



U.S. Government COVID-19 International Basic Education Response

July 2021



Cover Photo: Marc Maitre (right), a 1st grader, and his brother, Daniel, received a solar-powered radio and comprehension worksheets so that they can readily participate in the USAID/Haiti literacy radio distance learning program. Photo courtesy of Jean Cyril Pressoir/USAID

Table of Contents

Acronyms	4
Foreword from the First Lady	6
Introduction	8
Exacerbated Inequity and Learning Loss	8
The Ripple Effect	8
U.S. Government Approach	12
Strong Foundation of the USG Strategy on International Basic Education	12
Building Back Better Global Education Systems	13
Global Engagement	13
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	13
Coordination from Relief to Development	13
The Role of Domestic Education in International COVID-19 Response	14
U.S. Government Response	18
Addressing Barriers to School Participation And Learning	18
Ensure Safe Return to Learning, Especially for the Most Marginalized and Vulnerable	20
Engaging the Private Sector	24
Build More Resilient and Equitable Education Systems	25
The Critical Role of Higher Education in COVID-19 Response	27
Looking Forward	29
Adapting for Change	29
New Use of Data and Methods for Monitoring and Evaluation	29
Conclusion	30
Available Tools and Resources	31
Endnotes	32

Acronyms

CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DOL	Department of Labor
FY	Fiscal year
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex
McGovern-Dole	McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition
MT	Metric ton
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USG	United States Government
U.S.	United States



Safe return to learning

Thousands of Sri Lankan students returned to school in August after five months of closure—a USG initiative helped disinfect schools and ensure a healthy learning environment for Sri Lankan students.

Photo: USAID SCORE Program in Sri Lanka

Foreword from the First Lady



OFFICE OF
THE FIRST LADY

Education transforms us. It calls us to build on the knowledge and wisdom that has come before, and imagine new, innovative paths forward. Education reminds us that our futures are woven together.

Building back from the COVID-19 pandemic provides us with the opportunity to reimagine the systems that serve our students, with resourcefulness, resilience, and creativity. The United States is ready to lead this effort.

Now is the time to give children across the globe—all of our children—the chance to learn, grow, and become the people they want to be. Together, I know we can build this future.

—Dr. Jill Biden, First Lady of the United States



First Lady Dr. Jill Biden signs her name on a welcome sign during a visit to Benjamin Franklin Elementary School in Meriden, Connecticut.

Photo: Courtesy of Kevin Lowery



Building back better

In North Macedonia, Ana, Kaja, and their cousin Stela follow a USAID-supported TV-classroom program broadcast on national television.

Photo: UNICEF

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is a complex, multifaceted health, humanitarian, and development crisis that devastated the education sector.

At the peak of the first wave of cases, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimated that COVID-19 disrupted the education of 1.6 billion learners, as 190 countries faced nationwide school closures. The United States Government (USG) mobilized immediate support both domestically and internationally to face this unprecedented crisis.¹

Now, as many education systems begin to recover, the USG is working with partner countries to mitigate the loss of instructional time, prepare for heightened uncertainty in global education, and equip education actors and institutions to increase their resiliency. Despite numerous challenges in the education sector, the USG collectively reached more than 25.4 million learners in 57 countries through international basic education programs designed to improve measurable learning outcomes and expand access to high-quality education for all in fiscal year (FY) 2020. The USG will continue building on these efforts and utilize this opportunity to learn from the pandemic and build back better through policy and program reforms that transform education systems to be more inclusive and responsive to the needs of all learners and educators.

Exacerbated Inequity and Learning Loss

The effects of the pandemic have exacerbated preexisting inequities between and within education systems, disproportionately disadvantaging girls and women, people with disabilities, people living in extreme poverty, conflict-affected and displaced populations, and other marginalized groups. This is especially challenging for learners who face intersectional and compounded marginalization, causing the highest risk of drop-out and learning loss.

- Pre-pandemic, at least half of the 65 million school-age girls and boys with disabilities were out of school, and UNESCO estimated literacy rates for women and girls with disabilities at only one percent.²
- UNESCO estimates that 11 million of the hardest to reach girls may never return to school due to pandemic-related education disruptions.³

As a result of the pandemic, the hardest to reach learners are further marginalized by inequitable access and educational content that does not meet their needs,⁴ and an estimated 72 million learners worldwide have fallen into “learning poverty.”⁵ In the wake of mass school closures, education systems turned to distance learning solutions. However, distance learning can be challenging to implement, is not equally available to all learners due to access and technology constraints, and programs do not consistently integrate the principles of Universal Design for Learning.⁶

The Ripple Effect

In many households and communities, the pandemic has had overlapping, compounding and devastating effects caused by school closures in addition to the threat posed by the disease itself.

Gender: During school closures and prolonged confinement in the home, women and girls, especially those with disabilities and gender and sexual minorities, are at heightened risk for gender-based violence; child, early, and forced marriage; child

COVID-19 Education Ripple Effects

Gender



Women, girls, and boys at increased risk for violence, abuse and neglect

Financing for Education



Almost 2/3 of low- to lower-middle-income countries cut their education budgets since the pandemic began

Economic Impact and Child Labor



Progress to end child labor has stalled for the first time in 20 years

Protection and Social Well-Being



Out of school children lose access to essential services and protections

Health and Nutrition



Health impacts include loss of access to nutritious school meals and safe drinking water



trafficking; female genital mutilation;⁷ and gender-selective feeding (boys fed more than girls when there are scarce resources). For boys, a decline in regular access to safe and supervised environments caused by school closures can increase the risk of harsh forms of punishment and child labor, including recruitment into armed groups, and in some countries, susceptibility to trafficking.⁸

Protection and Social Well-Being: According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the pandemic has disrupted routines, stretched the capacity of family coping strategies, and contributed to increased rates of anxiety and depression in children and youth.⁹ COVID-19 has limited the ability of education systems to provide children and youth emotional and physical protection, instill a sense of normalcy and hope for the future, foster positive relationships, support the resilience and stabilization of communities, and build livelihood skills. By being out of school, children miss out on referrals to essential services, including those designed to identify and respond to cases of violence and other protection concerns.

Disability Services and Supports: School closures have left some learners with disabilities without access to the support services necessary to pursue their education and distance learning modalities are not universally accessible to all learners. Children with disabilities are the single most marginalized group of children; even prior to the pandemic, they were the last to enter school and more likely to leave school before completing primary or secondary education.¹⁰

Health and Nutrition: COVID-19 has had an impact on the health of learners, by limiting access to nutritious school meals, safe and potable water at schools, and handwashing facilities. Access to school meals is an important component of the health and well-being of all children, promoting gender equity, and increasing learning outcomes.

- USAID's Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) forecasts that globally there will be a 25 percent increase in the number of food insecure people in 46 extremely vulnerable countries, increasing the total number to 113 million.

Economic Impact and Child Labor: Educators, faculty, education staff, families, caregivers, and communities are adversely affected by school disruption, as jobs and income are placed in jeopardy, economic activities decrease, and stressors accumulate. As a result, the number of children in impoverished households has increased due to the economic impact of the pandemic, which will likely increase instances of child labor and forced labor. In addition, learners who were poised to advance to upper grades or higher education are now at risk of leaving education for informal employment opportunities.¹¹

- The combined long-term economic impact of learning loss and increases in school drop-out is projected at \$10 trillion in lost earnings, or 10 percent of gross domestic product.¹²
- UNICEF estimates the pandemic could increase the number of children living in monetary poor households by more than 142 million.¹³
- UNICEF and the International Labour Organization estimate that the number of children in child labor has risen to 160 million worldwide. Progress to end child labor has stalled for the first time in 20 years, reversing the previous downward trend that saw child labor fall by 94 million between 2000 and 2016.¹⁴

Financing for Education: COVID-19 is exacerbating the financing gap for education—estimated at growing from \$39 billion per year pre-pandemic to \$148 billion per year currently. Economic forecasts project declining real gross domestic product, leading to reductions in government revenue, government relocation of education budgets to health, and significant shocks to remittances and household income resulting in less household spending on education.¹⁵ This is especially problematic for pre-primary education, which is disproportionately underfunded despite documented high rates of return on investment and the opportunity to break intergenerational cycles of inequity.¹⁶

- Since the beginning of the pandemic, approximately two-thirds of poorer countries have cut their education budgets, precisely when more resources are needed to recover and build systems back better.¹⁷

Strong foundations

In Cambodia, USAID partnered with UNICEF to spread the word about COVID-19 through TV, radio, and text messages.

Photo: UNICEF Cambodia

U.S. Government Approach

Strong Foundation of the USG Strategy on International Basic Education

As the largest bilateral donor to basic education in the world, the USG is uniquely positioned to respond to the pandemic quickly and efficiently, building on the strong foundation set by the USG Strategy on International Basic Education.¹⁸

The changed global context highlights the relevance of the Strategy's two principle objectives to:

- Improve learning outcomes; and
- Expand access to quality basic education for all, particularly marginalized and vulnerable populations.

The pandemic exacerbated challenges to improving learning outcomes and increased preexisting inequities between and within education systems, disproportionately disadvantaging marginalized and vulnerable groups. As a result, these objectives remain more important than ever. To achieve these objectives, the USG continues to work together to:

1. Strengthen transparency and accountability, and streamline reporting;
2. Work to ensure a consistent level of quality across programs; and
3. Improve coordination and reinforce a “One U.S. Government” approach while optimizing each agency’s strengths to achieve maximum impact of taxpayer dollars.



Now is the time to give children across the globe—all of our children—the chance to learn, grow, and become the people they want to be.”

— Dr. Jill Biden, First Lady of the United States

Building Back Better Global Education Systems

Responding to the pandemic provides a unique opportunity to transform education systems to be more responsive, resilient, and inclusive to the needs of all learners and educators. The Biden-Harris Administration recognizes the importance of USG programming and policy leadership as essential to doing this. To support U.S. efforts, the Administration has released [U.S. COVID-19 Global Response and Recovery Framework](#), the National Strategy for COVID-19 Response and the Interim National Security Strategy Guidance. The USG is building upon the guiding principles set forth in the U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education and will integrate additional principles throughout our efforts to strengthen our programs.

Global Engagement

The USG will continue to lead with our multilateral and bilateral partners in international dialogues and forums, such as the G7 and G20, to further cooperation and coordination in responding to COVID-19. We will utilize our technical expertise and resources to shape policy and programming while engaging stakeholders to leverage knowledge and resources. Through this work, we will link country-level activities with global initiatives to enhance shared impact and build the resilience of our partners.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The USG will work to ensure the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion are central to and integrated throughout all of its efforts, and those of its partners. We will promote equity in COVID-19 responses and support equity for women and girls, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ persons, indigenous peoples, older persons, child laborers, children in humanitarian settings, and other marginalized and under-represented populations and groups in vulnerable situations, especially those who have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

Coordination from Relief to Development

The USG will strengthen coordination at the intersections of humanitarian, development, and peace by improving coordination structures and joint planning across stakeholders. The USG will collaborate to build the institutional capacity of country partners to plan, prepare for, and respond to crises holistically, to help mitigate future disruptions to essential services, such as education, to prevent and respond to violence in and around schools, promote psychosocial well-being, and help prevent development backsliding from compounding crises.

SPOTLIGHT

The Role of Domestic Education in International COVID-19 Response

Upon taking office, President Biden announced the reopening of schools as one of his first major priorities in the first 100 days of his administration and issued the Domestic Executive Order on Supporting the Reopening and Continuing Operations of Schools and Early Childhood Education Providers. Shortly thereafter, the Department of Education hosted the National Safe School Reopening Summit to convene district leaders, educators, and students, to share best practices and provide technical assistance to those navigating the return to in-person learning across the country.

Funding allocated through the American Rescue Plan helped to ensure that K-12 educators, students, and parents—especially those most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic—have what they need to resume and sustain in-person learning in classrooms as quickly and safely as possible. The Department of Education remains focused on ensuring school districts and college campuses have access to guidance, technical assistance, and examples of best practices to inform their efforts to get students back into classrooms and meet their social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a unique opportunity to leverage extensive technical expertise across the United States Government as Agencies and Departments responded to school closures both domestically and internationally. The pandemic also brought about a unique opportunity to increase U.S. engagement as a global leader in education, to provide science-based guidance, build bilateral and multilateral relationships and foster relationships with government officials, policymakers, researchers, educators, students, and other professionals around the world.



Secretary of Education, Miguel Cardona, visits Bright Beginnings Child Development Center in North Carolina
Photo: Department of Education

57 Countries: 25.4 Million Students

The USG collectively reached more than 25.4 million learners in 57 countries through international basic education programs designed to improve measurable learning outcomes and expand access to high-quality education for all in fiscal year (FY) 2020.

School Food Distribution—Guatemala



In Guatemala, the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition program distributed 221.5 metric tons of U.S. donated food. These take-home rations were distributed to parents so that children continued to benefit from daily nutritious meals while schools are closed.

Photo: Eric Hernandez of Luziernaga for CRS in Totonicapán.

Youth Pathways Central America—El Salvador and Honduras



In El Salvador and Honduras, Youth Pathways Central America's digital learning and socio-emotional support keeps youth and their parents connected to educators. They distribute supplemental school supplies so that children have the necessary resources to study at home.

Photo: Department of Labor

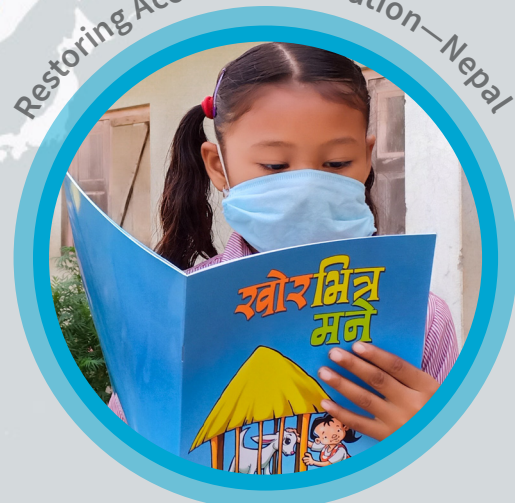
Back to School—Kosovo



In Kosovo, 10,000 Protective Equipment Kits were distributed to students and teachers. USAID, in partnership with UNICEF, implemented the “Back to School” initiative so that pre-university and primary education institutions were equipped with COVID-19 protective kits for a safe return to learning.

Photo: UNICEF Kosovo for USAID Kosovo

Restoring Access to Education—Nepal



In Nepal, the USG is restoring access to education for children disrupted by both the 2015 earthquakes and the COVID-19 pandemic. Programs include safe school construction and monitoring so that students, especially girls and children with disabilities, can return to safe learning environments after the pandemic

Photo: Bimal Gaire

Digital Story Time—Kenya



In Kenya, Digital Story Time, a series of storybooks in Kenyan Sign Language, airs morning and evening on Kenyan television and on demand on YouTube and ekitabu.com/tv so that children who are deaf have access to learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Photo: All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development Begin With Books awardee, eKitabu



Addressing barriers

Teacher Roziya Boboeva visits the homes of four of her students, who have low vision, with USAID-donated braille books and books with large print to help her students continue learning to read. Student Manija Sharipova is 11 years old and has just finished the 3rd grade at School #5 in Bokhtar, Tajikistan.

Photo: USAID Read with Me Project in Tajikistan

U.S. Government Response

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the USG implemented a combination of immediate response efforts to mitigate learning loss and psychosocial impact, and medium- to long-term investments to build more resilient and equitable education systems and societies with the capacity to better manage future shocks and prevent learning loss.

Addressing Barriers to School Participation And Learning

The USG response included addressing COVID-19-related barriers to education access, attendance, retention, and learning—including economic hardship, food insecurity, technology-related disparities, child early and forced marriage—and other barriers impacting the most marginalized, including girls, learners with disabilities, displaced populations, and child laborers.

Economic hardship

The USG adopts a holistic approach to promote sustainable efforts that address the underlying causes of child labor, exploitation, and abuse, including poverty and lack of access to education. Project strategies include linking vulnerable groups to existing government social programs, providing children with education or training opportunities, helping families improve their livelihoods to meet basic needs without relying on child labor, and raising awareness about the risks of child labor and trafficking. Programs also aim to help youth who were previously in school, employed before the pandemic, or have recently become the head of the household due to the loss of a caregiver to COVID-19, and have resorted to exploitative labor and panhandling.

In FY 2020, the Department of Labor (DOL) awarded more than \$25 million in new grants to combat child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking in seven countries. In El Salvador and Honduras, DOL works to reduce child labor and hazardous work. As a result of the pandemic, the program shifted its focus to supporting opportunities for virtual schooling for vulnerable children and virtual training for youth. The Youth Pathways Central America project provided digital learning and socio-emotional support to bolster the Ministries of Education's efforts to connect youth, educators, and parents and provides basic school supplies, so children have the necessary resources to study at home. In

Costa Rica, the Global Apprenticeship Network project provided remote digital literacy and soft skills training to vulnerable youth, and in Morocco, a DOL-funded project provided girls at risk of entering domestic work in the Marrakech Safi region with online awareness-raising and tutoring.

Technology-related disparities

Responding to the pandemic highlighted the digital divide, particularly for marginalized groups. Technology-related disparities include issues relating to connectivity, infrastructure, access, and the availability of technologies appropriate for low resourced areas. In addition, the need for increased online safety for learners is critical to ensure children and youth remain safe both in and out of school. The USG is committed to reaching learners through a range of learning modalities, including high-tech, low-tech, and no-tech distance learning modalities.

In Morocco, USAID strengthened the Ministry of Education's efforts to reach deaf and hard of hearing students in grades 1–12 during school closures. USAID supported sign language interpretation services to adapt distance lessons for deaf and hard of hearing students, filling a critical education gap caused by COVID-19 for deaf and hard of hearing learners in Morocco.

Food insecurity

At the height of the crisis in April 2020, an estimated 370 million children were suddenly deprived of their main meal of the day.¹⁹ In response to the crisis, projects that provided in-school meals pivoted to providing rations, which helped mitigate food insecurity created by the global COVID-19 pandemic and ensured donated commodities used for school meals did not expire or go to waste. In some areas, anti-child-labor messaging was combined with food security efforts. Schools that made meals available to children in poor families incorporated pro-education/anti-child-labor messaging into meal distribution routines.

In FY 2020, under the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition (McGovern-Dole) program, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) authorized the distribution of approximately 23,000 metric tons (MT) of U.S.-donated commodities and 550 MT of locally-procured commodities as take-home rations to over 1.7 million McGovern-Dole participants and their families across 26 active agreements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. For example, in Guatemala, the McGovern-Dole project provided 221.5 MT of U.S.-donated food commodities as take-home rations, which were distributed to the parents of students to ensure their children continued to benefit from daily nutritious meals. The project continued to support distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic by encouraging the use of a virtual library application to share digital books and by organizing virtual communication networks where parents could connect with teachers via digital communication tools. The digital components were supplemented with distribution of 60,000 printed books to promote the culture of reading at home.

Ensure Safe Return to Learning, Especially for the Most Marginalized and Vulnerable

Partnering with ministries and stakeholders to safely and responsibly reopen schools

During a crisis, sustained delivery of basic services is an important indication that governments are stable and responsive to the needs of their populations. The USG is partnering with governments around the world to sustain access to quality, equitable, and inclusive education services and to safely reopen schools, with personal protective equipment and water and sanitation facilities.

- In Kosovo, USAID worked in partnership with UNICEF to address the challenges of returning to school during COVID19. The “Back to School” initiative supplied pre-university and primary education institutions with protective kits against the coronavirus. To date, USAID and UNICEF have distributed about 10,000 kits containing masks, hand sanitizer, personal protective equipment, and other hygiene materials to students and teachers across Kosovo. This assistance is part of a \$1.6 million assistance package to increase Kosovo’s response capability and stop further transmission of COVID-19.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the USG has leveraged its existing relationships, expertise, and experience to partner with ministries and stakeholders to develop local guidance and policies to safely maintain education services through a variety of delivery modalities. As each country's context has evolved, the USG ensures school reopening plans center learning as a priority for all children and youth, especially young women and girls, children and youth with disabilities, child laborers, and separated or unaccompanied children.

- In Guatemala, the nationwide school closure impacted 4.2 million students enrolled across pre-primary and secondary schools. USAID supported 2.4 million primary and lower secondary students in the public education system to transition to a virtual learning platform in coordination with the Ministry of Education. In addition, USAID and the Millennium Challenge Corporation provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Education and Health to develop safe school protocols, including specific guidelines for topics such as COVID-19 prevention measures, school feeding during the pandemic, school transportation, and emotional support to learners returning to the classroom.

Building Back Better

Address Barriers to Education



23,550 Metric Tons of Food Donated

When children began missing their main meal of the day due to school closures, USDA authorized distribution of ~ 23,000 metric tons of U.S. donated commodities and 550 MT of locally procured commodities to 1.7 million families in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Safe Return to Learning, especially for the most marginalized and vulnerable



25.4 Million Learners

By supporting inclusive, accessible programming to reach students at home—online, TV and radio broadcasts, home based instruction, and visiting teachers—USG reached 25.4 million learners during a global pandemic.

Engaging Partners and Leveraging the Private Sector



Worldwide Partnerships

The USG is committed to collaborating and coordinating with local, regional, and international stakeholders to increase efficiency, reduce duplication, and leverage investments to increase the impact of programs and ensure sustainability.

Build More Resilient & Equitable Education Systems & Society



110,000 Youth Leaders

The USG's Positive Youth Development approach engages youth in promoting positive change in their communities—equipping them with training and resources to make a meaningful impact. The "Stay Home and Learn" campaign in Sri Lanka helped 110,000 youth build and strengthen life and career skills they will need post-pandemic.

Using accessible distance learning platforms

To mitigate the impact of school disruptions on school participation and learning loss, the USG quickly pivoted its programs and support to partners to keep the hardest-to-reach learners engaged in education through accessible learning even when classroom spaces are closed. While distance learning cannot fully replace in-person learning, a variety of platforms show promise for providing support to learners when schools are closed or to support supplemental instruction, including radio, television, internet, and home learning modalities. The accessibility of platforms can also be bolstered by integrating principles of Universal Design for Learning into the design of the platform, including provision of features such as captions, sign language interpretation, and printed braille books.

The USG is building on this success by partnering with countries, implementing partners, and the private sector to scale and institutionalize distance learning approaches when in-person learning is not available and to support remedial and catch-up education. In doing so, the USG aims to both help learners catch up and to improve accessibility of these programs to better serve struggling learners and marginalized groups in the long term. For example, programs are integrating the principles of Universal Design for Learning into online learning to meet the context-specific needs of learners with disabilities, developing supplementary reading materials to support at-home learning, preparing take-home food rations, and disseminating information on the increased risk of child labor exploitation.

Distance learning strategies are also supporting the way countries deliver training, coaching, and professional development to their teachers and education personnel. With USG assistance, ministries of education help educators and parents strengthen their skills to deliver online, radio, and home-based instruction. They also deploy new strategies to support peer-to-peer teacher support groups and to deliver psychosocial support to educators.

- In Kenya, the Department of State and USAID support teachers and provide learning opportunities to children and youth impacted by the pandemic. The Department of State provides support to UNHCR to broadcast lessons using community radio stations. In the Dadaab Refugee Camp, home to over 200,000 refugees, community radio helps ensure that children do not miss out on learning. Through its partnership with World Vision and the Australian Government in the All Children Reading Grand Challenge, USAID uses state-sponsored television to support distance learning that is accessible to students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Programs include broadcasts in Kenyan sign-language produced by a deaf-led team of native Kenyan sign-language users. These programs feature captions in English and Kiswahili, music, audio narration, and tie-ins to online learning resources.²⁰
- In El Salvador, Millennium Challenge Corporation worked to reform the national education system by improving the secondary education curriculum, aligning the country's TVET system with workforce skills, and providing teacher professional development for grades 7 to 12. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and major tropical storm the program adapted the teacher training component to an online format and trained 5,660 instructors—more than double the target.

Providing psychosocial support and protection services

The USG recognizes that during a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, education protects the holistic development and well-being of children and youth. Regular access to education, either in person or through distance learning modalities, creates a sense of order, stability, and routine for children. Education also provides safe, supportive, and caring relationships between children and adults, and between peers, that are prerequisites for learning. These relationships also provide an opportunity for referrals to external services and can help identify, report, or refer cases of violence or other child protection risks.

To sustain this important education system function during COVID-19, the USG quickly developed public service messages and remote learning programs to help parents and caregivers support the psychosocial well-being of their children, and to help educators cope with COVID-19 impacts. As learners return to the classroom, the USG is partnering with ministries of education to prepare teachers for heightened learner distress and to deploy school-based strategies to help learners recover. Given the uneven impacts of COVID-19 on children and youth, the USG recognizes that these services and protocols for responding are of particular importance for girls, women, and vulnerable and marginalized populations, who are at heightened risk of gender-based violence, abuse or exploitation in their homes and communities.

- In Uganda, USAID addressed a key gap in the implementation of the Ministry of Education's Preparedness and Response Plan—the need for provision of psychosocial support to teachers, parents, and learners during school closures and in preparation for the safe reopening of schools. With the Ugandan Ministry of Education, USAID helped establish a call center managed by professional counselors who provided COVID-19 response-related messages to 35,942 teachers. Of this group, 25,159 teachers received psychosocial support services through interactive voice messaging, and 12,160 teachers received guidance and counseling services from call center counselors.



A child studies at home under the new caregiver-led, home-based learning modality supported by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. Since the spread of COVID-19 to Bangladesh, the learning centers in the Rohingya camps have closed and shifted to support home-based learning in an effort to keep children safe from infection.

Photo: UNICEF

Engaging the Private Sector

Responding to the impact of COVID-19 on the education sector requires a coordinated effort across all stakeholders, including the private sector.

USAID and The LEGO Foundation are partnering to leverage resources, local presence, research, and comparative strengths to meet the growing needs of pre-primary and primary education for children in developing countries, especially those affected by crisis and conflict.

In addition to expanding country-level collaboration, USAID and The LEGO Foundation each contributed \$750,000 to the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) as part of the COVID-19 response. The partnership establishes new technical resources and support mechanisms to respond to COVID-19 requests, establishes a network space for global coordination on distance learning, and helps the education and humanitarian sectors take the lessons of COVID-19 with us into the future.

Now more than ever, learners, caregivers, and their communities around the world lack access to education. Low-tech, innovative strategies are needed to engage learners, help families cope, prevent development backsliding, and ensure teacher and child well-being. USAID and The LEGO Foundation share the goal of increasing access to playful learning for all children, especially the most marginalized during the global pandemic.



A girl reading , Malawi.
Photo: Lawrence Mtimaunenenji

Build More Resilient and Equitable Education Systems and Societies with the Capacity to Better Manage Future Shocks and Prevent Development Backsliding

Building emergency preparedness and response capacity

The USG is committed to building the capacity of local education leaders to prepare and implement data-driven emergency response plans. This increased capacity will help minimize disruptions to learning and protect the hard-fought gains in educational access and learning for all populations. This important programmatic pivot towards greater investment in emergency preparedness and response capacity builds on the USG experience helping communities and education authorities build back better following natural disasters in places such as Nepal, Haiti, and Pakistan.

Institutionalizing remedial and accelerated education to increase equity

Given the duration of school closures and the risk for long-term learning disparities, the USG is committed to helping learners, particularly those who are the furthest behind, to catch-up and recover lost learning. Building on the USG expertise and experience in non-formal and accelerated education, this will include support to remedial and accelerated education policies and programs, as well as training and coaching educators to prioritize core curricular content, assess learners' skills, and adapt instruction to help them get back on track.

With this support, educators can apply innovative catch-up strategies, meet diverse learning needs, and provide alternate pathways for (re)engaging the most marginalized, especially girls, learners with disabilities, and child laborers, not only in response to COVID-19 but also when learners are faced with other challenges. Institutionalizing these programs will be essential for an inclusive and resilient formal education system.

- USAID supports partner governments with technical assistance planning for accelerated learning models—both virtual and in person—to keep learners at grade level or to help bring them up. USAID is the largest bilateral donor in accelerated learning. In Nepal, USAID is piloting remedial education to help young girls at risk of early and forced marriage to catch up on lost learning due to COVID-related school closures and prevent school drop-out. The program will offer supplemental instruction to girls in the core subjects of Nepali, Math, Science, and English.

Engaging youth as leaders in the response

The USG sees the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on youth through adverse effects such as loss of education, increased unemployment, and deterioration of mental well-being. School closures directly impact young people, and evidence from past crises shows that the suspension of young people's education and training could have "scarring effects" in terms of educational attainment, job prospects, and earnings over their lifetime. However, youth can play a vital role in mitigating the long-term health, economic, and social costs their generation faces by leading the response in their communities.

At the heart of the USG's youth efforts is an approach called "Positive Youth Development" that ensures meaningful opportunities for youth to contribute to resolving issues and promoting positive change in their own communities. As Departments and Agencies across the USG support youth as leaders to mobilize their knowledge, innovation, and capacity to contribute to COVID-19 response efforts. USG integrates youth into official response efforts and equips them with the necessary training and resources to make a meaningful impact.

- In Sri Lanka, after mandatory school closures left youth with no access to the education they need for their future careers, USAID’s youth skills development and entrepreneurship project, YouLead, launched the “Stay Home and Learn” campaign. Reaching more than 110,000 youth, this campaign encourages youth to use this time productively—supporting them to build and strengthen life and career skills. With new skills and awareness, youth will be better prepared to become part of efforts that attract investment to Sri Lanka in the post-pandemic recovery.²¹

Engaging caregivers, communities, local leaders, stakeholders, and health officials

Robust planning and engagement is needed to build resilient education systems that reflect all stakeholders. Applying lessons learned from other fields, the USG understands the importance of actively communicating, consulting, and collaborating with educators, communities, and other stakeholders, including teachers unions, non-state education providers, the private sector, non-government organizations, and faith-based and civil society organizations, to meet the needs of all during a crisis. This is essential so that education actors understand local needs, have buy-in for decisions made, and build trust with communities. The use of multiple technologies, including SMS, radio, TV, social media, and in-person, can help to communicate with communities, sharing lifesaving and life-sustaining messages with families, learners, and educators.

With USG support, ministries have actively engaged in COVID-19 response efforts by partnering with public health officials at national and subnational levels. Decisions regarding safe operations of education institutions during a health crisis require reliable and accurate health data, information on other impacts of the crisis (e.g., data on abuse and neglect, gender-based violence, child marriage, and teen pregnancy), and the ability to analyze and interpret these data in real-time.

- In Timor-Leste, the USDA McGovern-Dole project worked closely with the Ministry of Health to fill the gap with communication and education materials for COVID-19 prevention. When schools reopened in July 2020, the McGovern-Dole project’s planned activities resumed with an increased focus on hygiene and handwashing. Through collaboration with the municipal-level COVID-19 task forces, a total of 1,348 household hygiene packages were delivered door-to-door in the four municipalities. The packages included hygiene supplies and a gravity-fed hand washing station with video instructions. To prepare schools for a safe reopening, the project trained teachers and parent-teacher associations on COVID-19 prevention techniques. As a result of those combined efforts, the proportion of project schools with handwashing stations increased from 10 to 76 percent, helping to mitigate the risks of disease transmission for students and teachers.
- In March 2020, the Peace Corps temporarily suspended in-country operations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When conditions allow for a safe and productive return to service, Volunteers will be trained in how to best protect themselves and others from COVID-19, how to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, and how to reduce stigma associated with COVID-19. Education Volunteers will have a unique opportunity to teach COVID-19 mitigation behaviors in their schools and communities. When they return to service, many Education Volunteers will introduce or expand access to hybrid models of learning in local schools, combining in-person learning and online learning, to help introduce students and teachers to the basics of distance learning. In countries with more robust digital infrastructure, volunteers will help counterpart teachers develop their own online learning management systems. In addition to preparing to return Volunteers to service overseas, the Peace Corps will continue to engage Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, as private citizens, in virtual service. Seventeen Peace Corps countries are currently supporting host country partners with virtual education engagements focused on a wide variety of activities, including blended learning, virtual language clubs, teacher training, and curriculum development.

The Critical Role of Higher Education in COVID-19 Response

The USG supports partners and higher education institutions to mobilize their knowledge, innovation, and capacity to contribute to COVID-19 response efforts and to utilize higher education across development sectors. Responses to the impact of COVID-19 highlighted the critical role of higher education systems and institutions and demonstrated the potential for how higher education can serve as a central actor in both crisis response and locally-led development through research, innovation, workforce training, continuity of learning, and strengthening networks and communities.

Additional information can be found in the [Higher Education Response to COVID-19: A Landscape Map of Partner Countries](#), which identifies the actions taken by higher education systems and higher education institutions, in 24 USAID partner countries, to respond directly to and mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on learners, institutions, communities, and countries.

- In Malawi, USAID support through the Innovation Scholars Program led to the development of two innovations to help in the fight against COVID-19 locally. A faculty scholar designed and tested a solar-powered mobile hand-washing station, which the United Nations Development Program agreed to purchase 40 units to distribute across the country. A group of student innovators developed a technology platform that allowed health officials to track disease hotspots, trace cases, and generate data for decision making.



USAID Helps Train Medical Students on COVID-19
Care and Treatment in Vietnam
Photo: USAID/Vietnam



Looking forward

Administrator Samantha Power plays a spelling game with children at a Youth Outreach Center in Honduras.

Photo: USAID

Looking Forward

Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the importance of flexibility and resilience both within USG programming and within the way we work as Agencies and Departments. The USG quickly and efficiently responded to the impact of the pandemic and will utilize these lessons to respond to future crises.

Adapting for Change

The USG responded to the impact of COVID-19 by developing structures and support systems to respond efficiently to rapidly changing demands. These structures included forming task teams focused on developing field guidance, tools, and resources, and utilizing existing cross-agency structures for coordination, training, and information sharing. Agencies also hosted regular outreach calls to staff to ensure response efforts and resources were driven by needs on the ground. Finally, existing and new flexible funding mechanisms were leveraged whenever possible to enable programs to adapt activities and fill gaps in local response plans. The shifts were critical to immediate response efforts and will increase the capacity of the USG to respond to future shocks to education systems.

Many Agencies and Departments across the U.S. Government actively engaged the CDC's COVID-19 International Task Force to respond to the pandemic. As a result of this engagement, international education experts helped advise, inform, and disseminate CDC guidance for schools in international settings, particularly those in low-resource settings. Agencies and Departments, and their partners, benefited from CDC-facilitated, science-based training and webinars on COVID-19 risk mitigation in schools. Collaboration is ongoing and we will leverage future opportunities to demonstrate coordinated USG leadership and commitment, particularly at the country level.

New Use of Data and Methods for Monitoring and Evaluation

The COVID-19 pandemic brought new challenges in monitoring and evaluation of programs in a safe and efficient manner—as well as opportunities to better utilize data to meet the changing needs of partner countries.

As part of the regular monitoring and reporting processes, the USG captured how our education programs and operations pivoted in response to COVID-19. This involved adapting and pivoting to remote data

collection methods and updating indicators to monitor the reach, engagement, and outcomes of programming in new distance learning environments. The USG developed tools and resources to support partners and countries with monitoring and evaluating their distance learning initiatives, as well as to collect the data necessary to inform the return to the traditional forms of education delivery.

Existing and updated indicators, as well as country-specific case studies, will give greater clarity on the critical dimension of the effectiveness of distance learning programs, specifically the extent to which learners are participating in the activities. Finally, we know that COVID-19 will have an even greater impact on marginalized and vulnerable groups. To help programs continuously learn and adapt, and to ensure the needs of the most marginalized and vulnerable are addressed, we work to ensure our data includes information by sex, learners with disabilities, and learners affected by crisis or conflict.

Conclusion

While COVID-19 brought unprecedented challenges to the education sector, the USG is committed to partnering with bilateral and multilateral organizations, stakeholders, and partner country governments, to build education systems that are resilient to future shocks and help ensure all individuals can return to more equitable and accessible learning. This effort supports the USG's holistic and integrated approach to responding to COVID-19 across all sectors, including extensive efforts to share vaccines with partner countries. The distribution will help ensure educators and students can return to in-person learning opportunities more rapidly.

Under the leadership of the Biden-Harris Administration and a strengthened comprehensive approach to international basic education, the U.S. will leverage tools and resources across Agencies and Departments to respond to the unique context and challenges in each partner country and build back better.



This past year, USG Departments and Agencies worked to prepare for, mitigate, and address the educational impacts of COVID-19. We are building back better global education by focusing these lessons-learned and success into forward-focused action."

— LeAnna Marr, Acting U.S. Senior Coordinator for International Basic-Education Assistance

SPOTLIGHT

Available Tools and Resources



From the White House

- [U.S. COVID-19 Global Response and Recovery Framework](#)
- [White House Announcement](#)



Domestic Resources

- [COVID-19 Resources for Schools, Students, and Families](#)
- [Technical Resources for Education Providers](#)
- [Reopening Guidance Volume One, Two and Three](#)



Return to Learning

- [Return to Learning Toolkit](#)
- [Strategies for Accelerating Learning Post-Crisis](#)
- [Fostering Resilience During COVID-19 through Social and Emotional Learning Blog](#)
- [Pandemic-era Responses in Higher Education & Youth Workforce Development: Guidance Brief](#)



Distance Learning

- [Delivering Distance Learning in Emergencies](#)
- [Guidance Note on Measuring Reach for Distance Education](#)
- [Roadmap for Measuring Distance Learning](#)
- [Distance Learning Interactive Audio and Radio Instruction Online Library](#)



Inclusive Education

- [Gender and COVID-19 Guidance](#)
- [Best Practices on Effective Social and Emotional Learning Interventions in Distance Learning](#)



Child Labor

- [COVID-19 and the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Addressing Increased Vulnerability Around the World](#)



School Meals and Nutrition

- [Impact of COVID-19 on School Meals](#)
- [FY 2021 Future Programming for McGovern-Dole](#)



CDC School Mitigation Resources

- [Operational Considerations for Schools in low-resource international settings](#)
- [CDC Readiness and Planning Tool: To Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 in Primary and Secondary Schools in Low Resource Non-U.S. Settings](#)

Endnotes

- 1 "Education: From disruption to recovery," UNESCO, <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>
- 2 Russo, H. (2003). "Education for All: a gender and disability perspective." Background paper for the Education for all global monitoring report 2003/4: Gender and education for all: The leap to equality. UNESCO. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001469/146931E.pdf>
- 3 "COVID-19: UNESCO and partners in education launch global campaign to keep girls in the picture," UNESCO, 2020, <https://en.unesco.org/news/covid-19-unesco-and-partners-education-launch-global-campaign-keep-girls-picture>
- 4 "How is the coronavirus affecting learners with disabilities?" World Education Blog, 2021. <https://gemreportunesco.wordpress.com/2020/03/30/how-is-the-coronavirus-affecting-learners-with-disabilities>
- 5 The World Bank defines learning poverty as the deprivation of schooling and the deprivation of learning. Deprivation of schooling is measured through enrollment to understand what proportion of the population is not receiving education services. Deprivation of learning is measured using national learning assessments and determining the proportion of enrolled learners who are not meeting minimum proficiency benchmarks.
- 6 UDL Guidelines, CAST, <https://udlguidelines.cast.org>
- 7 UNFPA. 2021. Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Family Planning and Ending Gender-based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage. Interim Technical Note. https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/COVID-19_impact_brief_for_UNFPA_24_April_2020_1.pdf
- 8 Kellum, J., Sproule, K., English, C. & Rames, V.S. (2001). USAID's Gender and COVID-19 Guidance. Banyan Global for USAID. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Full_COVID_and_Gender_Technical_Brief_March_2021_Compliant.pdf
- 9 Meherali, S., Punjani, N., Louie-Poon, S., Abdul Rahim, K., Das, J. K., Salam, R. A., & Lassi, Z. S. (2021). Mental Health of Children and Adolescents Amidst COVID-19 and Past Pandemics: A Rapid Systematic Review. International journal of environmental research and public health, 18(7), 3432. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18073432>
- 10 UIS (2017) Education and Disability. Fact Sheet No. 40, February 2017. UNICEF (2016) Towards Inclusive Education. Innocenti Research Paper. May 2016.
- 11 "COVID-19 impact on child labour and forced labour: The response of the IPEC+ Flagship Programme," https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@ipec/documents/publication/wcms_745287.pdf
- 12 "Urgent, Effective Action Required to Quell the Impact of COVID-19 on Education Worldwide," UNESCO, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2021/01/22/urgent-effective-action-required-to-quell-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-education-worldwide>
- 13 UNICEF. (2021). Children in monetary poor households and COVID-19. Technical Note. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-in-monetary-poor-households-and-covid-19/>

- 14 "Child labour rises to 160 million – first increase in two decades," ILO, 2021, https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_800090/lang--en/index.htm
- 15 UNESCO. (2021)" Act now: Reduce the impact of COVID-19 on the cost of achieving SDG 4." Global Education Monitoring Report.<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374163>
- 16 " A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing quality early childhood education,"UNICEF, 2019, https://data.unicef.org/resources/a-world-ready-to-learn-report/#_ftn1
- 17 "Education Finance Watch 2021," The World Bank, 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/publication/education-finance-watch-2021>
- 18 Department of Defense, Department of Education, Department of Labor, Department of State, Department of the Treasury, Millennium Challenge Corporation, Peace Corps, USAID. (2108). U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education. USG. <https://www.edu-links.org/resources/us-government-strategy-international-basic-education>
- 19 World Food Programme. (2021). State of School Feeding Worldwide 2020. <https://www.wfp.org/publications/state-school-feeding-worldwide-2020> <https://www.wfp.org/publications/state-school-feeding-worldwide-2020>
- 20 USAID, Educationlinks. (2021) Accessible to All: Creating Learning Materials for Children with Disabilities in Cambodia, Kenya, Rwanda, and Tajikistan. USAID. <https://www.edu-links.org/learning/accessible-learning-materials-children-disabilities-cambodia-kenya-rwanda-tajikistan>
- 21 PositiveYouth Development [search results], Youth.gov, <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/positive-youth-development>

