaptation to remote learning (URD 08/10/2020).

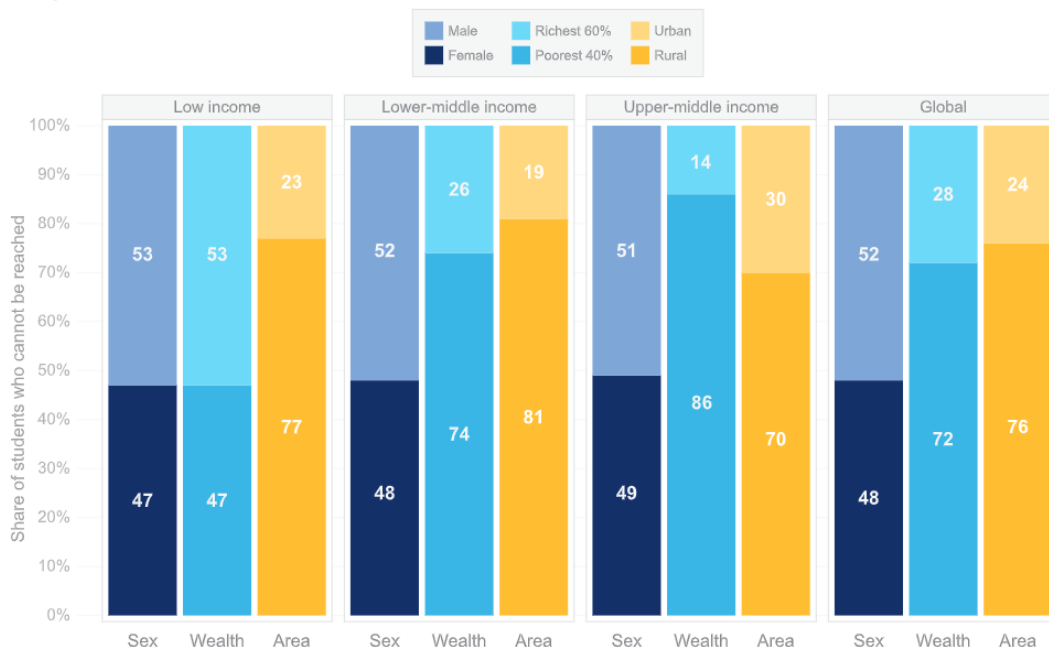
In addition, children that were already out of school risk having fewer opportunities to join school if shutdowns persist or remote learning tools are required but are inaccessible. 258 million children were estimated to be out of school worldwide in 2018, including 59 million children of primary school age, over 61 million of lower-secondary age, and 138 million children of upper-secondary age. The majority of out-of-school children were girls, while more boys than girls of upper-secondary age were estimated to be out of school (UNESCO 2019 last accessed 19/10/2020). The highest rates for all age sub-groups were in sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO 2019 last accessed 19/10/2020).

Twelve countries (Niger, Mali, Chad, Liberia, Afghanistan, Guinea, Mauritania, Yemen, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, and Côte d’Ivoire) are now at extreme risk of falling behind on progress towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (Save the Children 13/07/2020), as well as other SDGs where accessible education is a key component, such as SDG5: gender equality (UN last accessed 14/10/2020).

Remote learning

90% of all countries that have enacted school closures have adopted remote learning policies (UNICEF 09/2020). Many classes have been transferred online, televised, or broadcast on the radio. However, children may still face limited learning, as the quality of these alternatives has not been adequately assessed, and students may face other challenges studying from home. Students must also adapt to new modes of interacting with their schoolmates and teachers, which could take up learning time and cause anxiety. They may also have less time to learn, be subject to stress at home, and lack learning motivation. It is also likely that students may lack learning resources, including an educated adult to support schoolwork, or textbooks (URD 08/10/2020; European Commission 30/09/2020).

Composition of students who cannot be reached by remote learning by sex, households wealth and area of residence, by country economic classification

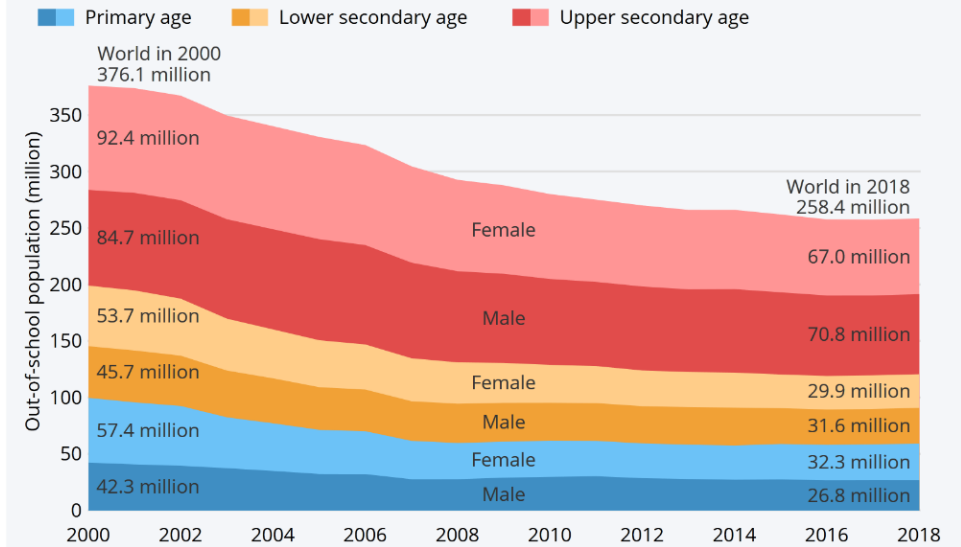


Source: Authors' calculations using MICS, DHS and other national household surveys.

Note: Figures were calculated using weighted averages based on the number of students across countries.

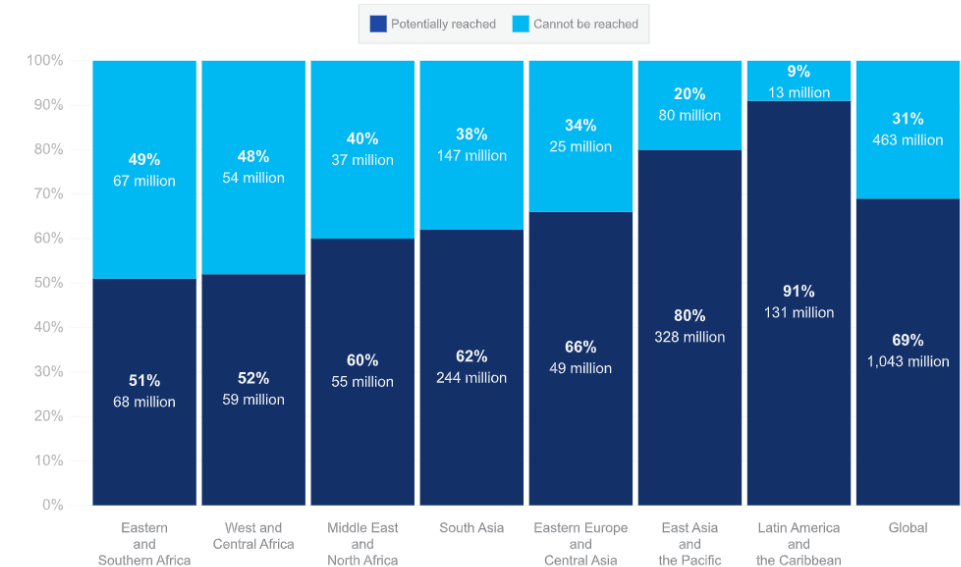
How to read this chart: The chart shows the percentage of students who cannot be reached, broken out based on their sex, household wealth and place of residence. For example, in low-income countries, 47 per cent of students who cannot be reached were girls.

Global number of out-of-school children, adolescents and youth, 2000-2018



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database.

Share and number of students potentially reached and not reached* by digital and broadcast remote learning policies, by region (pre-primary to upper secondary)



Source: Authors' calculations using MICS, DHS and other national household surveys.

Notes: i) Figures are calculated using weighted averages based on the number of students across countries.

ii) The high potential reach in Latin America and the Caribbean does not indicate that children in this region had more access to communication assets in the household – access is shown in Figure 5. Rather, it reflects that the policies in this region targeted technologies that are available in most households.

* "Reached" indicates potential maximums; "Cannot be reached" indicates minimums, which are likely much higher.

A Save the Children survey of 13,500 students aged 11–17 across 46 countries showed that 8 in 10 felt that they were learning little or nothing at all through distance learning, and 80% of students reported facing at least one obstacle to learning (Save the Children 29/09/2020). In several interviews conducted across Central, Eastern, and Northern African countries, students were found to be studying fewer topics or less content through distanced learning (HRW 26/08/2020). Early childhood education is more likely to be deprioritised if schools have been closed, and younger children will be less likely to independently take advantage of remote learning programmes and tools. However, these are essential years for the development of foundational learning skills. As learning is cumulative, this further compromises younger children’s future education (World Bank 05/2020).

Access to remote learning, internet/radio: A large portion of those students that were surveyed by Save the Children indicated that they had no access to learning materials (Save the Children 29/09/2020); this was particularly prevalent among students with disabilities, students living in rural areas, and among girls (Save the Children 29/09/2020). In sub-Saharan Africa, as at mid-July, 60% of remote distance learning mechanisms were provided exclusively online (Save the Children 13/07/2020). However, students may not have easy access to the internet or devices. At least 463 million children globally, or **31% of students, are estimated to not have been able to access remote learning** when their learning space or schools were closed, with the highest share of children located in Eastern and Southern Africa, and the highest concentration located in South Asia (UNICEF 26/08/2020). These figures are optimistic estimations, and the source maintains that it is safe to assume that more children were probably unreached by remote learning mechanisms.

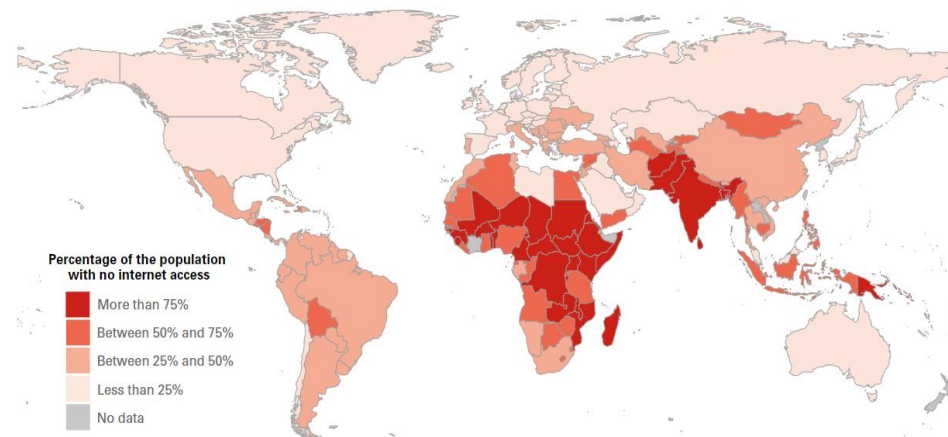
These 463 million children are more likely to be rural, and three-quarters worldwide are believed to come from the poorest households (UNICEF 26/08/2020). Children in private schools are also more likely to access digital learning than their public school counterparts.

In many countries, the internet is inaccessible/unreliable or, alongside other devices, unaffordable (HRW 09/04/2020). In 71 countries worldwide, less than half the population has access to the internet (UN 04/06/2020). Further, upwards of 25% fewer women globally have access to internet than men (Save the Children 29/09/2020) and in LMICs women are 8% less likely than men to own a mobile phone, and 20% less likely to use internet on it (World Bank 05/2020).

Findings in some African countries indicated that when children need to use technology to study, and access to the internet or devices is in short supply, girls may have less access than boys (HRW 26/08/2020). Some countries, including India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, have imposed regional internet shutdowns, further disrupting the few

education opportunities that students may access when learning spaces/schools are shut down (HRW 09/04/2020). Radio is also inaccessible to certain households: only one in five households in South Asia reportedly owns a radio (UN 22/08/2020).

The digital divide: percentage of children with no internet access, 2015–2019



Source: ITU 2019

Parental facilitation of remote schooling: Parents are often expected to facilitate their children’s remote schooling. However, as adults may be working, or preoccupied with managing livelihood losses, students may be lacking that support. This is likely to be an even greater barrier in households where adults have had limited education themselves, or where relevant books and material are unavailable to support parents and students (UNICEF Innocenti 09/2020; UNESCO last accessed 28/10/2020). These factors may restrict children’s learning: for instance, children’s “home literary environment” (children’s access to reading material and support for their use) has shown to be strongly associated with children’s reading scores (UNICEF Innocenti 09/2020).

Long-term outcomes

Increased dropouts: School closures could lead to at least 24 million children worldwide not returning to school next year (UN 08/2020). Girls, children with disabilities, and other marginalised groups are most at risk (according to most recent projections) as they are more likely to have faced pre-pandemic education or learning challenges (UNICEF 15/09/2020; Save the Children 10/09/2020; World Bank 06/2020; Save the Children 13/07/2020). For example, 130 million girls were already out of school prior to the pandemic (Save the Children 13/07/2020). Children that are out of school for longer periods are also more likely to drop out, particularly those who are at critical transitions between educational levels (UNICEF 15/09/2020; Save the Children 13/07/2020), students who are older, and whose families may be

struggling with household financial issues and with health shocks (World Bank 05/2020; Save the Children 29/09/2020). Disabled students are also more at risk of not returning to school (World Bank 2020). The economic shock created by the pandemic will push millions of children into poverty, further reducing their households' capacity to pay for school and learning materials.

Lost learning: Lost schooling, which includes the phenomenon of students dropping out, directly contributes to learning poverty in many LMICs, which is defined as a child being unable to understand a simple text or read by the age of 10 (World Bank 18/06/2020). Prior to the pandemic, 53% of children in LMICs were estimated to have had such low achievement in school that they were unable to read or understand a simple text by this age (World Bank 18/06/2020), dramatically restricting their future prospects. Further, the majority of these students come from their countries' poorest and/or rural households (Save Our Future 2020). The World Bank estimates that, on average, five months of school closures may result in an immediate loss of 0.6 years of schooling adjusted for quality of teaching (World Bank 18/06/2020). Any lost learning risks accumulating years after learning spaces/schools reopen if gaps are not immediately addressed. This could increase learning poverty and inequality in the future (World Bank 05/2020).

Lost future earnings and other lost benefits of education: Students forced to drop out, or who face significant declines in learning, will likely face lower lifetime productivity and earnings (World Bank 05/2020). Lost future earnings translate into further challenges, especially for the most economically vulnerable who may benefit the most from the increased future earnings correlated with effective education. These children are unlikely to have sufficient financial resources to catch up on missed learning through tutors or alternative methods. **This may perpetuate intergenerational poverty and inequality** (World Bank 05/2020). On a macro level, countries may see stifled growth and productivity (European Commission 30/09/2020).

Education is correlated with several beneficial economic returns, including higher lifetime earnings and more job prospects (World Bank 2018; World Bank 05/2020). In a simulation of the potential financial losses that global school closures may have incurred on this year's global cohort, where no effective policy responses for education progression exist once students return to school, US\$10 trillion worldwide may be lost in lifecycle earnings or approximately 16% of investments that governments have made in basic education (World Bank 18/06/2020). Average students from primary and secondary cohorts, according to the World Bank's intermediate scenario (between optimistic and pessimistic projections based on the length of school closures alongside other factors), could face a global average reduction of US\$872 in their future yearly earnings, or US\$16,000 over their work life at present value – although this figure is likely to be lower in LMICs, as it is a global average (World Bank 18/06/2020). Students may lose out on these earnings because they

have experienced significant setbacks in attainment and learning: lost school time is correlated with lower test scores and weaker or fewer skills (like reading and mathematics, but also executive function and social skills) – skills that are critical to supporting students' future professional lives (World Bank 2018; European Commission 30/09/2020). It is nonetheless important to note that those countries already struggling with severe learning poverty may not see significant learning losses because of school closures, though they may experience fewer opportunities to rectify learning poverty (World Bank 2020).

Education is also crucially correlated with other benefits, such as higher health status for educated women and their children, less engagement in risky behaviour, and more preventative health practices. These prospects risk being diminished for those who have already lost months of schooling due to the pandemic, and who could stand to miss out even further in the future. although further research is required to gauge the impacts and outcomes (Save Our Future 2020; Vinter et al. 2017; Duflo et al. 2019; Vogl 2012).

Health

School closure has been a widely adopted measure to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. However, such closures have implications for children's access to safe spaces, support networks, and health services, and therefore present risks to children's physical and mental health.

Disruption of health services in schools: School closures have disrupted crucial deworming programmes in many LICs and middle-income countries (MICs). These school-run programmes have been extremely effective in preventing parasitic worm infections in Africa and South Asia (World Bank 05/2020). **Disruptions to immunisation programmes in at least 68 lower-income countries, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, have put up to 80 million children at increased risk of contracting vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, polio, and diphtheria** (World Economic Forum 01/09/2020). Marginalised children in particular rely on such services provided at schools as they face barriers to accessing healthcare elsewhere (Save the Children 13/07/2020).

Mental health and trauma: Schools are a gathering place for children to learn, play, and interact with their peers and teachers. Being cut off from this school community presents significant risks to children's mental health and wellbeing. Save the Children conducted a survey with children and caregivers from 37 countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, the Pacific, and North America to assess the impacts of the pandemic on their health, education, and wellbeing. The survey

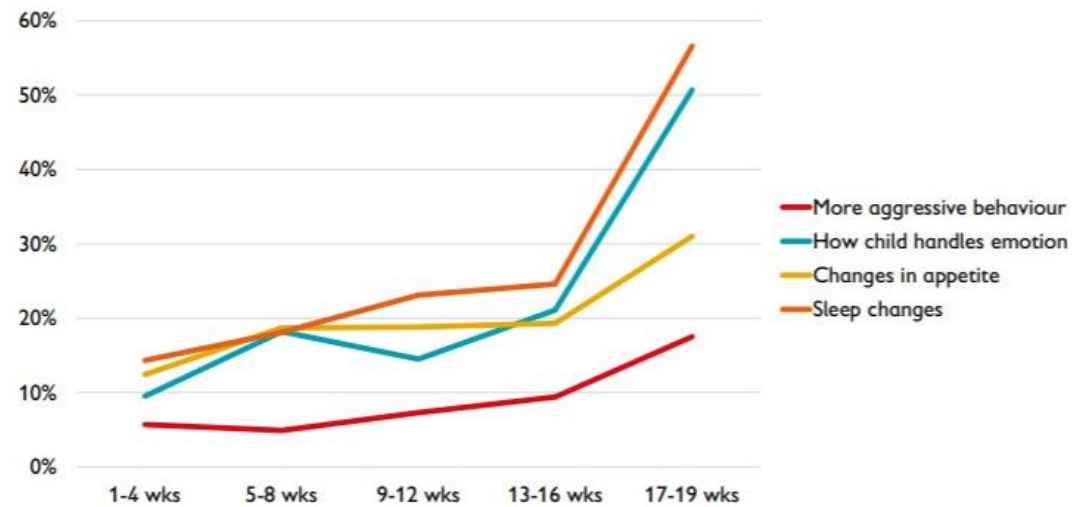
showed that 83% of the 8,000 children surveyed reported an increase in negative feelings as a result of the pandemic and related disruptions, including feeling less safe, less hopeful, less happy, and more worried. The highest proportion of children reporting an increase in negative feelings were in East and Southern Africa (87%). The proportion became higher the longer schools were closed, with 96% of children reporting an increase in negative feelings when schools had been closed for 17–19 weeks (Save the Children 10/09/2020). The length of school closures also correlated with parents' and caregivers' reports of behavioural change in their children such as sleep and appetite changes, more aggressive behaviour, and changes in children's ability to handle their emotions (Save the Children 10/09/2020).

Studies of school children and caregivers in China, Bangladesh, Italy, and Spain demonstrate increases in signs of depression and anxiety among children during lockdowns (Xinyan Xi et al. 24/04/2020; Yeasmin et al. 10/2020; Orgilés et al. 21/04/2020). Research also shows that long periods of social isolation and loneliness may result in worse mental health and higher levels of depression for children and adolescents in the future (Loades et al. 03/06/2020; Wagner 07/10/2020). Furthermore, poor mental health and high stress levels can have long-term impacts on a child's wellbeing, learning, and overall development (World Bank 05/2020). This means that **a deterioration of mental health during school closures can affect children's educational outcomes and health even after they have returned to school.**

Interactions with peers: Children are missing out on social contact that is essential for their learning, development, and wellbeing. This has contributed to increased negative feelings such as stress, anxiety, and depression, particularly among adolescents and children who had no contact with friends or peers during school closures (UNESCO 28/09/2020; HRW 26/08/2020; Save the Children 10/09/2020). Urban children also reported having less contact with friends and were more likely to feel less happy, hopeful, and safe than their rural counterparts (Save the Children 10/09/2020).

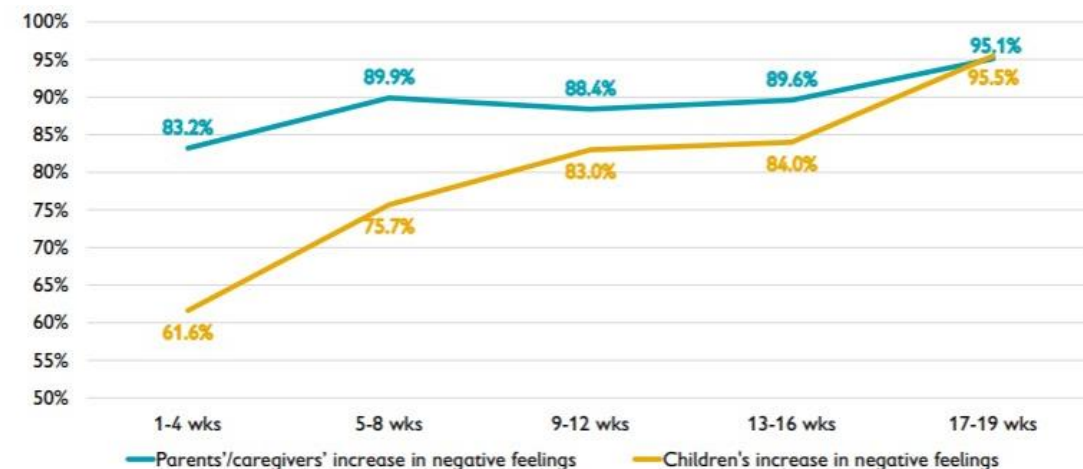
Lack of outdoor play: School closures, combined with strict lockdown measures, resulted in children losing access to school playgrounds and public parks. Over one-third (35%) of the 17,000 parents and caregivers surveyed by Save the Children reported that their children had no access to outdoor spaces, which increased to two-thirds (63%) among urban households. Furthermore, since being at home, two in five children reported playing less and half reported doing more chores and caring for siblings more than before the pandemic (Save the Children 10/09/2020). Girls, and displaced girls in particular, were most affected by increased housework. In West and Central Africa and Asia, almost 20% of girls surveyed reported that the increase in chores prevented them from learning (Save the Children 10/09/2020).

Weeks of school closures versus levels of signs of distress observed in children



Source: Save the Children 10/09/2020

Weeks of school closure versus children's and parent/caregivers' reporting of increase in negative feelings



Source: Save the Children 10/09/2020

Food security and malnutrition

Economic shocks and food insecurity: 270 million people worldwide are projected to be confronting food insecurity due to the pandemic (Save the Children 10/09/2020). Households worldwide are likely to struggle as their incomes are reduced due to job losses, restricted movement, reduced remittances, lost employment opportunities due to increased care burdens, and rising costs. According to Save the Children's survey of parents and caregivers worldwide, 89% of respondents whose children had been out of school for 20 weeks or more have been facing difficulties paying for food. One in three surveyed children indicated that they have been eating less food since the start of the pandemic (Save the Children 10/09/2020).

With each percentage point drop in GDP, 700,000 more children worldwide may face chronic malnutrition resulting in stunting. Rates of acute malnutrition, or wasting, are also anticipated to grow in contexts where the impacts are more severe, or where there are already pre-existing crises (Save the Children 13/07/2020). The Lancet predicted that 6.7 million more children under five could face wasting due to the pandemic, while WFP anticipates a 20% increase in the number of children under five facing acute malnutrition – equivalent to an additional 10 million children (The Lancet 22/08/2020; Save the Children 10/09/2020). Girls are more likely to face malnutrition worldwide than boys, due to biological issues (such as menstruation and pregnancy, for example) and, in some countries, due to gender inequalities (such as unequal food distribution and division of labour), which may result in girls' requiring more calories than they have access to (Hunger Notes 2016).

Undernutrition may increase susceptibility to disease and infection and may also impair physical and mental development in children. Undernourished children (chronically, severely, or even those who have micronutrient deficiencies or are just missing a meal) are more likely to miss school and have more difficulties learning (Save the Children 10/09/2020; European Commission 2020). **Malnutrition, from its milder to its more severe forms, is likely to prevent children from meeting their full cognitive capacity as adults if left untreated** (Save the Children 13/07/2020).

Disruptions to school feeding programmes: COVID-19-related economic shocks are making it even more difficult for families to provide additional food for children who usually receive free school meals – or even to ensure more general food security. In June, at the height of global school closures, WFP stated that approximately 370 million students in 143 countries had missed out on in-school meals that they previously relied on (WFP 05/10/2020; World Bank 05/2020). For many poor households, school meals are a crucial economic reliever for caregivers and either the only or main meal of the day for children, contributing substantially to their daily nutrition intake (WFP 05/10/2020; Save the Children 10/09/2020). **In countries with high rates of poverty and extreme poverty, a meal**

equivalent to one of the nine million meals provided by WFP can be worth up to more than 10% of the monthly income of the poorest families. Therefore, disrupted school meals are likely to jeopardise the financial and food security of economically vulnerable families (URD 08/10/2020). Although over 70 countries, including 45 LICs, have enacted some kind of programme to continue supporting children's access to school-time meals (including take-home meals, vouchers, or cash transfers), not all at-risk populations may be covered (Save Our Future 2020).

Children who no longer access school meals may have one less resource to prevent micronutrient deficiencies and low energy levels, and they may have difficulty continuing their education if that was their primary incentive for attending (Jomaa et al. 2011; UNICEF 26/08/2020). In West and Southern Africa, UNICEF has reported increased rates of malnutrition as children are missing school meals (UN 20/08/2020). India, the country with the largest school feeding programme in the world, may count upwards of 90 million children who no longer have access to school meals (Save the Children 13/07/2020).



Protection

The COVID-19 lockdowns and economic shocks may lead to several protection concerns, including a higher risk of violence, exploitation, and child marriage (Save the Children 10/09/2020). The poorest households, including those with refugee or IDP status and the urban poor, will be worst affected by such economic shocks, as COVID-19 aggravates the conditions of poverty in which they live, and increases job insecurity (Save the Children 10/09/2020). As a result of economic insecurity related to COVID-19, an estimated 42–66 million additional children could fall into poverty as a result of the crisis this year (UN 15/04/2020). In 2019, 386 million children were living in extreme poverty (UN 15/04/2020).

COVID-19 has further engrained gender inequalities in education, leading to increased risk of sexual exploitation, early pregnancy, FGM, and child marriage (UNESCO 31/03/2020). UNESCO states that **when schools close for long periods, FGM and child marriages increase, early pregnancies become more widespread, children are more likely to be recruited into armed groups, sexual exploitation increases, and child labour becomes more common** (UNESCO last accessed 28/10/2020). This can lead to neglect, increased vulnerability to abuse, accidents at home, and risky behaviour such as child substance

abuse (UNESCO last accessed 28/10/2020). Furthermore, many working parents and caregivers are forced either to miss work to look after their children – resulting in wage loss and economic strain – or to leave children unsupervised at home. The pandemic has demonstrated the huge disparities in government preparedness plans around the world, especially regarding children, and particularly those from low-income households, those with disabilities, and those who are asylum seekers or refugees.

Violence against children and gender-based violence (GBV): In emergencies GBV increases, whether in the context of economic crises, conflict, or disease outbreak (UNDP 11/05/2020). Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the UN has reported a surge in domestic violence cases and GBV including domestic violence, FGM, rape and trafficking. In Kenya, a third of crimes reported in the beginning of May were related to sexual violence against women and children (UNSDG 05/05/2020). Children living in households facing financial and job insecurity as a result of COVID-19 are more likely to be exposed to violence at home as perpetrators lash out and increasing numbers of caregivers resort to negative parenting methods, including corporal punishment (European Commission 2020; HRW 09/04/2020; Neetu et al. 04/08/2020; Save the Children 10/09/2020). In Lebanon and Malaysia, the number of calls made to helplines doubled, while in China they tripled compared to the same month last year (UN News 06/04/2020). Domestic violence may take place between parents or against children (HRW 09/04/2020; UN 15/04/2020). Children experiencing or witnessing violence, especially at an early age, may suffer long-term consequences to their mental and physical health as well as their brain development, leading to lower education achievements, and higher rates of depression, anxiety, suicide, and substance abuse later in life (World Bank 05/2020; HRW 09/04/2020).

Child trafficking and exploitation: Financial strains, combined with school closures and the loss of/reduced parental care, counselling and mental health services also puts children at increased risk of sexual exploitation, sometimes instigated by caregivers (HRW 09/04/2020; Education Cannot Wait 23/04/2020; World Bank 05/2020). Parents or caregivers may resort to drastic measures, such as selling their children to traffickers. In one reported case in India, a father sold his four-month-old child to a wealthy couple after losing his job (Caritas 28/07/2020). In other cases, traffickers may lure victims with false promises of a better life and education (Save the Children last accessed 28/10/2020; OHCHR 08/06/2020).

Children are in most cases trafficked for labour, commercial sexual exploitation, forced marriage or recruitment by armed groups. Girls are particularly at risk of being trafficked. The COVID-19 pandemic is making it even harder to identify and rescue trafficked and exploited children. Even prior to the pandemic, the identification of trafficking victims was challenging because trafficking victims are often exploited illegally, and child traffickers hide their operations in plain sight. Trafficked children may also be too afraid to report their victimisation or be unable to do so. With global government restrictions to prevent

the spread of COVID-19, the shortage of active civil society organisations, and the closure of schools and learning spaces where school staff can potentially identify trafficked children, may lead to an increase in the number of children being trafficked and exploited (Save the Children 2018).

Child labour: Child labour is a common coping mechanism for families in times of crisis. The added pressure, stress, isolation, and feelings of hopelessness may lead some parents to resort to negative coping mechanisms and compromised parenting that places children at greater risk of abuse and neglect. Families from low-income backgrounds in particular do not have the savings or credit to withstand financial shocks and setbacks such as job and income loss. Without sufficient government assistance, every abled member of such households is required to contribute to the family's survival (HRW 09/04/2020; World Bank 22/04/2020). The number of children involved in child labour worldwide had declined by 94 million since 2000 when children left the work force and entered classrooms, helping to break the cycle of poverty and ensuring better futures (ILO and UN 11/06/2020). COVID-19 is threatening the advances that have been made in this fight. Widespread lockdowns, school closures, and businesses experiencing massive job and income losses, combine to heighten the risk of child labour, which can include gruelling and dangerous work. The pandemic may also push children to work longer hours to generate more income under worsening physical and health conditions causing significant harm to their wellbeing and safety (HRW 12/06/2020). Furthermore, demand for cheap labour has increased, placing children at a greater risk of being exploited. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has predicted that there may be an increase in child labour for the first time in 20 years, and that for every 1% increase in poverty, there may be a corresponding 0.7% increase in child labour (ILO and UNICEF 11/06/2020; Save the Children 10/09/2020). Evidence from the Ebola epidemic has shown that the longer schools are closed, the more likely children are to join the workforce, and the less likely they are to return to school (HRW 12/06/2020; ILO and UNICEF 11/06/2020). In addition, child labour is often associated with educational marginalisation (K4D and Save the Children 08/06/2020). Research has shown that children who work perform worse academically than their non-working peers, and that child labour hampers their long-term chances as adults. These children are often more likely to be unemployed or job insecure, or to continue working in hazardous conditions in poverty while their children in turn, will also likely work, thereby continuing the cycle of poverty and child labour for generations (K4D and Save the Children 08/06/2020).

Children, particularly girls, are at risk of being required to take up work and other duties around the house that could mean that when learning spaces/schools reopen, they may never return (HRW 9/4/2020; World Bank 06/2020; Save the Children 01/10/2020). Furthermore, as children get older, the cost of education increases, and for some financially stressed households it may be difficult to justify sending older children back to school after a long

period of forced interruption (World Bank 06/2020). Since the start of the pandemic, research by the International Peace Information Service in Central African Republic points to an increase in children under 15 working in artisanal gold and diamond mines. Similar accounts have come from Nigeria and Madagascar (HRW 26/08/2020). In India, the police and the Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR) have witnessed an increase in child labour since the beginning of COVID-19. Children who had been rescued during the COVID-19 pandemic were found working in garment factories and mechanical shops (where they did not wear masks), and in unsafe and unhygienic conditions (Deccan Herald 27/09/2020).

Child marriage: As the pandemic is causing an increase in poverty and vulnerability, it is estimated that 2.5 million more girls are at risk of early marriage in the next five years as a consequence of COVID-19, in addition to the average 12 million who are married every year (BBC 01/10/2020; UNESCO 2019; Save the Children 01/10/2020). Out-of-school children are at increased risk of forced marriage (Education Cannot Wait 23/04/2020) and girls are especially at risk of child marriage as families face growing economic and food insecurity and resort to marrying their daughters off to reduce household costs and the number of mouths to feed (HRW 09/04/2020). Parents may also hope that their daughters will be better off in a family with greater financial stability (HRW 09/04/2020). Other families may resort to marrying off their daughters for dowry and monetary gain (HRW 09/04/2020). These protection concerns disproportionately affect girls, and risk exacerbating gender and education inequalities. Evidence from sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia suggests that when limited resources lead parents to choose which children to send to school, boys are usually prioritised, further increasing girls' vulnerability to protection violations (Centre for Global Development 27/05/2020). In many countries, according to the World Bank, secondary education may reduce the possibility of child marriage each year by at least 5% (World Bank 24/08/2017). Children in early marriages are more likely to complete fewer years of schooling and quit their education than their peers (World Bank 24/08/2017).

FGM: As prolonged lockdowns continue, economic insecurity increases, and as girls remain out of school, so the risk of FGM increases (The Guardian 16/06/2020). UNFPA has projected that pandemic-related disruption of services and preventative programmes could put more than two million girls at risk of FGM over the next decade (UNFPA 27/04/2020). According to Plan International, some parents see the COVID-19 lockdowns and school closures as an opportunity to carry out FGM procedures and the time at home as a break for healing (Plan International 18/05/2020). The economic crisis caused by COVID-19 lockdowns has created opportunities for some to resort to harmful livelihood options as they go door-to-door offering their cutting services. Somalia, which already has the highest rate of FGM, has seen a worrying surge of FGM cases since the start of the

pandemic (Save the Children 11/06/2020), while in Egypt some girls have been tricked into FGM with a promise of COVID-19 vaccination (Al Jazeera 05/06/2020).

Orphaned children: As at 30 October, there were more than one million global deaths linked to COVID-19. The global death toll is still rising, leading to an increasing number of children left without one or both parents or caregivers (HRW 09/04/2020). Children who are orphaned and lack a permanent home are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation, including sexual exploitation, begging and other forms of child labour – and many may be unable to return to school when they reopen. Furthermore, orphaned children may have less access to public health information and services that are often provided in schools, which makes it difficult for them to know about or comply with government health mitigation measures such as curfews, quarantines, and self-isolation (HRW 09/04/2020). Children may be left without care and supervision if parents are hospitalised, and older children may have to give up their education as they are forced to work to support their younger siblings and older family members (HRW 09/04/2020). If family members become sick, girls will shoulder the heaviest burden in terms of caring responsibilities. Globally, women perform 75% of unpaid care work. This increases their exposure to the disease and the likelihood of school dropout rates amongst girls (Neetu et al. 04/08/2020). Without adequate support, the trauma of losing a parent or guardian can have long-term impacts on a child's learning, development and wellbeing (HRW 09/04/2020; World Bank 05/2020). During the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, orphaned children were ostracised due to stigma surrounding the disease and older children often dropped out of school to take over childcare duties (HRW 09/04/2020). During the HIV/AIDS crisis in South Africa, orphaned children were also significantly less likely to remain in school (World Bank 05/2020).

Online sexual exploitation of children: Learning spaces/schools provide a safe place for children to socialise with their friends and peers. Without a place of interaction and a caretaker's presence at home, children may spend an increasing amount of time online, where they are at a risk of sexual exploitation (HRW 09/04/2020). In Save the Children's survey, 77% of 11–17 year olds expressed that they knew various ways to keep themselves safe online, including what information they should and should not share, and who to share personal information with (Save the Children 09/2020). However, not all children have the necessary resources, knowledge, or skills to keep themselves safe online. The hurry to move education online highlighted data privacy concerns. For example, most countries do not have children's education-related data protected through regulations that would prevent information such as children's names, home addresses, behaviour information, or any other personal details from being shared and used by providers of internet technologies or ending up in the hands of online predators (HRW 09/04/2020). Children may be left vulnerable to sexual exploitation and grooming, as online predators

exploit the COVID-19 pandemic that has left numerous children feeling lonely and isolated. Feeling lonely may also heighten the risks children take online to connect with others. Children online may be approached by strangers or by older people they know who may have sexual interests in them. Online predators may request children to share their personal information or sexualised images and videos (UNICEF 20/04/2020). According to the India Child Protection Fund, there has been a sweeping increase in child pornography searches in March just after the nationwide lockdowns were announced in India. Furthermore, in India the consumption of child sexual abuse material spiked by 95% during the lockdown (Times of India 14/04/2020). In addition, children themselves may be exposed to harmful and violent content or be the targets of online bullying (WHO 08/06/2020; UNICEF 15/04/2020).

Conflict and child recruitment: 75 million children in 35 war-torn countries around the world were already at risk of suffering disruption to their education as a result of displacement and targeted attacks on schools (UN News 09/10/2020). Indeed, in 2016, children in fragile and conflict-affected countries accounted for a third of the 263 million out-of-school children. Refugees are five times more likely to be out of school than the average child (World Bank 2018). School closures due to COVID-19 further disrupt these children's access to education and other services and may put them at increased risk of protection violations. Furthermore, these measures could provide incentives for conflict actors to appropriate empty schools for military purposes (UN News 09/10/2020).

The closure of schools, coupled with the economic and social fallout of the pandemic, has provided fertile ground for recruiters. The Ebola epidemic in DRC caused an increase in child kidnapping for ransom, recruitment into armed groups, and child marriage (Save the Children last accessed 28/10/2020). An education official in North Kivu expressed concerns that without schools to engage and protect, children were at increased risk of being recruited by armed groups operating in the area (HRW 26/08/2020). Colombia has also seen a spike in the recruitment of children as illegal armed groups take advantage of the pandemic to expand their control over territory and local populations (Save the Children 02/10/2020; UN News 15/07/2020). Armed groups are also luring in children with a promise of regular meals, wealth, and protection. In part because of COVID-19, almost as many children are estimated to have joined armed groups in Colombia in the first half of 2020 as in the whole of 2019 (COALICO 09/2020; The New Humanitarian 10/09/2020). Children, particularly of indigenous and Afro-Colombian origin and those from rural areas, have become increasingly isolated during the lockdown in Colombia and armed groups have seized the opportunity to deceive and co-opt children or force parents to let their children to join armed groups (Insight Crime 28/08/2020).

Attacks on educational institutions have continued during COVID-19, and have increased in some cases (GCPEA 09/2020). While in some countries school closures appear to have

reduced incentives for attacking them, in others, closures and the use of school buildings as quarantine centres have triggered violence (Insecurity Insight 14/07/2020). In South Africa, vandalism and arson attacks have risen dramatically since the start of lockdown with attacks on over 1,500 schools. While targeted attacks against educational facilities have decreased across the Western Sahel, violence against schools remains a concern in Burkina Faso, as well as in Mozambique, Ukraine, and Yemen (Insecurity Insight 14/07/2020).

As schools lie vacant, they may be repurposed by non-education actors such as non-state armed groups and the military, further delaying the return to classes (Save the Children 13/07/2020). This has already occurred in Sudan, where paramilitaries occupied a girls' primary school and began using it as a military training base, preventing it from being reopened for exams (HRW 26/08/2020).

Finally, research shows that tolerance is related to education levels, with more years of schooling resulting in more tolerant attitudes towards other groups. In LICs and MICs however, high levels of educational inequality increase the likelihood of conflict. These findings suggest that severe disruptions to education owing to COVID-19 could increase the probability of social discord and conflict (Save Our Future 23/10/2020).

Schools as community hubs

Schools often act as community hubs, playing an important role in collecting and disseminating vital information for the local community. Children pass on information received from their teachers to their households, which is especially important for families who do not have access to other information sources. Additionally, caregivers often have access to school committees and meetings, where they can receive information about their children's education and other important issues such as support services and programmes, disaster preparedness, health, safety, and nutrition advice, and points of contact for those who need further information or support. Lockdowns and school closures have disrupted access to these information sources.

Families who have low literacy levels and face barriers to accessing the internet and basic services such as healthcare are at the most risk of not receiving important communications, including crucial information about the pandemic (HRW 19/04/2020; Save the Children 10/09/2020). Refugees, IDPs and the very poor are among the most likely to be unable to access this essential information (HRW 19/04/2020; Save the Children 10/09/2020).

Reduced access to health communication: In the context of the pandemic, access to health communication is especially critical. Schools often provide important information on health-related issues, such as how to prevent and control infectious diseases and illnesses. Lockdowns and school closures disrupt children's access to information

sources such as teachers and friends, making them reliant on their caregivers to relay COVID-19 health information (Save the Children 10/09/2020). Where caregivers are unwilling or unable to communicate with their children about COVID-19, the household's health is put at risk. These children also miss out on learning about hygiene practices that schools often teach, including regular hand washing – a crucial measure for minimising the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Older children in particular may turn to social media, which increases risks of the spread of misinformation. Households with no access to the internet may not receive any information regarding the pandemic, including how to protect themselves, and where to seek healthcare and advice (Save the Children 10/09/2020).

Loss of school personnel support: Children are facing increased stress and uncertainty due to the pandemic and many require extra support to deal with COVID-19-related disruptions. Supportive parents and caregivers are crucial for mitigating the adverse effects of increased stress levels (World Bank 05/2020). Save the Children's survey found that children were less likely to feel increased negative feelings during school closures if their parent or caregiver engaged in several activities per day with them (Save the Children 10/09/2020). Therefore, children who do not have supportive parents or caregivers at home are likely to struggle most, having lost access to teachers who may have been the most supportive adults in their lives. Teachers are often the first to detect problems and intervene when children need help. As a result, many domestic abuse cases may go undetected as children cannot access the support they need (HRW 09/04/2020; UN 15/04/2020). Furthermore, having lost access to peer and teacher support networks, at school, children's access to information during lockdowns is determined by those caring for them.



Funding gaps in education

Decline in government funding for education: A July 2020 model indicated that 98 LICs and MICs could face a US\$55 billion–US\$109 billion education financing gap by 2021, due to the pandemic's economic consequences (Save the Children 13/07/2020). Education in such countries is likely to also be challenged by reduced household income and difficult fiscal markets (World Bank 05/2020). In sub-Saharan Africa, public education spending per

child may fall by an estimated 4%–5% in 2020, mirroring declines in other areas of the world (World Bank 05/2020).

Reduced donor support for education: Global economic activity is anticipated to fall by 6% in 2020, restricting OECD and partner countries' public funding capacities. This is likely to result in reduced education aid (OECD 30/09/2020). The top 10 bilateral donors for education have contributed 85% of total education aid funding for the past decade worldwide, and recessions in their economies are projected to be twice as large as during the 2008 financial crisis (UNESCO 14/07/2020). A July forecast by the IMF anticipated that education aid budgets could fall by US\$2 billion by 2022 (UNESCO 14/07/2020). Even in the short term, changes in funding have had an impact: in a survey undertaken by the Centre for Global Development, close to half of frontline (education, health, and other sectoral) respondents reported that their organisations are experiencing budget cuts – 73% of whom reporting that this is due to reduced funding from private donors (Centre for Global Development 05/2020).

For the last two decades, education has been declining as a donor priority in development funding, noticeable in particular as other sectors have maintained similar shares of direct aid over time. While funding for education in humanitarian settings has increased slightly as a share of global humanitarian assistance (from 1% in 2014 to 3% in 2019), aid for education is at risk of long-term decline (UNESCO 14/07/2020). There is also a risk that education funding may shift from LICs to MICs, mirroring trends following past financial crises (UNESCO 14/07/2020). Donors' medium-term plans remain unclear, notably as to whether funding for education will be reallocated to other sectors such as healthcare (UNESCO 14/07/2020).

Households financial impact on schooling: Households in poorer countries are more likely to feel required to take on the burden of education investment than households residing in richer countries (Save our Future 2020). However, reduced household incomes will mean that families will find it more challenging to ensure adequate investment in education, in addition to making up for additional public funding shortages in school material and potentially school fees. This is particularly difficult for the most economically vulnerable families, such as those dependent in some form on remittances, on jobs within industries particularly affected by the pandemic, and those who are displaced (Save our Future 2020). Education systems may also be further over-stretched as households move their children from private schools to public schools in order to alleviate the financial burden. This will likely put pressure on the quality and resources available for often already strained education systems (World Bank 05/2020).

This report benefited from support by the H2H Network's H2H Fund, which is supported by UK aid from the UK government.