



# IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ADOLESCENTS' EDUCATION

Evidence briefing  
June 2021

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was written by Adrienne Monteath-van Dok, Anthony Davis and Nicholas Frost.

The project was commissioned and managed by Anthony Davis, with support from Anna Darling. The research and analysis were led by Adrienne Monteath-van Dok and Nicholas Frost from Bloem Consulting.

We would like to thank everyone who supported the preparation of this report. Most of all, we extend our sincere thanks to the adolescent girls and boys, the parents, teachers, local leaders and policymakers in Guatemala, Honduras, Nepal and Sudan who participated directly or indirectly in this research.

We would like to thank all the Plan International staff and researchers who supported the quantitative and qualitative research: Ashish Lamichhane; Andres Yepes; Amanda Vanessa Reyes; Anil Bogata; Diego Barrios; Estuardo Fuentes; Guzal Nari; Hanadi Mohammed; Isobel Fergus; Janaina Hirata; Krishna Shrestha; Lucia Rost; Rafael Fajardo; Shreejana Bajracharya; Shreekrishna Wagle; Tatiana Carranza.

We would also like to thank the research steering group and Plan International staff for their review, comments and feedback throughout the process: Alison Joyner; Amelia Whitworth; Angela Machonesa; Anika Krstic; Anna Darling; Ashish Lamichhane; Cesar Bazan; Jane Clancey; Kathleen Spencer-Chapman; Kelly Worwood; Laura Adams; Lisa Marie-Jones; Liz Satow; Pasanna Mutha-Merrennege; Romeo Matas; Rose Caldwell; Tom Philips.

**Copy editor:** Richard Steele

**Design:** Kapusniak Design

**Cover photo:** Girl wears face mask at her school to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

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**Plan International UK 2021**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

**Education is a fundamental human right. Quality, equitable and inclusive education benefits individuals, communities and countries. It saves lives; improves nutrition; reduces child, early and forced marriage; and leads to more equal, respectful and open societies.<sup>i</sup> It is critical to achieving gender justice, peace, stability and climate resilience.**

It is of grave concern, therefore, that the COVID-19 pandemic has created the worst education crisis in a century, affecting 94% of students worldwide.<sup>ii</sup> At the pandemic's peak in 2020, 1.6 billion students were taken out of the classroom.<sup>iii</sup> One in seven children globally have missed more than three quarters of their in-person learning since the start of the pandemic.<sup>iv</sup>

While swift and wide-ranging attempts were made to reach girls and boys through remote learning, nearly a third (463 million) were not able to access it – often lacking the necessary technological assets at home.<sup>v</sup> As a result, it is estimated that more than 100 million additional girls and boys will fall below the minimum proficiency level in reading.<sup>vi</sup> This year of lost learning will have a damaging effect on the futures of millions.<sup>vii</sup>

The closure of schools has also prevented girls and boys from accessing protective spaces. Critical services such as school meals, menstrual hygiene kits, health services, and mental health and psychosocial support were suddenly

out of reach.<sup>viii</sup> Current evidence and experience shows the impacts of this are gendered, with girls and young women most affected through increased exposure to child, early and forced marriages; trafficking and sexual exploitation; and unintended or unwanted adolescent pregnancy.<sup>ix, x, xi, xii</sup>

The pandemic has exacerbated many pre-existing crises, including an education emergency that has resulted in high out-of-school rates, particularly among adolescents<sup>1</sup> and young people,<sup>xiii</sup> and a global learning crisis.<sup>xiv</sup> The climate emergency, humanitarian crises and conflicts are growing in complexity and length, further halting progress.<sup>xv</sup> COVID-19 has amplified these crises and knocked even further off course progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5 on education and gender equality, which was already lagging.<sup>xvi</sup>

Millions of girls and boys risk missing out on an education unless ambitious action is taken. As it prepares to host the G7, the UK government has pledged to inject some “urgency”<sup>xvii</sup> into the global

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<sup>1</sup> Plan International defines adolescents as being between 10 and 19 years old.



Girls wear face masks at their school to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

education recovery. However, despite being a repeatedly stated priority of the prime minister and a manifesto commitment, funding for girls' education is estimated to have been cut by 40%.<sup>xviii</sup> Now is not the time to shirk our responsibilities to the world's poorest girls. The second half of 2021 – with the G7, Global Partnership for Education Replenishment summit and COP26 summit on climate change – offers a critical opportunity to turn the tide on the global education crisis. It is a chance for the UK government, alongside other donors, national governments and partners, to turn rhetoric into reality.

This research was commissioned to help shape and inform these efforts. It shines a light on the impact of COVID-19 on adolescents' education by bringing together quantitative and qualitative data sets to help us understand how adolescents, and particularly adolescent girls, have or have not been able to continue their education during the pandemic.

The research provides an opportunity for adolescents to speak from their own perspectives, vividly portraying how

COVID-19 has had a profound effect on their learning, motivation, mental health and wellbeing. The findings present a stark insight into the challenges that adolescents, parents and teachers have faced over the past year:

- Nearly two-thirds of teachers were unable to teach remotely during lockdowns due to their own or their students' lack of connectivity or access to devices.
- Nearly nine in ten teachers reported fewer students attending online lessons compared with pre-pandemic school-based lessons.
- Fewer than a third of adolescents felt they learned as much at home as they would have in school.
- More than a year since the pandemic began, six in ten adolescents have not yet fully returned to education.

Recovery from this crisis will be long, uneven and uncertain. Swift and targeted action is needed to reverse the damage done to girls' education over the last year, and to build back better and more equal.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study applied quantitative and qualitative data capture and analysis to investigate the effect of COVID-19 on children’s education in low- and middle-income countries, particularly for adolescent girls. It also draws upon the findings from a broad literature review.

Quantitative data was gathered through a survey of adolescents, parents and teachers in Guatemala, Honduras, Nepal and Sudan, offered in English, Spanish, Nepali and Arabic.<sup>2</sup> Data collection methods varied between countries, ranging from entirely online to using WhatsApp texts and phone calls. In contexts where connectivity and/or access to electronic devices was not possible, interviews were carried out in person, in line with COVID-19 safety protocols.

Qualitative research was carried out through 134 key informant interviews and focus group discussions with adolescent boys and girls, parents, teachers and local leaders in Nepal (one urban and one rural location) and Sudan (three

urban and one semi-rural location). An additional 21 adolescent girls and 30 adolescent boys (aged between 10 and 19) participated in a ‘photovoice diary’ methodology, a form of participatory research that allows participants to express their views, perspectives and feelings through photographs that are discussed collectively.<sup>xix</sup>

Ethics approval was sought from Plan International’s Ethics Approval Committee and granted before the start of the study. All research activities were carried out in line with Plan International’s Research Policy and Standards. Researchers were required to adhere to strict codes of conduct, including child protection and safeguarding policies. Written and/or verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants in this research.

There are several limitations to the methodology. First, the data is not representative for any given country or region, as most data was collected in

**TABLE 1: SURVEY RESPONSE RATES, ACROSS ALL FOUR COUNTRIES**

Survey N=984	Adolescent Female	Adolescent Male	Adolescent Prefer not to say	Parent Female	Parent Male	Parent Prefer not to say	Teacher Female	Teacher Male
Guatemala	111	35	3	134	43	-	72	93
Honduras	76	14	1	23	7	-	24	22
Nepal	41	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sudan	55	32	2	54	45	1	67	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>140</b>

<sup>2</sup> For access to the survey questions, or for any other information on the methods, email [policy@plan-uk.org](mailto:policy@plan-uk.org).



Mely studies at home in Guatemala.

areas where Plan International works. Second, as the research has a particular focus on adolescent girls, the majority of the adolescent survey respondents were female, and a comparative gender analysis could not be carried out on that data. However, parents were asked to respond to the survey in relation to either their daughter or son, which in this case

allows for comparison by gender. Third, as sampling was random, parents and teachers are not necessarily those of the adolescent respondents who took part in this study. Finally, it was not possible to collect adequate comparable quantitative data from parents or teachers in Nepal, and therefore this data was not included in the analysis for these groups.

**TABLE 2: QUALITATIVE RESPONSE RATES, NEPAL AND SUDAN**

Qualitative N = 185	Method	Adolescent girls (10–19)	Adolescent boys (10–19)	Parent	Teacher	Local leader	Total
Nepal	Key informant interviews	20	20	23	8	4	75
	Photovoice diaries	20	20	n/a	n/a	n/a	40
	Focus group discussion	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Sudan	Key informant interviews	7	13	22	8	5	55
	Photovoice diaries	1	10	n/a	n/a	n/a	11
	Focus group discussion	4	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	4
<b>Total</b>		<b>45</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>185</b>

### 3. OVERVIEW AND KEY FINDINGS

“After dropping out of school, I worry about who will teach me how to read.”

*Adolescent girl, 18 years old, Nepal*

Between March 2020 and March 2021, schools in Guatemala and Honduras were fully closed for 35 and 37 weeks respectively. In Nepal, schools were completely closed for 26 weeks and partially closed for a further 26 weeks. In Sudan, schools were fully closed at the national level for an average of 15 weeks, although each state could evaluate the local health conditions and adjust accordingly.

The impacts of COVID-19 on the education of adolescent girls and boys in these countries, as perceived by respondents to the survey, are significant. To provide an overview of these impacts, questions have been grouped into eight domains<sup>3</sup> and an average score captured between one and five (1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neither agree, nor disagree, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree). A score of less than three indicates that most respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statements set out in the survey in each domain, indicating areas of concern.

Survey results across the three different respondent groups highlight concerns and challenges in all domains except two, with most scores lower than three. Response scores for Sudan are the lowest across all but three domains. Survey respondents raised most concerns over the impact of home learning and their lack of inclusion in decision making.

**“I’m worried about school performance. Now that the schools have re-opened, students were assessed, and the truth is that it is very weak. The boys and girls did not learn anything.”**

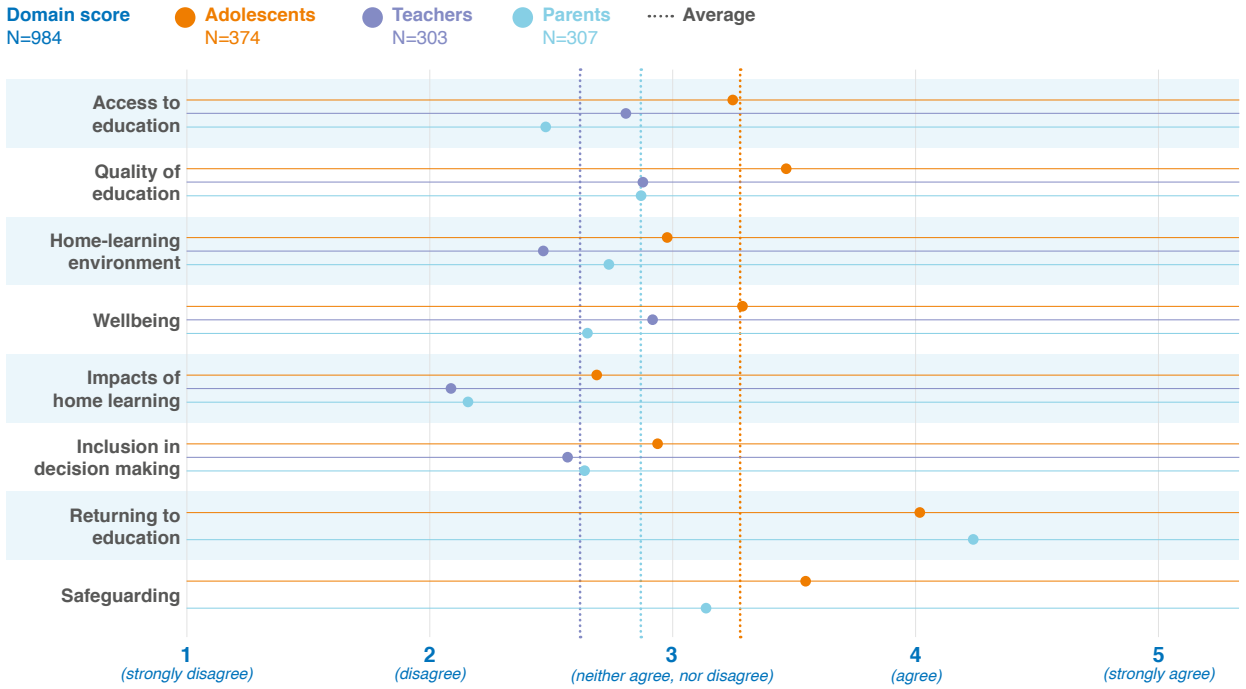
*Male teacher, Guatemala*

Average domain scores among adolescents vary by country but, overall, adolescents are more positive than parents and teachers. While those who returned to school expressed happiness at being able to see their friends and enjoy in-person classes, many were concerned about having fallen behind and the impact this would have on their future.

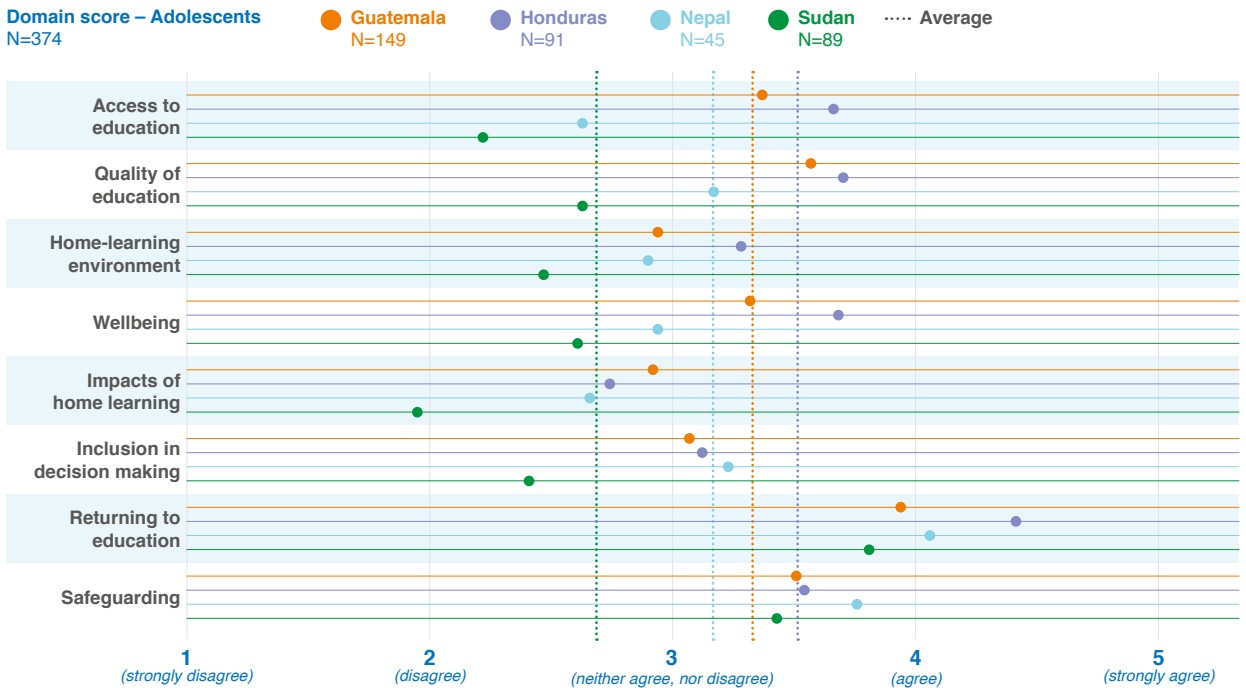
<sup>3</sup> This was only possible for those questions using a Likert scale format, rather than the open-ended questions.



**FIGURE 1: AVERAGE DOMAIN SCORES, ACROSS ADOLESCENTS, TEACHERS AND PARENTS**



**FIGURE 2: ADOLESCENTS' DOMAIN SCORES, ACROSS ALL FOUR COUNTRIES**



## KEY FINDINGS

This study presents wide-ranging impacts of COVID-19 on adolescents' education.

Key findings include:

- Already weak and overstretched education systems failed to adapt and cope with the sudden shift to remote learning.
- A lack of electronic devices, digital infrastructure and electricity meant most adolescents – particularly those in rural locations – were unable to access a quality education.
- The existing inequalities in the education system were exacerbated by the pandemic, particularly for girls, who face challenges unique to their intersecting experiences of gender and age.
- The home environment was generally not conducive to learning, with adolescents feeling easily distracted, unsupported, and limited in study time due to competing demands.
- The social and economic impacts of the pandemic, isolation, concerns about the future, and stressful home-learning environments placed additional burdens on students, parents and caregivers. Adolescents reported significant impacts on their mental health and wellbeing.
- Reduced numbers of adolescents have returned to school. The reasons for this include more girls deciding, or being forced, to enter marriage or find work. Others did not return because they felt they had missed so much education they were unable or unwilling to catch up.
- Nearly all adolescents want greater involvement in decisions about their education and how to respond to COVID-19 in their community.

## 4. ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Before the national lockdowns and school closures, 84% of the 374 adolescent respondents to the survey were in education. Another 4% attended school on a part-time basis and 12% were out of school.

The quantitative analysis in this report is based on findings from adolescents who were in school before the pandemic but whose school temporarily closed during it. As most survey questions were focused on the home-learning experience, skip logic omitted those adolescents who were not in school before the pandemic or whose school remained open during lockdown (which was the case in one of the research locations in Sudan).

### School/student communication during lockdown

While 78% of adolescents reported that their school had been in touch with them during the school closures, there

are significant differences between countries. For those adolescents in Nepal and Sudan whose schools had closed, around a third received some communication from their schools, compared with more than 90% in Guatemala and Honduras.

**“Two to three months after the lockdown was announced, our school gave us some books to study at home.”**

*Adolescent girl, 13 years old, Nepal*

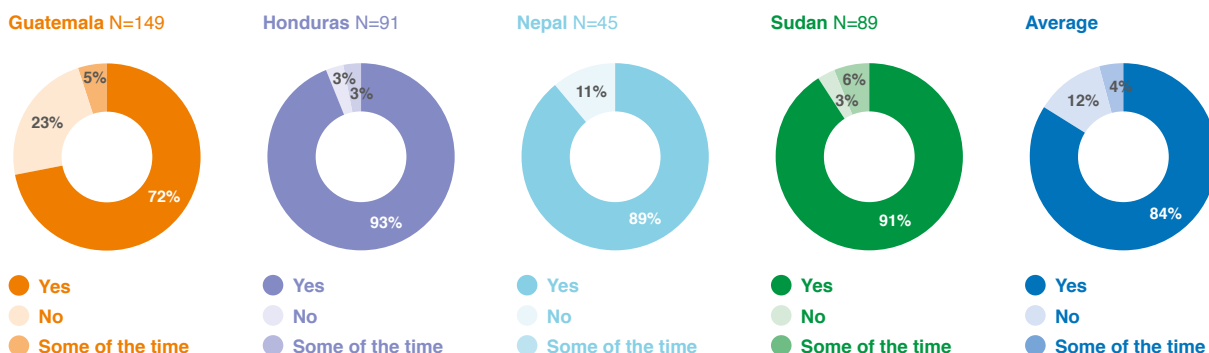
Responses by parents confirmed these findings, although the proportion of adolescents who said their schools had been in touch with them was higher than that reported by parents.

**“[There was a] lack of support from teachers, because until the end of the year they loaded the students with tasks that they never explained.”**

*Mother, Guatemala*

**FIGURE 3: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS ATTENDING SCHOOL BEFORE THE PANDEMIC, BY COUNTRY**

Adolescents: Before the coronavirus pandemic, I went to school N=374



## Access to devices and the internet

Globally, around 47% of all primary and secondary students do not have access to the internet at home.<sup>xx</sup> Home internet access by adolescents varied widely in the study. In Nepal, 53% of adolescents did not have access, compared with 34% in Guatemala and 28% in Honduras. Although the proportion of the overall population with access to electricity and network coverage in Sudan was the lowest of the countries included in this research,<sup>xxi</sup> only 14% of respondents reported having no access to the internet. However, this figure is based on a low number of respondents (seven) because most were filtered out having indicated that they did not have access to a device at home.

**“[Schools] tried to organise online classes but not everyone was able to access them because not everyone had an internet connection for this – so they stopped the classes because it was unfair to those who couldn’t attend.”**

*Adolescent girl, age unknown, Sudan*

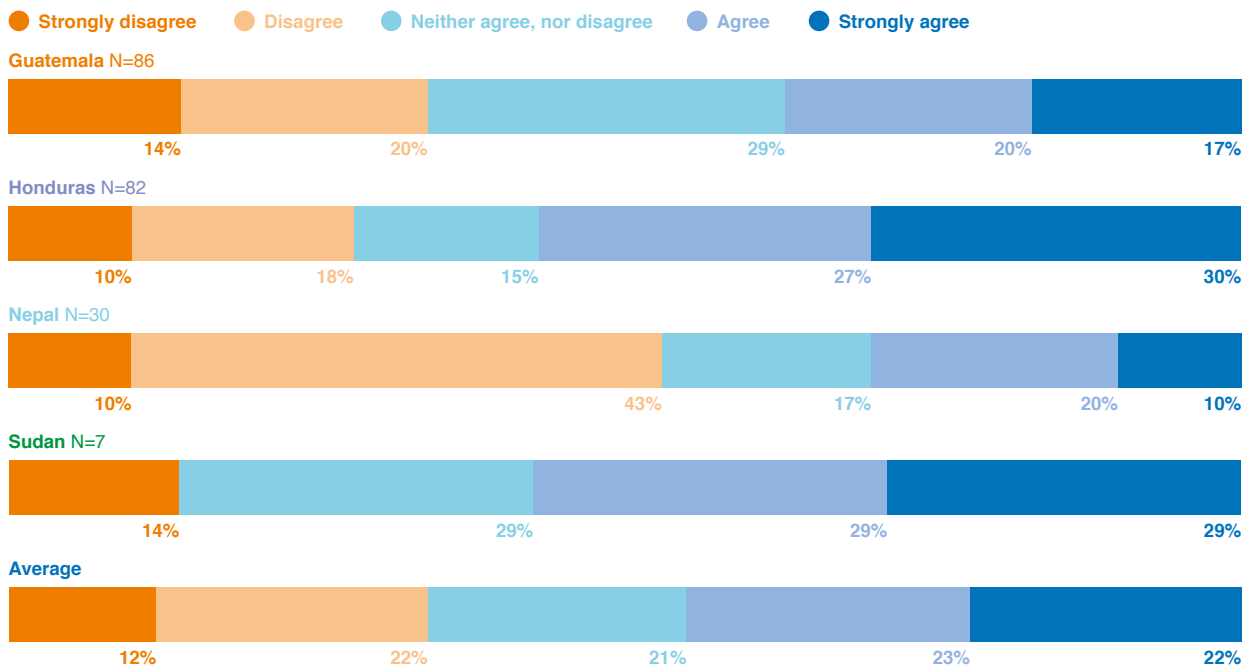
**“It is a modern method of teaching, but I think the schools haven’t the capacities and abilities to apply it.”**

*Male local leader, Sudan*

Sixty-nine percent of parents stated their children did not have access to an electronic device for learning. More than

**FIGURE 4: PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS WITH ACCESS TO THE INTERNET WHEN NEEDED, BY COUNTRY**

Adolescents: I always had access to the internet for my home learning when I needed it N=205



**“ Education is not only for those who have a mobile phone, but [should be] available for everyone. ”**

*Adolescent girl,  
14 years old, Honduras*

60% of adolescents reported having to share a device with their siblings. Girls are often at a greater disadvantage as a result of the digital gender divide – due to gender norms, boys can be favoured in terms of use of devices and the internet. In many countries, there is less frequent use of household computers and the internet by girls than boys.<sup>xxii, xxiii, xxiv</sup>

**“I feel very bad about the situation. My anxiety and stress make me worse. Adding to this, the academic load they give us. Not to mention that I have to wait to see if one of my sisters lends me their computer. And when they cannot, many times I am left without submitting my work.”**

*Adolescent girl, 17 years old,  
Honduras*

### **Teachers’ online access**

Effective technology-enabled remote teaching requires both students and teachers to have access to electronic devices with an internet connection. However, of the 303 teachers that took part in this survey, 62% were unable to teach remotely due to their own or



their students’ lack of access to devices. Of those teachers who were able to teach remotely, only half had access to an electronic device and 39% had access to the internet when they needed it to teach their lessons.

### **Radio- and TV-based lessons**

Globally, most countries (94%) provided digital (internet-based) or broadcast (radio- or TV-based) remote learning while schools remained closed.<sup>xxv</sup> Radio-based instruction was implemented at much higher rates in low-income countries compared with lower-middle-income countries, which commonly preferred internet- and TV-based instruction.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Fewer than a quarter of parents surveyed for this research reported that their adolescent children were able to access radio- and TV-based learning. This dropped to one in ten in Sudan. Of those adolescents that had access to TV and radio lessons, 60% reported learning new things and 58% that they found the lessons useful. Teachers were more critical, with only 30% agreeing the lessons were useful.

**“Our school did not provide any remote lessons. However, the government had given [some] on television. It was a nice programme. We could watch and attend the class on TV.”**

*Adolescent girl, 16 years old, Nepal*

### Poverty and location

Access to education varies by location.<sup>xxvii</sup> With limited electricity, internet or access to electronic devices, many adolescents in poor and rural communities are unable to access online learning, or any form of distance/home learning in some cases.

**“The education system must [be] strengthened. Many child[ren] in rural areas do not have access to technology [and we are not able to] meet the basic needs of the population.”**

*Female teacher, Guatemala*

Nearly nine out of ten teachers (86%) reported that fewer students attended online lessons compared with pre-pandemic school-based lessons. The reasons for this varied, but teachers commonly referred to the need for adolescents to carry out income-generating activities to support their families instead of learning.

**“We didn’t find [remote learning] as effective as classroom learning... only 30 to 35% of students were able to [attend the] online classes.”**

*Female local leader, Nepal*

**“When we started home-to-home teaching,<sup>4</sup> it was difficult to find students... some were at work.”**

*Male teacher, Nepal*

**86%**

**of teachers reported fewer students attending lessons online compared with pre-pandemic levels**

**“The challenge that I see is that students... abandon school and learning, and instead... search for marginal works.”**

*Female teacher, Sudan*

<sup>4</sup> Home-to-home teaching is when teachers go to their students’ houses to hand out teaching materials and explain how to complete them.

# 5. QUALITY OF EDUCATION

As lockdowns were imposed across the world, schools were asked to provide remote teaching at short notice. Most girls and boys were suddenly relying on teachers who had little, if any, training in teaching remotely.<sup>xxviii</sup> Parents were often ill-equipped, ill-supported or had limited time available to meet their children’s learning needs.

## Remote teaching

Due to teachers or students lacking access to technology and/or connectivity, only 30% of teachers were able to teach remotely. Of these, 24% received training on remote teaching. Teachers in Sudan were the least

likely to be able to teach lessons remotely (with 85% either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing), followed by Guatemala (60%) and Honduras (36%).

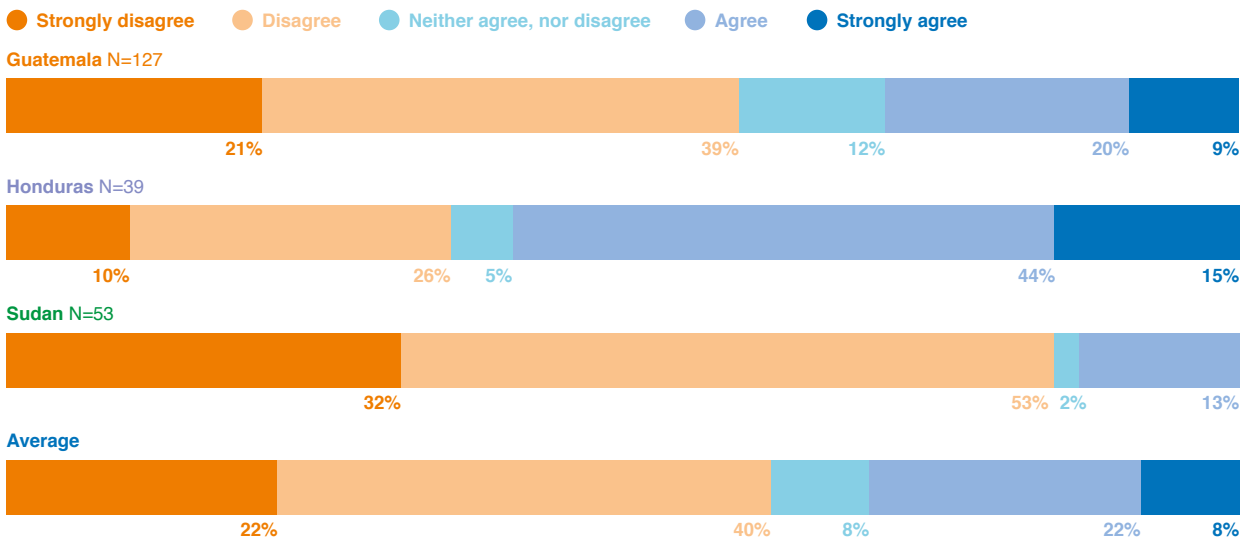
**“I did not have the opportunity to teach online because there are no resources. The community where I work is poor and there is no internet access.”**

*Female teacher, Honduras*

However, of the adolescents who received online lessons, most agreed (43%) or strongly agreed (26%) that their teachers taught well online and generally felt able to ask their teachers questions during or after online lessons.

**FIGURE 5: PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS ABLE TO TEACH LESSONS REMOTELY, BY COUNTRY**

Teachers: I was able to teach lessons remotely N=219



## Home-learning materials

Only half of adolescents received home-learning materials from their school. This average hides variations between countries – 84% of adolescents in Sudan reported not receiving any materials at all. Of those that did, fewer than half (46%) reported being able to learn from them.

**“Materials for teaching were not available.”**

*Father, Sudan*

**“I don’t think the [home] learning is sufficient, because [teachers] just sent the homework without knowing whether [pupils] have made mistakes or not.”**

*Mother, Guatemala*

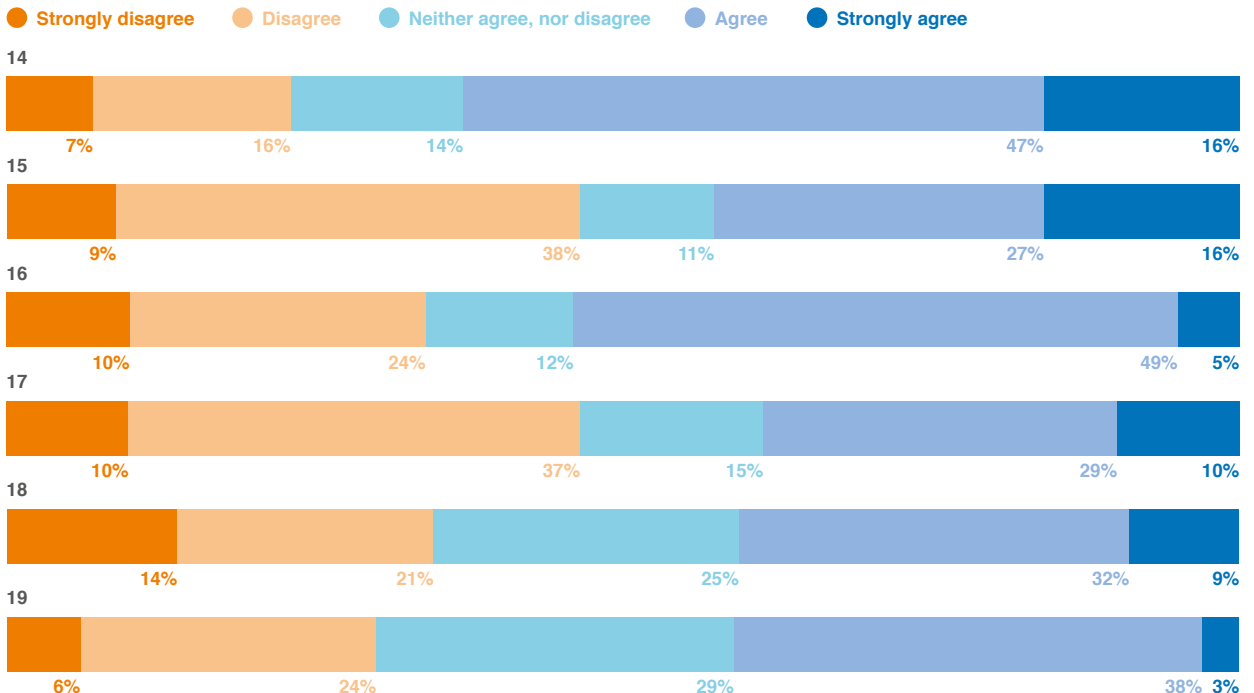
Teachers also highlighted different challenges with the home-learning materials, including that there were not enough (or any) and that they were not fit for purpose.

**“The authorities should go to the communities and see what situation they are in to be able to help and not only send documents and projects that are very far from reality.”**

*Female teacher, Guatemala*

## FIGURE 6: ADOLESCENTS’ ABILITY TO LEARN FROM SCHOOL MATERIALS, BY AGE

Adolescents: I was able to learn at home with the materials the school gave me N=261





## Parental and community support

More than half (53%) of parents felt unable to support their children's academic learning, often due to their own lack of ability or knowledge as a result of a limited education.

Just over half (52%) of adolescents felt family members were able to support their learning.

**“We have a big family, so when we found difficulties in a subject or matter related to our studies, we used to go to our uncles' and aunts' houses, because many of them are teachers also.”**

*Adolescent boy, age unknown, Sudan*

**“The only efforts to continue education came from our family members – they would buy internet packages and study books every chance they get. But there were no efforts from a specific institution.”**

*Adolescent girl, age unknown, Sudan*

While the survey did not ask adolescents or parents about non-academic support, it should be noted that parents and family members of course provide their children with other crucial types of support, including emotional and psychosocial.

**“I always support her emotionally.”**

*Mother, Guatemala*

**52%**

**of adolescents felt supported by family members to learn at home**

**“ There are many things I don't understand. I never had the opportunity to study. ”**

*Mother, Guatemala*

# 6. HOME-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

As schools were forced to close and people’s movements restricted, domestic settings became places of learning. However, low-capacity education systems were unable to adequately support students and parents with guidance on home learning.

**“The education itself was already weak. Nothing changed.”**  
*Mother, Sudan*

The psychosocial impacts of the pandemic and learning from home, disruptions to learning in the household,

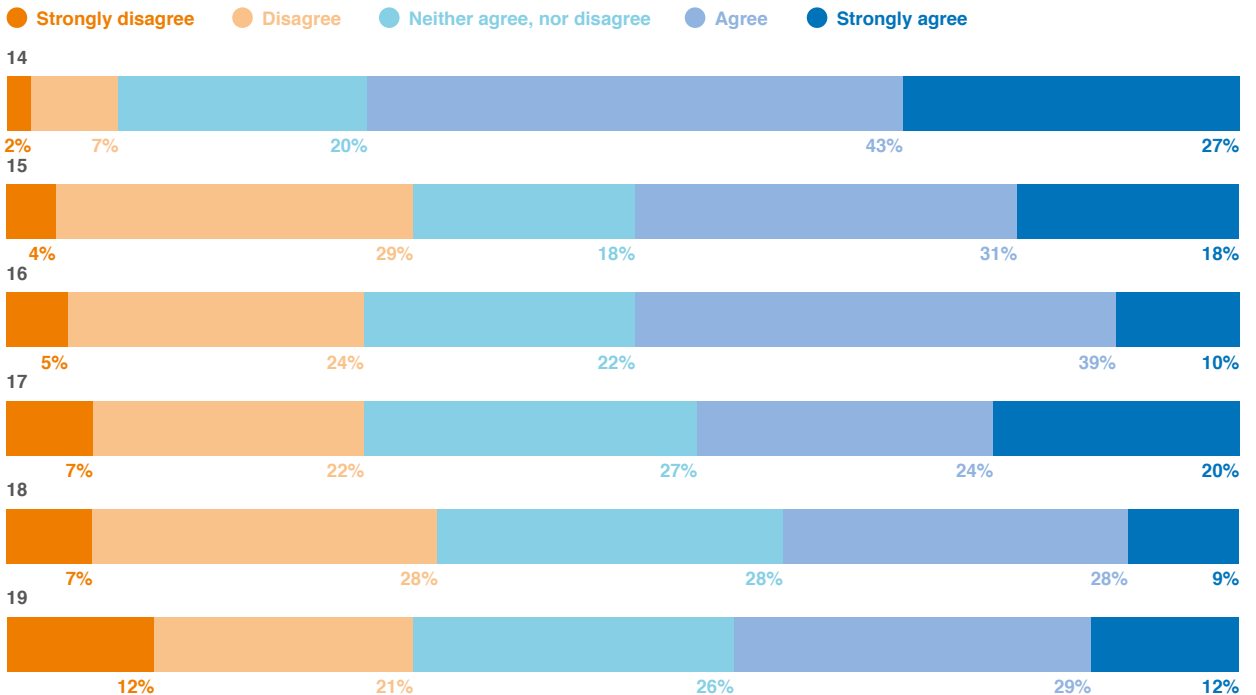
and competing priorities placed on adolescents in the home environment resulted in challenges to students’ concentration levels and time available to study.

**“There would be frequent interruptions. I would get disturbed when someone entered the room during class time. I had no separate room [to study in].”**  
*Adolescent girl, age unknown, Nepal*

Fewer than half (48%) of parents agreed that their children had enough time to

**FIGURE 7: ADOLESCENTS’ ABILITY TO CONCENTRATE, BY AGE**

Adolescents: I was able to concentrate when learning at home N=262



# 52%

of adolescents reported difficulty concentrating on their learning

study at home and 52% of adolescents reported difficulty concentrating on their learning. Older adolescents reported greater challenges concentrating.

### Household chores

COVID-19 has forced adolescents to take on increased unpaid care burdens. This is often gendered, with girls expected to support with domestic duties such as cooking, cleaning and collecting water and firewood, as well as taking care of sick family members.<sup>xxix</sup> In this research, parents indicated that household chores increased significantly for both girls and boys, and slightly (3%) more for girls. Given that on average more than half (51%) of the children had to do more chores in the house, it is perhaps unsurprising they had less time to study.

### Gender-based violence, and child, early and forced marriage

The data collection methods employed for this survey are not appropriate for addressing gender-based violence (GBV). However, it is well documented

that the pressures and restrictive measures of lockdowns and amplified risk factors have resulted in an increase in violence against women and girls and vulnerable groups,<sup>xxx</sup> in what has become known as ‘the shadow pandemic’.<sup>xxxi</sup> Out-of-school girls are at greater risk of being trafficked or forced into harmful and exploitative work,<sup>xxxii</sup> with the rates of child labour starting to rise for the first time in 20 years.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Similar rises have been recorded in the rates of child, early and forced marriage, as the pandemic intensifies the drivers.<sup>xxxiv, xxxv, xxxvi, xxxvii</sup> In Lebanon, for example, limitations on girls’ access to education, healthcare, psychosocial support, and gender-based violence prevention and response services were linked to increases in child marriage.<sup>xxxviii</sup> UNICEF predicts that 10 million more girls will be at risk of child marriage this decade due to the pandemic.<sup>xxxix</sup>

**“Girls were involved in household chores and found to be getting ready for marriage. Whereas boys spent most of the time with friends.”**

*Male local leader, Nepal*

**“ Many girls got married but I have no idea whether they have intention to return to school or not. ”**

*Teacher, gender unknown, Sudan*

## 7. WELLBEING

**“ I miss my friends and teachers, but mostly my friends and going to school each day and learn[ing] more, this is what I miss. ”**

*Adolescent girl, 14 years old, Honduras*

Long-term confinement and isolation from educational spaces has threatened to erode adolescents' social-support networks.<sup>xi</sup> Home learning has placed additional burdens on students, parents and caregivers, contributing to mental health issues.<sup>xii, xiii</sup> The psychosocial impacts of the pandemic, increased stress in households, and concerns about the future have compounded people's anxiety.<sup>xiiii</sup> This may have had an impact on learning and/or lead to higher dropout rates, setting learners back even further.<sup>xliv, xlv</sup>

This research found clear differences between in-person education and learning at home. While most adolescents (87%) stated they enjoy going to school, only 44% reported enjoying learning from home, and 52% that they felt motivated to do so. Isolation from friends and the loss of interaction with teachers and peers was a significant factor.

**“Initially, my siblings were so excited that they were going to stay home and not go to school. But with [the] weeks passing, they started to forget the poems they were taught... to forget their friends... and became withdrawn.”**

*Adolescent girl, age unknown, Sudan*

**“Our schools didn't close like a lot of the other schools... we were divided into two shifts so that we would not all attend classes at school at the same time, and that prevented me from communicating with my friends and seeing them like I used to.”**

*Adolescent girl, age unknown, Sudan*

Teachers also highlighted the stress faced by adolescents caused by the uncertainties of not knowing when schools would reopen and whether they would be able to sit their exams, both of which would affect their chances of higher education. This was reiterated by adolescents themselves.

**“Teachers explain things to us, and they make us do an activity so that we do not get stressed.”**

*Adolescent girl, 17 years old, Guatemala*

## 8. RETURNING TO EDUCATION

As of May 2021, it is more than a year since the pandemic was declared and schools are still closed in 27 countries.<sup>xlvi</sup> UNESCO estimates that 11 million girls will not return to school.<sup>xlvii</sup> Our research has found that 60% of students have not fully returned to in-person education. While many schools are yet to open, others have not returned for a range of reasons.

**“They lost their motivation, their enthusiasm.”**

*Male teacher, Honduras*

**“[They have not returned] Because of the [fear of the] second wave of coronavirus.”**

*Male teacher, Sudan*

**“Girls are impacted negatively the most, because many families talked to them about marriage since schools are closed and the opening date still unknown.”**

*Female teacher, Sudan*

While adolescents who have returned to school are generally happy to be back, parents and teachers are concerned about the learning lost and progress halted, with nine in ten teachers stating this would have a negative impact on their students’ futures. Parents and teachers commented on how the pandemic has exacerbated existing weaknesses in educational systems, the loss of socialisation skills, and the abandonment of education due to low household incomes.

**60%**

**of students have not fully returned to in-person education**

**“Not everyone has the economic capacity [to continue education].”**

*Male teacher, Guatemala*

**“It is not the same learning. Only three times a week they go [to school] and they don’t learn the same.”**

*Mother, Guatemala*

**“They are not able to understand or keep up.”**

*Male teacher, Sudan*

**“Due to the lockdown, some of the parents’ financial situations have got worse. As a result, some of the students go to work with their parents and... are not back to school.”**

*Male teacher, Nepal*



Sucely holds a sign reading 'That girls and women have technological support for their education'.

## 9. LISTENING TO ADOLESCENTS

**“No one has asked anything. Everyone was scared and were thinking of themselves.”**

*Adolescent girl, 13 years old, Nepal*

Young people have a significant role to play and should be meaningfully included in all aspects of the COVID-19 response. On average, 42% of the adolescents surveyed reported having some involvement in decision making during the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> However, adolescent participants in the qualitative research in Nepal and Sudan reported that they were not consulted.

**“Who are we that they would ask to us? We were never asked about anything.”**

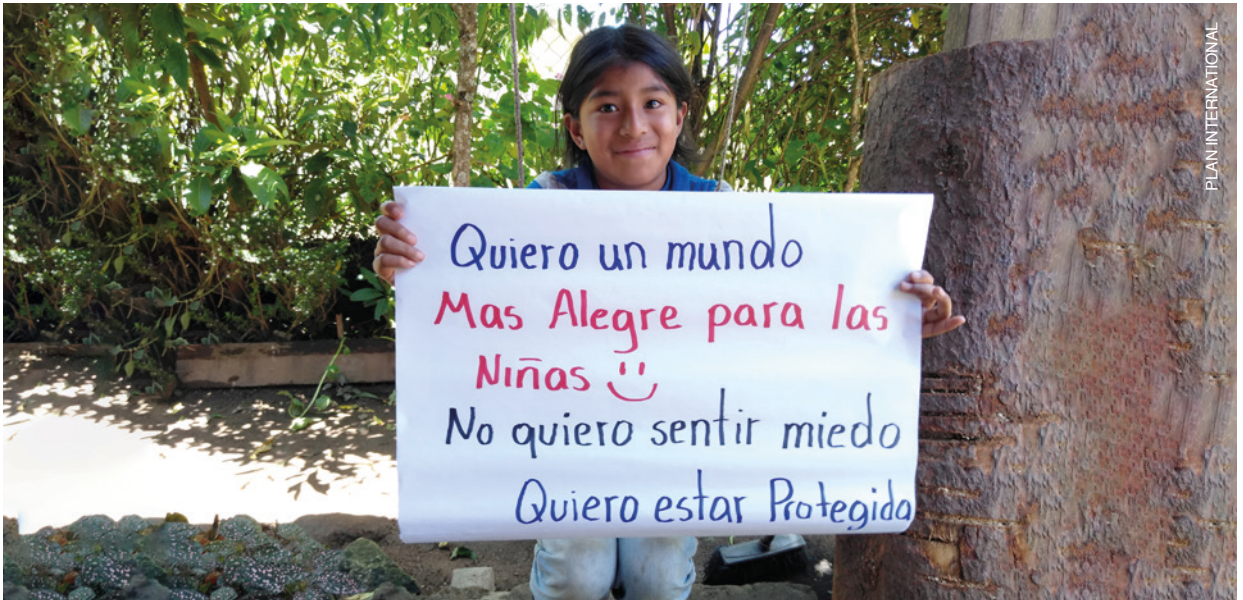
*Adolescent boy, 13 years old, Nepal*

**“No. [laughs] I am so small for that.”**

*Adolescent boy, age unknown, Nepal*

Eighty-nine percent of adolescents wanted to be more involved in decisions

<sup>5</sup> These numbers are higher than expected based on extensive comparable research conducted by Plan International. One reason for this could be that the research was conducted in areas that Plan International was already working, with child participation core to our programme approach.



Fany holds a sign reading 'I want a happier world for girls. I don't want to be afraid. I want to be protected'.

# 89%

of adolescents wanted to be more involved in decisions about their education and the COVID-19 response in their community

about their education and the COVID-19 response in their community.

**“[I would have liked them] To have asked us what we think about the classes.”**

*Adolescent girl, 18 years old, Guatemala*

**“I would ask them to re-construct the schools well, in a way that would allow us to live through such pandemics in the future without further... compromising our studies.”**

*Adolescent girl, age unknown, Sudan*

**“Local authority should provide materials for study and provide counselling.”**

*Adolescent girl, 17 years old, Nepal*

**“I wish our local authority will take strict actions to prevent coronavirus in school or community and they will provide food to needy people and also provide vaccines to all.”**

*Adolescent girl, 14 years old, Nepal*

**“Ask the students what is the most convenient way to access education during these times.”**

*Adolescent boy, 18 years old, Honduras*

**“[I believe] That the authorities [should] give free courses so that young people do not miss classes.”**

*Adolescent girl, 16 years old, Guatemala*

## 10. CONCLUSION

**The pandemic has created an unprecedented education emergency that has placed the future of the world's most marginalised children and adolescents in jeopardy. The impact of lockdowns and social distancing measures have brought to light the lack of resilience of traditional educational systems and models. Local and national governments were unprepared to deal with the large-scale disruption caused by COVID-19.<sup>xlviii</sup>**

Economic, gender, social, geographical and technological inequalities – already barriers to education – were heightened during the pandemic. These factors, on their own or combined, limited the ability of students to access education following the sudden shift to remote learning with limited optimisation of existing low- or no-tech solutions. Many teachers were unable to provide lessons at all. Most parents and adolescents were ill-prepared and under-supported, or had too many competing demands on their time, to manage education at home. Too few were consulted on how to improve the situation. Adolescents struggled to learn, and the psychosocial impacts of the pandemic, isolation, and worries

about their future affected their mental health and wellbeing.

Despite the global commitment to guaranteeing a quality education for every child, millions more girls now face a future outside of the classroom. The risk of them never returning to school is drastically heightened as they take on additional unpaid care, are forced into marriage or domestic servitude, and shoulder increased economic burdens. Without addressing the gender-based barriers preventing girls from returning to and accessing a quality education, recovery from this education crisis will stall. The stakes have never been higher.





Training healthcare providers on how to use personal protective equipment.

# 11. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE G7

The pandemic has threatened to undo years of progress and hard-won gains on gender equality and girls' education. We can no longer afford to delay reversing the catastrophic impacts of a year of lost learning for children and adolescents. Progress needs to be made in strengthening the resilience of education systems to ensure continuity of learning during future climate crises, economic shocks, and disruptions. Funding needs to be increased and moved quickly, inclusively, and through locally-led processes. Girls and young women need to be at the centre, able to access decision-making spaces, occupy leadership positions, and help shape an equitable and just recovery.

The G7 nations, working with other donors, national governments, and national and international organisations, could be critical in supporting this. In doing so, this group of wealthy nations would set in place a truly transformative agenda to address these monumental challenges and create a more sustainable, inclusive, equitable and resilient post-COVID world.

*The G7 Declaration on girls' education: Recovering from COVID-19 and*

*unlocking agenda 2030<sup>xlix</sup>* (Girls' Education Declaration) is a welcome commitment along this road. It offers a springboard for continued action on girls' education in what is a decisive year for global education. The gap in financing required to reach SDG 4 is now estimated at around US\$200 billion annually.<sup>1</sup> Political commitments must be matched with commensurate resources and action to avoid more empty promises.

**We call on the G7 leaders to:**

## 1.

**Unanimously sign up to the G7 Girls' Education Declaration and support the full realisation of its commitments:** (a) Endorse the Declaration in the G7 Leaders' Summit Communique; (b) Match political commitments to girls' education in the Declaration with funding and concrete action; (c) Develop an effective accountability mechanism to monitor its implementation and how G7 leaders are to account for its delivery.

## 2.

**Urgently increase funding for adolescents' education:** Increase and sustain financial support to reverse the impact of the biggest shock to education globally and meet the education needs of adolescent girls and boys, including those living through conflict and humanitarian crises. Progressively commit to spend 15% of overseas development assistance (ODA) on education and 10% of humanitarian aid on education by 2025. The UK government should urgently reverse its aid cuts, including those to education, and renew its commitment to spend 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) on ODA, delivered through equitable, inclusive and gender-transformative<sup>6</sup> policies and programmes.

## 3.

**Protect learning during COVID-19:** Ensure a safe return to school and prevent further lost learning for all children, by: ensuring equitable access to and availability of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines in low- and middle-income countries; addressing the gendered impacts of the pandemic and the barriers girls face in returning to education; financing and implementing accessible catchup classes that balance children's need to learn with other responsibilities; and addressing the mental health and wellbeing needs of children, adolescents and teachers. Accelerated efforts are needed to ensure all children, including those with different abilities and those that lack access to the internet and technology, can access a quality education. Where children are learning remotely, increase targeted support to parents and caregivers.

## 4.

**Plan for future shocks and strengthen resilience:** Support planning for future shocks that will enable continuity of learning through resilient education systems and flexible, (local) context-specific delivery mechanisms. Contingency plans should include guidance on how best to enable teachers, students and parents to access learning materials and educational support in a format that is appropriate and accessible, including in rural and poor communities. Teachers should be trained to provide gender-responsive support to students, parents and caregivers, through both online and low- or no-tech (for example, paper-based) distance-learning approaches.

<sup>6</sup> A gender-transformative approach goes beyond addressing 'symptoms' to explicitly tackle the root causes of gender inequality, particularly unequal gender power relations, discriminatory social norms and systems, structures, policies and practices. It improves the daily condition of girls and women, while advancing their position and value in society.

## 5.

**Eliminate systemic and gendered barriers:** Prioritise interventions that address the structural barriers and gender norms that prevent girls from accessing and completing education (gender-based violence, unintended or unwanted pregnancy, child marriage, unpaid domestic work, and so on), including by working with boys and men to change negative attitudes and behaviours that hold girls back. Increased priority should be given to ensuring that (home) learning environments are gender sensitive, safe, inclusive and promote equality, non-discrimination and human rights for children of all gender identities.<sup>7</sup>

## 6.

**Support and resource adolescents' participation and girls' leadership on COVID recovery and girls' education:** Listen to adolescent girls and commit to and adequately resource the meaningful participation of girl-led groups and girl activists in key national and global decision-making processes on COVID recovery and girls' education. This should include multi-year flexible and accessible funding to grassroots, child-and-youth-led and women-led organisations delivered through collaborative partnership models that include in-built child-friendly community feedback and accountability mechanisms.

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<sup>7</sup> Plan International believes in a comprehensive vision of education, consistent with state obligations and the aims of education, as set out in Articles 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Education should be relevant to the needs of students, and delivered in learner-friendly, safe, secure and healthy environments. Education should seek to achieve the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity. Education sector plans, budgets, curricula, textbooks, teaching materials, methods and learning environments should be gender sensitive and promote equality, non-discrimination, human rights and peace. See <https://plan-international.org/publications/financing-right-education>.



Girl washes her hands at school.



Plan International staff member uses child-friendly COVID-19 book to teach children about the disease.

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