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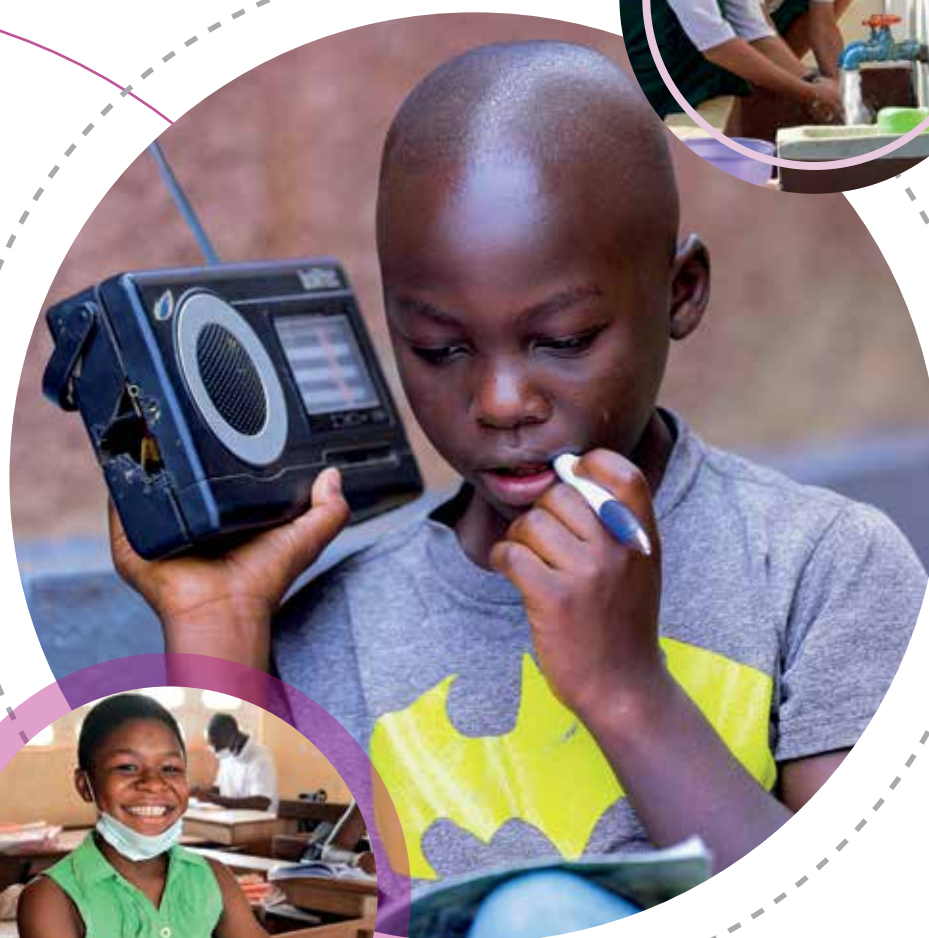
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# COVID-19 and Education

Overview of the response of the Education Network of  
the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation



# THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IS NOT ONLY A HEALTH CRISIS, IT IS ALSO A LEARNING CRISIS



At the peak of the crisis, 194 countries implemented nationwide school closures in an attempt to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus, impacting over 1,6 billion learners, 91% of the world's student population, according to UNESCO. A disruption in schooling has short, medium and long-term risks for the development, well-being, protection, future prospects of children and youth, and lasting consequences for social and economic recovery, people's resilience and sustainable development. The consequences are particularly severe in developing countries, fragile and conflict-affected contexts, which already had scarce educational resources and stretched education systems before the pandemic.

The members of the Education Network of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) have engaged at country, regional and global levels to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on education and the anticipated humanitarian, social and economic after-effects.

## OVERVIEW OF SDC EDUCATION NETWORK ENGAGEMENT IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IMPACTED SCHOOL CLOSURES






### Response at country level

-  Reprogramming of existing education projects and/or development of new projects
-  Launch of a Special COVID-19 Funding Window under the SDC Education Fund "Innovation meets Education" (together with the SDC Network e+i)



### Technical support and peer learning

-  Advisory and support offer to SDC country offices on reprogramming existing projects
-  Capacity building and peer exchange
-  Development of tools and guidance, dedicated webpage on Shareweb with resources from partners



### Global and regional engagement





# SDC RESPONSE AT COUNTRY LEVEL

## Special COVID-19 & Education Funding Window

The SDC Education Fund: *Innovation meets Education* had opened a **special 3-month funding window** to support innovative approaches that enable to continuing or catching-up learning as a result of COVID-related school closure. Innovative basic education related COVID-19 responses funded by the EDU-Fund's COVID-19 window will be implemented in **Bhutan, Colombia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lebanon, and Syria**. The Education Fund is jointly managed between the SDC Focal Points of Education and Employment & Income.

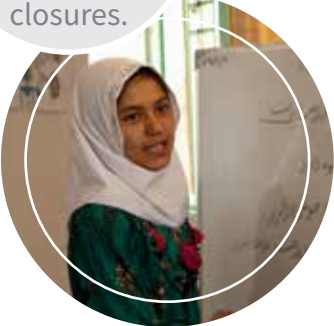
## Snapshot of SDC basic education interventions to respond to the learning crisis as a result of COVID-19 impacted school closures

Many education systems in developing countries already faced numerous issues even before the COVID-19 crisis hit: lack of capacity to offer quality education to an increasing young population, high numbers of children and youth out of school, high school dropout rates, lack of teachers and material, mediocre infrastructure and scarce financial and human education resources, shocks like natural disaster, conflict of forced migration and displacement stretching the resilience of education systems. School closures in the context of COVID-19 is an additional burden for many SDC partner countries, as the impact on the education sector has been unprecedented and has potential long-term negative social and economic consequences.

The majority of interventions are multi-sectoral, in collaboration with health, water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH), protection, nutrition and food security sectors to ensure all needs of children and youth are met.



More than **915 million** learners affected by school closures.



### ASIA

#### FACTS

**800 million** of children and youth affected by school closures, including:

- **92 million** in pre-primary education
- **383 million** in primary education
- **325 million** in secondary education

#### CHALLENGE

*Conflict, natural disasters and displacement of populations affect the provision of education services in some countries. Slow Internet speed and electricity cuts are limiting factors in the use of alternative learning arrangements, particularly in hard-to-reach regions.*

#### Afghanistan

##### Improving access to quality education

With 3.7 million children out-of-school prior to the COVID-19 crisis, the project under the Education Cannot Wait Multi-Year Resilience Programme framework aims at improving access to education through community-based approach, creating inclusive teaching and learning environments, ensuring quality of education and continuity of learning for all, with a particular focus on girls, returnee and displaced children. With 10 more million children affected by COVID-19 related school closures, education activities are adapted to respond to COVID-19.

Internet, computer or cell phone. Through this new project in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, media and private firms, self-learning materials and radio education are developed to reach the children left behind. In parallel, e-learning programmes are strengthened and teachers trained to institutionalize the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in education.

#### Bhutan

##### Uninterrupted access to learning services

17'000 children cannot access the online learning services due to lack of access to

#### Mongolia

##### Multi-sectoral support to families

Families of kindergarten children are provided with hygiene, nutrition and early childhood development kits in order to mitigate the impact of kindergarten closures and improve the nutrition and hygiene status and provide recreational activities to the beneficiaries. 450 children and their families benefit from this multi-sectoral support.

## EASTERN AFRICA

### FACTS

**97 million** of children and youth affected by school closures, including:

- **11 million** in pre-primary education
- **69 million** in primary education
- **17 million** in secondary education

### CHALLENGE

Conflicts, natural disasters, displacement, poverty, poor quality education, lack of access to remote learning, education systems in East Africa were already facing many challenges before the COVID-19 crisis. Ensuring uninterrupted access to education during school closures is critical to avoid children and youth to be left behind.

### Ethiopia

#### Quality E-learning in low tech environment

Distance learning has been challenging for the teachers and students of the Wukrokinder school as they do not have access to mobile teaching and learning. This new project will equip the 19 classrooms with ICT infrastructure, train teachers on using ICT and appropriate pedagogies to guide their students towards self-oriented digital learning. Students will be provided with a shared tablet to ensure uninterrupted access to learning. An internal Wi-Fi will be set up to allow access to quality education curriculum and offline multimedia repositories even when Internet services are disrupted. Gender-specific and health-related curriculum are developed to insure the inclusion of all, in particular girls, and to mitigate health risks.

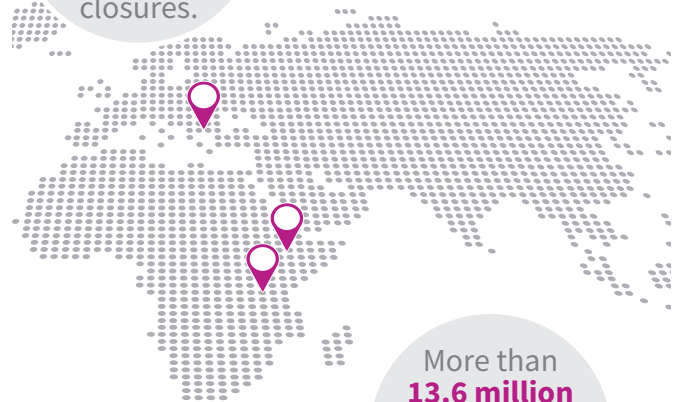
### Kenya

#### Skills for Life

Targeting youth from host and refugee communities in and around Kakuma refugee camp and Kalobeyei settlement who have dropped out of school, the Skills for Life training offers them skills training and income-generating opportunities. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the project upgraded its digital literacy and numeracy platform to ensure uninterrupted learning to the beneficiaries and access to virtual coaching and mentorship. Tablets will be provided to allow at-home study and at a central learning location for those who do not have access to electricity and Internet at home. Transition from face-to-face group-based learning to a blended approach with digital learning will increase self-reliance and the willingness to undertake complementary trainings online.



More than **99 million** learners affected by school closures.



More than **13.6 million** learners affected by school closures.

## EASTERN EUROPE and the CAUCASUS

### FACTS

**10.9 million** of children and youth affected by school closures, including:

- **1.9 million** in pre-primary education
- **3.7 million** in primary education
- **5.3 million** in secondary education

### CHALLENGE

For the children and youth who were vulnerable before this crisis - from underprivileged families, marginalized communities, ethnic minorities, children and youth with disabilities, refugees and migrants, and those digitally left behind - the pandemic seems certain to heighten the risks they already faced, in particular the risk of dropping out of school.

### Western Balkans

#### Inclusion of Roma children in education

The inclusion in education programme supports quality education, from Kindergarten to University, and has resulted in increased enrollment rates and decreased dropouts, closing the gap in education outcomes between Roma and non-Roma learners. Activities are adapted to alleviate the barriers Roma children and youth are experiencing accessing remote learning during COVID-19 restrictions.





More than **115 million** learners affected by school closures.

## SOUTH AMERICA

### FACTS

**94 million** of children and youth affected by school closures, including:

- **13 million** in pre-primary education
- **38 million** in primary education
- **43 million** in secondary education

### CHALLENGE

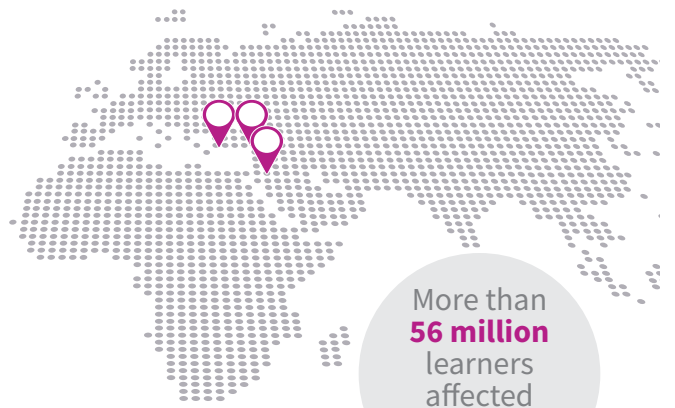
Accessing online education is a challenge in rural areas and for the most vulnerable segment of the populations. The pandemic increases social inequalities, malnutrition and protection risks.

### Colombia

Reaching the students left behind and strengthening community resilience

Since schools closed in March, education has entirely shifted online, leaving behind 67% of the students who do not have access to Internet, computer or smartphone, putting them at risk of dropping out.

The new project *I learn, I take care of myself and I cultivate my future* focuses on the most vulnerable students from a multi-sectoral perspective: securing access to online learning through the provision of tablets, computers and internet access; sharing key messages on preventing COVID-19; and developing vocational skills on family farming by creating community-based orchards and gardens to strengthen food security and social cohesion.



More than **56 million** learners affected by school closures.

## MIDDLE EAST

### FACTS

**47.7 million** of children and youth affected by school closures, including:

- **2.7 million** in pre-primary education
- **26 million** in primary education
- **19 million** in secondary education

### CHALLENGE

The Syrian conflict resulted in massive displacement within Syria and across border in neighboring countries, impeding access to education to millions of Syrian children and youth and putting an additional burden on education systems of neighboring countries. Poor Internet connection and mobile phone coverage, and frequent electricity cuts are barriers to distance learning.

### Jordan

Maintaining essential education services in refugee camps

Learning support activities in Za'atari and Azraq refugee camps help refugee children and youth stay and progress in school, while catch-up classes enable out-of-school children before they integrate the formal education system. With schools closed due to COVID-19 restrictions, access to education services is maintained through a blended approach: tertiary education students take their classes online, while primary and secondary education programmes are broadcasted on the television.

### Lebanon

Remote learning and safe back to school for vulnerable children

Non-formal education and access to health services continue during the current crisis in poor neighborhoods in Southern Beirut. Additional emergency cash assistance is provided to the most marginalized children and their families, many of them Palestinian and Syrian refugees. The continuation of education is ensured through distance self-learning programmes for Palestinian refugees.

Through an integrated multi-sectoral approach, out-of-school Syrian refugee

children will be provided an opportunity to learn in an inclusive and protective environment. Basic literacy and numeracy programmes and remedial support will help children to catch up on lost learning. Investment in WASH facilities and COVID-19 raising awareness will protect children from any health risks, while provision of psychosocial support and collaboration with child protection mechanisms will help children overcoming their trauma and ensure referral to case management when needed. A flexible learning approach will prepare teachers and students to shift between face-to-face and remote learning modalities to ensure continuation of learning in the volatile context in Lebanon.

### Syria

Uninterrupted education in crisis context

Even before COVID-19, millions of children in Syria were out-of-school or at risk of dropping out as the country entered its tenth year of conflict. The suspension of classes mid-March has created further uncertainty for millions more children. With education, protection and economic components, an innovative project seeks to ensure continued access to education through distance learning, teacher training, cash for education interventions, and provision of remote psychosocial support to children, parents and teachers.



More than **88 million** learners affected by school closures.

## WEST AFRICA

### FACTS

**85 million** of children and youth affected by school closures, including:

- **6 million** in pre-primary education
- **56 million** in primary education
- **23 million** in secondary education

### CHALLENGE

Many West African countries were facing a learning crisis and considerable geographical and social disparities in the provision and quality of education even before the COVID-19 crisis. Conflicts, insecurity and displacement further hinder access to education.

Ensuring continuity of teaching during and after the COVID-19 is a priority to avoid further deterioration of education outcomes for children and youth.



### Benin

#### Inclusion of health and WASH interventions in education

Existing education programmes, such as alternative education for out-of-school children and youth, support to quality education, and decentralized and community-based education, have included health and WASH activities in their response: development and distribution of distance learning materials, radio education programmes, teacher training in remote learning, development and dissemination of awareness-raising materials on preventive measures, distribution of hygiene kits to schools and literacy centers, set up of washing hands station.

### Burkina Faso

#### Keeping schools safe from violence and COVID-19

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, access to education was difficult due to insecurity. Terrorist attacks in the border regions of Mali and Niger forced hundreds of schools to close. Existing capacity building for out-of-

school youth programmes and safe and resilient schools programme will adapt its activities to develop and disseminate awareness-raising materials on COVID-19 preventive measures, train teachers in distance learning and provide additional school materials (tables and benches) to implement social distancing measures.

### Chad

#### Promoting quality education through teacher training and ICT

Local education contingency plans are developed in alignment with the national education response plan. The existing programme promoting quality education adapts its teaching materials for distance learning and trains teachers, facilitators of literacy and non-formal education centres on distance learning. Activities raising awareness on COVID-19 hygiene and health prevention measures are also included in teacher training. Tablets and cell phones will be distributed to teachers to facilitate remote teacher training and foster inclusion of ICT as a teaching method.

### Mali

#### Coordinating the education response

Reprogramming of existing education projects allows to contribute to the Ministry of Education and Education Cluster response plan and turn existing teaching materials into television and radio education programmes, raise awareness with teachers and parents on COVID-19 preventive measures and and prepare for the safe reopening of schools.

### Niger

#### Catch-up classes for youth

Due to the fragility of the education system, students had limited access to distance learning options during school closures. Now that schools have reopened, the existing basic education and vocational training programme for youth will adapt and focus on catch-up classes, inclusion of TIC and multi-sectoral interventions with protection.



## TECHNICAL SUPPORT AND PEER LEARNING

### Remote support to SDC country offices

The SDC Education unit provided advisory support to SDC staff at country level in reprogramming, developing new projects and submitting proposals to the special COVID-19 Education Fund Window. In addition, the SDC partner [Swiss Network for Educational Innovation](#) (SNBI) offers support on [how to design distance learning solutions during the COVID-19 restrictions](#) to country staff upon request.

### Capacity building and peer exchange

The SDC Education Network organized a webinar series on COVID-19 & Education, in English and in French. The [first webinar](#) highlighted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education, and provided guidance on programming during such exceptional times. The [second webinar](#) looked at the key role of education in cross-sectoral responses, providing guidance on cross-sectoral programming during school closures and for planning the safe reopening of schools. Both webinars encouraged peer

exchange and learning from the network members' experience. In addition, the SDC partner Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) organized 12 webinars to provide technical guidance to support COVID-19 education response.

### Provision of tools and guidance

Plethora of tools and guidance were developed by education stakeholders to respond to the worldwide school closures caused by the COVID-19. The SDC Education Network set up a [dedicated COVID-19 & Education webpage](#) to make easily accessible the most relevant collection of resources and tools, news, and events.

In addition, the SDC Education unit has developed a series of short and practical tools and guidance to support the network members' education response:

- [COVID-19 & Education Response Guidelines](#) and accompanying [FAQs](#) with links to curated thematic resources
- [Importance of Investing on Basic Education during COVID-19](#)



## GLOBAL AND REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT

The SDC Education unit supports global, regional initiatives and multilateral partners in line with its strategic priorities and strengthens strategic partnerships, alliances and coalition building with like-minded stakeholders. SDC's global partners have all joined forces to face the COVID-19 learning crisis:

### Global Partnership for Education

GPE unlocked [US\\$ 500 million](#) to help 67 developing countries to mitigate both the immediate and long-term effects of COVID-19 on education systems and support distance learning programmes that prioritize the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Switzerland has increased its [2020 contribution](#) by CHF 6.5 million as a top-up of its regular support to GPE in order to help make education systems more resilient and performing.

### Education Cannot Wait

ECW granted a total of [US\\$ 24.5 million to 27 conflict and humanitarian crisis affected countries](#) through its first emergency response window. The funding supports refugee, internally displaced and other humanitarian crisis affected children and youth to accessing an education, as with COVID-19 they are now double disadvantaged. They are provided hybrid learning platform, the opportunity to sit for exams, health and water/sanitation life-saving risk-mitigation measures. Switzerland provided a top-up of CHF 2.6 million to its regular CHF 6 million 2019 contribution, dedicated to the COVID-19 First Emergency Response Appeal addressing the education needs of refugees.

### Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies - #EiEGenevaHub

To promote a major education fallback due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent social, economic and protection consequences, Switzerland has signed a [Call for action to address the threat by the COVID-19 pandemic to the education of those left furthest behind](#) such as vulnerable children and youth impacted by armed conflicts, forced displacement, and protracted crises – an initiative of the co-signatories of the Global Refugee Forum pledge to make Geneva a Global Hub for Education in Emergencies.

### Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies

INEE has created a [go-to webpage](#) where members can access a curated collection of resources, technical note, key advocacy messages, webinar series and collection of blogs to provide practical advice and technical guidance to support EiE practitioners in their response.

### UNESCO International Institute of Education Planning

Educational planning and management are instrumental in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. [UNESCO-IIEP](#) is contributing to [UNESCO Global Education Coalition](#) through numerous joint activities and has developed a [series of specific initiatives on COVID-19](#): online learning forums for educational planners, training, development of guidelines and resources, and technical support to countries.

### Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education

ASPBAE members are reprogramming their activities to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The network is strategizing [advocacy efforts](#) to prioritize adult learning, education and action plans.

### Safe to Learn

Due to COVID-19 related school closures, the Safe to Learn initiative from the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children has focused its interventions at home where children are learning but at higher risks of violence, and developed recommendations [Safe to Learn during COVID-19](#) additional [relevant resources](#) to help government prevent and respond to violence against children in different learning environments during the pandemic.

Read more about Switzerland based SDC education partners' COVID-19 response by visiting their respective websites: [RECI](#) and [NORRAG](#).



**Impressum**

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