

The Fierce Urgency of Now!

Education in Emergency Response to COVID-19

2 April 2020

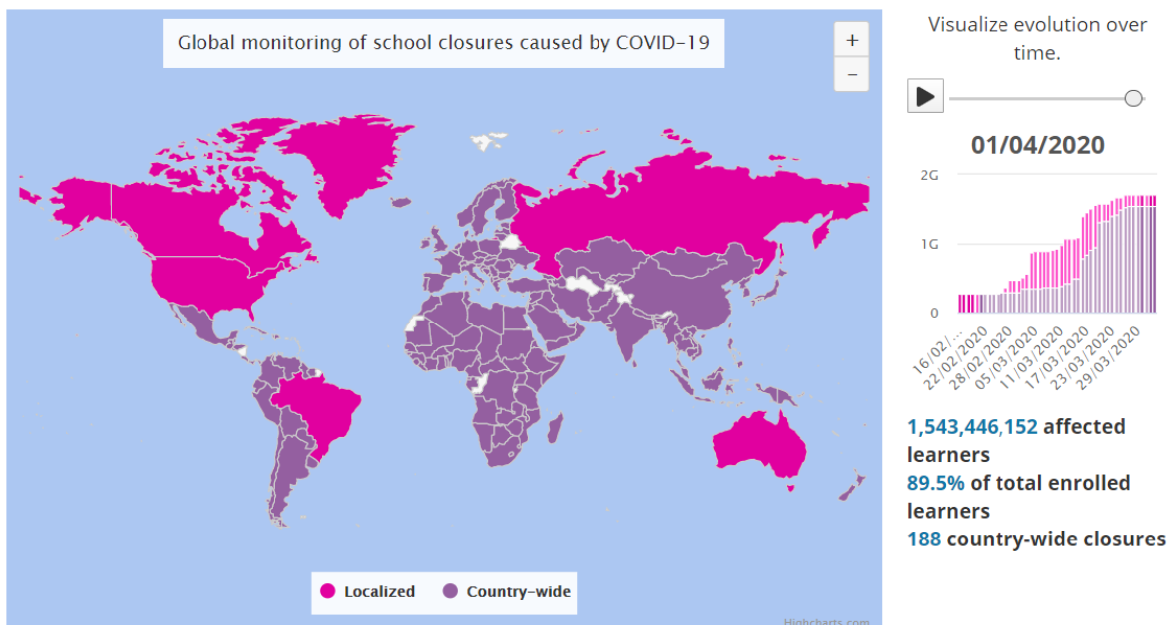


THOSE LEFT FURTHEST BEHIND MOST AT RISK

The COVID-19 pandemic is having an unprecedented impact on a global scale. The number of confirmed cases has spiralled since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the virus an international public-health concern on 30 January 2020. WHO, as of 2 April 2020, reports 900,306 confirmed cases in 206 countries, areas or territories, with 45,693 deaths. The global economy has come to a complete standstill, while strict lockdown measures are forcing millions of people around the world to stay at home.



This lockdown is causing considerable hardship and disruption everywhere. Yet, the coronavirus crisis likely will most impact 75 million school-aged children and youth, of whom 39 million are girls, and their families who are already marginalised by armed conflict, forced displacement and natural disasters. Barely coping within one crisis, they are now being forced to seek to survive another. Today, there are 31 million children who have been uprooted from their homes, including over 17 million internally displaced, 12.7 million refugees and 1.1 million asylum seekers. Children with disabilities, those in marginalised households or living in abject poverty midst violent conflict, often in remote areas, and girls who are already disadvantaged by their societies, are extremely vulnerable and will likely bear the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic.



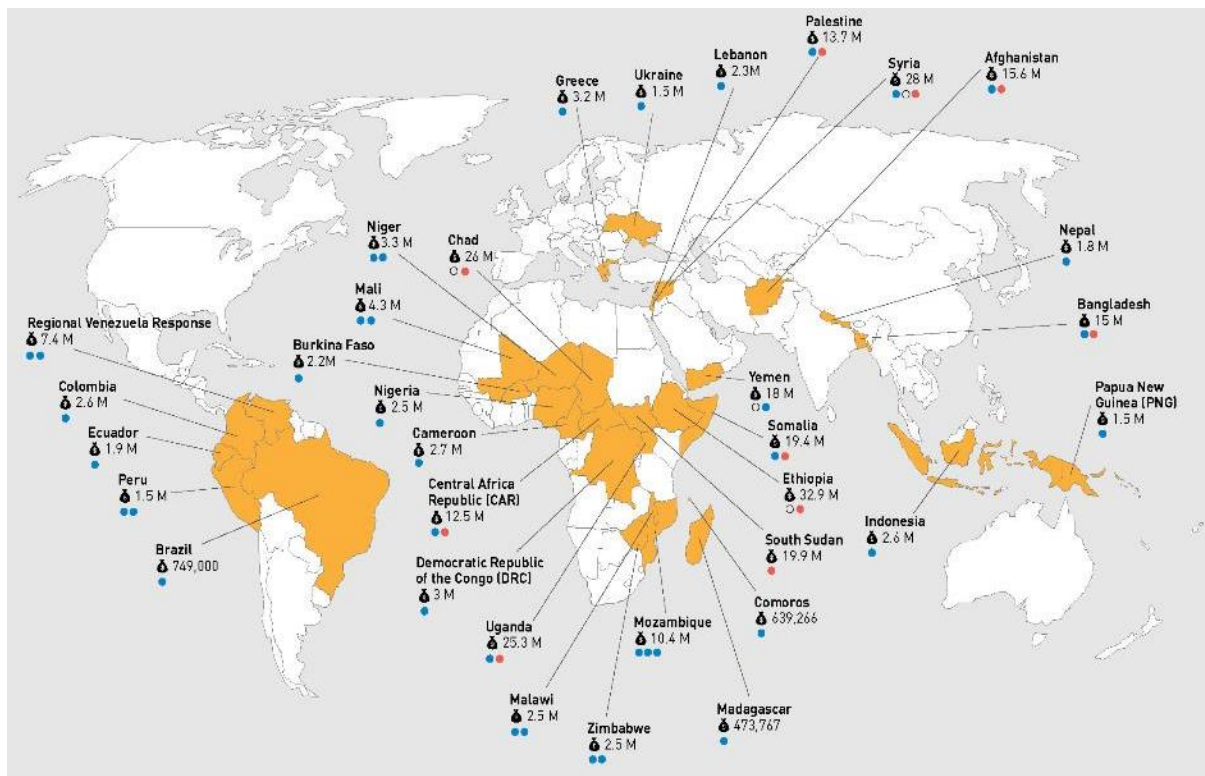
Of the 1.54 billion, there are 75 million children and youth *already* affected by crises – armed conflicts, forced displacement, natural disasters and protracted crises - who now face the double impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

STARK REALITIES ON THE GROUND

While this is an unprecedented global health crisis, its' consequences exacerbate the existing learning crisis and protection crisis. The ramifications are severe. It disrupts education, increases gender-based violence and other protection risks and poses enormous long-term risks, in terms of their safety, their food security, and their overall physical and mental health. We can expect to see: long-term loss of access to education; increased school drop-out rates; increased violence against children in the home; increased numbers of orphans; psychological harm to children related to COVID-19 and social distancing; and, loss of access by children to protection reporting systems in schools. As household finances become strained and needs increase, out-of-school children are more likely to be exposed to risks like domestic violence, child labour, forced marriage, trafficking and exploitation, including by responders. For the most vulnerable children, education is lifesaving.



A rapid assessment by Education Cannot Wait, the global fund for education in emergencies, has been carried out in close conjunction with governments, UN agencies and civil society partners who are currently present in 27 countries already affected by armed conflict, forced displacement, natural disasters and protracted crises. This initial assessment paints a worrying picture of the huge impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having on already severely strained education systems. There is an acute shortage of distance learning tools and materials, which means that millions of pupils will not be able to complete the current school year. In addition, many areas lack hygienic knowledge, as well as supplies and facilities.



5 SNAPSHOTS OF 27 COUNTRY CONSULTATIONS

Bangladesh

Cox's Bazaar has the largest and most densely populated refugee camp in the world, with some 1 million refugees, in one of the most densely populated countries in South Asia. With one case confirmed already in Cox's Bazaar, the overcrowded and poor sanitary conditions are ripe for infection. All learning centres remain closed until further notice. Home tutoring options have not yet been accepted by the government, which has listed health, nutrition and water/sanitation as essential. Humanitarian staff are being reduced due to lack of hospitals and only critical visits to the camp are allowed. Moreover, attacks on foreign humanitarian workers have increased because of the belief that foreigners are spreading the virus, which is occurring in other countries as well. The national COVID-19 response does not explicitly include education.



Central African Republic (CAR)

As one of the poorest countries in the world, CAR has seen fresh conflict since May 2017. The country has some 600,000 people who are internally displaced. Five COVID-19 cases have been recorded so far but the numbers are expected to rise due to extreme poverty and sub-standard medical facilities. Over 63 percent of teachers in public schools are community based and do not receive salaries from the government. Water and sanitation in schools remain crucial, with some 869 public schools located in COVID-19 affected zones or near the border with Cameroon, a country where the number of cases are rapidly increasing.

Colombia

With over 4 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants having fled Venezuela due to violence, insecurity and lack of food, medicine and essential services, Colombia has welcomed more than 1.6 million Venezuelans with safe haven. Simultaneously, Colombia continues to address ongoing insecurity in some areas where rebel forces continue attacks and violence. The government has closed all schools as of 16 March until 20 April, with extended closure possible depending on how the COVID-19 crisis develops. Some 9 million children are not accessing education as a result, including many refugees and migrants. Teachers need help to prepare for this emergency in terms of distance learning modules, and school feeding has been suspended. Humanitarian and other responders are swiftly looking to address an array of protection concerns arising from the coronavirus crisis.

Nigeria

Humanitarian organisations report that civilians in parts of Nigeria and in neighbouring countries face grave human rights violations, as well as pervasive SGBV, forced recruitment and suicide bombings. In Nigeria alone, there are over 2 million internally displaced people, while the crisis there thrives since 2014 in the face of brutal attacks by Boko Haram. Meanwhile, the government shut down schools nationwide on 20 March 2020, and is developing a national response plan using existing coordination mechanisms. The challenges are daunting, with communities suffering from chronic poverty, poor infrastructure, and other epidemics, compounded by ongoing insecurity and violence.



Yemen

The country faces a humanitarian disaster as millions flee their homes to escape conflict. People fleeing face terrible conditions as they seek safety, shelter and emergency aid. Humanitarian agencies estimate that some 22.2 million Yemenis are now in need of humanitarian assistance. Although no cases of COVID-19 have been reported, the likelihood is high that it will spread as the number of confirmed cases in neighbouring countries continue to increase. Schools in Yemen are closed, and social distancing measures are in place.

KEY EARLY TRENDS

Massive disruption to education

- Students are unable to complete the academic year and sit for (final) exams (ALL)

Lack of capacity to operationalise distance learning modalities

- There is a lack of capacity to operationalise distance learning modalities, and a shortage of appropriate distance learning tools and materials (Afghanistan, Cameroon, Chad, CAR, Colombia, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Somalia, Uganda, Yemen)
- The home tutoring options suggested by education actors on the ground have not yet been accepted by the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission (RRRC). The RRRC has issued a formal notice that all education activities are temporarily halted (Bangladesh)

Teachers no longer receive their salaries

- Teachers are not receiving their salaries due to bank closures (CAR)
- Community teachers (over 60 per cent of the work force) are not getting paid (Chad)

- Extending the school year will require additional financial support to pay salaries of teachers and other education personnel (Niger)

Lack of awareness and information, and failure to implement protective behaviours

- Concerns that the lack of testing capacity has led to vast undercounting of the number of coronavirus cases (Bangladesh, Yemen)
- Lack of awareness and information about COVID-19 pandemic, and failure to implement protective behaviours (CAR, Malawi, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria)

Concerns about the safety and well-being of out-of-school children

- Concerns that school closures will result in an increase in domestic violence as families struggle with the consequences of the lockdown (Chad, Palestine, Yemen)
- Girls are now particularly vulnerable to forced marriage, trafficking and exploitation (CAR, Chad, Mali)

SWIFT AND COORDINATED IN-COUNTRY RESPONSE

This global humanitarian crisis demands a well-coordinated response in-country. In line with the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan,¹ ECW is using its existing First Emergency Response windows, designed for rapid humanitarian response to support this coordinated response to deliver urgently needed assistance and support to our government, UN and Civil Society partners on the ground to jointly respond to and cope with the coronavirus pandemic.



Last week, ECW launched a call for proposals, encouraging existing grantees to re-programme their ECW Multi-Year Resilience Programmes and/or apply under ECW's First Emergency Response window and allocations were released by the ECW Director in the first week of April.

These measures are meant to enable them to quickly move from face-to-face to distance learning while also stepping up their investments in mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), water, sanitation and hygiene, as well as other cross-sectoral activities linked to student, teacher and parent well-being and protection against, and dealing with the impacts of, COVID-19 infections.

¹ See Objective 2.2: Ensure the continuity and safety from risks of infection of essential services including health (...), water and sanitation, food supply, nutrition, protection, and education for the population groups most exposed and vulnerable to the pandemic

While invoking the First Emergency Response (FER) application form, ECW will also exercise flexibility for re-programming Multi-Year Resilience Programmes in alignment with any education plans specific to the COVID-19 response.²

Applicants have been requested to include targeted interventions for the populations specifically covered by ECW, such as refugees, internally displaced and otherwise crisis-affected prior to COVID-19 with a focus on girls and marginalised groups, such as children with disabilities. To this end, ECW has requested all grants agents to comply with the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action's COVID-19 Technical Guidance Note with all its partners in reference to the 2019 Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. ECW works to respond to needs conveyed by its partners which are articulated through the appropriate EiE coordination mechanisms (i.e. Cluster, EiEWG or equivalent).



INDICATIVE INTERVENTIONS

Support accelerated learning

- Work with Ministries of Education to develop catch-up programmes or condensed curricula to avoid loss of school year

Facilitate distance learning

- Support Ministries of Education to map available distance learning tools, and prepare additional relevant content for academic skills as well as MHPSS and health
- Assist Ministries of Education and other education actors with the production of materials for distance learning at pre-primary, primary and secondary levels
- Expand radio and television education
- Special measures with regards to gender differences or for children with disabilities in accessing home-based learning
- Keep teachers engaged with their classes and students to monitor progress, assign new lessons and give required PSS or share information on referral services
- Assess child safeguarding risks associated with distance learning modalities and include mitigation measures, including child-friendly safe digital learning messaging

² For instance when it comes to online education, radio and television education, home visits, flexible/alternative learning programmes, and independent study

Raise further awareness of risks associated with COVID-19

- Ramp up information dissemination and awareness-raising activities to inform students, teachers and parents of the risks associated with COVID-19
- Ensure that adequate information about the pandemic is provided, especially when it comes to reducing the risk of getting sick and infecting others

Provide WASH services

- Upgrade WASH facilities at schools and ensure availability of water and soap
- Develop comprehensive health and hygiene protocols and disinfect schools before re-opening them

Prioritize MHPSS and protection

- Offer psychosocial support to children as well as to teachers and parents
- Ensure that protection and safety messages are delivered to parents and children in a way that limits panic and distress, and encourages adherence to health messaging
- Train teachers and other school staff on signs of distress to enable them to identify and refer children who may have specific child protection needs
- Ensure that teachers and other education staff have necessary knowledge and skills related to SGBV mitigation, child safeguarding and safe referral practices
- Put in place measures to avoid stigmatisation of students, teachers and/or parents who may have been exposed to COVID-19

Funding Requirements

Based on the coordinated submissions from in-country coordination mechanisms received as of 1 April 2020, ECW expects that US\$50 million in additional funding will be required to respond to the COVID-19 related education needs for the coming 3 months (1 April - 30 June 2020), while also sustaining a reserve for new onsets or escalation of crisis during this period.

The situation will be reassessed in June with the possibility of a second round of ECW First Emergency Response Window allocations, which would double the current \$50 million amount required and bring the total requirements for April – September to \$100 million.

“We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.

For those who would like more details on the context in the 27 countries and ECW’s COVID-19 response, please contact: info@un-ecw.org



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