ENCOURAGING RE-ENROLLMENT

APRIL 2021

Following the widespread school shutdowns, many countries will find it challenging to ensure that all students return to school. Vulnerable populations, such as girls and refugees, will likely take even more effort to re-enroll. Countries can encourage re-enrollment through offering financial and practical assistance to students, carefully monitoring the re-enrollment process, including women and girls in decision-making, re-evaluating policies that may result in inequity, and individually supporting the most at-risk students.

Reasons Countries Should Prioritize Re-Enrollment

Keeping vulnerable students enrolled in school is a challenge under ordinary circumstances, but the health and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have created additional complications to enrolling and retaining students. During lockdowns, many students have become disconnected from school due to school closures, financial difficulties, a lack of access to technology, sickness, or other challenging circumstances. Without a proactive and inclusive plan, temporary disconnection may turn into permanent dropout. Extra effort will be needed to re-enroll most students under these circumstances, and special attention needs to be paid to already vulnerable groups, such as girls, refugees, and students with special educational needs.

How Countries Can Respond

Fee Waivers and Scholarships

In countries where families are still expected to pay fees, awarding enrollment fee waivers or scholarships may encourage students to return to school. School fees can create a barrier to education for students from low-income backgrounds (Global Partnership for Education [GPE] 2020). Waiving or subsidizing fees is not unique to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Sierra Leone waived secondary school enrollment and examination fees for two years following an Ebola-related school shutdown (World Bank 2015). In 2004, Colombia implemented a program that reduced enrollment fees for low-income families, leading to a significant increase in enrollment (Barrera-Osorio, Linden, and Urquiola 2007). Eliminating fees will reduce barriers to school re-entry.

Direct Cash Transfers

Some students may not be able to overcome the financial barriers to education without the additional assistance of direct cash transfers, so the provision of these transfers to vulnerable students may assist them with re-enrollment. Brazil's Bolsa Familia program has been providing cash transfers to vulnerable students for years, which has led to increased enrollment (Glewwe and Kassouf 2012). In response to COVID-19, Ghana's LEAP program is increasing their cash transfers to low-income households, particularly for girls (Jenkins and Winthrop 2020). In addition, UNICEF is currently partnering with Airtel Africa to provide cash transfers to support both in-person re-enrollment and access to distance learning in Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo, Gabon, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia (UNESCO 2020). Families of children with disabilities may also need additional financial assistance for returning to school (Inclusive Education Initiative [IEI] 2020).

School Meals

School meals both provide an incentive and reduce indirect costs for school attendance. After the Ebola shutdowns, school meals were key to Sierra Leone's plan to re-enroll its most vulnerable students (World Bank 2015). A pre-pandemic intervention in rural India also demonstrated that providing a daily hot meal was more effective in improving attendance than a monthly distribution of food to students' families, particularly for girls (Afridi 2011). Although it is more difficult to implement school meal programs during distance learning periods, countries can consider alternatives such as meal collection services (Fry and Lei 2020). The risk of distributing school meals may be an opportunity for viral transmission if not executed well, however. Possible strategies for mitigating these risks include serving meals outdoors and keeping students distanced during meals.

School Supplies

Other indirect costs of school enrollment, such as textbooks, uniforms, and school supplies, may also inhibit vulnerable students' re-enrollment. After the Ebola epidemic, Sierra Leone prioritized providing funding for textbooks in their re-enrollment plans (UNESCO 2020). In Kenya, a pre-pandemic intervention through which vulnerable children were given free uniforms demonstrated a noticeable impact on their continued enrollment (Kremer, Evans, and Ngatia 2004). For female students, lack of access to sanitary products is another potential barrier that could be exacerbated by pandemic-related financial difficulties (GPE 2020; Jain 2020).
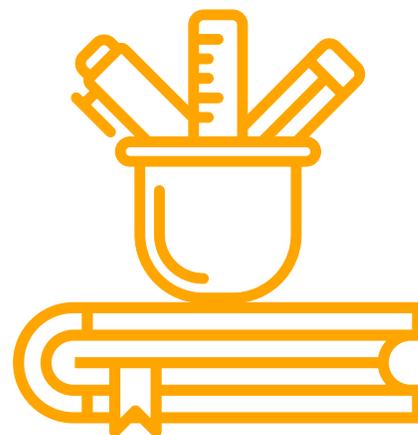
Girls' Education

Enforcement of policies that protect girls' education and promote girls' health and safety at school should be strengthened. For example, strong policies aimed at preventing gender-based violence at school are needed, including separate sanitation facilities for girls and boys (UNESCO 2020). Following pandemic-related shutdowns, about a million girls in Sub-Saharan Africa are estimated to be prevented from returning to school due to teenage pregnancy (World Vision 2020). Policies that prohibit pregnant girls or young mothers from returning to school should be eliminated (Fry and Lei 2020). During Ebola-related shutdowns, a 25-percent increase in teenage pregnancy was observed in some parts of Sierra Leone (Elston et al. 2016). Zambia adopted a thorough re-entry policy for pregnant girls in the early 2000s, and in March 2020 Sierra Leone overturned a policy that prohibited pregnant girls from continuing to attend school (UNESCO 2020). At the curricular level, access to gender-equitable sex education can also help reduce the risk of female students' dropping out due to teenage pregnancy (GPE 2020; Fry and Lei 2020). In addition, women and girls should be consulted when creating school reopening plans to ensure that their concerns have been considered (UNESCO 2020).
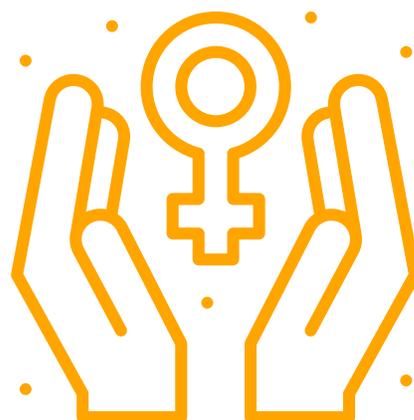
Enrollment Processes

Create and implement a flexible enrollment process, especially for vulnerable groups. Countries need to ensure that the enrollment process is easy to navigate and that procedural barriers to re-enrollment are low. In the Philippines, several adjustments have been made to make registration more flexible during this time. First, students may continue to enroll for a period after the beginning of the school year. Second, deadlines for providing required documentation, such as birth certificates, have been extended until the end of the first semester. Finally, enrollment forms are available both physically and digitally, with physical forms at public kiosks (UNESCO 2020). Some school systems prohibit out-of-school children from re-enrolling, which needs to be corrected during this time when children have disconnected from school at alarming rates (Human Rights Watch 2020). Policies that create barriers for refugees also need to be reconsidered, such as awarding financial assistance based on residential status (Kollender and Nimer 2020).

Data Collection

Improve enrollment data collection and track enrollment of vulnerable groups separately. Monitoring enrollment and attendance carefully is important for understanding the success or failure of re-enrollment efforts (UNESCO 2020). Collecting overall enrollment numbers is not enough, however. Data need to be disaggregated for vulnerable groups—particularly for girls, refugees, and students with special educational needs—to determine whether enrollment levels for vulnerable groups have returned to pre-crisis levels (Fry and Lei 2020; Human Rights Watch 2020; IEI 2020; Jain 2020).
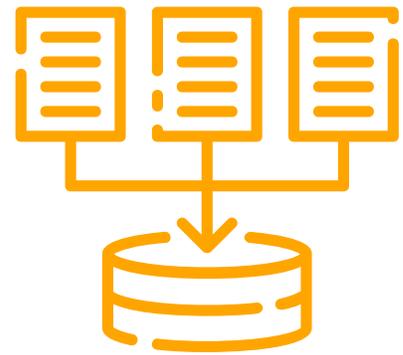
At-Risk Students

Identify and support specific at-risk students. Structural changes such as those listed above are important, but so is supporting individual students. One possible strategy is to schedule one-on-one check-ins with parents and students. Costa Rica used this method following heavy flooding in 2015. The Ministry of Education asked school directors to check in with every family individually with the goal of ensuring re-enrollment for every child (UNESCO 2020). Alternatively, more regular check-ins from a child's teacher may also be effective. When a student initiates the process of dropping out, it is important to follow up directly with them (Jain 2020). A peer-to-peer mentoring system may also be helpful in keeping students engaged in school (UNESCO 2020).

Useful Resources

- COVID-19 Response—Re-enrolment

- Girls' Education and COVID-19: What Past Shocks Can Teach Us about Mitigating the Impact of Pandemics

- Supporting Continued Access to Education during COVID-19: Emerging Promising Practices

WORLD BANK GROUP

References

Afridi, Farazana. (2011). "The Impact of School Meals on School Participation: Evidence from Rural India." Journal of Development Studies 47, no. 11 (July 2011): 1636–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2010.514330.

Barrera-Osorio, Felipe, Leigh Linden, and Miguel Urquiola. (2007). "The Effects of User Fee Reductions on Enrollment: Evidence from a Quasi-Experiment," last modified August 14, 2013. enGender Impact: The World Bank's Gender Impact Evaluation Database.

Elston, J. W. T., A. J. Moosa, F. Moses, G. Walker, N. Dotta, R. J. Waldman, and J. Wright. 2016. "Impact of the Ebola Outbreak on Health Systems and Population Health in Sierra Leone." Journal of Public Health 38, no. 4 (December 2016): 673–78. https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdv158.

Fry, Lucia, and Philippa Lei. 2020. Girls' Education and COVID-19: What Past Shocks Can Teach Us about Mitigating the Impact of Pandemics. Malala Fund. https://malala.org/newsroom/archive/malala-fund-releases-report-girls-education-covid-19.

Glewwe, Paul, and Ana Lucia Kassouf. 2012. "The Impact of the Bolsa Escola/Familia Conditional Cash Transfer Program on Enrollment, Grade Promotion and Dropout Rates in Brazil." Journal of Development Economics 97, no. 2 (March 2012): 505–17. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2011.05.008.

Global Partnership for Education. 2020. "Joint Solidarity Letter to the African Union: The Impact of COVID-19 on Girls' Education and Child Marriage." April 30, 2020. https://www.globalpartnership.org/news/joint-solidarity-letter-african-union-impact-covid-19-girls-education-and-child-marriage.

Human Rights Watch. 2020. "I Want to Continue to Study": Barriers to Secondary Education for Syrian Refugee Children in Jordan. https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/06/26/i-want-continue-study/barriers-secondary-education-syrian-refugee-children-jordan.

Inclusive Education Initiative. 2020. Pivoting to Inclusion: Leveraging Lessons from the COVID-19 Crisis for Learners with Disabilities. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank. https://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/147471595907235497/IEI-Issues-Paper-Disability-Inclusive-Education-FINAL-ACCESSIBLE.pdf.

Jain, Shruti. 2020. "Gender dimensions of school closures in India during COVID19: Lessons from Ebola." Observer Research Foundation. Last modified May 23, 2020. https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/gender-dimensions-of-school-closures-in-india-during-covid19-lessons-from-ebola-66643.

Jenkins, Robert, and Rebecca Winthrop. 2020. "5 Actions to Help Bring the Most Marginalized Girls back to School after COVID-19." Brookings Institution. Last modified May 15, 2020. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2020/05/15/5-actions-to-help-bring-the-most-marginalized-girls-back-to-school-after-covid-19.

Kollender, Ellen, and Maissam Nimer. 2020. Long-Term Exclusionary Effects of COVID-19 for Refugee Children in the German and Turkish Education Systems: A Comparative Perspective. IPC-Mercator Policy Brief. Istanbul Policy Center. https://www.tepsa.eu/long-term-exclusionary-effects-of-covid-19-for-refugee-children-in-the-german-and-turkish-education-systems-a-comparative-perspective-ellen-kollender-and-maissam-nimer-ipc-turkey.

Kremer, Michael, David Evans, and Mūthoni Ngatia. 2009. The Impact of Distributing School Uniforms on Children's Education in Kenya. Poverty Action Lab. https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/impact-distributing-school-uniforms-childrens-education-kenya.

UNESCO. 2020. COVID-19 Response—Re-enrolment. UNESCO and McKinsey and Company. https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unesco-covid-19-response-toolkit-re-enrolment.pdf.

World Bank. 2015. "Back to School After the Ebola Outbreak." May 1, 2015. https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2015/05/01/back-to-school-after-ebola-outbreak.

World Vision. 2020. COVID-19 Aftershocks: Access Denied. https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/coronavirus-health-crisis/covid-19-aftershocks-access-denied.