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Safe Back to School: Re-opening after COVID-19

COVID-19 School Reopening

The global COVID-19 pandemic has led to unprecedented levels of disruption to education, impacting over 90% of the world's student population: 1.54 billion children and young people, including 743 million girls. School closures and the wider socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on communities disrupted support systems for children and young people and left them vulnerable to both protection risks.

As governments prepare to reopen schools and other learning sites, ministries and other education providers, must minimise the risk of further transmission of COVID-19, while at the same time address learning inequalities and protection concerns exacerbated by the crisis. An integrated and coordinated approach, looking at WASH, health and education needs, is essential while preparing for school reopening.

National standards and regulations for reopening, whether on required WASH facilities, personal protective equipment, physical distancing or school health measures, might have a considerable impact on learning if not properly resourced. Without those resources, education providers may be faced with a hard choice:

1. Enrolling all children and therefore failing to abide by national standards and regulations, which may result in **a resurgence in the number of COVID-19 infections** and a new round of school closures;
2. Abiding by national standards and regulations, which will impact their ability to re-enrol all children into educational programmes and therefore result in **millions of children and young people dropping out of school**.

Cost implications for school re-opening

We would like to urge the donor community to:

1. Provide education providers sufficient **flexibility to re-programme** their activities and revise budgets in order to be able to abide by standards and regulations set by national governments and ensure appropriate learning takes place;
2. Provide the education sector as a whole with sufficient **additional resources**, whether financial or in-kind, to ensure schools and other learning spaces are able to reopen and remain open in a safe and protected way in both the short-term and long-term.

Depending on the context and standards and regulations set by national authorities, required programme components that might have significant cost implications could include amongst others:
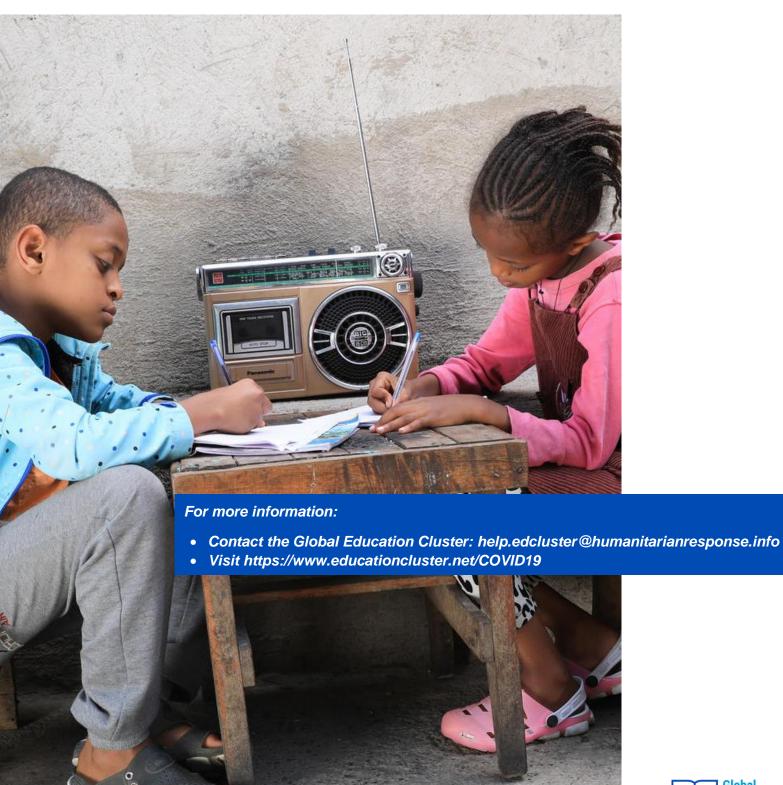
- **WASH:** in order to reopen schools safely, education providers might need to consider building additional toilets and handwashing stations. Schools might need to procure personal protective equipment or additional cleaning materials. Development and dissemination of communication on risks and messages on community engagement;
- **Physical distancing:** physical distancing might result in smaller classroom sizes, in contexts where classrooms are already overcrowded. Renting or constructing additional classrooms and recruiting additional (community) teachers might be needed to cater for the return of all children and young people.
- **Well-being:** both the well-being of children and young people as well as the well-being of parents, teachers and educational personnel is at risk, coming from a period of uncertainty and stress in combination with demands to comply with new regulations in an often already overstretched education system. Sufficient resources for psycho-social support and socio-emotional learning are essential;

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- **Learning:** school closures might have resulted in additional learning gaps for already marginalized children and young people. Additional support, such as remedial teaching, summer camps and catch-up programmes should be considered as well as remote-teaching and blended learning modalities.

Recovery and contingency planning

As an education community we will assess what went well and what could have gone better during school closures and document lessons learned, for example on remote-teaching modalities, MHPSS and parent support and on effective sector coordination. At the same time, we will start a process of contingency planning to prepare for future school closures, focusing on physical safety, well-being and continuity of learning, keeping in mind that remote teaching and learning cannot fully replace face-to-face modalities.

For more information:

- *Contact the Global Education Cluster: help.edcluster@humanitarianresponse.info*
- *Visit https://www.educationcluster.net/COVID19*

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