Background

Following the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020, schooling was disrupted for more than 800 million children across Asia. Although schools have reopened in most countries in Asia and the Pacific, millions of students remain affected by partial closures or have not yet returned to classrooms and are at risk of dropping out. Data from a March 2022 report released by UNICEF, together with that from the UNESCO Global Monitoring of School Closures, reveal that schools have been fully closed for 18 weeks in the East Asia and Pacific region and 35 weeks in the South Asia region, as of 28 February 2022. In the East Asia and Pacific region and the South Asia region, schoolchildren have lost nearly 400 billion hours and 700

1 UNESCO and UNICEF, *Situation analysis on the effects and responses to COVID-19 on the Education Sector in Asia*
2 Except Nepal and Philippines, as of 28 February 2022. *Global monitoring of school closures caused by COVID-19*
3 *Where are we on Education Recovery? Taking the Global Pulse of a RAPID Response*, in partnership with UNESCO and the World Bank
billion hours of in-person learning respectively. The total closure duration (fully closed and partially closed) ranges from 0 weeks in Nauru to 95 weeks in Nepal.

While school closures are detrimental to all students, pre-existing gender roles, limitations and expectations shape the specific barriers and risks experienced by girls and boys. The most marginalized, including girls with disabilities, those in conflict-affected contexts, remote and rural communities and those in the poorest quintile, are expected to be most affected by COVID-related school closures4, facing additional constraints on their ability to fulfil their right to education, health and protection, among other rights.

We need to understand the ways gender affects students’ lives during school closures to develop effective responses that not only ensure educational continuity, but also mitigate negative effects arising from the loss of schools as a locus of health information and services. These can include, for example, information and services related to sexual and reproductive health; nutrition; peer support and positive social interaction; counselling and referrals; protection from abuse, violence, and exploitation; life skills building and career development; and guidance through a successful transition to adulthood.

UNESCO, through the Global Education Coalition’s Gender Flagship and with evidence collected by the Population Council, has published a global report on gendered impact of COVID-19 school closures, entitled *When schools shut* (2021). Based on a literature and database review, a large-scale survey of organizations working on gender and education, key informant interviews and focused research in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Côte d’Ivoire, Kenya and Mali, the report shows how interventions that challenge gender-based barriers can limit learning loss and drop-out rates when schools reopen safely. It was generously funded by the Global Partnership for Education. *When schools shut* is accompanied by a systematic review of the research evidence on the gendered impacts of extended school closures, prepared by University College London (*Evidence on the gendered impacts of extended school closures: A systematic review – forthcoming*).

**Objectives**

- Examine the findings and recommendations outlined in *When schools shut: Gendered impacts of COVID-19 school closures* and its accompanying publication *Evidence on the gendered impacts of extended school closures: A systematic review*, and consider their implications for the region;

- Foster knowledge and ideas exchange on how countries in Asia and the Pacific can develop and implement comprehensive intersectoral interventions that challenge gender-based barriers to participation in remote learning during extended school closures and the return to school, with particular attention to learners’ protection, health, nutrition and well-being; and

- Build understanding of how, in the medium- and long-term, countries in Asia and the Pacific can develop gender-responsive learning recovery and foster gender-transformative education systems that prioritize equity and resilience and address the key bottlenecks and barriers to education.

**Languages**

The webinar will be held in English.

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