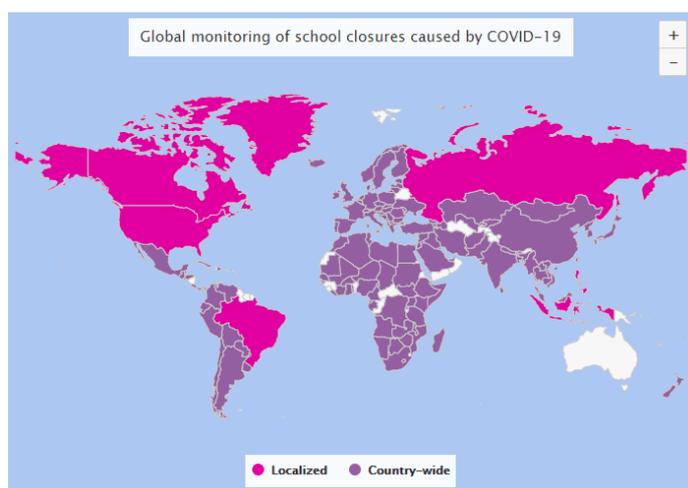


HI statement on COVID 19 - The impact on Inclusive Education 30/03/20



The COVID -19 pandemic is having a truly global impact on a scale that hasn't been seen since the last world war. This map shows the status of school closures on 31st March 2020, monitored by UNESCO. School closures are currently affecting most countries across the world, and already 88% of the world's student population are out of school. This has the potential to be

for a prolonged period of time especially in areas where it will be harder to control the spread of the disease¹.

In addition to the immediate health crisis this outbreak will also have an impact on children's ability to access education and linked services such as access to food programmes, social support, personal assistance or medical care. Children and young persons with disabilities are amongst the most affected², as the break-down of support structures can increase their vulnerability, disrupt protection systems, and expose them to discrimination and violence. It also has an impact on their chances to return to school in the long-term.

Promoting Inclusive Alternative Education Arrangements

HI should join wider education advocacy on COVID 19 (see Uganda example³) as for instance to recommend not using schools for health purposes which would delay the use of schools for education even longer. HI should ensure that children with disabilities are prioritised in government responses to target the most marginalised groups and should continue to advocate that sufficient budget is targeted towards children with disabilities within the education sector, during and post COVID 19.

Most countries are trying to support home schooling options, either through online alternatives, sending work home to the children via schools, or by radio or television transmission, internet platforms or a mixture of these approaches.

HI's role in education responses should not be to try to design the content of the curriculum, but to support the way in which the content is taught over the radio, so it is done in a child-friendly, inclusive way, promoting active learning such as Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI), encouraging students to take part in the lesson

¹ UNESCO, [Coronavirus School Closures](#)

² UNESCO, [How is the Coronavirus affecting learners with disabilities?](#)

³ See in Teams Toolbox Uganda COVID-19 Response signed by numerous NGOs "Keep children learning and safe while schools are closed"

rather than just listening . In Sierra Leone, HI was involved in supporting radio lessons by [mobilising CBR volunteers](#) to support learners in small groups, when schools were closed during the Ebola outbreak in 2015. Such close proximity between groups of individuals may be difficult in many countries at present, but in the post- acute phase, this kind of approach could be helpful to allow learners to understand content better.

HI should support ministries to promote active learning solutions, and provide additional advice in terms of making it accessible for all children with disabilities. Children with hearing impairments should be able to access the same information such as access to written materials, or access to a sign language interpreter, or access to television broadcasts or online video options in some contexts, with sign language support.

The importance of keeping connected

HI should also support supplementary radio/ television/ online / mobile phone based messaging and campaigns, aiming to support the connection between teachers and students via parents and caregivers. HI should promote inclusion of all learners and ensure that solutions offered are actually accessible especially for children with visual, communication or intellectual disabilities (communication messages, software, computer features, etc).

In contexts with no access to the internet, children with intellectual disabilities must still be provided with content that is relevant and support their learning (for example, by giving guidance to parents or caregivers for simple home-learning tips, and the provision of home learning/ education kits for example, with a focus on developing learning aids using local materials as much as possible).

Keeping the link is crucial to mitigate learning difficulties and permanent school drop-out. Post crisis activities should involve the identification of children who remain at home.

Teachers

Whilst HI should reach out to hear the voices of children and young people , organisations of people with disabilities and others, teachers and other education staff are crucial to these efforts. They need to be supported to stay in work, and given training on how best to reach out to their students, through radio teaching, developing guidelines to send home to parents, and helping to develop education packs for home learning for example. HI should remain at the forefront of supporting teachers to remain inclusive even when supporting learners from a distance.

Conclusion

HI should ramp up the focus on a holistic and cross sectorial approach, which is even more paramount during the COVID-19 pandemic, so in all our IE projects, a

coordinated response linking education, livelihoods, health and rehabilitation, social protection, MHPSS and WASH should be a key focus. HI will continue to advocate that the voices of children with disabilities are not lost within all mainstream responses.

HI should also ensure that organisations of persons with disabilities are involved in the response (ADCAP, IASAC guidance), not only as beneficiaries but as experts, some have specific resources adapted to the crisis response.

Inclusive Education Sector, HI