

# CHILDREN DURING COVID-19: FROM EVIDENCE TO ACTION - CHILD PROTECTION

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## Round Table 2: Global multi-sector humanitarian actors

### Centering Children and Young People’s Voices During Infectious Disease Outbreaks Related School Closures and Reopenings - What We Can Do as a Sector

On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022, key actors from the Child Protection sector were brought together to discuss the impact of school closures on children in humanitarian settings, listen to children’s key messages, and discuss recommendations to bring to the multisector Round Table on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Recommendations were discussed and organized around four thematic areas.

☆ The star symbol notes recommendations that were identified by participants as ‘key recommendations’.

#### **1. Mitigating the long-term protection, well-being and education impacts arising from school closures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

i.e., MHPSS, child marriage, recruitment to armed groups, child labour, decreased school enrolment.

☆ **Ensure that the social service workforce, including front line child protection workers, is trained**, with sufficient personnel and in the right places to identify vulnerable children (who are in need of case management and other child protection support and services).

Identify children who have heightened vulnerability (for example, out of school children, children who are working, or children without parental care and connect them to services *(also applies to theme 2 - prevention)*).

- Carry out root cause analysis: once vulnerable children are identified, identify what are the root causes of the vulnerability to address and prevent future harm.
- Address loss of livelihoods, connect children exposed to child labour, sexual exploitation, school dropout etc., with food, livelihoods, and social protection.
- Develop and fund a strong, robust targeted plan to reach out to and support children whose protection and safeguarding has been severely violated including being recruited into armed groups (including extremism, organized crime and trafficking).

- Prioritise funds to protect children before, during and after outbreaks. Ensure that all steps of Case Management are budgeted for so that action can be taken to protect vulnerable children that are identified.
- Understand the pathways of harm to children in infectious disease outbreak settings for early identification. Invest in early identification at the outset of an outbreak.
- Provide Accelerated Education to children who have lost several years of school, for example through accelerated learning programs. (See INEE [Accelerated Education](#)).

Enhance cross sectoral coordination to mitigate long term impacts of COVID-19 related school closures:

- Sectors should work closely together to ensure that information and resources are shared effectively, and that interventions are coordinated to avoid duplication and ensure maximum impact. i.e. Enhance coordination between Child Protection, Education, Health and livelihoods sectors to improve coordination to address issues such as child labour, food security and mental health and psychosocial support.

## 2. Preventing negative impacts to children’s protection, well-being, and education during infectious disease outbreaks in the future (based on our learning from COVID-19)



**Invest in Anticipatory Action that integrates child protection.** Anticipate what is needed to protect children’s well-being (for example: identify vulnerable families and provide case management support and services). For example:

- Anticipate that governments with less resources will need additional resources to resume education sooner rather than later.
- Anticipate the loss of livelihoods and conduct a mapping of vulnerable families for provision of cash support and other CP services and supports as required, for example case management.

**Invest in community strengthening programs.** For example, identify community coping mechanisms and enhance or strengthen them.

- Understand how communities are already addressing negative coping mechanisms and how these approaches can be enhanced/strengthened by CP actors.

**Invest and plan for MHPSS provision** for children, caregivers, and community members.

### 3. Meaningfully engaging children in decision-making on school closing/opening, during infectious disease outbreaks and in addressing impacts of COVID-19.

☆ **Prioritize funding, support and strengthen capacity of child and youth-led organizations, child/youth leadership/networks and groups, and community-based organizations that work *with* child leaders and engage these groups in outbreak preparedness.** This sets a foundation – a strong basis/structure that can be built upon locally and nationally in the event of an outbreak.

- Have a concrete action to collaborate on: i.e. Outbreak preparedness plan; Operationalization of CP and Education Minimum Standards.
- Build on local structures and ensure that resources, funds, and services are accessible by children so that they are recognized as partners in the response.
- Ensure representation of children and groups who were disproportionately affected, for example, children with disabilities, younger children under five, and adolescents.

**Learn from and profile examples of participatory, collaborative, multi-sectoral and/or locally led approaches have been employed with children.** Use these to enhance locally led approaches and to develop processes to keep national governments accountable to children, families, and communities.

☆ **Recognize children as experts, respect their voices, and revolutionize outbreak strategic planning by ensuring children are enabled to participate and engage with decision-makers.**

- Recognize that strategies deployed without the insights of children compromised the COVID-19 response and prioritize learning from children to inform better decision-making.
- Build stronger messages to decision-makers with children's voices incorporated.
- Work with children to understand and communicate the implications of isolation as a result of school closures during infectious disease outbreaks.

**Co-create communications material with children for children,** ensuring that concise, clear, and accurate information is accessible ahead of an infectious disease outbreak as well as during and after.

### 4. Ensuring equity, accessibility, and continuity of learning for all children in safe and protective environments during infectious disease outbreaks

☆ **Ensure that outbreak preparedness is carried out *with* children and young people.**

☆ **Strengthen multi-sectoral collaboration on meaningfully engaging children.** Develop a framework for Child Protection, Education, Health, and other sectors to guide child engagement during an outbreak.

- Invest in strong child protection measures, systems, and guidance ahead of an outbreak, recognizing the 'exacerbation effect' during an infectious disease outbreak.
- Provide guidance to each sector about accessing protection services and ensuring inclusivity.
- Maximize response quality and coverage while reducing duplication of efforts by strong coordination for MHPSS using Global Education Cluster and CPAoR [here](#)

**Address compounding issues impacting children’s wellbeing and learning such as food insecurity.** Identify and support vulnerable children *before* an outbreak occurs.

- Provide financial support to families whose household income has been affected during an infectious disease outbreak.

**Invest in locally driven and nationally accountable leadership.**

- Advance locally led leadership through collaborating with children, communities, and key leaders.

**Invest in accessible and inexpensive digital education and self-directed learning materials.**

- Utilize inexpensive technology, allowing access in remote locations. Ensure that programs consider children's participation in remote locations in budgeting processes.
- Encourage access to radios at the local level to inform, convey, and share learning offline during outbreaks.
- Provide accessible, inclusive and supportive self-directed learning materials.
- Invest in community centres or communal areas for learning and school-like programs in communities to ensure continuity of education.
- Ensure a greater focus on school-like programs during school closures, to ensure continuity of education, especially for girls. Engage children in planning for these programs.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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Organisation
Global Child Protection Area of Responsibility
The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action
The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
Social Services Workforce Global Alliance
International Federation of the Red Cross

<b>Save the Children</b>
<b>International Rescue Committee</b>
<b>UNHCR</b>
<b>Bureau d'Information, Formation, Echanges et Recherche pour le Développement (BIFERD)</b>
<b>UNICEF</b>
<b>Save the Children (READY Initiative)</b>
<b>Bank Information Centre</b>
<b>Fundación Centro Internacional de Educación y Desarrollo Humano (CINDE)</b>
<b>Global Education Cluster</b>

This Round Table was carried out as part of a series of discussions that aim to move evidence - from a three-country study exploring the impact of COVID-19 related school closures on children's protection, wellbeing and educational inequalities - toward action. The research reports, advocacy briefs can be [accessed here](#), as well as the Round Table overview and the Children's and Young People's Key Messages from Round Table 1.