

The Impact of COVID-19 School Closures on Child Protection and Education Inequalities in Humanitarian Settings: Recommendations for Action!

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With the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic, the cancellation of in-person learning has meant the postponement of education as a whole for an estimated **1.3 billion children**. This has left the remaining **300 million out-of-school students** to attend class by way of remote learning. It is clear to see that this change has not only posed great protection risks for the parties within the former demographic, but it has also revealed longstanding inequities in the education received by children around the world.

Primary schools were one of the first institutions to be shut down worldwide, as child interaction was seen as a sure means of accelerating the virus' spread. As programs began to integrate into online learning, however, a large majority of children found themselves without the technological means to partake in this new form of education. Furthermore, this new means of self-guided education has brought to light a contrast with children who aren't mentally capable of abiding within this new system.

The lack of a consistent education source has proven to be detrimental in the progression of life and general welfare for many children. Not having this centre of livelihood has thrust children into a completely new dynamic within their homes, as well as the outside world. Speaker Dr. Dzaghig Koul Sahagian discusses the various domestic conflicts that children in Lebanon face as a result of limited education. These conflicts include abuse and neglect, increased undertaking of

labour, early marriages, etc.. Sahagian also mentions the undertaking of domestic responsibilities by Lebanese children as a factor that limits time for play and extracurricular activities.

Following Sahagian's presentation, Jonas Habimana (BIFERD, DRC) discusses the increased risk factors that children out of education face during these times, using his home nation of the Congo as a case study. The issues already befalling children in the Congo have only been amplified without lack of an education system. Since the beginning of the pandemic, civilians within the Congo have been victims of tremendous natural disaster and military conflict, as well as dire economic strife.

Citing remedies for these significant risks the children face, Habimana recommends *"Global protection and education clusters and supporting humanitarian agencies and networks to continue to mobilise funds to support education and child protection in DR Congo."* This is in addition to any internal budget allocations the state government may be able to produce.

Presenter Dr. Laura Lee continues this discussion of remedies by illustrating a series of policies enforced by global educational systems that would ensure child wellbeing in the event of an infectious disease outbreak (IDO). Her recommendations include the closing of schools only in the most extreme circumstances, strengthening child IDO preparedness related to education and protection, and maintaining accountability towards children, families, and communities.

As Ayesha Kadir acknowledges, an open dialogue needs to be maintained with children enrolled in remote education to identify the mental and logistical struggles that are inflicted on a daily basis. The path to remedying the issues faced by children out of education is clear, yet our individual efforts cannot be mobilised without the aid of external resources and unity amongst organisations and working groups.

The meeting concludes with panelist moderator Dean Brooks asking all attendees a single question: **"What is one action you can take forward, as an individual or organisation, to advance the (aforementioned) recommendations?"** As the audience's responses appeared on a live feed from Brook's presentation, a common theme began to form. **Strengthen work and capacity building across sectors, further develop communication systems with children in need, and solidify child centred emergency response plans as a result.**

With a great interactive presence between our speakers and attendees, "The Impact of COVID-19 School Closures on Child Protection and Education Inequalities in Humanitarian Settings: Recommendations for Action!" was an excellent close to Day 2 of the 2022 Annual Meeting. To find the resources discussed during this session, please [click here](#).