The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered an education emergency of unprecedented scale. In developing countries, which were already facing a learning crisis, 810 million children have been cut off from schools.

If we don’t act now to safeguard and strengthen education systems, millions of students may never return to school. Those most likely to be left behind are girls from the poorest families.

The Global Partnership for Education is stepping up to mitigate the impacts that school closures in developing countries will have on the most vulnerable children and to build the resilience of education systems.

**GPE response**

GPE is committed to ensuring that no child loses the opportunity of an education in the wake of the pandemic. We are supporting partner countries to fortify their education systems and build resilience for the future, including by:

- **Keeping students learning** and providing support so the most vulnerable students, especially the poorest girls, are not left behind.

- **Supporting education systems and teachers** during the crisis, ensuring that schools can safely reopen as soon as possible and that learning gaps are closed.

- **Supporting governments to rapidly develop mitigation and response plans**, safeguard education spending, and helping to align external funding behind national priorities.

The challenges developing countries face are varied and unique. GPE is committed to working across the partnership to promote coordinated responses that are country-driven, aligned behind government priorities, and to share information and experiences.
Supporting education systems from the onset of the pandemic is the best way to protect the most vulnerable students and lay the foundations for a speedy recovery, while also building resilient education systems for the future.

Funding COVID-19 response and recovery

On April 1, GPE unlocked US$250 million to help developing countries mitigate both the immediate and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on education. The move came just three weeks after the outbreak was declared a pandemic.

GPE’s COVID-19 fund will help sustain learning for up to 355 million children in 67 countries, with a focus on ensuring that girls and children from the poorest families, who will be hit the hardest by school closures, are not left behind.

Ministries of Education and their partners can use the funds for activities such as:

- produce and distribute learning materials, including through radio and television
- distribute equipment such as radios and textbooks to the poorest households
- support teachers to coordinate and track learning
- assist vulnerable households and include learners with special needs or disabilities
- ensure that teachers and schools are prepared to re-open when it is safe to do so, and
- assess learning gaps and provide remedial learning opportunities to make up for time lost to the pandemic.

Of the US$250 million window, US$25 million has been set aside to support global and regional coordination, learning and knowledge-sharing, such as developing shared teaching materials. It is expected that additional funding will be required to meet the needs in all 67 countries.

On March 25, GPE provided US$8.8 million to UNICEF to kickstart education systems’ response to COVID-19. The funds are supporting 87 developing countries to:

- plan and coordinate their education systems’ responses
- develop communications around safe school operations
- share knowledge and build capacity for the current and future pandemics.

A global education emergency

School closures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have left 810 million children in developing countries out of school and cut off from their friends, learning, and the vital services and protection that schools provide.

Interrupted learning and economic shock will exacerbate inequalities and expose the most vulnerable children to additional risks. Evidence shows us that the longer vulnerable children are out of school, the less likely they are to go back to school.

- Girls who are excluded from school are more vulnerable to gender-based violence, early marriage and teenage pregnancy. New reports estimate that 10 million more secondary school-aged girls could be out of school following the crisis. ([Malala Fund])
- Teachers may be forced to find other sources of income and may not return to the profession.
- Government budgets may shrink as economies contract.
- Schools will need to be sanitized and refurbished before they can re-open safely — those servicing the poorest communities may not be able to re-open quickly.