

COVID-19 and Education – Protecting Child Rights: Practical Resources and Actions

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The COVID-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in history, at its peak affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries. Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted 94 per cent of the world's student population¹. The crisis has exacerbated pre-existing education disparities by reducing learning opportunities for many of the most vulnerable. Learning losses threaten to have long-lasting human development and economic impacts.

There is an urgent need to consider – and rapidly respond to – the child rights dimensions and consequences of the coronavirus pandemic. Child rights and protections is an education issue, while being fundamentally cross-sectoral. All children, regardless of age or gender, are potentially at risk of harm. This document offers a selection of recommended guidance, tools and actions to minimise and mitigate the risks to children and youth arising from school closures and disruptions. It is intended to provide actionable recommendations for policy influence (e.g. practical dialogue with and resources for partner governments), strengthened partnerships (e.g. good practice discussions with development partners) and investment pivots (e.g. re-shaping investments to address emergent risks).

Recommended Resources for Program Pivots and Policy Engagement:

1. Child Protection: Technical Note: Protection of Children during the Coronavirus Pandemic (2020), the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action

Key Messages:

- **Evidence from earlier epidemics indicate that children face greater protection threats** to their personal security with schools suspended, disrupted services, and absent or sick caregivers.
- **Previous pandemics and public health emergencies demonstrate the need to take a gendered and age-sensitive approach to child protection at both the individual and community levels.** During COVID, children may be vulnerable to illness (COVID and non-COVID), death, sexual violence, and other risks, with interplays between disability, gender, poverty and age.
- **Child protection responses need to communicate key information to families, particularly primary care-givers, to change harmful attitudes and practices** that, for instance, stigmatise and cause shame in boys and girls who experience violence.

Actions:

- **Assess whether appropriate child protection systems are in place** and in use during COVID-19. Communicate with government and development partners, to take action/advocate if gaps are identified.
- **Support linkages between child protection and violence against women and girls (VAWG) systems** to ensure child protections interventions are responding to the unique needs of girls and boys, and supporting gender equitable outcomes.

2. Gender and Inclusion Safeguarding: (a) Girls' Education Challenge: Safeguarding and COVID-19 - Guidance Note for Projects (2020), FCDO; (b) Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Violence against Women and Girls (2020), Social Development Direct

¹ UN Secretary General Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/08/sg_policy_brief_covid-19_and_education_august_2020.pdf

Key messages:

- **Due to COVID-19, there is a risk that discriminatory gender and age-related social norms will become more rigidly enforced, shaping how households and communities respond to the crisis.** In all countries, vigilance and active systems are needed to avoid a rise in survival and transactional sex, child marriage, sexual violence, unwanted pregnancies, and unsafe abortions for girls. There is a need for cross-over between child protection and violence against women programs to ensure the safety needs of girls and women are addressed.
- **The impacts on girls' learning, well-being, and life chances will be long-term and potentially permanent, if not addressed.** This means multi-sectoral interventions are needed to address girls' immediate and medium-term needs through investment in promising [strategies](#).
- **Document and learn from practical COVID-19 innovations responding to violence against girls.** These need to be carefully piloted, in line with [international standards](#), before broad-based implementation or going to scale. There are [promising](#) long-distance data collecting methods using mobile phones with vulnerable adolescents in COVID-19 lockdown.

Actions:

- **Adopt a 'twin track' approach (targeted; mainstream)**, combining support to organisations working directly with girl survivors and integrating VAWG into sectoral responses to COVID-19.
- **Action rapid and combined gender, poverty and vulnerability assessments of the impact of COVID-19 on girls**, to inform multi-sectoral interventions.
- **Build upon existing data and transform insights from evidence into concrete actions** – learn from pilots to scale effectively.

3. **Children with a disability: [The impacts of COVID-19 on people with disabilities: a rapid review \(2020\), Social Development Direct](#)**

Key messages:

- **Access to essential services, including online and remote education, will be reduced for all children, but will disproportionately impact children with disabilities.**
- Discriminatory social norms, environmental factors, institutional barriers and political economy factors compound the likelihood, experience, duration and health and socio-economic impact for children with a disability. **Efficacy of responses hinge on inclusive and disability-targeted COVID-19 interventions.**
- Donors and partners can predict and mitigate impacts by **drawing on lesson from previous public health emergencies, coupled with rapid situational analyses (e.g. using [intersectional analytical frameworks](#))**.

Actions:

- **Assess (e.g. rapid situational analysis)** whether appropriate systems to protect and enable children with disabilities are in place, and in use during COVID. Take action/advocate if gaps are identified.
- **Identify with government and development partners ['twin track' approaches](#)** (targeted; mainstream) to disability inclusion in COVID responses.

This resource is one of a number of tools produced by the Education Section (DFAT Human Development and Governance Division) on the human development impacts and issues related to COVID-19 disruptions.

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