

SAVE OUR EDUCATION NOW

**An Emergency COVID-19 Education Plan to
get the poorest and most marginalised
children safely back to school and learning**

January 2021



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The world is facing the biggest global education emergency of our lifetime. Education has been the hidden victim of the COVID-19 pandemic, with far-reaching consequences for today's school-aged children - and for the future development prospects of all nations. However, the most marginalised children, including girls, displaced and conflict affected children and children with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries are particularly vulnerable to never returning to school.

Whilst some countries have reopened their school gates and others are preparing to in the coming months, many countries continue to use national or local school closures to prevent the spread of the virus. As of December 2020,¹ nearly 200 million pre-primary and school-aged children continue to be out of education, however this number continues to fluctuate and does not account for the additional numerous localised school closures.

There is a significant risk that even when schools do reopen, millions of children either do not return, or return and swiftly dropout, reversing decades of hard-won progress on increasing access to school. **Save the Children's research suggests that almost 10 million children may never return to school - and this is likely to be an underestimate.**²

Save the Children is urgently calling on the world to come together to agree and fully fund a plan to ensure a safe return to school and learning for all children, especially the poorest and most marginalised.

This briefing sets out five key interventions that the plan must include, and should focus on ensuring that children whose education has been disrupted by the pandemic can safely return to school and learning. These are interventions that national governments should prioritise in the COVID-19 education response, based on rigorous evidence of what works for children. It includes approximate costs for these interventions, and details of the additional funding and support needed from the international community to ensure that the futures of all children are protected from the pandemic.

Our analysis suggests that just over \$50 billion is needed to ensure the safe return to school for children in some of the poorest and conflict-affected countries, as well as support to help them catch up on their lost learning.

This briefing does not dictate when the right time is to reopen schools - that is for governments to decide. But it is important that planning for school reopening happens in a timely way and by weighing up the risks that children face by not being in school such as abuse, exploitation, and violence – and the loss of learning. Governments must focus now on keeping children safe and ensuring their right to an education whether they are in school or not.

AN UNPRECEDENTED EDUCATION EMERGENCY

The economic impact of the pandemic is already putting pressure on family finances at a time of rising child poverty.³ As a result, children may be forced into child marriage and child labour to help support household finances, and are at increased risk of violence and sexual exploitation, which may lead children to drop out of school permanently.

Save the Children's research suggests that almost 10 million children are at risk of not returning to school due to the economic impact of the virus and rising child poverty – and this is likely to be a significant underestimate.⁴

As a result of the economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, an additional **2.5 million girls are at risk of child marriage over five years and adolescent pregnancies are expected to rise by up to 1 million in 2020.**⁵ In fact - we are already seeing evidence emerging of increased risks to children that may cause them to drop out of school altogether. To take just one example, our team in Uganda have reported a doubling of teenage pregnancies, increase in child labour and child marriage, as well as increased reports of violence against children in some of the areas where we work. Whilst some children have returned to school, more than 13 million children have remained out of school since the end of March, including 600,000 refugee children. The impact of COVID-19 on girls' futures and dreams of achieving gender equality within their lifetimes depends on how the world chooses to act now.

Those who do return to school have months of lost learning to catch up on

When children are out of school, their learning does not just stop but is likely to regress. Save the Children's global survey of 25,000 children and caregivers found that four out of five children felt that they were learning little or nothing at all while out of school, with girls, displaced children and children living in poor households most likely to report that they had learned nothing at all during school closures.⁶

Literature on 'summer learning loss' measures how much each student knows about maths or reading at the end of each school year, and again after two and a half months, at the beginning of the following school year. On average, children from low socioeconomic backgrounds lose the equivalent of three months learning.⁷ Research on the impact of the 2005 earthquake in Kashmir, Pakistan captures the risk to learning. Schools were closed for three months. When they reopened, attendance quickly recovered, however four years later, children aged between three and 15 who lived closest to the fault line had lost the equivalent of 1.5 years of learning.⁸

Learning loss will have long-term impacts on the economic outcomes of the COVID-19 generation. According to the World Bank, school closures lasting five months could result in an average reduction of US\$872 in yearly earnings for each student from the primary- and secondary-aged cohorts of today, while the long-term economic cost of lost learning could be as much as US\$10 trillion.⁹

The COVID-19 education emergency comes on top of an existing learning crisis

258 million children and young people were out of school before the pandemic - around one sixth of the global school-age population.¹⁰ Girls face some of the greatest barriers, with inequalities starting early; 9 million primary-school-age girls are likely to never step foot into a classroom, compared with 3 million boys.¹¹ Even when children are in school, many are not learning, especially those who are the poorest and most marginalised. Last year the World Bank released new evidence estimating that 53% of children in low- and middle-income countries cannot read and understand a simple story by the end of primary school. In low-income countries, the level is as high as 80%.¹²

Conflict and forced displacement further impact children's learning, safety, and wellbeing, with one in three children and young people out of school in countries affected by war or natural disasters – more than a third of the global out-of-school population prior to the pandemic.¹³ Prior to the pandemic, 3.7 million refugee children were out of school – more than half of the world's school-age refugee children, and only 63 per cent of refugee children attended primary school, compared to 91 per cent globally.¹⁴ In fragile and conflict-affected states facing violence, insecurity, and already weakened education systems, COVID-19 will only serve to compound existing education inequalities.

Schoolchildren, teachers and their schools continue to come under attack in countries affected by conflict and insecurity. Between 2015 and 2019, there were more than 11,000 attacks on educational institutions, harming 22,000 students and educators in at least 93 countries.¹⁵ Girls were directly targeted or more exposed to attacks because of their gender in at least 21 countries in the same period, including in the form of sexual violence, violent repression of girls' education, recruitment by armed groups, abduction and forced marriage.¹⁶ Violence disproportionately impacts girls' access to education and safe environment for learning, with girls affected by conflict and forced displacement more than twice as likely to be out of school than boys.¹⁷

As countries focus on their response to COVID-19, it is critical that they take steps to strengthen protections for education from attack. Governments should endorse and fully implement the Safe Schools Declaration, and refrain from using schools for military purposes, vacating schools occupied during the pandemic and ensuring that safe education can occur upon reopening, in line with the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools & Universities from Military Use*.¹⁸

Rising needs and shrinking budgets - a learning collision is in sight

At a time when governments should be investing in children and their education, budgets are being hollowed out by a recession and the diversion of public spending to health care and economic recovery. UNESCO estimates that there is a US\$148 billion annual financing gap in low- and lower-middle-income countries to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all by 2030. Their recent research suggests that additional costs due to COVID-19 related school closures risk increasing this financing gap by up to one-third, or US\$30 billion to US\$45 billion.¹⁹ It is vital that in line with the newly endorsed 2020 UNESCO GEM Declaration that all national governments commit to maintaining or increasing their share of funding towards education budgets.²⁰



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Increased international financing is critical. Most of the world's poorest countries, especially in Africa, entered the economic downturn with limited fiscal space. That room for manoeuvre is now shrinking further as recession hits and external-debt problems intensify. Rich countries have responded to the COVID-19 crisis by tearing up their fiscal and monetary policy rulebooks and underwriting ambitious national recovery plans. They should be equally bold in supporting education in developing countries. Governments and the World Bank must acknowledge the severity of the situation and the huge opportunity costs that will arise if the challenge is not met.

KEY INTERVENTIONS TO SUPPORT THE SAFE RETURN TO LEARNING

This briefing outlines five key interventions that evidence shows are amongst the most effective ways to ensure the poorest and most marginalised groups of children are able to return to school safely and catch up on the learning they have missed out on. They have been selected as examples of interventions that need adequate urgent funding.

The interventions listed deliberately target the population of children who were in-school before COVID-19, and the costing model has been calculated based on getting this group of children back into school and learning. It does not, therefore, address the very large challenge that remains to get the children who were out of school before this crisis into education including girls; children with disabilities; and children affected by conflict, insecurity, disaster and displacement.

Save the Children's *Save Our Education* report²¹ outlines a longer list of recommendations for national governments and donors to facilitate children's safe return to school, ensure that children can access distance learning during school closures, and to build back better, more resilient education systems.

For instance, it is critical that governments address gender-related barriers to education, including laws, policies and harmful social norms that prevent girls from continuing their education if they are pregnant, married or child mothers. Governments should also ensure that refugees, internally displaced and conflict-affected children are included in national COVID-19 education response plans.

In contexts affected by conflict and insecurity, governments must put in place a range of appropriate protection measures to ensure a safe return to school and employ alternative or distance learning measures where schools cannot safely reopen. Any decision to reopen schools in insecure areas must be based on a risk assessment and school security and response plans in place to prevent and mitigate the impact of attacks on education before, during and after the reopening of schools.

The following five interventions covered in this section include:

- 1. Targeted cash transfers**
- 2. Catch up classes**
- 3. Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities in schools**
- 4. Back-to-school campaigns**
- 5. Teacher professional development**

1. Targeted cash transfers

We need to ensure that when schools reopen, children and families do not face disincentives to return to learning. Cash and voucher assistance can mitigate the impact of the pandemic on household incomes and livelihoods. It can help economically vulnerable children return to school and prevent dropout, for example by reducing the economic pressures that force children into labour markets. Further, there is substantial rigorous evidence from cash transfer programmes globally that they increase the number of children able to attend school, even when that was not the main objective of the programme.²²

Cash can be spent on transport, clothing, uniforms, supplies, books, or whatever is needed to ensure children can attend school. Cash transfers are particularly important at the start of the school year when families face the highest expenditures. Cash transfers should target children most at risk of school dropout, for instance, adolescent girls at risk of gender-based violence, or adolescent boys at risk of forced child labour. Cash transfers linked to school attendance can be effective in preventing girls from dropping out of school, which is also a risk factor for

child marriage. Care must be taken to ensure the effectiveness of cash transfers and mitigate risks to girls, for instance, by carefully considering eligibility criteria to avoid tensions between recipients and non-recipients.

Cash and voucher assistance can be used to pay school fees directly, through cash grants to schools.²³ Evidence from an evaluation of a USAID Ebola cash transfer programme in Liberia and Sierra Leone found that transfers were increasingly spent on schooling, and in focus group discussions with families in both countries, payment of school fees was one of the top three financial priorities.²⁴

2. Catch-up classes

When children are out of school, their learning does not just stop but is likely to regress. At this stage in the crisis, it is difficult to quantify how much learning will be lost from school closures; countries shut their schools at different times and in some countries it is unclear how long schools will remain closed. In the poorest countries, a child who has not gone to school for more than a year is likely never to return to the classroom.

How countries respond to lost learning will vary depending on the duration of school closures. For example, the Kenyan government closed their schools in March 2020 in response to the pandemic and they will primarily remain closed until January 2021, although some schools have partially reopened. Kenya's school calendar runs from January through to November, and so for many children this means the loss of nearly a whole school year of education. Therefore, the government has confirmed that all students will repeat the school year.²⁵ The Rwandan government is reportedly planning to do the same as schools are reopened in a phased way. Ethiopia is planning to promote all children to the next grade, with an accelerated learning course at the beginning of 2021.

Some countries, however, may decide that students require extra support to help them catch up with their learning, especially for those who have little or no access to learning whilst schools were closed.

Catch-up classes are short-term transitional education programmes for children and young people who previously attended school, are not at the expected grade for their age, and have missed out on a year or less of school. They provide students with the opportunity to learn content they missed and support students' re-entry to the formal system. Given the anticipated length of school closures, catch-up classes that start from where children are, rather than where the curriculum dictates they should be, are likely to be the most appropriate accelerated education programme.

Extensive evidence exists that demonstrates the effectiveness of catch-up classes. For instance, Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) is a catch-up initiative that aims to build foundational skills in maths and reading in primary school children by assessing learning levels using a simple tool and grouping children accordingly. Evaluations have shown that the TaRL initiative consistently improves learning outcomes when implemented well and has led to some of the largest gains among rigorously evaluated education programs.²⁶

Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC) supports out-of-school children, especially girls, through delivering a condensed curriculum to provide accelerated learning for children to catch-up with their peers in a participatory and child-friendly learning environment. Evaluations of BRAC schools in Afghanistan and South Sudan showed that students obtained significantly higher learning scores in reading and maths.²⁷

3. Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities in schools

Health and hygiene facilities need to be accessible to all at school. For schools to be able to reopen, they need to be able to operate with good health and hygiene practices that will help prevent the spread of the virus. However, many schools do not have sufficient facilities. In 2016, only 53% of schools were reported to have basic hygiene services, defined as a hand-washing facility with water and soap.²⁸

Schools play an important role in spreading public health messages and good practices that help prevent the spread of the virus. Evidence from school reopening after the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone demonstrated that a well-communicated focus on improving hygiene practices at school, including training teachers, were effective in encouraging parents to send their children back to school. Having such practices in place enabled schools to reopen before Ebola was totally eradicated.²⁹

Governments should increase hand-washing facilities to adhere to national standards, including ratios of learners to hand-washing stations, toilets, and drinking water stations. These should be age-appropriate, low-cost, low-

maintenance facilities, with eco-friendly designs, and accessible to children with disabilities. Teachers, educational and cleaning staff should be trained in school hygiene practices and disinfection.

Menstrual hygiene materials are also essential components of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) kits. Girls and female staff need access to menstrual hygiene materials and provision for their non-infectious disposal. Toilets need to be kept clean, lockable from the inside, and sex segregated.³⁰

4. Back-to-school campaigns

After the Ebola crisis, many parents did not know about the reopening of schools and the implementation of strict protocols to ensure their safety. In Liberia, an assessment found that parents prevented their children from returning to school because of continued concerns about Ebola. To motivate parents to send their children back to school, the community needs to feel confident that the right COVID-19 health and safety protocols are in place for all students and education personnel.

As schools reopen, strong, nationally directed, community-led back-to-school campaigns are needed. This is vital to ensure that progress made on universal access to education is not lost. Special attention should be paid to ensuring that lack of space and challenges in applying physical distancing do not lead to some children being discriminated against and dropping out as a result.

Public messaging in back-to-school campaigns must be child-friendly, age appropriate, gender-sensitive, accessible to and inclusive of people with disabilities, and available in the relevant local languages. Campaigns must specifically address the barriers facing girls and others less likely to return to school. To help reach all audiences, messages should be shared through different modalities. This may include through loudspeaker, radio, and TV with captioning, subtitles, or sign language interpretation for those with hearing difficulties, and posters with images and simple text for those less literate. Children and young people should have the opportunity to design and participate in the campaigns themselves. Campaign messages may include information about school reopening, how to prepare your child to return to school, and COVID-19 protective measures, as well as school safety measures and the value of education to address social norms that may deter parents from supporting children's learning.

5. Provide effective teacher professional development

The absence of training and support for teachers as schools reopen may jeopardise children's learning, and impact teacher motivation and wellbeing. Teachers should be trained in how to communicate about the COVID-19 pandemic and supported to put in place measures to keep schools safe.

Teachers also require ongoing training in alternative teaching methods to ensure the sustainable use of technology including internet-enabled devices during school closures and as they reopen. Teacher training institutes should play a role in enhancing training and tools that reinforce teachers' capacity for pedagogical innovation, including digital literacy, information and communications technology, and child-centred teaching skills.

In some contexts, technology is already being used to deliver teacher professional development in low-income settings. For instance, in Kenya and Rwanda, smartphones and Secure Digital (SD) cards loaded with videos of teaching practices are used to support training, coaching and learning exchange. Technology used to train teachers during school closures could be blended with face-to-face training when schools reopen.³¹

As part of the education system recovery effort in Sierra Leone following the Ebola epidemic, trained teachers were allocated to provide peer mentor support and training for illiterate or poorly trained teachers in rural schools. Similar efforts could be rolled out as part of the COVID-19 recovery efforts in many countries.³²

Save the Children has developed a Teacher Professional Development module on COVID-19 that can be used for self-study or as part of in-person trainings, that includes topics such as how to talk to children about the pandemic, school safety measures, and child protection. This is being implemented in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh.

WHAT IS THE GLOBAL COST OF DELIVERING THESE INTERVENTIONS TO THE POOREST AND MOST MARGINALISED CHILDREN?

To date, there has been limited global action in response to the COVID-19 education emergency. Delivering the interventions above would be a significant step forward in ensuring that the poorest and most marginalised children globally are supported to safely return to school and catch up on lost learning.

This briefing focusses on a set of evidenced-based emergency short-medium term interventions that will enable children in low-income countries to return to learning. However, further interventions are urgently needed to support the long-term recovery from COVID-19 and the achievement of SDG4, which was already dangerously off-track prior to the pandemic. Save the Children's calculations focus on ensuring a safe return to school for children who were previously in school before the pandemic hit. Without concerted action to ensure these children return to school, there is a risk of significant increases in numbers of children dropping out of school, which will compound the pre-pandemic crisis. However, this is just the first step. In 2021, Save the Children will focus our campaign efforts to ensure that every last child, including those out of school prior to the pandemic, have access to quality education and catch up on lost learning.

Save the Children has extensive experience working with partners and governments to deliver interventions such as those listed above. Based on our experience, we have developed approximate, estimated costs for delivering these interventions across 59 countries eligible for International Development Association (IDA) assistance.³³ IDA is the single largest source of concessional finance for the poorest countries in the world. We are focusing on IDA-only eligible countries as we expect this group of countries to potentially require more support from donors.

Our calculations suggest that governments in these 59 countries will require approximately an additional US\$50 billion in order to support children's safe return to school and learning. Such investment would support approximately 136 million children across these countries who were in-school before the pandemic hit, at a cost of approximately \$370 per child. A full methodology can be found in the Annex of this briefing.

These calculations are estimates, and do not take into account cost variability across different countries. They also do not account for the children who may already have access to these interventions, or investments that governments may have already made. As such, whilst the total figure may be an overestimate, it demonstrates the scale of investment urgently needed to accelerate progress towards SDG4 and ensure that children in the poorest countries are not left behind.

HOW TO FINANCE THE PLAN TO GET CHILDREN SAFELY BACK TO SCHOOL AND LEARNING

While the COVID-19 crisis is sending shockwaves around the globe, the 59 poorest countries are in a particularly difficult position to respond. Without sustained international effort to support them, permanent scars of this crisis are likely to harm development prospects, exacerbate inequality, and threaten to wipe out a decade of progress reducing poverty.

Domestic resource mobilisation

The global economic recession is a serious threat for the right to education in many countries. In response to the pandemic, there is an urgent need to increase government spending on health and social protection, including the progressive realisation of universal child benefits to help protect families from future shocks and keep children in school.

However, government revenue generation in 2020 in the 59 poorest countries had declined significantly, causing them to borrow just to maintain levels of expenditure.³⁴ Despite this, evidence shows these governments have increased budget allocations to health and social protection, and maintain education allocations in 2020 compared with 2019.³⁵ At a time when resources have been substantially reduced, this commitment to maintain education spending is welcome.

However, in 2021 government revenue generation will continue to be constrained and combined with growing debt burdens will limit resources available for education. Despite this pressure, it is vital that in line with the newly endorsed 2020 UNESCO Global Education Meeting Declaration all governments should commit to maintain or increase their share of education spending.³⁶

Moreover, there continues to be scope to increase domestic public resources in many of the 59 countries, through strengthening tax administration systems and improving the enabling environment through legislative reform to reduce corruption. Together with support of the international community, governments must address these issues now, reducing international taxation loopholes, for instance through the inclusive Framework on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS), and stemming illicit financial flows. Improvements in these areas would boost public finances in the medium term, leading to substantial increases in financing for education. However, governments must ensure that increases in revenue mobilisation are progressive, and that spending accelerates progress towards the SDGs.

Household budgets and school payments

According to the Education Commission's report from 2016, households in low-income countries contribute on average more than one-third - 39% - of total education spending.³⁷ Declining incomes may also lead to shifts in enrolment from private schools to public schools, adding to pressure on government education budgets. The poorest households bear a disproportionately high share of household spending on education, increasing the risk of school drop out for children of these families due to economic downturn and loss of income.

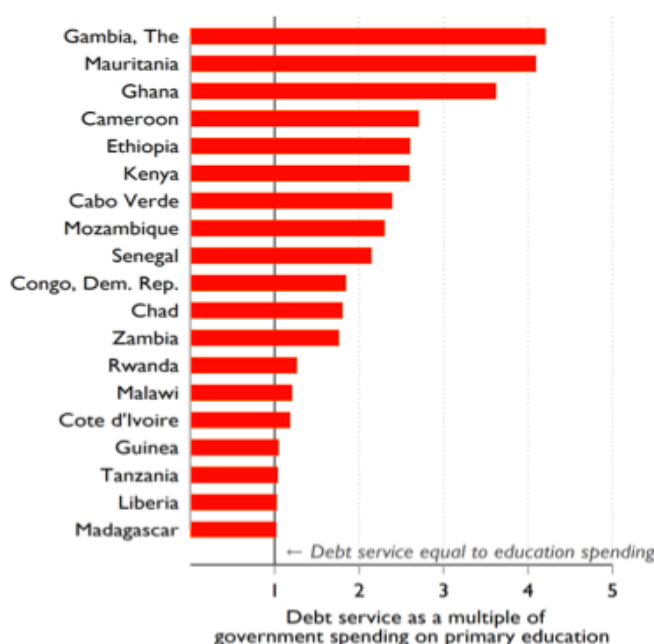
Governments must ensure that children continue to learn during and after COVID-19, and take steps to mitigate the negative impacts of the pandemic on children's learning, health and wellbeing. SDG target 1.3 calls on countries to 'implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all', which will help countries prepare for future shocks to children's education, and ensure domestic investment in education is upheld and increased in order to build back better.

Whilst the majority of funding for education should come from domestic resource mobilisation, significant support is needed from international donors to support low-income countries respond to the scale of the education crisis.

Debt relief

Debt repayments currently account for a large proportion of revenue in developing countries, which could be used to respond to and mitigate the impacts of the pandemic. Even before the COVID-19 crisis, 26 of 59 IDA-only eligible countries were already in or at high risk of debt distress, which means less funding is available to spend on social sectors such as education. The chart below shows 19 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa spending more on debt servicing than primary education.

Chart: 19 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa spending more on debt servicing than primary education



Debt service: World Bank - COVID 19 Debt Service Suspension Initiative;
Spending on primary education: UNESCO UIS/World Bank (available for 32 countries).



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Since April 2020, two main debt relief initiatives have emerged. The International Monetary Fund Catastrophic Containment Relief Trust (IMF CCRT), which provides grants for debt relief for the poorest and most vulnerable countries hit by disasters, is providing debt relief to 28 of the 59 IDA-only eligible countries until April 2021, which has amounted to over US\$700 million in grants. Whilst this has provided welcome relief, an additional US\$900 million is required from donors to continue this support until June 2022.

Secondly, the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) agreed by the G20 in April, provides for a suspension of debt payments by official bilateral creditors in 73 eligible countries, with commercial creditors encouraged to provide comparable terms.³⁸ Since it took effect on May 1, 2020, the initiative has delivered about US\$5 billion in relief to an estimated 43 eligible countries. However, DSSI has faced several challenges including non-participation of 30 of the 73 eligible countries due to fears of credit rating downgrades, poor involvement from private creditors, and coordination issues amongst G20 members that have prevented effective implementation. Although in October DSSI was extended to June 2021, there is an urgent need for reform and an extension until the end of 2021.

If governments across the 73 DSSI eligible countries were relieved from paying interest and repayments to G20 official bilateral donors in 2021, US\$15.9 billion would be suspended in payments. This would unlock an additional US\$1.6 billion for education in 19 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa spending more on debt servicing than primary education. In addition, if all external private creditor debt service was suspended this would unlock an additional US\$14.2 billion, translating into an additional US\$3 billion for education for the 19 countries in our sample.

Whilst DSSI could unlock resources to invest in education this year, the suspension means that countries will still need to make debt payments later, creating a further debt crisis that will impact education spending. The G20 has agreed in principle to a common approach to debt treatment beyond the DSSI to support governments in the poorest countries on a case-by-case basis.

However, whilst the common approach is a step in the right direction, there remains a lack of clarity on how this will be implemented. Furthermore, debt suspensions will be conditional on countries applying strict austerity measures which could further restrict education spending.

A systematic, comprehensive, and enforceable debt framework must be put in place through the UN system that ensures debt liabilities are converted into efficient, equitable investments that will help ensure children's safe return to school and learning. Furthermore, debt relief initiatives must be linked to a more comprehensive and long-term approach to address the debt crisis.

Bilateral international public funding

Aid to education reached the highest amount ever recorded at US\$15.6 billion in 2018, an increase of 9% from the previous year. From one year to the next, aid to basic education increased by 6%, aid to secondary education by 7%, and to post-secondary education by 12%.³⁹

Despite these climbs, recent estimates from UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report suggests that global aid is likely to decline by up to US\$2 billion by 2022 as a result of COVID-19, representing a 12% drop in international support for education.⁴⁰

Basic education is not prioritised by key donors, receiving only 45% of total aid to education with 55% going to secondary and upper secondary education.⁴¹ This weighting does not account for the greater needs in basic education, as well as the importance of basic education in securing learning and access to higher levels of the education system. Pre-primary education received US\$76 million per year - under 1% - of education aid, in contrast to US\$3.6 billion spent on post-secondary; in 2015 the amount of aid disbursed for scholarships was 26 times that spent on pre-primary.⁴² Aid disbursements are also not allocated to the country's most in need. The share of basic education aid to low-income countries fell from 36% in 2002 to 22% in 2016.⁴³

We examined what funding would be available if Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors maintained their current levels of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) spending to education, social protection, and water and sanitation across 2021 and 2022.

TABLE: DAC donor bilateral ODA 2021-2022 based on current levels spending on education, water and sanitation and social protection

(US\$ millions, 2018 constant prices)	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
DAC Bilateral ODA to education	9,451	9,583	8,974	9,102	9,367
DAC Bilateral ODA to water and sanitation	4,426	4,480	4,197	4,287	4,399
DAC Bilateral ODA to social protection	760	772	721	688	708
Total	14,637	14,835	13,892	14,077	14,474

Whilst we encourage donors to maintain their level of ODA, it is likely that some ODA budgets will shrink because of the pandemic and economic recession. For example, the ODA budget of some donor countries such as the UK, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Sweden is connected to their gross national income. When reviewing ODA spending, donors must ensure they target investment on fighting poverty and increasing essential services, including education. The proportion of aid budgets spent bilaterally on education must be maintained or increased to help countries recover from this education emergency.

Multilateral funding

A Supplementary International Development Association Budget for Investments in Children

The World Bank has a critical role to play in multiplying aid. Now more than ever, the World Bank must step up to support children's learning in the poorest countries. At its last replenishment in 2019, the International Development Association (IDA), the part of the World Bank that focuses on the world's poorest countries, received US\$23.5 billion in funding from donors, which unlocked US\$82 billion between July 2021 and June 2023.

In its response to the pandemic, the Bank announced US\$160 billion in financing up to June 2021, tailored to the health, economic and social shocks that countries are facing, including over US\$50 billion of IDA resources on grant and highly concessional terms. However, this financing is being provided by frontloading resources originally allocated for the next two years, rather than from new and additional resources which are needed to respond to the crisis.

World Bank member countries should agree to a supplementary IDA budget of around US\$25 billion over the next two years, which would require US\$10 billion in donor contributions. This could amount to an additional US\$3.4 billion for education, as well as an additional US\$3.5 billion for social protection, and US\$1.5 billion for Water, Sanitation and Waste Management.⁴⁴

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE)

On 1 April 2020, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) unlocked US\$250 million in funding to help developing countries mitigate both the immediate and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on education. On 1 June, to respond to strong demand from partner countries, the GPE increased the COVID-19 response window to US\$500 million.

To date, 55 grants have been approved for US\$440 million. This funding will be used to sustain learning for up to 355 million children in 67 countries. For example, in Haiti, Lao PDR, Nigeria and South Sudan, new water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and health promotion activities will allow for a safe return to school. In Rwanda and the Republic of the Congo, community campaigns will help ensure children at highest risk of dropping out, including girls and those with disabilities, return to school.

Ensuring that the GPE is fully funded for the next five years is essential for supporting the learning of millions of the most marginalised children in some of the poorest countries. The GPE is seeking at least US\$5 billion for its 2021-2025 replenishment to transform education systems in up to 87 countries, which are home to 1.1 billion school-aged girls and boys.

Education Cannot Wait

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, Education Cannot Wait (ECW) has acted quickly to disburse US\$42 million across 36 countries already affected by humanitarian crises. The duration of grants varies between 6 and 12 months. Grants focus on ensuring continuous access to education, including online and radio learning; information campaigns, risk communications and community engagement in local languages; mental health and psychosocial support; child protection, and water and sanitation facility upgrades in schools and learning centres

To fulfil ECW's funding gap for multi-year programs and emergency responses for the period 2021-2023; it requires an additional US\$400 million to its global fund and at least US\$2 billion to be leveraged and aligned in-country to support ongoing investments in the African Sahel, Latin America, Bangladesh, the occupied Palestinian territory, Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Chad, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Uganda, and others.

Responding to the education crisis in Lower-Middle-Income Countries

This briefing does not focus on lower-middle-income countries. However, this does not mean that these countries will be spared the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis, and that this will not in turn impact education systems. Many lower-middle-income countries face the prospect of deep cuts in education spending. These countries house the greatest numbers of people in absolute poverty and have large, chronic, and unmet needs for education. Three of the five nations with the largest number of people living in extreme poverty are lower-middle-income countries – India, Nigeria, and Bangladesh. Nearly half of the world's 1.4 billion school-age children live in lower-middle-income countries, including most out-of-school children, and half of all refugee and displaced children and young people.

Despite these critical needs, lower-middle-income countries face chronic funding shortfalls in education. Even if lower-middle-income countries put in place measures to mobilise more resources domestically – notably from reforming their tax systems – they would still rely on external financing.

The International Financing Facility for Education (IFFEd) is a forthcoming mechanism in the education financing architecture. The IFFEd aims to blend ODA with new, additional money for education by creating a consortium of public and private donors and international financing institutions. Using credit guarantees provided by donors, the multilateral development banks would use their 'Triple A' rating to borrow capital on the international markets at reduced interest rates and mobilise funds that are otherwise not available for education. Multilateral development banks would then provide loans at a lower interest rate than the beneficiary countries could obtain in the private market. These funds would be blended with donor grants, which would subsidise loans, effectively making them available at an even lower interest rate.

IFFEd funding must be equitable by making the principle of progressive universalism an absolute requirement; adhere to the strictest debt sustainability framework; provide concessions to avoid unsustainable debt burdens, and must not come at the cost of ODA to low-income countries or other education support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We call on the international community to protect the learning and wellbeing of a generation of children and youth, and address the deepening education crisis caused by COVID-19 **by committing to funding this emergency package of interventions to support the safe return to learning.**

1. **National governments should seek to increase their domestic revenues by expanding their tax base** with the purpose of increasing their investments in children including in education. This should be done by progressive taxes that are redistributive and gender sensitive. Governments should analyse their taxation of multinational companies and remove harmful tax incentives such as tax holidays.
2. National governments that are granted debt suspensions or debt relief **should document increased investments in child welfare, including education.**
3. **World Bank members should agree to a supplementary IDA budget of around US\$25 billion over the next two years, which would require US\$10 billion in donor grant contributions.** This would provide an additional US\$3.4 billion for education and US\$3.5 billion for social protection.
4. **The World Bank should work with the IMF to strengthen the Debt Service Suspension Initiative to secure a freeze on US\$48 billion of debt service payments during 2021.** Faced with an education emergency, rising child poverty, and worsening nutritional conditions, the 73 countries covered by the DSSI should be supported to prioritise domestic spending over debt repayments. Measures must be established to ensure that both public and private creditors participate, including support for countries to negotiate with private creditors and legislation to prevent bondholders from suing for repayment. Innovative solutions to build support for debt relief should be explored, such as the establishment of country-owned child investment funds which would convert debt liabilities into investment in education and wider COVID-19-recovery strategies for children.
5. **Donors should ensure that the Global Partnership for Education's US\$5 billion 2021-2025 replenishment is fully funded** to ensure that they have the resources required to support partner countries to recover from COVID-19 and build back better.
6. To fill the funding gaps for the COVID-19 response in countries affected by crisis and conflict for the remainder of its strategic period up to the end of 2023, **donors should fully fund Education Cannot Wait which requires an additional US\$400 million to its global fund and US\$2 billion in-country to support multi-year resilience programmes.**

Annex: Methodology

Save the Children has extensive experience of working with partners and governments to deliver interventions such as the ones mentioned in this briefing.

Based on our experience, we have developed approximate, estimated costs for delivering these interventions across 59 IDA-eligible countries.⁴⁵ We derived these estimates by examining the cost breakdowns of our programmes to understand the per-child or unit costs for different interventions. As much as possible, we developed the unit costs used below by taking a range of different estimates and creating an average.

However, these unit costs are estimates and should be taken as such. They do not consider cost variability across different countries.

We then identified total costs for each intervention. Each intervention is different in terms of the population it might target. For example, some interventions might be multiplied by the number of teachers, or number of schools. Some might apply to all children who were previously in school, and some might need to be more targeted, for instance, focused on a proportion of the poorest children.

The total figure we developed – approximately US\$50 billion – also does not account for the fact that some children may already be receiving some of these interventions and some governments or schools may have already made such investments.

Therefore, it is likely that the total figure may be an overestimate. However, it serves to demonstrate the degree of investment needed to ensure that we do not see a reversal in the progress made towards SDG4 and that children in the poorest countries are not forgotten in this crisis.

Estimated per child/unit cost of intervention	Multiplied by	Total cost (USD)
WASH facilities in schools Country specific unit costs are informed by Hutton & Varughese (2016) ⁴⁶ , with their model adapted to cost universal basic access to schools by 2021 (infrastructure and maintenance).	Estimation of one basic WASH facility should be available to 30 students.	\$6,181m
Funding for national-led back-to-school campaigns Sierra Leone spent \$275k on community social mobilisation and \$750k on radio/TV. This is equivalent to \$0.59 per student.	All children in-school ⁴⁷	\$131m
Targeted cash transfers Estimated cost: \$120 per child per year (\$10 per month)	All in-school age children living below the national poverty line + admin costs ⁴⁸	\$13,315m
Catch up classes Estimated cost: \$291.60 per child This could include activities such as: - Development and dissemination of student learning packs; - Selection and training of teachers as community volunteers - Establishment and support of community and home-based learning circles.	Proportion of in-school children, which missed out on distance learning offers ⁴⁹	\$28,061m
Teacher professional development Estimated cost: \$378.90 per teacher This could include activities such as: - Teacher professional development cycles (face to face workshop, PLC, coaching, lesson observation) for teachers on literacy and numeracy. - Continuous teacher support/mentoring with follow-	Number of teachers ⁵⁰	\$2,836m

up and feedback, particularly related to the skills to maintain an equitable and inclusive gender environment in the classroom.		
- Collaboration with district authorities, to engage and capacity build teachers in the roll out of distance learning programme in case of a second wave of COVID-19.		
		TOTAL COST: \$50,525m

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