

RBC COVID 19 RESPONSE PLAN

BACK TO LEARNING IN THE MENA REGION – A CALL FOR ACTION

- 15 million out of schoolchildren in the MENA region¹
 - 1.3 million increase in dropouts in the Arab states
 - USD 24,770,000 needed for WFP for joint action to go back to learning and minimize drop-outs
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The Challenge

To minimize the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, Governments in over 180 countries have temporarily closed schools, affecting over 90% of the world's learners. School closure not only impacts children's learning but also has increased the risk of dropping out, particularly among children of vulnerable households and those affected by protracted conflicts². Children may find themselves having to work to support their families at this time of economic distress, there may be an increase in early marriages and children may be more exposed to violence and exploitation, including sexual assaults and abuse. Children with no access to remote learning may simply not be able to keep up with any home-based learning and as such are more likely not to return to schools when they reopen.

In July 2020, UNESCO released a report using data on over 180 countries, estimating that about **24 million learners**, from pre-primary to university level, are at risk of not returning to school. In the MENA region, 15 million children between the ages of 5-14 were already out of school while 10 million were in school but at risk of dropping out due to poverty and social marginalization³. The latter is expected to increase by more than 13%, with an additional 1.31 million at risk of not returning to learning in the Arab States.

The Response

Under the Global Framework for School Reopening⁴, UNICEF and WFP, along with other UN agencies, teamed up to jointly work on a regional Back to Learning campaign. In addition to the work being done at regional level through webinars and high level ministerial dialogues, the two agencies got together at country level to jointly work on supporting governments to ensure safe and inclusive continuity of learning in a way that could protect children of dropping out. The following strands are key:

1. Schools as safe places: adequate conditions are created to apply protocols on healthy behaviors (such as physical distancing, handwashing, respiratory etiquette) and maintaining cleanliness of schools, as well as what to do if cases of the virus rise;

¹[https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/6706/file/MENA%20OOSCI%20Regional%20Fact%20Sheet%20\(2018\).pdf%20.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/6706/file/MENA%20OOSCI%20Regional%20Fact%20Sheet%20(2018).pdf%20.pdf)

² We refer to children affected by protracted crisis in Syria, Yemen, Libya and Palestine in country as well as in host-countries. Many of them have suffered from multiple displacement and live in spaces where it is difficult to observe COVID19 protocols. In addition, the COVID19 crisis aggravates their already precarious livelihood and may leave families without any source of income.

³[https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/6706/file/MENA%20OOSCI%20Regional%20Fact%20Sheet%20\(2018\).pdf%20.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/6706/file/MENA%20OOSCI%20Regional%20Fact%20Sheet%20(2018).pdf%20.pdf)

⁴ UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank and WFP - April 2020)

2. Learning: ensure children can catch up on learning;

3. Inclusiveness: ensure all students return to school(ing) – particularly those at risk of dropping out due to socio-economic pressures;

4. Wellbeing and protection: address the likely psycho-emotional impact on children; re-establish regular and safe delivery of essential services, emphasize health and hygiene practices, draw on WHO guidance and consider further support through school feeding, protection referrals and specialized services for children with disabilities.

This regional call for action, focuses specifically on the prevention of drop-outs of boys and girls among the most vulnerable. Next to an extensive joint advocacy campaign, UNICEF and WFP propose to target at risk primary school children with a one-off incentive in 6 countries as per the below.

Action breakdown by country

EGYPT: Support is structured around three strands to prevent the risk of increased drop-outs:

- Production of video material on distance learning and access to referral systems.
- Provision of additional 50 EGP to students' families for hand sanitizers and masks.
- Online training workshops for teachers on children's health, wellbeing and protection, with a focus on identifying and preventing drop-outs.

Budget: USD 2,9 million

IRAQ: WFP will support 11 most vulnerable districts selected by the Ministry of Planning where specific schools and communities will be targeted based on their vulnerability, population, enrolment numbers and school infrastructure condition, with attention to the groups at higher risk such as girls and poor rural families. Activities are structured around 5 strands to prevent the risk of dropouts:

- Expand the national school feeding programme.
- Provision of small hygiene kit to all school children and promotion of hygiene practices.
- Distribution of printed self-learning material to the most remote and poor areas where access to e-learning solutions is a challenge as well as training to teachers and parents on the alternative distance learning tools.
- Develop in cooperation with MoE and MoH a TV programme to be broadcast on the national TV channel on nutrition and hygiene education to sensitize children and families.
- Training to school and DoE staff to learn from the COVID-19 crisis and build capacity to react and adjust for the future.

Budget: USD 8 million

JORDAN: Whilst online and televised lessons have been made available, technology solutions were only able to reach those that had internet connectivity, adequate data and appropriate devices. This digital gap, which was especially true for girls, may contribute to children failing to re-engage with education once schools re-open and eventually dropping out. The country office's back to school/learning campaign is structured around 3 pillars:

- A national media campaign in partnership with UNICEF, UNESCO, several NGOs and the MoE with targeted messages for parents, students and communities.

- Outreach and referral for at risk children. WFP field monitors are interviewing and filling the “UNICEF’s online tool” questionnaire to get more information about the “at-risk-of-dropping-out” and “out-of-school” children on their ability to attend school or enroll in education next semester, including challenges, concerns and needed support.
- Preparation for Safe Reopening of School: while UNICEF will ensure provision of cleaning kits to all schools, delivery of ToT on Infection Prevention Control (IPC) and ToT on the Safe Operational Guidelines, WFP will contribute through the distribution of food items to further encourage children and their families to return to school.

Budget: USD 2.7 million

LIBYA: The school/learning campaign is structured around 2 pillars to prevent the risk of dropouts:

- A media campaign in partnership with UNICEF around the importance of keeping engaged in learning, school re-opening dates, social distancing, prevention measures, etc.
- Provision of food items (school meals or Take Home Rations) to further encourage vulnerable children and their families to return to school.

Budget: USD 370 000

SYRIA: WFP teamed up with UNICEF on exams support, jointly supporting the food needs of the 12th and 9th grade students coming from areas out of Government control and from Lebanon to sit for national exams. In addition to this, the country office developed a wider plan of intervention to prevent drop-outs structured around 3 pillars:

- Rehabilitation of WASH facilities.
- A media campaign around the importance of keeping engaged in learning, school re-opening dates, social distancing, prevention measures, etc.
- Provision of food-voucher for students participating in compensating learning sessions planned to take place before the opening of schools and for students during the 1st semester of the academic year conditional to achieving 80 % attendance to incentivize attendance and retention of students (2 cycles of distribution).

Budget: USD 2 million

YEMEN: Under the efforts to support the government in making sure that all children, even the most vulnerable, benefit from an inclusive and appropriate education, WFP teamed up with UNICEF on supporting the Education Authorities in the North during the August exams for grade 9 and 12 through a joint advocacy campaign.

Additionally, as part of the wider Back to Learning campaign, WFP and UNICEF have agreed to jointly target selected areas within the 22 governorates of the country, based on the severity & vulnerability assessment undertaken by the Education Cluster. The target population under the COVID-19 Education Cluster Response Strategy include an estimated 5.8 million children enrolled in school and an estimated 2 million out-of-school children. The plan is structured around 4 pillars:

- Enhancing coordination among key actors and ensuring monitoring and documentation of lessons learned and good practices.

- Support Ministries of Education in the production of basic education lessons to be broadcast, including the dissemination of key public messages on hygiene, COVID-19 and other water borne diseases.
- Provision of training sessions to teachers.
- A support package of activities for the safe re-opening of schools.

Budget: USD 8.8 million