

When the pandemic started in March, we were concerned about the closure of schools and how they were affecting school children. By April we had 1.6 billion children out of the school system, 370 million missing out on school meals. Six months later the situation has not improved. The education sector is in full crisis mode. About 380 million children are still out of school (180 million of them girls). Countries are unevenly opening their schools systems and exacerbating inequalities because the poorest children don't have access to remote learning technologies and are missing out on crucial support like school meals. Today we are sharing three papers that are part of an effort to call on global leaders to act now and invest in school health and nutrition in national and global COVID-19 recovery plans:

- A [Joint Statement by UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO and WFP](#) (launched today): presents the rationale for investing in school health and nutrition and has a box with concrete evidence to support this. The four agencies ask governments and partners to broaden the concept of education, to include the wellbeing of children, not just the provision of education itself.
- A [White Paper](#): signed by several agencies including WFP about the situation in the education system broadly and the priorities moving forward. Priority 1 includes school feeding.
- The [GEM Declaration](#): a document endorsed by Heads of State and Ministers of Education in last week's Global Education Meeting. The declaration (endorsed by your Ministers) includes a mention of school feeding.

From these papers, here are the main messages on what is happening in the education sector:

- 90% of children in the world have had their education interrupted due to COVID-19. This means that vulnerable children are missing out not only on education but also on vital services such as nutrition and health.
- Budgets for education are at risk of being slashed due to the financial impacts of COVID-19 and this could lead to a huge funding gap of almost \$200 billion per year for low- and middle-income countries.
- COVID 19 learning losses could result in approximately USD 10 trillion of earnings lost for this generation of children, which amounts to one-tenth of global GDP. About 0.6 years of learning will be lost due to the pandemic, which roughly equates to \$16,000 of wages lost for each student over the course of their lifetime.
- At least 463 million, or almost a third of students from pre-primary to upper secondary school, have not been learning at all due to either lack of remote learning policies or lack of technology.
- In addition to the 258 million children already out of school, between 16 and 24 million students from pre-primary to secondary are at risk of not returning to education in 2020, with 7.6 million of them being girls. UNHCR predicts that 50 percent of refugee girls in secondary school may not return when schools reopen. Girls living in crisis- and conflict-affected environments are almost 2.5 times more likely to be out of school, and young women are nearly 90 percent more likely to be out of secondary school than their counterparts in countries not affected by conflict. A study in Brazil found that economic shocks, such as parental unemployment, increased the likelihood of girls dropping out of school by up to 60 percent.
- UNESCO, UNICEF, WFP and WHO call on all national governments and development partners to advance an equitable, inclusive and progressive approach to education that includes comprehensive, integrated school health and nutrition programmes strengthening school policies, outreach, curricula, environment and school health services throughout primary and secondary education.

WFP has aligned with the main priorities of the education sector, the first of which is especially important for us (for an exhaustive list, see the White Paper): *Prioritize reopening schools, deliver vital services to children, and treat the workforce as frontline workers*. Related to this, some priority actions for WFP are the following:

- Support countries to reopen schools safely and restore access to meals (both for government and WFP operations).
- Discuss with government and partners how school feeding can be used/adapted (by adding cash transfers or vouchers for example) to reach the ones that will not come back to school without added incentives, especially girls.
- Work with the government and education sector partners (especially UNICEF, World Bank, GPE and ECW) to see if additional funding could be allocated to school feeding.

More information is available on our [school health and nutrition site](#).