



# **SAFE BACK TO SCHOOL**

**Guide for supporting  
inclusive and equitable  
learning for the most  
marginalised children**



**Save the Children**

# Purpose of this guide

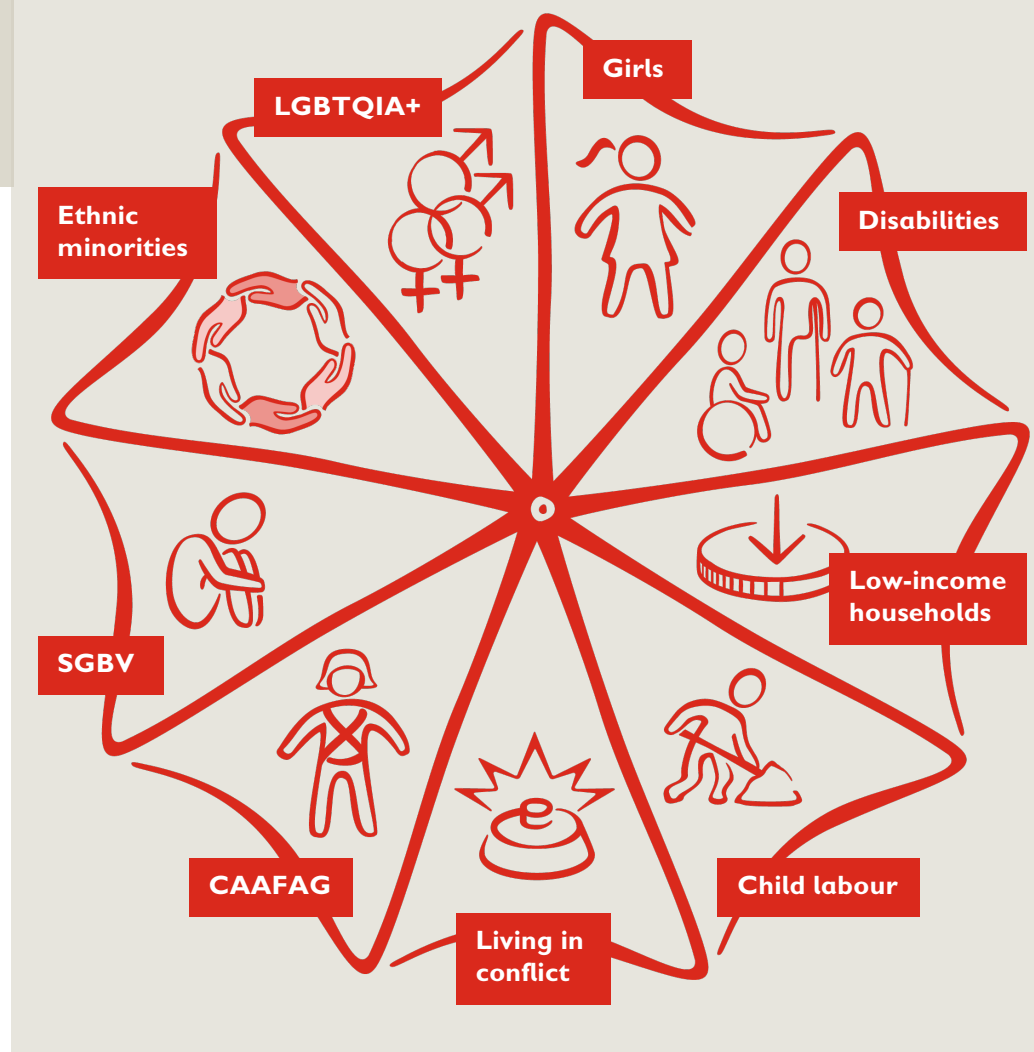
Every child has a right to education. However, school closures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated the barriers to learning that millions of children face. Children and adolescents in every country, including those affected by displacement and conflict, are being prevented from fulfilling their right to quality, safe and inclusive education.<sup>1</sup>

Save the Children global research has confirmed that the COVID-19 pandemic has deepened existing inequalities, particularly in terms of access to teacher follow-up and access to learning resources.<sup>2</sup> The longer children are out of school, the more likely it is that they will never return. The guide identifies some of the children who are the most vulnerable including: girls; children with disabilities; children from low-income households; child labour; children living in conflict; children associated with armed forces or armed groups; children who have experienced violence; ethnic minority children and children who identify as LGBTQ+.

## An opportunity to build back better

Save the Children is dedicated to supporting inclusive and equitable access to learning for every child, which includes support for individual needs and to overcome any educational barriers.

This guide will support country office staff to ensure that all children have access to safe learning opportunities that meet their individual needs. It outlines the barriers to learning that the most marginalised and excluded groups of children face and recommends interventions to support their inclusion in remote learning and their return to school. The guide also recommends key resources to use when designing interventions for inclusive and equitable learning.<sup>3</sup>



The provision of remote learning during school closures, and the subsequent re-opening of schools, provides an opportunity to 'build back better' and ensure that children who did not previously have access to education can be supported to get back to learning and in many cases, to return to school.



# What do we mean by inclusive and equitable access to learning?

The promotion of inclusive and equitable learning is based on three key components: enabling a child's **physical presence in a learning environment**, their **learning** and their **participation**.<sup>4</sup>

Save the Children defines inclusive learning as **education that enables all children to learn together with support for their individual needs**.<sup>5</sup> Every child should be welcomed and supported to enter the classroom (physical inclusion), to engage in social interactions while they are there (social inclusion), to learn (inclusive teaching methods), and to have their inclusion guaranteed (inclusive policy).

Equitable learning aims to ensure that **each child receives the support they need to thrive**. Unlike equality, which dictates that everyone receives the same support, equity is based on the principle that different learners will need different types and levels of support to achieve targeted learning outcomes.



# How to use this guide

Sacha Myers / Save the Children



This guide can be used at different stages of the project cycle, whether you are designing, monitoring, or evaluating how well an intervention has been adapted to overcome the barriers to learning faced by marginalised groups of children.

It is suitable for humanitarian and development contexts and can be used by formal and informal learning facilities for children and adolescents of all ages. Country programmes will need to consider their own context, facility and age ranges, to determine which of the recommended interventions to use.

## FURTHER ADVICE ON THE RESOURCES

Whilst we have tried to make this tool as accessible as possible, there are a number of resources that are internal and available only to SC staff. Get in touch with the Safe Back to School team at [SB2S@savethechildren.org](mailto:SB2S@savethechildren.org) if you have any questions and feedback about this guide or the resources included in it, or need more support.

**A very special thank you to the many Advisors across themes, cross-cutting areas, contexts and areas (advocacy). This guidance document would not have been developed without your significant efforts.**

## PLEASE KEEP IN MIND

1. An individual child may fit into more than one category (for example, a girl with a disability, or a child from a minority ethnic group who identifies as LGBTQIA+) and may experience compounding discrimination as a result.
2. Local legal frameworks may impact the interventions you choose. For example, in some contexts, migrant and displaced children may not be permitted to access learning in their host community, despite it being their fundamental right.
3. Every child has the right to participate in decisions that affect their life, including learning, so you should consult with children on their preferences for participation and access.
4. Existing research carried out by Save the Children or by other organisations, may be useful to identify the barriers to learning that marginalised groups of children face in your context, for example through a Child Rights and Situation Analysis. Localised barriers and solutions should remain key considerations when planning interventions.
5. The *Safe Back to School Guide of Topics to Include in Your Situational Analysis* is another important tool to use when collecting data to assess the barriers to learning for different groups of children and will provide some initial information on which to base your targeted interventions.



## All children



You should take into account the following common, high-level considerations for all children, in addition to the specific considerations that are listed below for groups of marginalised and excluded children.

### What support do they need to access learning when their school is closed?

- Equitable access to devices, connectivity and materials.
- Safeguarding of children and their data on platforms.
- Individual learning needs assessments, and teaching and learning materials at different levels to meet those needs.
- Educational materials that are adapted to the local language and in a format that can be used locally.
- Ability to access additional services and materials if needed.
- Modification of the learning materials and the way in which they are delivered over time, to meet evolving needs.
- Peer support groups for learning facilitators and learners.

### What support do they need to return to school<sup>6</sup> safely?


- Safe and secure learning facility, with assessment and modification for hygiene services and social distancing.
- Provision of COVID-19 personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Social as well as cognitive skill assessment and reintegration support.
- Teachers trained on inclusion, special needs identification and referral protocol.
- Teachers trained on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) including psychological first aid (PFA).
- Reconnection to child protection and MHPSS services with a particular emphasis on support for parents to support their children.
- Identification and follow-up of children who do not return to school.
- Connection between the parent/guardian and the school.
- School policies and mechanisms established, reinstated and/or reinforced to:
  - Protect children's right to be heard, particularly in relation to their learning, safety and wellbeing.
  - Ensure children's participation in the governance of the school, to enable a safe learning environment.







School closures may have a disproportionately harmful impact on girls, particularly the most marginalised and deprived. The gap between the numbers of girls and boys out of school is likely to increase due to COVID-19, as girls are less likely to return to school following extended school closures.

Without access to safe schools and learning spaces, girls are frequently tasked with care responsibilities and are at increased risk of child and forced marriage, early pregnancy, domestic and sexual violence. These long-term consequences may be exacerbated by existing gender discrimination and harmful social norms.<sup>7</sup>

Girls	What support do they need to access learning when their school is closed?	What support do they need to return to school safely?
<p><b>All girls</b></p>  <p>Remember to take into account the high-level considerations for 'all children' too</p>	<p><b>Digital learning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure girls are equipped with digital skills. Given the gender digital divide for adolescent girls, messaging for girls must also be made available through non-digital channels and take into consideration language, literacy, ability and limited movement.</li> <li>● Increase girls' access to online learning (through free internet, zero-rate traffic to educational content or other measures) and support girls' early, safe and sustained exposure to digital technologies, to build girls' skills, self-efficacy, and interest in technology.</li> <li>● Introduce gender-specific safeguarding measures against online violence and abuse, including equipping girls with the knowledge and skills they need to stay safe online.</li> <li>● Advocate with parents that they give girls the same access to computers as boys, and that they take appropriate measures to safeguard girls and boys online.</li> </ul> <p><b>Learning via TV/radio</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Radio and TV may be appropriate distance learning practices in contexts where digital solutions are less accessible. Low-tech and gender-responsive approaches should be used.</li> <li>● Develop radio messaging specifically for adolescent girls and radio programming, such as short stories, that can be both a learning and recreational outlet.</li> <li>● Ensure programme scheduling and learning structures are flexible and allow self-paced learning, so as not to deter girls who often disproportionately shoulder the burden of care and domestic chores.</li> <li>● Radio and TV broadcasts may be accompanied by gender-responsive printed materials that avoid stereotyping and stigma.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Assess the impact of COVID-19 on girls' protection risks (such as violence; child, early and forced marriage (CEFM); early and unintended pregnancy; child labour, including unpaid caregiving and domestic chores) and develop mitigating measures to respond to girls' needs and transition them back to school.</li> <li>● Support financial costs (school fees, examination fees, and other indirect costs) that act as barriers to learning and prevent girls from returning to school, as well as for girls at risk of dropping out.</li> <li>● Promote social protection mechanisms, such as cash transfers and nutritional aid to keep girls in school and to motivate families to prioritise their daughters' education.</li> <li>● Promote culturally relevant back to school campaigns, with the involvement of community, traditional and religious leaders, men and boys, caregivers and other champions for gender equality, that challenge the pervasive gender norms that reduce the likelihood of girls' return to school.</li> <li>● Include remedial measures for girls, considering accessibility measures for girls with disabilities and those in challenging contexts, and paying attention to the transitions between levels of education and from school to training or employment.</li> <li>● Ensure protocol and referral systems are in place to respond to each case of regular or extended absenteeism or non-return to school, with associated measures in coordination with child protection and health systems.</li> <li>● Ensure whole school approaches are in place to prevent and protect from gender-based violence (GBV), including minimum standards and a monitoring framework.<sup>8</sup></li> <li>● Promote comprehensive sexual education and life skills, especially among girls, for example through girls-only clubs, to improve their skills for protection from GBV, negotiation and empowerment.</li> </ul>



Girls (continued)	What support do they need to access learning when their school is closed?	What support do they need to return to school safely?
<p><b>All girls</b></p>  Remember to take into account the high-level considerations for 'all children' too	<p><b>Printed materials</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure learning materials are free from gender bias, stereotypes and stigma, for example in their representation of girls with disabilities, from ethnic minority groups, and from other backgrounds and contexts.</li> <li>● Distribute recreational kits that include items that facilitate activities for adolescent girls, ensuring accessibility and language appropriateness.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Promote spaces that enable girls to speak out and share their experiences and receive support for their psychosocial health, ensuring they are safe for girls and engage girls in the development of peer-to-peer support mechanisms and awareness-raising activities.</li> <li>● Maintain menstrual hygiene management (MHM) education, services, materials and adapted facilities.</li> <li>● Ensure there are safe, female-friendly, accessible and age-responsive, hygienic single-sex water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities in schools.</li> <li>● Support recruitment of women teachers and women in school management and leadership positions, recognising their positive impact on girls' continuity of learning and return to school.</li> <li>● Provide on-the-job training for teachers on gender transformative approaches, ensuring accessibility and language appropriateness.</li> <li>● Train education and other support workers to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills needed to recognise, prevent the risk of, and respond to GBV, through safe referral practices and protection services, and the skills to provide PFA.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Pregnant girls or girls with children</b></p>  Remember to take into account the high-level considerations for 'all children' too	<p>Same considerations as for all girls</p>	<p>In addition to the considerations for all girls:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Remove discriminatory school policies to allow and encourage pregnant and married girls to attend school.</li> <li>● Provide safe spaces and care for their children so they can fully attend classes.</li> <li>● Provide special accommodations, including flexible learning, particularly for pregnant girls and young mothers, and other measures to build knowledge and skills.</li> </ul>

## Girls (continued)

### Married girls or girls who are at risk of early or forced marriage



Remember to take into account the high-level considerations for 'all children' too

## What support do they need to access learning when their school is closed?

In addition to the considerations for all girls:

### Digital learning

- Use mobile applications to communicate relevant messages to help girls and women report GBV and child marriage, and to identify girls and women at risk.

## What support do they need to return to school safely?

- In addition to the considerations for all girls, and for pregnant girls or girls with children:
- Develop specific education and empowerment programmes for married girls who are not allowed to come back to school.
- Lead parent workshops to ensure they have the most up-to-date information about skills building and economic opportunities for girls in the community.
- Develop community campaigns and specific awareness-raising, behaviour change sessions for girls' husbands (and where relevant, male carers) to encourage married girls' participation in school or education programmes.

### TOP RESOURCES

[Social protection & child protection: working together to protect children from the impact of COVID-19 and beyond](#)

[A whole school approach to prevent school-related gender-based violence](#)

[Technical note on COVID-19 and harmful practices](#)

[Keeping Girls in School: A "Cash Plus" school bursary programme for narrowing the gender gap in school enrollment in Malawi](#)





## Children with disabilities

physical neurological, psychosocial, intellectual or sensory<sup>9</sup>



Globally, children and adults with disabilities are amongst the most marginalised and socio-economically deprived groups. Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many children with disabilities were facing significant barriers to attending quality education, as schools and teachers were not always able to provide the accommodations or adaptations they need.

Disabilities can increase during conflict and other humanitarian crises due to injuries and lack of access to supports such as eye glasses, medicines or social services. In some contexts (including but not limited to conflict-affected areas), teachers may not have received training on inclusion and records may be lost (or may not exist) about individual students' learning needs.

During periods of school closure, distance learning typically offers fewer opportunities to engage with course materials, which is challenging for all children, but especially for those with disabilities who may not be able to engage as effectively in narrower education pathways.

Likewise, students who do receive services and accommodations in school (such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, or individual attention and targeted teaching methods) may find themselves cut off from the support they need in order to thrive. School closures also lead to disruption to daily routines, which can be particularly difficult for children who need reliable routines and may cause stress for families of children with disabilities, who require additional support.<sup>10</sup> Parents may feel ill-equipped to support their child with disabilities to learn at home, so their education during the pandemic and their return to school afterwards may be deprioritised by their family.

Back to school campaigns are often designed with a 'typical' student in mind and may exclude children with disabilities from messages and planning. At the same time, the massive disruption to education systems presents a critical opportunity to build back better for children with disabilities, and support schools to meet their educational needs better than they have in the past.

### Children with disabilities

### What support do they need to access learning when their school is closed?

### What support do they need to return to school safely?

#### Mild disability



Remember to take into account the high-level considerations for 'all children' too


#### Digital learning

- Teacher should check in with the student individually to ensure they are following the learning programme.
- Establish COVID-safe peer learning groups where children can motivate and support each other.
- Ensure that all curricular material is shared in more than one format.
- Establish links or pathways between learner circles so that each child's needs can be assessed and met comprehensively.


#### Learning via TV/radio

- Teacher should check in with the student individually to ensure they are following the learning programme.
- Establish COVID-safe peer learning groups where children can motivate and support each other.
- Provide supplemental materials (videos, recordings, transcripts, learning packs) to ensure that all curricular material is shared in more than one format.

- Work with organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) and local leaders to identify children with disabilities in their communities, in order to provide them with individualised support.
- Ensure teachers are trained in principles of inclusive education, inclusive teaching methods, and common accommodations for students with disabilities.
- Ensure that information about reopening of schools is shared through multiple media and pathways, and clearly specifies that children with disabilities are encouraged to enrol, and will be supported to attend, participate and learn.
- Coordinate with child protection colleagues to ensure the quick identification and referral of children with disabilities who have not returned to school.

Children with disabilities (continued)	What support do they need to access learning when their school is closed?	What support do they need to return to school safely?
<b>Mild disability (continued)</b>	<b>Printed materials</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teacher should check in with the student individually to ensure they are following the learning programme.</li> <li>● Establish COVID-safe peer learning groups where children can motivate and support each other.</li> <li>● Provide supplemental materials (videos, recordings) to reinforce messages that are shared in writing.</li> <li>● Provide materials in large print or Braille if needed.</li> </ul>	
<b>Moderate disability</b>  Remember to take into account the high-level considerations for 'all children' too	<b>Digital learning</b> <p>Same considerations as for children with a mild disability, and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure that the child's Individual Education Plan (IEP) accommodations are adapted to remote learning.</li> <li>● Facilitate ongoing check-ins between the child and any specialists (occupational therapists, speech therapists, etc.) that the child was supported by before.</li> </ul> <b>Learning via TV/radio</b> <p>Same considerations as for children with a mild disability, and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure that the child's IEP accommodations are adapted to remote learning.</li> <li>● Facilitate ongoing check-ins between the child and any specialists (occupational therapists, speech therapists, etc.) that the child was seeing before.</li> </ul> <b>Printed materials</b> <p>Same considerations as for children with a mild disability, and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure that the child's IEP accommodations are adapted to remote learning.</li> <li>● Facilitate ongoing check-ins between the child and any specialists (occupational therapists, speech therapists, etc.) that the child was seeing before.</li> </ul>	<p>Same considerations as for children with a mild disability, and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lead parent workshops for families of children with disabilities to ensure they have the most up-to-date information about school reopening and can advise on their child's needs.</li> <li>● Partner with an organisation for persons with disabilities (OPD) to identify and address barriers to (re)enrolment.</li> <li>● Partner with OPDs and/or disability rights organisations to incorporate screening and referral to services if needed.</li> <li>● Ensure teachers are trained to develop and support IEPs.</li> <li>● If this is the first time that the child is enrolling in the school, conduct awareness-raising with other children at the school and enforce anti-bullying rules or codes of conduct.</li> <li>● Ensure that the child has safe transportation to and from school.</li> </ul>



Children with disabilities (continued)	What support do they need to access learning when their school is closed?	What support do they need to return to school safely?
<p><b>Severe disability</b></p> <p> Remember to take into account the high-level considerations for 'all children' too</p>	<p><b>Digital learning</b></p> <p>Same considerations as for children with a moderate disability, and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Arrange for regular COVID-safe home visits or check-ins by the teacher or a community volunteer to guide the student through distance lessons.</li> <li>● Create a remote support group for parents and caregivers who are assisting their child at home.</li> </ul> <p><b>Learning via TV/radio</b></p> <p>Same considerations as for children with a moderate disability, and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Arrange for regular COVID-safe home visits or check-ins by the teacher or a community volunteer to guide the student through distance lessons.</li> <li>● Create a remote support group for parents and caregivers who are assisting their child at home.</li> </ul> <p><b>Printed materials</b></p> <p>Same considerations as for children with a moderate disability, and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Arrange for regular COVID-safe home visits or check-ins by the teacher or a community volunteer to guide the student through distance lessons.</li> <li>● Create a remote support group for parents and caregivers who are assisting their child at home.</li> </ul>	<p>Same considerations as for children with a moderate disability, and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lead parent workshops for families with children with disabilities.</li> <li>● Conduct home visits to provide families with individual support and assistance with planning.</li> <li>● Arrange for a classroom assistant to provide additional support during the first weeks following reopening (and longer if possible).</li> </ul>



#### TOP RESOURCES

[Tip sheets for disability inclusion during COVID-19](#)

[Guide for inclusive distance learning](#)


[SNAP \(IE\) project resources](#)

## Children from low-income families



The unprecedented global economic shock brought about by COVID-19 could set back more than a decade of progress in reducing child poverty. Even before the pandemic, far too many children were living in poverty; 585 million children in low and middle-income countries, almost 1 in 3, lived in households below their national poverty line, facing deprivations that will limit their future potential.

Children in low-income families are particularly at risk of not returning to school as families may be faced with economic pressures and trade-offs that push children to drop out of school and engage in harmful work or be forced into early marriage. In conflict settings, increased poverty can be an extra incentive for child recruitment to armed militia. At the start of the year, in particular, families incur educational costs for fees, transport, uniforms, supplies and books, which may be prohibitive especially if they have lost their livelihoods due to COVID-19.

Low-income families	What support do they need to access learning when their school is closed?	What support do they need to return to school safely?
 Remember to take into account the high-level considerations for 'all children' too	<p><b>Digital learning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure children from low-income families have access to the internet and mobile phones and have basic digital skills.</li> <li>● Given the existing digital divide, messaging must also be available through non-digital channels and take into consideration language, literacy, ability and limited movement.</li> <li>● Increase access to online learning (through free internet, zero-rate traffic to educational content or other measures) and support early, safe and sustained exposure to digital technologies, to build skills, self-efficacy and interest in technology.</li> <li>● Ensure programme scheduling and learning structures are flexible and allow self-paced learning so as not to deter children who may take on more work within and outside the household.</li> </ul> <p><b>Learning via TV/radio</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Radio and TV are appropriate distance learning practices in contexts where digital solutions are less accessible, where it has been verified that sources of power exist or can be made accessible at low cost (consider introducing solar power where power is not currently available).</li> <li>● Ensure programme scheduling and learning structures are flexible and allow self-paced learning so as not to deter children who may take on more work within and outside the household.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Assess the impact of COVID-19 on families at risk of sending their children to work or to join armed militia, or forcing them into early marriage as a negative coping strategy in response to financial stress. Develop mitigating measures to respond to their needs and to transition their children back to school.</li> <li>● Ensure access to financial support through cash and voucher assistance (CVA) or access to existing social protection schemes, such as bursaries, child grants or nutritional aid, to keep children in school and to motivate families to prioritise their children's education.</li> <li>● Assess and support direct financial costs incurred by families to send their children to school (including school fees, examination fees, transport, uniforms, books and meals) and indirect opportunity costs (such as the lost income from not sending children to work) that may prevent children from returning to school and increase the risk of dropping out.</li> <li>● Promote culturally relevant back to school campaigns, with the involvement of community, traditional and religious leaders, caregivers and other champions, that challenge the pervasive norms that reduce the likelihood of children in low-income families returning to school.</li> <li>● Ensure protocol and referral systems are in place to respond to each case of regular or extended absenteeism or non-return to school, with associated measures in coordination with child protection and social protection and health systems.</li> </ul>



Low-income families (continued)	What support do they need to access learning when their school is closed?	What support do they need to return to school safely?
	<p><b>Printed materials</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure learning materials are free of cost.</li> <li>● Ensure programme scheduling and learning structures are flexible and allow self-paced learning so as not to deter children who may take on more work within and outside the household.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure teachers and caregivers are sensitive to the stigmatisation of poverty and the possible effects this has on children's motivation to attend school.</li> <li>● Ensure integrated messaging to families and caregivers that includes information on the value of education and the links to economic opportunities.</li> </ul>



#### TOP RESOURCES

[Decision matrix on whether to implement cash and voucher assistance \(CVA\) directly or to support the Government's social protection systems: Step by Step Guidance](#)

[Social Protection & child protection: working together to protect children from the impact of COVID-19 and beyond](#)

[Cash and Voucher Assistance for Education in Emergencies. Synthesis Report and Guidelines](#)

[Tip sheet on education-specific CVA](#)

[Tip sheet on integrated CVA and child protection](#)

[Save the Children Global Child Sensitive Social Protection Approach Paper](#)


[Keeping Girls in School: A "Cash Plus" school bursary programme for narrowing the gender gap in school enrollment in Malawi](#)

## Child labour



In 2021, new statistics from the ILO and UNICEF showed that in the previous 4 years, the number of children in child labour had risen to 160 million worldwide – an increase of 8.4 million since 2016. These numbers had not taken into account the impacts of COVID-19 and it is predicted that millions more are at risk due of entering into child labour as a result.

For the first time in 20 years progress to end child labour has stalled, reversing the previous downward trend that saw child labour fall by 94 million between 2000 and 2016.

Children at risk of child labour	What support do they need to access learning when their school is closed?	What support do they need to return to school safely?
 Remember to take into account the high-level considerations for 'all children' too	<p><b>Keeping an eye out</b></p> <p>Whilst covid restrictions are in place and schools are closed, it is more difficult for community leaders, social workers, and civil society organizations to monitor and provide support to vulnerable children, putting them at a higher risk of exploitation. Communities and families should be encouraged to look out for each other more and ensure that any child who is being exploited is supported to access support and services.</p> <p>Stay-at-home orders and curfews will limit access to hired adult labour, resulting in labour shortages and a demand for local workers, including children.</p> <p>COVID-measures and restrictions have taken away incomes and livelihood-opportunities for families, ending in children risking to engage in supporting family households and with acquiring income, especially in the informal sector.</p> <p>Girls risk ending up supporting the household and in domestic work, often invisible and under the radar – impacting their ability to learning, their health or their development.</p> <p><b>Digital learning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure all parents are aware that even whilst schools are closed, all children should be in education – emphasising the availability of online learning.</li> <li>• Ensure access to digital learning (free internet, access to digital devices) for children out of school and in work.</li> <li>• Ensure online learning schedules are flexible and allow self-paced learning so as not to deter children who may take on more work within and outside the household. Children's wellbeing and learning will be impacted if they don't get enough rest, sufficient time to study, play or recover.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify children and families in need of financial support and those who may need alternative or flexible learning schedules because they are supporting their caregivers with household work or work outside the home. No child should be involved in hazardous or harmful work or any work (both domestic work or work outside the home) that interferes with their schooling, health or development.</li> <li>• Ensure that orphaned or highly vulnerable children who have lost one or both parents during the pandemic have access to resources and protection to access school and stay out of child labour.</li> <li>• Include remedial measures for children in child labour to return to full time education, informal education or vocational training.</li> <li>• Promote social protection mechanisms, such as cash transfers to support the return to school of child laborers from low income families.</li> <li>• Ensure schools are linked to case management and referral systems to respond to cases of regular or extended absenteeism or non-return to school due to child labour.</li> <li>• Ensure teachers and caregivers are sensitive to the stigmatisation of children in child labour and associated poverty and the possible effects this has on children's motivation to attend school.</li> <li>• Ensure integrated messaging to families and caregivers that includes information on the value of education and the links to economic opportunities.</li> </ul>



## Children at risk of child labour (continued)

### What support do they need to access learning when their school is closed?

#### Learning via TV/radio

- Radio and TV are appropriate distance learning practices in contexts where digital solutions are less accessible, where it has been verified that sources of power exist or can be made accessible at low cost (consider introducing solar power where power is not currently available).
- Ensure programme scheduling and learning structures are flexible and allow self-paced learning so as not to deter children who may take on more work within and outside the household. Children's wellbeing and learning will be impacted if they don't get enough rest, sufficient time to study, play or recover.

#### Printed materials

- Ensure learning materials are free of cost.
- Ensure programme scheduling and learning structures are flexible and allow self-paced learning so as not to deter children who may take on more work within and outside the household. Children's wellbeing and learning will be impacted if they don't get enough rest, sufficient time to study, play or recover.

## TOP RESOURCES

[5 child labour resources, explained simply](#)

[Child Labour | The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#)





## Children living in conflict



More than 75 million children across the world's crisis and conflict-affected countries urgently require support to access quality education. Millions of forcibly displaced people are living in overcrowded, under-resourced refugee and internal displacement sites with poor hygiene and sanitation facilities, and limited access to learning opportunities.<sup>11</sup>

Analysis indicates that girls are almost two-and-a-half times more likely to be out of school if they live in conflict-affected countries. Outbreaks of COVID-19 in humanitarian settings could be catastrophic and require specific attention. School closures as a result of COVID-19 mean that vacant schools are at risk of being used by a range of non-education actors.

This may include the use or occupation of schools by non-state armed groups and the military, increasing the risk of armed attack. This is a particular danger as militaries are mobilised in the medical response, for example to build field hospitals. COVID-19 may also lead to an intensification in conflicts, with the risk of worsening existing humanitarian situations and increasing the incidence of attacks on schools. The resulting damage to school infrastructure may prevent schools from safely reopening and increase the amount of time children are out of school.<sup>12</sup>

### Children living in conflict



Remember to take into account the high-level considerations for 'all children' too

### What support do they need to access learning when their school is closed?

#### Access

- Conduct conflict sensitivity analysis regarding provision of education to different identity groups (e.g. are teachers paid by NGOs targeted for attack? Are girls targeted for attack when en route to an alternative education site?)
- Carry out a 'do no harm' analysis. Will supporting education put any child identity groups at greater risk for attack?
- Assess ability to reach the target community with teaching. Conflict-affected areas are commonly disconnected, intentionally or unintentionally, from information sources.
- Conflict actors may control the internet, electricity, and information flow. Safeguard children and their data.
- Conflict areas are resource scarce environments, so families make choices on who to prioritise for access to education and may deprioritise girls. Ensure digital technology used to deliver teaching is available to both boys and girls.
- Conduct conflict analysis wherever a resource such as radios, cash transfers, tablets or generators are provided to a resource scarce environment, so the resource does not put learners at risk for attack.
- Assess social norms around technology, e.g. fear of surveillance or government tracking, or gender norms that limit girls' use of devices in the household.
- Conflict contexts are dynamic, so establish contingency plans to adapt delivery mechanisms if they should become disrupted, so that all children are consistently reached.

### What support do they need to return to school safely?

#### Access

- Coordinate with water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) & shelter clusters to ensure that school infrastructure is safe. Are WASH facilities adapted for COVID-19 measures? Is the school safely restored from any conflict damage?
- Advocate for schools that are used for non-educational purposes (e.g. for an internally displaced persons (IDP) shelter, military use or health centre) to be cleaned and safely returned for learning purposes.
- Report military use of schools and other attacks on education via safe, established pathways (e.g. the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), the Education Cluster).
- Prioritise access and connection to learning. Boys and girls out of school in conflict areas are at greater risk for exploitation, trafficking, and recruitment by armed forces or armed groups.
- Use child-seeking strategies to reach and reintegrate children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups.
- Address administrative barriers that are common to conflict areas (e.g. denial of exam, graduation or birth certificate recognition) so all children can access education.
- Conduct participatory risk mapping with the whole school community to identify risks that children and teachers face in and around school.

Children living in conflict (continued)	What support do they need to access learning when their school is closed?	What support do they need to return to school safely?
	<p><b>Learning materials</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Conduct conflict-sensitivity analysis of learning materials. Will certain topics or content, for example in history, civics or social science lessons, put learners or the learning site at risk for attack?</li> <li>● Conflict-affected children are commonly displaced to areas where the language of instruction is not their own. Provision of distance learning methods will need to be translated and taught in the language of the students.</li> <li>● Disabilities increase during conflict due to injuries and lack of access to supports like eye glasses, medicines or social services. Use varied learning methods to ensure accessibility (e.g. radio and written materials) and consider specialised follow-up for children with disabilities (e.g. teacher phone calls or case worker visits).</li> <li>● Provide social and emotional learning content to promote resilience and peacebuilding skills in children.</li> <li>● Avoid pockets of exclusion or marginalisation when delivering materials. Ensure equitable distribution of distance education materials to all children in a geographic area to avoid perception of favouring one group over another, leading to intergroup tensions.</li> <li>● Ensure any parallel distance programme is designed for students to re-enter mainstream learning, to avoid unintended marginalisation of identity groups.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Children's well-being</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reconnect children impacted by conflict violence, loss and trauma to mental health referral systems, and include structured psychosocial support activities, such as HEART.</li> <li>● Ensure the school routine and schedule is predictable and stable. Children exposed to the disruption of conflict need routine to heal.</li> <li>● Train teachers on conflict-sensitive education, inclusive classroom management, social and emotional learning, and psychological first aid.</li> <li>● Include training on teacher wellbeing, so that teachers are mentally healthy and able to deliver wellbeing support and training to children.</li> </ul>

## TOP RESOURCES

[INEE Conflict Sensitive Education Pack](#)

[GCPEA Study on Field-based Programmatic Measures to Protect Education from Attack](#)

[Progress Under Threat: Refugee education one year on](#)

[UNHCR COVID-19 Refugees' Return to Schooling Guidelines](#)

[Safe Back to School: A Practitioner's Guide \(Technical Annex 6: Adaptations for Camp Settings\)](#)

Teacher Professional Development Module on Attacks on Education (including psychological first aid):

[Teachers in Crisis Contexts Training](#) (available in English, French, Spanish and Arabic)

[Teachers in Crisis Contexts Training for Inclusive Education](#)

[Safe Back to School: A Practitioner's Guide \(Technical Annex 5: Participatory education & protection continuity planning\)](#) (available in English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Portuguese and Ukrainian)

Save the Children – Heart at Home – [English](#); [Arabic](#)

[Safe Schools Declaration 1-Day Training](#): (available in Arabic, Spanish and French upon request)

## Children associated with armed forces or armed groups (CAAFAG)



Children currently associated, or perceived to be associated, with armed forces or armed groups may drop out of education to earn money to support their family financially. These children will require specific attention to ensure they enrol and continue in distance learning and successfully reintegrate when schools reopen. Attention to both social and cognitive skill building can support their sustained reintegration.

### What support do they need to access learning when their school is closed?

#### Digital learning

- Assess how accessible digital learning is to children in this context and if online technology and connectivity are limited, consider using mobile phone applications such as WhatsApp.
- Ensure vulnerable children are identified and supported appropriately, being aware of any other issues within households and communities; integrate support into existing and required interventions to help prevent recruitment to armed groups.

#### Learning via TV/radio

- Assess how accessible radio or TV is to children in this context; radio instruction is likely to be more accessible than TV.
- Ensure vulnerable children are identified and supported appropriately, being aware of any other issues within households and communities; integrate support into existing and required interventions to help prevent recruitment to armed groups.

#### Printed materials

- Distribute materials through appropriate socially distanced means, either in camps or in communities.
- Ensure vulnerable children are identified and supported appropriately, being aware of any other issues within households and communities; integrate support into existing and required interventions to help prevent recruitment to armed groups.

### What support do they need to return to school safely?

- Assess the impact of COVID-19 on families at risk of sending their children to join armed forces or armed groups as a negative coping strategy in response to financial stress. Develop mitigating measures to respond to their needs and transition their children back to school.
- Provide support for children to catch up on education, as well as livelihood training, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), and support to prevent re-recruitment to armed forces or armed groups.
- Ensure that interventions address stigma through education, awareness and efforts to challenge pervasive social norms that are a barrier to returning to school.
- Ensure vulnerable children are identified and supported appropriately, being aware of any other issues within households and communities; integrate safe back to school support into existing and required interventions to help prevent re-recruitment and ensure sustained reintegration to education.

#### TOP RESOURCES

[Key Considerations for CAAFAG Programming during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

[Technical Note: COVID-19 and Children Deprived of Their Liberty](#)


[Civil-Military and Armed Non-State Actors Engagement](#) (also available in [French](#))



## Children who have experienced sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)



The impacts of infectious disease outbreaks and the link to increased sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) have been well-documented in each of the most recent major epidemics - including Zika, SARS and Ebola. Early evidence indicates that COVID-19 is no different in this respect, with early reports of a sharp increase in reported SGBV incidents, along with other forms of violence against children. Studies of past disease outbreaks and other humanitarian crises have shown that without targeted intervention, COVID-19 will heighten pre-existing risks of SGBV with particular increased vulnerabilities for adolescent girls.

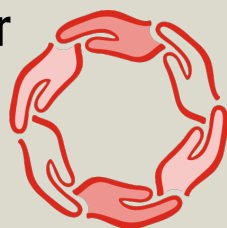
Children who have experienced SGBV	What support do they need to access learning when their school is closed?	What support do they need to return to school safely?
 Remember to take into account the high-level considerations for 'all children' too	<p><b>Digital learning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Integrate and adapt life skills and girl empowerment activities through online platforms, incorporating safeguarding measures against online harassment, bullying and other types of cyber violence.</li> <li>● Provide virtual and telephone-based hotlines offering psychosocial support to children who have experienced sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).</li> <li>● Use mobile applications to communicate relevant messages that can help girls and boys (and women and men) to report cases of SGBV, including child marriage, and identify those at most risk.</li> </ul> <p><b>Learning via TV/radio</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Integrate and adapt life skills and girl empowerment activities into radio programmes.</li> <li>● Use radio to communicate relevant messages that can help girls and boys (and women and men) to report cases of SGBV, including child marriage, and identify those at most risk.</li> </ul> <p><b>Printed materials</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Include relevant messages that can help girls and boys (and women and men) report cases of SGBV, including child marriage, and identify those at most risk.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Assess how case management systems can be adapted and linked to education systems where SGBV and child protection structures, and response and referral pathways, are disrupted, and help to develop or improve gender-sensitive systems.</li> <li>● Provide psychosocial support and give particular attention to the provision of preventative and responsive child protection and SGBV services for the most vulnerable children, including adolescent girls in school, for example through 'girls only' safe spaces.</li> <li>● Train education and other support workers to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills needed to recognise and prevent the risk of child marriage and other harmful SGBV practices, including safe referral practices and protection services.</li> </ul>

### TOP RESOURCES


[COVID-19 Child Protection Case Management Guidance](#)

[Child and Adolescent Survivors of Sexual Violence and COVID-19: Key Considerations and Practical Guidance](#)

## Ethnic minority children and/or children who struggle with the language of instruction



For ethnic minority children, or other children who have difficulty with the language used for teaching, key barriers will include lack of motivation to learn due to past difficult experiences, and for some children there may be gaps in their education. Remedial or additional support will be needed to enable them to transition to a new or different system of education or to catch up with any learning they have missed.

Ethnic minority and/or struggle with instruction	What support do they need to access learning when their school is closed?	What support do they need to return to school safely?
 Remember to take into account the high-level considerations for 'all children' too	<p><b>Digital learning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Given the existing digital divide, appropriate technical support should be provided and messaging must also be available through non-digital channels.</li> <li>Ensure all additional learning materials and supplementary language support are shared in more than one format (e.g. videos, recordings transcripts, learning packs)..</li> </ul> <p><b>Printed materials</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure all additional learning materials and supplementary language support are shared in more than one format (e.g. videos, recordings transcripts, learning packs).</li> <li>Engage in clear dialogue with parents to ensure they understand and can support the learning needs of the learners in the home equitably.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with local leaders and community to identify at risk children.</li> <li>Provide individualised (or small peer group) support to learners, for example through a classroom assistant.</li> <li>Provide remedial support for learners.</li> <li>Ensure schools, teachers and all education staff are trained in principles of inclusive education.</li> <li>Ensure that information about reopening of schools is shared through multiple media and pathways.</li> <li>Invest in inclusive back-to-school campaigns, working with local champions who can access at risk groups directly.</li> <li>Monitor data on back-to-school children for enrolment and attendance, to ensure at risk groups are not left behind.</li> <li>Undertake community campaigns to reinforce inclusive back-to-school messages and the importance of education as a right for all children. Pay attention to community, traditional, gender and religious stereotypes.</li> <li>Consider social protection measures that can support families to send their children to school (e.g. financial support for school uniforms etc).</li> <li>Create clear child protection support and referral pathways (with consideration for language and gender) and communicate them clearly, so that children and education staff can address any trauma, violations, stress or anxiety around the return to school.</li> <li>Ensure education and learning materials are inclusive and representative of the community to redress existing stereotypes and prejudice.</li> </ul>

### TOP RESOURCES

[Save the Children Inclusive Education Handbook](#)

## Children who identify as LGBTQIA+



Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual children, or those perceived as such, experience discrimination in various ways, including at school and when seeking accessing to health and other public services. During COVID-19, they face potentially amplified discrimination and barriers to education and healthcare. LGBTQIA+ young people represent approximately 25% of those experiencing unstable housing (for example, living in a shelter or motel), which makes it more challenging to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 through physical distancing and to access online education.

LGBTQIA+ students experience greater harassment than heterosexual and cisgender students, both in school and online.

They often do not report victimisation, fearing that adults will be unresponsive, which is linked to elevated physical and mental health concerns. A number of LGBTQIA+ young people report rejection or harassment from caregivers and siblings, therefore some do not disclose their identities to family members or authorities, including children on the move. During periods of stay-at-home guidance, some LGBTQIA+ young people have “re-closeted” and avoided expressing their identities, and reported distress due to fears of safety at home. LGBTQIA+ individuals are also at elevated risk for child abuse and domestic violence, and they may have been unable to report this through traditional channels such as schools, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### What support do they need to access learning when their school is closed?

#### Digital learning

- Share online LGBTQIA+ resources that provide affirming support and connect LGBTQIA+ youth in virtual settings.
- Integrate LGBTQIA+ inclusive materials into educational content.

#### Learning via TV/radio

- Integrate LGBTQIA+ inclusive materials into educational content.

#### Printed materials

- Integrate LGBTQIA+ inclusive materials into educational content.

### TOP RESOURCES

[A Whole School Approach to Prevent School-Related Gender-Based Violence](#)

### What support do they need to return to school safely?

#### Access

- Establish guidelines for respectful and affirming in-person and online interactions among students and school staff, and review school mission statements for inclusivity.
- Integrate LGBTQIA+ inclusive materials into educational content.
- Review anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies and reporting procedures, and update as needed to cover changing circumstances (e.g. the processes for receiving, reviewing and responding to student reports may be altered during distance learning).
- Review teacher codes of conduct and update as needed to be inclusive of LGBTQIA+ children.
- Offer continuing education for school staff on LGBTQIA+ students' concerns, effective support strategies, and how to implement inclusive policies.
- Provide students with coping techniques and daily routines, such as check-ins and mindfulness exercises, and ensure access to support groups and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS).
- Communicate regularly with students and offer referrals to LGBTQIA+ affirming agencies or health professionals for students with mental and physical health needs.
- Train teachers and support staff to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills needed to recognise and prevent the risk of gender-based violence (GBV) through safe referral practices and protection services.
- Ensure whole school approaches are in place to prevent and protect from GBV, including minimum standards and a monitoring framework.





Sacha Myers / Save the Children

## Next steps

This guide is a living document and will be updated to include guidance on:

- **Children in alternative care settings**
- **Migrant and displaced children**  
(including internally displaced, refugee and migrant children)
- **Children in detention.**

To share your feedback and resources with the Safe Back to School team, please contact: [SB2S@savethechildren.org](mailto:SB2S@savethechildren.org)

- <sup>1</sup> Save the Children, The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), and UNICEF (2020), Learning Must Go On
- <sup>2</sup> Save the Children (2020), The Hidden Impact of COVID-19 on Children's Education
- <sup>3</sup> As referenced throughout, some guidance is adapted from Learning Must Go On, an advocacy brief developed by Save the Children, The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) and UNICEF, which includes recommendations for inclusive and equitable access to learning
- <sup>4</sup> Echeita Sarrionandia & Ainscow (2011), reference framework for the evaluation of inclusive education systems
- <sup>5</sup> SC Inclusive Education Handbook (2016), SC SNAP training guide
- <sup>6</sup> In this context, school means any educational facility including public schools, community-based education etc. This guidance should be contextualised for the facility.
- <sup>7</sup> Op. cit. Save the Children, INEE and UNICEF (2020)
- <sup>8</sup> United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) (2019), A whole school approach to prevent school-related gender-based violence: minimum standards and monitoring framework
- <sup>9</sup> According to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, "persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."
- <sup>10</sup> Op. cit. Save the Children, INEE and UNICEF (2020)
- <sup>11</sup> A recent study by the World Health Organisation reveals that the pandemic has had a disproportionately harmful impact on refugees around the world. These include limited access to information caused by language and cultural differences, coupled with the geographic marginalisation, lack of access to basic services, such as education and health, and to adequate employment.
- <sup>12</sup> Op. cit. Save the Children, INEE and UNICEF (2020)



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