

**EDUCATION & ACADEMIA**

STAKEHOLDER GROUP

**Quality education and lifelong learning for all – a sustainable response to crises**

SECTORAL PAPER - HLPF 2022<sup>1</sup>

**I. Introduction**

The ongoing pandemic has caused the huge interruption of educational processes around the globe, with an insurmountable scale of loss to children’s schooling, leaving also millions of various groups of learners outside of the processes of formal and non-formal education. Individual, social and economic consequences are dramatic, and some of them are yet to be seen. A recent report published by the World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF (2021) states that this generation of students is losing \$17 trillion in lifetime earnings in present value, or about 14 percent of today’s global GDP, as a result of COVID-19 pandemic-related school closures.

The pandemic has also exacerbated deep-rooted social injustices that make the consequences of the pandemic even more critical for those vulnerable groups who are deprived of the right to education. Women and girls are amongst the most affected, as well as elderly people, persons with disabilities, people living in emergency situations and amongst others, people living with low income and in dire material conditions.

School reopening is therefore not enough for securing the right to education of those millions already excluded before the pandemic and those whose education has been disrupted since. A new social contract for education is mandatory in order to repair structural social and economic injustices and secure an effective and sustainable

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<sup>1</sup> This document was drafted by Vernor Munoz Villalobos and Luis Eduardo Pérez Murcia, both members of the Global Campaign for Education, with substantive contribution of EASG members, May 2022.

response to ongoing and future crises<sup>2</sup>. Such a new contract for education must be grounded in the understanding of education as a social, political, economic and cultural right as well as a public and common good. The new contract must also explicitly recognise that governments are the main duty-bearers for the provision of education, either by securing education for the most marginalised, or by coordinating and regulating participation of other actors in education.

Sustainable recovery requires focus both on schools and other educational institutions, as well as on lifelong learning opportunities at every age. It is necessary to create inclusive policies and learning environments, tackle urgent problems and develop long-term strategies and increase investments in education and lifelong learning. It is also necessary to consider the specific needs and vulnerabilities faced by all the actors involved in the provision of education. Teachers subject to unfair work conditions, including labour exploitation, and living in emergency contexts and conflicts, are only two worthy examples.

Furthermore, sustainable recovery requires not only adaptive education and learning, helping people to keep up with the changes in the environment. It also demands the transformation of the whole education system to be more inclusive, to develop critical thinking skills amongst students and values like autonomy, emancipation, freedom, democracy, and agency. Moreover, and considering that illiteracy is still one of the biggest problems faced by humankind, the new contract for education should include vocational education opportunities and include strategies to promote universal functional literacy, global active citizenship, peace education, and education for sustainable development.

We strongly argue for actions built upon inclusive and equitable quality learning opportunities and outcomes, across the lifespan. They include adult learning in all its many and creative manifestations, in work and life, formal, non-formal and informal. Therefore, SDG4 should be implemented in its all-embracing character, keeping in mind that adult education is the longest phase in the lifelong learning process. The new contract for education should also take in consideration demographic changes and

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<sup>2</sup> See UNESCO (Year). Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education.

the need for rapid and effective responses to ongoing and future crises related to climate change.

During the pandemic, technology helped to bridge the learning gap and reduce new “learning poverty”, introducing significant changes in the ways teaching and learning is organised, requiring new, digital skills. While technology can be a driver of progress in education, it can also create new barriers to access, make social or collective learning more challenging, widen existing social divides and create new ones. Therefore, inscribing access to digital as a new “human right” bears the risk of neglecting numerous groups of learners, as well as areas of learning that require other methodologies. The problems of our world are not technological, but pedagogical, therefore the challenges that the education sector has to meet cannot be solved alone by digital tools, learning e-platforms and artificial intelligence. The right to education must not be replaced by the right to connectivity, but pursued in parallel.

Following this introduction, section 2 discusses the issue of women and girls’ right to education. Section 3 stresses the need to transform education systems. Section 4 discusses the critical challenges in securing the right to education for people affected by different emergencies. Section 5 explores the benefits and limitations of the use of technology to improve education outcomes. The paper ends in section 6 by briefly outlining the main recommendations.

## **II. Women and girls’ right to education**

The Pandemic has exposed deep-rooted vulnerabilities and structural problems that exacerbated the consequences of COVID-19, especially affecting vulnerable groups, depriving them of their right to education. Women and girls belong to the most affected group, whose losses in education had detrimental effects on other areas of life and work; but also older people, people living in poverty, etc.

Patriarchy and heteronormativity are at the roots of gender discrimination and are deeply anchored in societies through norms, beliefs, practices, policies and legal

frameworks, so educating girls and women is one of the most efficient ways to combat poverty and improve economic growth in developing countries.

According to the Global Campaign for Education's Gender Strategy<sup>3</sup>, some encouraging developments have taken place in addressing the inequalities for women in education. According to recent figures, the gap between girls and boys globally is down to 1% in primary and secondary education. However, the majority (57%) of illiterate youth globally are still female.

Of adults aged 15 years or older, the estimated 473 million illiterate women make up 63% of the total illiterate population. In the three regions with low literacy rates, Northern Africa and Western Africa, Southern Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, the situation for women is worrying. In sub-Saharan Africa, it is estimated that barely 57% of women are literate. Discrimination against girls and women in education is more due to the unwillingness of public authorities to act and less a consequence of capacity, for example bureaucratic quality and financial resources. Cultural traits, including traditions, result in practices that deny women not only access to education but also possibilities to participate in economic, social and political fields.

Worldwide, 129 million girls are out of school, and only 49 percent of countries have achieved gender parity in primary education. At the secondary level, the gap widens: 42 per cent of countries have achieved gender parity in lower secondary education, and 24 per cent in upper secondary education.

The reasons are many. Barriers to girls' education – like poverty, child marriage and gender-based violence – vary among countries and communities. Low income families often favour boys when investing in education.

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<sup>3</sup> Conrad, Stefanie, Global Campaign for Education, 2021.

In some places, schools do not meet the safety, hygiene or sanitation needs of girls. In others, teaching practices are not gender-responsive and result in gender gaps in learning and skills development<sup>4</sup>.

These global statistics, however, mask significant disparities at the regional and country levels:

- Central Asia reports the largest gender disparity rate (GPI) with 1.27; the region also shows the widest gender disparity at the lower secondary school level with 28.5% of girls out-school compared to 25% of boys.
- In Northern Africa and Western Asia girls of every school age group are more likely to be out of school than boys.
- In Sub-Saharan Africa, significantly fewer girls than boys complete lower secondary school (36% for girls and 42% for boys).

In European and North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, girls have a lower out-of-school rate compared to boys:

- o In Eastern and Southeastern Asia, there are 18.8 million boys and male youth out-of-school compared to 13.8 million girls and female youth. 85 % of girls here complete lower secondary education compared to 73 % of boys.
- o In Latin America and the Caribbean, 9.9 % of male children, adolescents and youth in school-going age are out of school compared to 9.2 % females. In this region 83% of girls and 78% of boys complete lower secondary.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/education/girls-education>

In countries affected by conflict, girls are more than twice as likely to be out of school as girls living in non-affected countries<sup>5</sup>.

Gender inequalities have reversed in higher education in the course of the past couple of decades:

Except for sub-Saharan Africa, women are today the majority of undergraduate students in all regions in the world<sup>6</sup>, more likely to complete tertiary education than their male peers and generally outperform men in every higher education indicator<sup>7</sup>.

Although this “female advantage” in higher education is a considerable social change, and in fact it is predicted that this ‘advantage’ grows further in the coming years<sup>8</sup>, there is the need to develop comprehensive policies to address the structural causes of male dropping out.

Suggested reasons for girls’ outperformance in higher education are:

- An alternative suggestion is that women go to university more than men because entry level jobs for females are now professionalised (e.g. nursing, teaching) while men have more career options, e.g. to enter better paid employment in trades without higher education<sup>9</sup>.
- A different social and behavioural skills that enable higher levels of academic performance.
- Greater efforts made by girls resulting in better grades

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<sup>5</sup> UNICEF (2020) Education Learning and Skills <https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/learning-and-skills/> – online

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO (2020) Women in higher education: has the female advantage put an end to gender inequalities? ([online](#))

<sup>7</sup> idem

<sup>8</sup> DiPrete, T., & Buchmann, C. (2013). *Rise of Women, The: The Growing Gender Gap in Education and What it Means for American Schools*. Russell Sage Foundation. Retrieved May 14, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7758/9781610448000>

<sup>9</sup> It is worth highlighting however that women’s care responsibilities often become a barrier to access higher education.

- Greater attachment to school resulting in higher gratification and therefore more incentives to perform at school<sup>10</sup>

Restrictions on access and achievement in education become even more severe when multiple discrimination factors, such as disability and gender, intersect. The available data suggest that the gap is considerable: compared to men without disabilities, women with disabilities are three times more likely to be illiterate. However, educational policies and programmes take little account of the issue of intersectionality: while disability and gender are important factors of exclusion, they are often considered separately. The programmes and measures put in place do not take into account the specific relationship between disability and gender and therefore fail to effectively address this specific situation of exclusion.

### **III. Transformative education**

Schools' reopening is not enough for sustainable recovery and for the development of individual and social resilience when facing future crises. A new social contract for education is needed that can repair injustices while transforming the future (as defined in the UNESCO report *Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education*). It must be grounded in the understanding of education as a public and common good, whereby governments remain the main duty-bearer for the provision of education, either by securing education for the most marginalised or by coordinating and regulating the participation of other actors in education.

Further on, sustainable recovery requires not only adaptive education and learning, helping people to keep up with the changes in the environment, but transformative one, including critical thinking and developing values like autonomy, emancipation, freedom, democracy, and the agency of learners. Furthermore, although vocational education remains very important, illiteracy is still one of the biggest problems humankind is facing, so curricula for the changing world have to be based on literacy,

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<sup>10</sup> idem

and include global active citizenship, peace education, education for sustainable development, etc.

In order for education to develop all its transformative potential, it is necessary to rethink and reorganise it in a systemic, holistic way, so that it is possible to transcend the merely didactic and curricular aspects and undertake a review of pedagogical practices, of school governance and especially of the teaching role.

This great reform is called to overcome the patriarchal and utilitarian historical conditions on which the appearance of educational systems was based during industrial modernity and which we have inherited today.

Obviously, changes are necessary in all areas. However, there are four aspects in which these changes are urgent: the decolonization of educational systems, gender transformation, the process of making education systems truly inclusive, and, finally, the need to build human rights and peace education, as stated by the Sustainable Development Goal Targets 4 .7 and 5.

Transformation requires focus both on schools and other educational institutions, as well as on lifelong learning opportunities at every age. It is necessary to create inclusive policies, tackle urgent problems and develop long-term strategies and increase investments in education and lifelong learning.

We strongly argue for actions built upon inclusive and equitable quality learning opportunities and outcomes, across the lifespan. It includes early childhood education, and adult learning in all its multiple manifestations, in work and life, formal, non-formal and informal. Therefore SDG 4 should be implemented in its all-embracing character, having in mind that adult education is the longest phase in lifelong learning process, but also because of the demographic changes, as well as the urgency around climate crises, that requires immediate educational actions.

Human rights education is consubstantial with the right to education and at the same time is the basis for all human rights to be understood and practised as a way of life, so that learning should never be built outside of justice, equality and equity. That is why education cannot be neutral in the face of infamy and violence: it is always called to free people from oppression and poverty.

Education must respond to its aims, as established by the human rights law and in this direction it must set pedagogical practices, which always seek to transform the conditions of inequality and oppression. For this reason, education must be based on the principles of human rights and must incorporate these principles into the daily work of schools and into lifelong learning processes.

In the past decade, the concept of gender transformation and gender transformative approaches has gained importance, particularly in the development sector. Behind this concept lies the idea that programs and projects must make more comprehensive efforts to address the root causes of gender inequality, reshape unequal power relations and remove gender barriers to the enjoyment of rights.

Gender transformative education is crucial to dismantling power relations, not only in the educational field, but in society. Without an education that rescues the idea of equality between men and women and that recognizes and enhances the legitimacy of the various gender manifestations, including the LGTBIQ+ community, it will be very difficult to advance in the construction of truly democratic societies, not to mention the urgent need to combat structural violence and especially the violence suffered by women and girls.

Decolonial education speaks to one of the most urgent changes we need today. The notion of transformative education as an alternative framework for understanding the purposes of education, and in particular, the ways education quality is conceptualised and assessed. We are concerned with the emancipatory function of education as a catalyst for change in the world. To do so we need to acknowledge where we come

from in such a way that the consequences of the facts of history - like slavery, like colonialism, like apartheid - are not matters of opinion, but become ontological and epistemic starting points for collective action and efforts that, with intention, build a better future for all. We need to enable learners to discover, value and share different perspectives. Our future is at stake and it is our imperative to make sure that we understand what lies at the intersection of colonial education systems that have not changed and the revolutionary decolonial requirements of freedom.

The entire Sustainable Development Agenda and specifically SDG4 implementation should ruthlessly engage in critical narrative change work. Decolonisation as praxis means fully understanding the concept of modernity; the modern world (and its colonial and capitalist inventions) is firstly a historical-geographical project and secondly, a discursive hierarchical ordering and ‘othering’ of life in the world. Then, decolonizing education as praxis means collectively stealing away the imperative of the master’s plantation, it means tracing the colonial cartographies of failure and the violent mediocrity of all kind of supremacies within education systems, and it means healing, by touching ancestral wounds and seeing them as invitations to build a world where anybody is left behind.

#### **IV. Education in emergencies: Old and new inequalities that compromise the right to education for those affected by emergencies**

Emergencies have been always posing significant challenges for governments, families and communities to secure the right to education for all learners. Conflict, disaster and climate change-related emergencies have become part of everyday life for millions of students in both countries of the Global South and the Global North. In many countries, with Bangladesh as just one worthy example, climate and conflict-related emergencies consistently interplay, disrupting the right to education of local residents, internally displaced people and those seeking for asylum (see Shohel, 2022). More broadly, United Nations estimates for 2022 shows that over 274 million people worldwide are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. What is even more critical, the same agency estimates that the number of people living in

emergency situations increased in 39 million in a single year and that critical levels of emergencies are observed in over 60 countries<sup>11</sup>.

However, with the closure of schools and universities nearly all over the world during the most critical waves of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the right to education of children, boys, girls, youth and adults has been dramatically affected (see Karalis, 2020; Sahlberg, 2021). The everyday experience of going to school/university was temporarily suspended for over one billion learners (see Onyema et al, 2020). The temporary closure of education facilities, however, can mean dropping out of school/university for many. What is more, the negative impacts of the pandemic on education are far from equally distributed (see Murat and Bonacini, 2020). As it has been commonly observed before the pandemic (World bank, 2018; OECD, 2019) and in other emergencies (Baytiyeh, 2018), those who have been largely excluded from the benefits of development and economic growth, and those who have been historically marginalised and discriminated, such as girls and women in patriarchal societies such as Afghanistan (Shayan, 2015), have been the most affected. Learners with disabilities, migrants and refugee communities, indigenous, black and more generally so-called ‘minority’ ethnic groups as well as people living in remote communities have been once again left behind by policy frameworks aiming to address the impacts of the pandemic. In fact, multiple forms of disadvantage intersect and therefore gender, ethnicity, age, socio-economic background and place of residency, amongst other social markers and structures, matter for understanding the impact of the pandemic on the distribution of educational opportunities and skills (Blundell et al, 2021). Overall, as illustrated by Tarricone, Mestan and Teo (2021) in their analysis of the impact of Covid-19 and other emergencies on the Australian education system, emergencies endanger students’ wellbeing and make the worst pre-existing disparities in learning outcomes.

*But what are the critical challenges posed by long-term rooted humanitarian emergencies and the ongoing pandemic to secure everyone’s right to education?* This question deserves in-depth research and the analysis of specific emergency contexts

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<sup>11</sup> Global Humanitarian Overview 2022. OCHA. Retrieved online 12 May 2022.

which are beyond the scope of this paper. However, the remaining paragraphs of this section aims to provide initial insights of the types of challenges that policymakers, civil society organisations and the international community need to systematically address to effectively secure all learners' right to education.

To begin with, emergencies make (in person) education temporarily unavailable for all types of learners and in some cases, as stressed below, those who belong to the most disadvantaged communities never go back to school/university/education facilities. As Baytiyeh (2018: 215) has pointed out in the analysis of school closures in the aftermath of natural hazards such as earthquakes, hurricanes and floods, "the longer children are out of school, the less likely they are to return". Furthermore, the reconstruction of schools after devastating disasters and climate-change related events in very diverse contexts such as Haiti, Nepal or Australia take a significant number of years if not decades. However, while in wealthy economies financial resources can be allocated within a few years to secure the safe return to school, children and youth in contexts such as Nepal have been waiting to go back to school for years (see Westoby, Wilkinson and Dunn, 2021). The critical point here is that the level of wealth of the country, as well as the possibility to implement rapid and sustainable responses to emergencies, matters for securing access to education and learning.

Closely related to the issue of financing education and effective planning to address the multiple impacts of emergencies, it is the possibility to secure qualified staff to provide education even without school infrastructure. Countries with already existing gaps in the provision of qualified and fairly remunerated teaching and education support staff, are expected to deal with more challenges to secure all learners' education after an emergency. As Perez Murcia (2014) shows in the case of Colombia, teaching staff and school personnel are very often unqualified to address the multiple needs of children who have first-hand experience of multiple forms of violence and who have been forced to leave their communities. Here the challenge is not only related to the provision of adequate infrastructure, including school facilities, desk and chairs, books and pedagogical materials. The challenge is also providing training for

teachers and emotional support for families, students and in general all of those who are part of the education experience.

Beyond making education available, accessibility is a critical challenge for securing the right to education of those living in emergencies. Discrimination and exclusion dominate the narratives of displaced populations and policies often fail to fight racism within school settings (Block and Hirsch, 2017). Moreover, students with refugee backgrounds often find themselves in a position in which due to the local communities' perception of them as either vulnerable victims or threats to the economic and cultural integrity of the so-called 'host' country, education obstructs rather than creates their opportunities for social mobility (see Lems, 2020). Exclusion and discrimination also shape the narratives of those living in context where their fundamental rights are threatened by those in power. After the recent takeover of the Taliban in Afghanistan, girls and women have seen their opportunities to access education even more disrupted. Today, not only their right to education is systematically neglected, but their fundamental rights to protest are restricted and their lives at risk.

Making education acceptable in terms of quality and content is also critical in many corners of the world. Embracing the multiple challenges that emergencies pose to education systems not only requires comprehensive social policies for teachers' training and the development of new teaching methods to address the specific needs of people on the move and those living in precarious material conditions and political instability. The case of those thousands of Ukrainians students and their families whose school infrastructure has been destroyed and are now on the move seeking safety is only one worthy example. Questions around whether the world, and in this particular case, European countries are ready to address the needs of those hundreds or perhaps thousands of university students who have been forced to abandon their studies require an immediate answer and policy solutions. We must not forget that those hundreds of thousands of students from Africa, Asia-Pacific, the Middle-East and Latin America who have left university years ago because of conflict and war and who have never been able to resume their studies are entitled to the right to education

and deserve an immediate response from governments and the international community.

Finally, education should be adapted to the specific needs of those affected by emergencies. Students affected by war, climate change and disaster-related emergencies not only need to go back to a safe school environment. They also need the school environment to take into consideration the many ways their lives have been affected by those emergencies. As Sapkota and Neupane (2021) have shown in their analysis of the impacts of the 2015 earthquake in Nepal on its education system, students who are affected by emergencies and for example the loss of family members require special policies to help them to understand and navigate those impacts.

Humanitarian crises of any type or length can profoundly impact the wellbeing of children and young people, including their mental health; that such crises can disrupt family and community cohesion; and that they may increase the risk for children to be exposed to harm from child labour, violence and/or exploitation. The complexity and interdependency of children's care, safety, wellbeing and education in times of crisis requires the adoption or strengthening of coordinated multi-sectoral approaches that incorporate inclusive education strategies<sup>12</sup>.

## **V. Education and the digital divide**

Remote communities have resorted to technology to access education for their children and themselves for many decades. The use of radio and TV to deliver literacy programmes and primary and secondary education in Colombia and other Latin American countries between the mid-1990s and early 1990s is only but one example (Cant, 2020). The worldwide closure of schools and universities during the multiple Covid-19-related lockdowns, however, have dramatically increased the use of technology, including radio, TV, mobile phones and PCs as alternatives to support access to education. The unprecedented scale of the closures of education facilities, in

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<sup>12</sup> See Humanity & Inclusion (2020) "Let's break silos now! Achieving disability-inclusive education in a post-COVID world".

more than one hundred countries at the same time during the first outbreak of the coronavirus disease (Onyema et al, 2020), has brought to the fore discussions on the potential and limitations of technology for supporting education. Although technology constitutes a mechanism to give students the continued possibility to learn while school facilities are closed, their benefits and limitations should be carefully examined. All in all, technology was already playing a critical role in education long before the pandemic, for example through platforms for distance learning for people who can attend or afford face-to-face higher education. However, the positive impact of this in addressing complex emergencies cannot be taken for granted, including the ongoing pandemic and protracted humanitarian crises in countries around the world related to conflict, disaster and amongst other reasons, environmental and climate change. Although an in-depth analysis of the benefits and pitfalls of technology for supporting education outcomes is beyond the scope of this paper, its remaining paragraphs briefly discuss one of the aspects that are currently shaping education policy debates: the digital divide. As Coleman (2021) argues, the term digital divide comprises several interrelated dimensions: access to technological devices and the internet, digital skills, as well as parental support to use technology, teacher skills and the learning environment.

To begin with, the massive closure of schools, universities and other centres of formal, informal and non-formal learning and the possibility to rely on technology to enable learners to access education cannot be taken for granted in any country. The closure of schools and other institutions, for example, brought to the fore deep-rooted inequalities in the access and use of technology which can be observed in countries with very different levels of income and development such as Nigeria (Azubuike, Adegboye and Quadri, 2021) and the UK (Coleman, 2021). In the latest context, children and youth from black and Asian families not only face more challenges to access technological devices but also struggle to get a reliable internet connection to attend online teaching. Furthermore, teachers in many cases lacked the skills to teach online and parents also lacked skills to support the education of children (see Coleman, 2021). These are of course not the old issues - in many areas of the UK, many children struggled to eat well because they could not access school meals for

many months and resources for school meals were significantly reduced (see McKinney, 2020).

The reader of this paper may be already thinking at this stage, if this was the case in one of the most powerful economies in the world, what can be expected of learners in low-income countries which in addition to the pandemic, have been living in protracted emergencies for years if not decades? Countries such as Eritrea, Somalia, South Sudan in Africa, Bangladesh in South Asia Pacific, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria in the Middle East, and Haiti and Colombia in Latin America are only some examples. All in all, the pandemic has ‘unhidden’ long-term inequalities within and across countries. No country was prepared to deal with the massive closure of schools and other learning institutions but those with less income and protracted crises were more critically affected. In low and middle-income settings, particularly in rural areas, access to electricity and Internet connection may be limited, which prevents learners from distance learning. So the first critical issue to highlight here is that the technological divide between countries and within countries is massive and therefore education systems cannot simply rely on promoting teaching via technology to secure education outcomes.

Closely related to the digital divide and its impacts on education is the lack of skills amongst teachers and parents to support education outcomes (see Coleman, 2021; Železný-Green and Metcalfe, 2022). Teachers and other educational support staff, such as librarians, in particular in low-income countries, have been struggling to get the skills they need to deliver online teaching and parents to support their children’s education. Appropriate digital skills also require a certain level of literacy to use certain devices; due to low literacy rates among parents and carers, support can be further limited. In addition, girls, in particular those with disabilities, tend to have lower digital skills, creating a gender gap (see Humanity & Inclusion, 2022). Beyond limited digital skills, as Onyema et al (2020) stress, online education is often hindered by poor infrastructures including, network, power, inaccessibility and unavailability issues. For example, if teaching happens only via radio transmission, then there must

be mechanisms put in place to ensure that children who are deaf or hard of hearing can access the same educational content.

Furthermore, there is the challenge of the gap in access to educational content, in particular in relevant languages and appropriate for each learner's context. This can be addressed through proactive support for open educational resources, in line with the UNESCO Recommendation of 2019, promoting the development of local content (as opposed to the continued dominance of publishers based in just a few countries), and tackling weaknesses in copyright frameworks that expose teachers, librarians and others to uncertainty and potential illegality.

Last but not least, not only has distance learning often been inaccessible for children with disabilities, but many of these children have also been cut off from other important services such as health, nutrition, psychosocial support and protection – all services which are often accessed through schools<sup>13</sup>. Ongoing research shows evidence of significant impacts of the Covid-19 school closures on mental health (Irawan, Dwisona, and Lestari, 2020; see also Cheshmehzangi, Zou and Su, 2022) and other social problems including domestic abuse (McKinney, 2020) and other forms of violence especially against girls and women (see Železný-Green and Metcalfe, 2022). One of the critical recommendations that emerge for many of these studies, is the absolute need of counselling support for those millions of students who have been experiencing emotional distress and anxiety due to the closure of schools and extensive online-learning without face-to-face human interaction. As the research conducted by Irawan, Dwisona, and Lestari (2020) in the context of Indonesia shows, only two weeks of online teaching following school closure due to the pandemic, significantly increased boredom, anxiety and mood changes amongst students.

## **VI. Recommendations**

### **General**

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<sup>13</sup> See International Disability & Development Consortium (IDDC), 2020: "IDDC Inclusive Education Task Group response to COVID-19"

A new social contract for education is mandatory in order to repair structural social and economic injustices and secure an effective and sustainable response to ongoing and future crises. Such a new contract for education must be grounded in the understanding of education as a social, political, economic and cultural right as well as a public and common good. Education must be based on the principles of human rights and must incorporate these principles into the daily work of schools and into lifelong learning processes. The new contract must also explicitly recognise that governments are the main duty-bearers for the provision of education, either by securing education for the most marginalised, or by coordinating and regulating participation of other actors in education.

### **Women and girls' right to education**

Educational policies and programmes must take account of the issue of intersectionality and gender equality in education, facing patriarchy, heteronormativity, poverty, child marriage, gender-based violence; and narrowing the gap between girls and boys in accessing and staying in education.

### **Transformative education**

Sustainable recovery requires not only adaptive education and learning, helping people to keep up with the changes in the environment, but transformative one, including critical thinking and developing values like autonomy, emancipation, freedom, democracy, and the agency of learners. Transformation requires focus both on schools and other educational institutions, as well as on lifelong learning opportunities at every age. It is necessary to create inclusive policies, tackle urgent problems and develop long-term strategies and increase investments in education and lifelong learning.

Decolonial education speaks to one of the most urgent changes we need today. We are concerned with the emancipatory function of education as a catalyst for change in the world.

## **Education in emergencies**

It is urgent to invest in public financing for public education and effective planning to address the multiple impacts of emergencies, securing qualified staff, training and working conditions for school workers and adequate school infrastructure. Emotional support for families, students and in general all of those who are part of the education experience is very important. The complexity and interdependency of children's care, safety, wellbeing and education in times of crisis requires the adoption or strengthening of coordinated multi-sectoral approaches that incorporate inclusive education strategies. Education must be available, acceptable, adaptable and accessible, with policies facing:

- discrimination and exclusion, without obstruction for the most vulnerable and people living in conditions of displacement;
- school and universities destruction through wars, conflicts, and impacts of climate change and disasters, making safe spaces for all learners;
- impacts of the pandemic and other sanitary issues, producing interseccional policies with health and social assistance.

## **Education and the digital divide**

The technological divide between countries and within countries is massive and therefore education systems cannot simply rely on promoting teaching via technology to secure education outcomes. States must provide good infrastructures including, network, power, accessibility and availability. It requires also proactive support for open educational resources, in line with the UNESCO Recommendation of 2019, promoting the development of local content (as opposed to the continued dominance of publishers based in just a few countries), and tackling weaknesses in copyright frameworks that expose teachers, librarians and others to uncertainty and potential illegality. There is also absolute need of counselling support for those millions of students who have been experiencing emotional distress and anxiety due to the closure of schools and extensive online-learning without face-to-face human interaction.

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