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All children returning to school and learning

Considerations for monitoring access and learning participation during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic

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This document aims to provide pointers for monitoring (re)enrolment, attendance and participation in learning following the spring 2020 school closure and education disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It addresses absenteeism, out-of-school and out-of-learning across types of education provision, whether formal or non-formal, and across different modes of learning, whether face-to-face, distance or blended learning. It recognises the link between low learning outcomes and dropout. Students out-of-learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic are therefore potentially at risk of dropping out, particularly when impacted by other risk factors.

These suggestions are intended for governments, ministry officials and other education decision-makers at the national level, local governments and schools.

They complement UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office's general considerations for school reopening: *Building Resilient Education Systems beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic: Considerations for decision-makers at national, local and school levels.*

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in school closures in 20 countries and pre-school closures in 19 countries in Europe and Central Asia. This affected a total of 49.8 million children of pre-primary to upper secondary age, who had a very disrupted last school term, if any, at the peak of school closure.

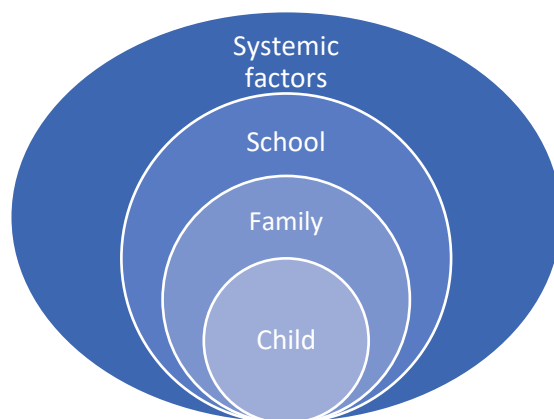
The pandemic has deeply exacerbated existing education and social inequities in the region and amplified the drivers of social exclusion. The challenge faced by countries and governments at the beginning of this new school year is to ensure that all children will safely return to school and participate in learning.

Countries might lack the monitoring capacity at all levels from system to school to classroom to follow-up on re-enrolment, attendance and learning participation. Existing data systems might not be sufficiently robust for timely monitoring. These systems might also not be sufficiently responsive to enable local teams to engage in good time with families and young people disengaged from education and learning. Identifying risk points and developing mechanisms to ensure that all children return to school and engage in learning is therefore mission critical for this new school term.

*For the purpose of this document, **attendance** refers to physical attendance in school and online learning when teachers have the capacity to ascertain that the child is present, and **learning participation** refers to attendance to online and distance learning opportunities, established by other means such as submission of assignments or learning logs.*

2 Risk factors impeding school return and participation in learning

The literature agrees that not enrolling in school or dropping out from school is usually a process rather than a decision following a single (or exceptional) event. This process is influenced by a range of factors that interact in complex and dynamic ways at different levels:



It is important to recognise that these factors not only relate to individual and family circumstances but also strongly stem from the school environment and factors at macro level (legislation, policy, social norms) that shape the education, social welfare, child protection systems and influence the socio-economic context of a country. Indeed, **children being out of school or out-of-learning is often the result of individual and family circumstances that structures and systems are unable to respond to or address timely and appropriately.**

2.1 Individual and family related factors

A range of interrelated factors might contribute to children and adolescents not returning to school or not participating in learning.

Gender. Several gender associated risks might prevent girls and boys from returning to school:

- Girls might be at higher risk of marrying early throughout the pandemic. Early marriage is a phenomenon that is often influenced by the economic contexts. When poverty increases, families might support early marriage to protect their girls from future economic hardship while also easing the immediate economic pressure on their household.
- Social and gender norms might result in girls being expected to stay at home to look after sick relatives or to support relatives with chronic illnesses who need to be shielding from the COVID-19. They might also be expected to contribute to caring for young children, particularly where childcare facilities are closed and when parents are working from home. This can affect both school attendance and participation in remote learning.
- Pregnant girls and young mothers might fear returning to school under the pandemic to protect themselves and their baby from a potential coronavirus infection.
- Girls might be facing greater hurdles to access technology and a lack of technological literacy and/or confidence compared to their male peers. Studies have also shown that in contexts with limited technological resources, teachers tend to favour male students over female students in access to and time spent with technology. These factors may influence girls' experience with, access to, time on, and confidence with using devices at home, thus impacting their participation in digital, distance and blended learning, even when devices are available (but limited) in the home. Importantly, these factors can also impact girls' motivation for and perceived competence in learning when delivered via distance or digital platforms.

- Boys and girls might drop out to work and contribute to the family income during this adverse time. Gender norms might put greater pressure on boys to financially support their parents and families or to find financial independence.
- Boys, who overall have lower reading skills than girls in the region according to PISA results, might be at high risk of learning loss.
- Boys represent the greatest proportion of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children across Europe and Central Asia.
- A recent rapid gender assessment in the region also reveals that women and men reported having felt/heard of increases in domestic violence and discrimination. While data for domestic violence is mixed, over 15 per cent of women respondents from four countries perceived having felt/heard of an increase in domestic violence.¹ While this data does not provide insights into school age children and young people, other sources report increases in calls to helpline for child abuse globally and the reduction in services and support mechanisms for families and children.²

Disability. Children with disabilities are at high risk of not returning to school due to:

- Absence of adequate school transport and school transport accommodations during and beyond the pandemic.
- Insufficient accommodations in new school safety protocols and arrangements and insufficient availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) for children whose disabilities make school return a high risk.
- Overall lack of accessibility of distance, online and blended learning facilities, which have constrained their ability to learn during periods of education disruption. This was worsened by the limited resources and support available for parents to support the learning continuity of their children at home.

Ethnicity. Children from traditionally marginalised ethnic groups and from ethnic groups overrepresented in out-of-school children and dropout statistics are more likely not to return to school or not to participate in learning due to:

- Poverty and costs associated with supplies and equipment for distance learning.
- Stigmatisation as some ethnic groups may be viewed as “carriers of the virus”.
- Fears and misinformation about the virus due to weak public health communication in hard-to-reach communities.
- Weak communication on back to school processes between schools, governments and families without access to phone or the Internet.
- Digital gap, lack of access to IT equipment and the Internet.
- Weak cultural relevance of distance and online learning materials.

¹ UNWOMEN (2020) The Impact of Covid-19 On Women’s and Men’s Lives and Livelihoods in Europe And Central Asia: Preliminary Results from A Rapid Gender Assessment. Accessible from: <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eca/attachments/publications/2020/07/the%20impact%20of%20covid19%20on%20womens%20and%20mens%20lives%20and%20livelihoods%20in%20europe%20and%20central%20asia.pdf?la=en&vs=5703>

² <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/18-06-2020-countries-failing-to-prevent-violence-against-children-agencies-warn>

- Underlying education exclusion factors such as discrimination, limited communication between home and school, and low level of participation of marginalised families in school governance structures and decision-making processes, which might have resulted in concerns from marginalised families not being adequately considered in school reopening policies and plans.

Language. Children and children of families not mastering the medium of instruction have faced significant barriers to participation in learning due to:

- Limited availability of distance and online learning materials in different mother tongues and for second language learners.
- School-home communication hampered by lack of translation of correspondence and communication.
- Inability of parents whose language is different from the medium of instruction to fully support their children with schoolwork during home learning periods.

Mobility. Children on the move, internally displaced persons (IDPs), migrant and refugee children and children involved in seasonal migration have faced particular barriers throughout the period:

- Weak communication mechanisms between neighbouring schools and migrant, refugee or seasonal migrant communities.
- Closure of non-formal education provision facilities.
- Unavailability of distance and online education materials for second language learners.
- Lack of access to IT equipment and the Internet.
- Limited educational support provided by NGOs and CSOs as a result of the pandemic.
- Stigmatisation and discrimination as migrants may be viewed as “carriers of the virus”.

Illness. Some children with medical conditions or with relatives with medical conditions might be unable or unwilling to return to school to prevent infection by COVID-19. In addition, stress of contamination might affect their participation in learning remotely. Children educated in hospitals or other health institutions might have encountered barriers to participation in learning due to lack of equipment and limited connectivity and accessibility.

Income. Children from low-income families are at risk of not re-enrolling or not participating in learning due to:

- School-related fees and costs in a context when decreased household income might hamper the capacity of families to invest in education.
- Increased pressure to work and engage in child labour due to a reduction in family earnings.
- Lack of school supplies and equipment for participating in distance and online learning.

Age. Age might have constrained children access to home technological equipment and to parental learning support. Older children, including children in exam years might have been given priority to access limited devices at home over younger children. Young children not independent in learning would have been more dependent from parental learning support, generally affected by both work and level of education factors. Children who were close to primary entry age may have missed out on critical moments for school readiness and development, setting them up for lower learning outcomes. Young people beyond the age of compulsory education may be more prone to early school leaving, particularly when combining several risk factors.

Conflict with the law. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, some children in conflict with the law educated in detention centres, ‘colonies’ or equivalent may not have been able to fully participate in

learning due to safety regulations, reduction of educational activities, or lack of IT equipment and connectivity.

2.2 School and system level factors

In addition to individual and family related factors, a range of supply-side factors at school and national levels have contributed to children being out of school and out of learning before the pandemic. These factors have had a greater impact during the pandemic and are likely to affect the (re)enrolment, attendance and participation in learning of students in this new academic year. The list below does not aim to be exhaustive as these factors have been widely commented upon elsewhere.³

Digital divide and internet infrastructure. Children lacking from IT equipment or connectivity due to economic, social or geographical factors (rural, remote and mountainous areas) have been excluded from many distance and online learning opportunities. Where schools have not welcomed children on a full timetable in September, these children will continue to be excluded from learning. Schools in rural and remote areas are also victim of the digital divide and may not be able to access educational resources and teaching and learning materials specifically developed to mitigate the learning loss throughout the 2020-2021 academic year.

Education expenditure. Government revenues are projected to fall due to the economic shock of the pandemic, while increased priority given to the health sectors means funding is likely to be reduced for education. Increased costs in education (due to distancing, more classes, fewer children per class, procuring disinfecting supplies and PPE for teachers, hiring additional teachers, operating schools in shifts, producing additional learning resources, etc.) combined with the overall reduced financing mean per capita spending on children's learning is likely to decline. This matters for families because there will likely be increased "invisible" costs of education (e.g., parents expected to donate cleaning supplies and provide masks for their children) which may lead to fewer youth able to return to school or to participate in distance learning.

Education system capacity, including:

- Limited EMIS and monitoring mechanisms at school, local and national level,
- Limited planning capacity, hampered by budget constraints,
- Weak communication mechanisms and confusing messaging around (re)enrolment and dropout prevention,
- Inadequately trained staff. Teachers and schools' training gaps may span from identifying students at risk of not returning to school, following up on cases of out-of-school children, preventing dropout, engaging with students and families during periods of distance and

³ See UNICEF and UNESCO-UIS (2015) [Education Equity Now! A regional analysis of the situation of out of school children in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States](#). Geneva: UNICEF CEECIS.

UNESCO-UIS and UNICEF (2015) [Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All: Findings from the Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children](#). Montreal: UIS.

UNICEF (2017) [Improving Education Participation: Policy and Practice Pointers for Enrolling All Children and Adolescents in School and Preventing Dropout](#). UNICEF Series on Education Participation and Dropout Prevention, Vol 2. Geneva: UNICEF CEECIS.

blended learning, digital competences, mitigating and addressing learning loss, socio-emotional learning and supporting students' mental health and psychosocial support needs.

- Education staff may also have concerns for safety, be in need of mental health and psychosocial support, or be at risk of burn out due to increased workload, fast changing regulations, poor working conditions and low job satisfaction.

2.3 Education risk points

Risks of non-(re)enrolment and non-learning are especially high at certain points in the education and life journey of children and adolescents, namely:

Entry to Grade 1 (or the first year of compulsory pre-primary school). Many out-of-school children in the ECA region are children who have reached compulsory school age but have not entered Grade 1 or the first year of compulsory pre-primary schooling. Delaying entry to compulsory education might negatively impact their development and learning in future years. With the COVID-19 pandemic, more parents might decide to postpone Grade 1 entrance for their children, particularly where they feel they have 'missed out' on learning in kindergarten due to school closure or due to fear of infection or concerns over the education experience that children will be facing due to safety and protective measures. In many countries, pre-primary education was given the least priority and parents received limited support to engage younger children in learning.

Transition to lower secondary. Transitions between education cycles are common risk points in the education journey of children. While most students transition from primary to lower secondary (Grade 5 or 6), some drop out in the process or shortly after transitioning. This can be due to the change in teaching and learning practices (subject teaching), a change in the medium of instruction where mother tongue education is not available in secondary education, a change of school, usually for bigger and possibly more intimidating schools which are further away from home. Under the current circumstances, families and students might be reluctant to reenrol due to fear of infection and lack of transportation.

Transition to upper secondary. Upper secondary education is rarely compulsory in the region and many young people end their education after completing Grade 9. In the current situation, fewer students are expected to transition from lower to upper secondary. Some will be looking for work, others not being able to afford the costs of upper secondary education. Students might question the validity of their choice of TVET streams such as hospitality or health and wellbeing with the current restrictions.

Entry to a new country or a new locality. Education systems are often at risk of losing track of children when they move across countries or localities. This risk remains present throughout the crisis, particularly as Ministries and local authorities are busy working on school reopening planning. Loss of income and loss of jobs may lead to families moving home, re-locating or migrating for work abroad. With quarantine rules and distance or blended learning options, some children might more easily fall through the crack of the systems supposed to ensure that every child is enrolled in school.

School transfers. School transfers also represent a risk point for education systems when they might lose track of students. The additional burden put on schools, education and local officers due to the pandemic adds a layer of risk to the appropriate monitoring of school transfers. School transfers are likely to increase due to parents relocating for work or families choosing to move their children from public to private education provision on the understanding that private schools may be more adequately resourced and equipped in terms of PPE, safety procedures, IT and trained teachers on digital, distance and blended learning.

Transition between non-formal or alternative education pathways and formal education.

Transition between types of education provision is never without dropout risk. Some children in the region are more likely to be exposed to those risks than others, particularly (i) IDPs, migrant and refugee children temporarily educated in non-formal education centres, (ii) children previously educated in Residential Care Institutions who are being deinstitutionalised, and (iii) children and young people previously educated in health institutions (e.g. hospitals or sanatoriums) or detention centres (or equivalent).

Transition between full-time education to evening classes or adult education provision. Beyond the compulsory school age, young people might choose to continue their education through evening classes, adult education provision opportunities, or as independent learners. The economic recession following the pandemic is likely to result in more young people choosing to pursue their education through such learning opportunities. Monitoring student intake and providing support wherever possible for students to return to formal education provision will be important not only to ensure that students have the best chance to succeed in their studies but also to reduce pressure on other alternative provisions that might not be equipped or prepared to deal with a high influx of new students.

Transition between general to vocational education and apprenticeship. The volatility and uncertainty of the economic and social environment due to COVID-19 is likely to significantly impact young people beyond the compulsory school age. At times of economic hardship, decisions to pursue education or engage in vocational or other training might be compromised by livelihood imperatives or reduced opportunities due to the closure of businesses and the reduced activity in trades such as in transport, hospitality, or tourism. Mitigating learning loss has been challenging for TVET institutions as practical and hands-on training is little transferable online and as restrictions in the workplace has affected internships, apprenticeships and other types of work-base mentoring modalities. In addition, career services might not have been able to support students adequately during the last term of the 2020 academic year, leaving young people misinformed or unsure about which vocational education streams to choose in the current context. This could translate into enrolling in education pathways and streams different from students' initial ideas and choices, and lead to early dropout in the autumn.

3 Monitoring (re)enrolment, attendance and participation in learning

Below are suggestions to strengthen mechanisms for monitoring (re)enrolment, attendance and participation in learning.

3.1 Adapting attendance monitoring systems to capture participation in learning

Regular (physical) attendance monitoring systems will need to be adapted to reflect the current situation and possible future closure of schools. Changes might be needed on the type of data that is collected, how it is collected and how it is analysed. A distinction between physical and remote attendance, and between attendance and participation in learning opportunities may be necessary.

- (i) **Review of attendance coding systems** to ensure that:
 - Students and families are not penalised when not attending school during periods of school closure, periods when parents have the choice to send or not their children to school, and periods when school arrivals are staggered in time (for the recording of tardiness);

- Students and families are not penalised when students are required to stay at home because (i) they are clinically vulnerable or living in a household with clinically vulnerable members; (ii) they are displaying symptoms or live in a household displaying symptoms of COVID-19; (iii) they live in a town or neighbourhood where a temporary local lockdown has been applied.
- Data on COVID-19-related absences can be disaggregated from other absence related data (for illness, truancy, etc).
- Attendance data for on-site learning and distance learning can be disaggregated.

(ii) **Monitoring attendance in distance learning programmes:**

- Monitoring attendance in distance learning programmes might require schools to be creative and combine different sources of data to assess whether a child was attending a given learning opportunity, such as:
 - Online system log-in data
 - Participation in a Zoom, Teams or other online platform live class or catch-up event organised by the teacher
 - Participation in What'sApp/Email discussion
 - Submission of an assignment (by email, post...)
 - Phone conversation with a student or parent
- **Monitoring attendance might require schools to assess engagement rather than daily attendance**, particularly when students do not have access to online or distance learning equipment. Engagement can be measured through:
 - Phone and email conversation with the child and/or parents
 - Live class participation
 - Submission of assignments (photos of projects, worksheets, submission of written assignments by email, post, delivery...)
 - Remote learning logs
 - Conversations with NGOs and volunteers working with children in communities with limited access to technology.

(iii) **Informing parents and students of changes in how attendance and learning participation is monitored.** Mediating and explaining these changes is key. While schools might use existing communication channels to do so, additional channels and/or effort to ensure that all families and children understand the new rules, expectations, monitoring mechanisms and sanctions where relevant will be critical.

Examples of questions for national, local and school decision makers:

- How will school absenteeism data be collected and reported and at which frequency during distance and blended learning periods?
- How will schools monitor student learning engagement during distance and blended learning periods?
- How will schools collaborate with parents, students and NGOs where relevant, to track student engagement, including through projects, assignments, remote learning logs and one-to-one or group engagement with teachers in classrooms or remotely?

- What partnerships with civil society organisations will be necessary to support data collection on participation in distance and blended learning?
- How will schools maintain contact with students throughout distance and blended learning periods, including students without internet or phone access?
- How will regular check-ins with students be organised, particularly with the most marginalised and those without access to phones and the internet?
- What channels of communication and engagement mechanisms will schools establish with parents (mothers and fathers) for periods of school closure, distance learning and blended learning?
- What specific communication and engagement mechanisms will schools develop for marginalised communities and hard-to-reach parents, particularly parents from linguistic minorities?

Source: UNICEF (2020)

3.2 Identifying compulsory school age children at risk of not entering Grade 1 (or the first year of compulsory pre-primary education)

Grade 1 (or the first year of compulsory pre-primary education) entrance is a risk point in the life of a child as some fail to enter the school system at this age and as many delay their entry and miss out on learning and developmental opportunities. Parental fears around school safety and concerns over the lack of readiness of their children to enter Grade 1, following the learning disruption of the end of the 2020 academic year and periods of lockdown and social isolation, have increased the risk of children reaching the compulsory school age not to enter Grade 1 on time. Several steps can be taken to prevent this risk. These are extracted and adapted from UNICEF ECARO's publication: [Improving Education Participation](#) (UNICEF, 2017).

- (i) **Establishing early lists of children reaching Grade 1 entry age to engage parents ahead of time:**
 - Contact parents ahead of the registration period to ensure they enrol their children. This can be done through:
 - Individual letters or telephone contacts from the municipality
 - Information meetings for parents
 - Display of information on Grade 1 enrolment procedures in public places
 - Local-level awareness-raising and information-dissemination activities
 - Involvement of NGOs, community groups, religious and community leaders to facilitate communication between parents, schools and municipalities.
 - Support parents during the enrolment process:
 - Obtaining and compiling the necessary support documents for enrolling students
 - Filling in the registration form (literacy and language support)
- (ii) **Comparing lists of children previously enrolled in preschool with lists of children registered in Grade 1** to identify children who have not registered in Grade 1 for the new academic year.
- (iii) **Monitor Grade 1 attendance in the first weeks of the new academic year** to identify students who have not entered Grade 1 and contact parents.

Examples of questions for national, local and school decision makers

- What protocols will be established to ensure that all children having reached the age of school entry by September will have been identified, registered in schools and enrolled in Grade 1?
- How will education data be triangulated with health, social services, family mobility data, and NGO data to ensure that all out-of-school children are identified, including migrant and refugee children and children with disabilities?

Source: UNICEF (2020)

3.3 Tracking compulsory school-age students transitioning between education cycles or transferring between schools

Additional tracking mechanisms may need to be established to ensure that students will return to school in the new academic year, such as:

(i) **Systematic tracking of students transitioning from one education cycle to another over the summer and in the first months of the new academic year.**

- Where this is done electronically, an officer should be appointed to follow up without delay on cases flagged up by the system when the child has not enrolled/registered to attend the education cycle.
- Where this is done manually, schools can ensure that they have received information about where the student intends to enrol in September and confirm with the new schools that a registration has been made by the family. District education offices can also compare school registration lists. When students do not seem to be enrolled in the next cycle of compulsory education, a referral should be made to a responsible officer or a dropout prevention team to contact parents and investigate the case further.

(ii) **Systematic follow-up of students supposed to transfer school since March 2020.**

- Where this is done electronically, an officer should be appointed to monitor cases flagged up by the system when the child has not attended the destination school (locating the child/family, calling parents...)
- Where this is done manually, the school of origin should contact the destination school and check that the child has attended the new school. When this is not the case, a referral should be made to a responsible officer or a dropout prevention team to investigate the case further.

Examples of questions for national, local and school decision makers:

- How will students' transition between two levels of education be monitored and tracked before the start of the new academic year?
- How will school transfers be tracked and followed-up to ascertain that children transferring schools before school reopening have re-enrolled and attended their new school?

Source: UNICEF (2020)

3.4 Tracking students transitioning from non-formal or alternative education pathways to regular schools

Similar suggestions to the ones presented above for monitoring school transfers and tracking students transitioning between two cycles of education can be applied for tracking students across types of education provision. Additional steps may need to be taken and more stakeholders will need to be involved in the process:

(i) **Engaging stakeholders in monitoring the transition process.**

- In addition to the staff of the education provision the child was attending (NFE, alternative education, education in detention centres or health institutions...), other stakeholders might be involved such as:
 - NGOs and volunteer community groups supporting specific marginalised groups such as Roma children or migrant and refugee children.
 - Local authorities and local representatives of the line Ministries managing the education services the child was attending, such as the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Interior.
 - Social workers, when the child or family is working with a dedicated social worker.

(ii) **Establishing a support and monitoring mechanism to follow the child** throughout the transition process.

- Ensuring that teachers and staff from each type of education provision can liaise and discuss the child's situation, learning progress and challenges and any support that might need to be put in place or maintained.
- Ensuring that the child and the family have an opportunity to visit the premises of the new school and meet staff and teachers ahead of the new academic year.
- Ensuring that all professionals working with the child (social worker, volunteer, mentor, contact person etc.) are aware of the transition and have received the contact details of the new school.
- Carrying over, to the extent possible, the existing support mechanism for the child. For instance, if a child was benefiting from mentoring in Non-Formal Education, the mentor could continue working with the child for a few months after the transition, or the new school could offer mentoring support to the child.
- Monitoring that the child is attending the new school in the new academic year and referring the case to a responsible officer or dropout prevention team if the child is not attending while also ensuring coordination with the previous education provider (NFE centre, sanatorium, etc.).

Examples of questions for national, local and school decision makers

- What protocols will be specifically established for vulnerable children, namely children educated in residential care institutions, informal education centres, detention centres and health institutions (hospitals, sanatoriums)?
- How will the most vulnerable children, particularly children formerly educated in Residential Care Institutions, detention centres, non-formal education centres or health institutions be supported to enrol in regular schools?

Source: UNICEF (2020)

3.5 Identifying students at risk of dropping out and leaving school early

Some countries and schools in the region have established dropout prevention systems to identify students at risk and support their return to schools. Where such systems exist, they will have to be reviewed to ensure that they are sufficiently responsive to potential cases of dropout due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the disruption of learning in the last term of the 2020 school year.

Setting-up such systems where they are not in place can play a significant role in preventing cases of dropout. This would include:

- (i) **Nominating a team in schools and municipalities to identify students at risk and follow-up on children who are not coming back to school.**
 - In Kosovo, each school and each municipality has out-of-school and dropout prevention team. In Bulgaria, there are one or more cross-sectoral school enrolment teams in each municipality in charge of locating compulsory school age children and adolescents who are not enrolled or not attending school.
 - When teams comprise representatives from social services, child protection, health, the police, NGOs and the municipality, they have access to more data to identify students not in school and have greater competences to support their return.

- (ii) **Identifying drop out risk factors.**
 - Common risk factors include absenteeism, low academic performance, overage compared to peers, life circumstances and sense of belonging to the school. For more information, see UNICEF ECARO publications: [Monitoring Education Participation](#), [Improving Education Participation](#) and [Early Warning Systems for Students at Risk of Dropping out](#)
 - COVID-19 related risks might need to be considered, such as:
 - COVID-19 affected household,
 - Clinical vulnerability (of the child or of a household member),
 - Learning disengagement during periods of school closure,
 - Absence of contact between teachers and the student during periods of school closure,
 - Other factors such as absence of school transport or of reasonable accommodations of school transport for students with disabilities.

- (iii) **Monitoring the children at risk of dropping out throughout the year.** For more information on the process, please refer to UNICEF ECA publication: [Early Warning Systems for Students at Risk of Dropping out](#) (UNICEF, 2018).

- (iv) **Monitoring attendance and learning engagement in distance and blended learning opportunities at the start of the new academic year.** The longer students are absent, the more challenging it is to bring them back to school. Acting timely, at the first signs of absenteeism or non-engagement will be key.

Examples of questions for national, local and school decision makers

- Who will be in charge of identifying out-of-school children and youth and students at risk of dropping out?

- What protocols and processes will be used, adapted or created for dealing with cases of out-of-school children or student at risk of dropping out?
- Who will be nominated (individuals or teams) to outreach to children and/or students who have not come back to school? Who are at high risk of dropping out? What will be their role and responsibilities?
- How will existing referral mechanisms between education, health, social and protection services be reviewed and adapted to best respond to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on out-of-school and dropout risks?
- How will individual cases of children out of school or at high risk of dropping out be managed? What protocols will be used? What needs assessment will be conducted? What re-enrolment plan or school retention plan be developed?

Source: UNICEF (2020)

4 Supporting children to return to school and preventing dropout

Criteria of successful support mechanisms to help children return to school and to prevent dropout in Europe and Central Asia have been identified based on the rich experience of countries in combatting early school leaving and dropout. They are summarised below:⁴

- **Timely response:** implemented as early as possible - the longer a child or adolescent is out of school, the most difficult it is to support his/her re-enrolment in school.
- **Individual response:** based on the specific needs of a specific child/family.
- **Coordinated response:** underpinned by (i) effective cross-sector collaboration and coordination at local, district and national levels and based on clear roles and responsibilities for each actor; and (ii) by strong partnerships with local municipalities, NGOs, and community groups and leaders.
- **Participatory and empowering response:** interventions that are jointly decided with the child and the family and that build on the strengths of the family and the talents and potential of the child.
- **Response that combines support at the level of the child, of the family and of the school simultaneously.**
- Response that **spans prevention, intervention and compensation measures.**
- Response **supported by equity principles** aiming to reduce disparities in education, including through channelling more funds to the students and schools that need it most.
- Response **adopting a three-tier approach of universal, targeted and individual** interventions depending on the degree of risk and the situation of the child. (For more information the three-tier approach, see: [Improving Education Participation](#) and [Early Warning Systems for Students at Risk of Dropping out](#))
- Response **relying on sound data collection and information management systems** and regular data analysis to provide evidence for action.

Support measures will encompass the 5 Areas of the *Considerations*, namely:

⁴ Criteria have been adapted from *UNICEF (2017) Improving Education Participation: Policy and Practice Pointers for Enrolling All Children and Adolescents in School and Preventing Dropout* and *Bulgarian Ministry of Education/UNICEF (2018) Guidelines for School Enrolment Teams*.



You may refer to UNICEF (2020) *Building Resilient Education Systems beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic: Considerations for decision-makers at national, local and school levels* for detailed inputs on how to organise the support for children and families in each of these areas.

Examples of questions from the Considerations

- What parental concerns to school re-enrolment or school transition do schools foresee and how will they address these through differentiated parent engagement strategies?
- How will all parties ensure that the support provided is constructive and not stigmatising for students and families?
- What specific incentives to school re-enrolment will be provided to the most economically vulnerable girls and boys who would otherwise contribute to family income following the COVID-19 pandemic economic hit?
- How would the incentive schemes span across compulsory and non-compulsory education levels, so that girls and boys are encouraged to continue education and training after Grade 9?
- How will authorities engage with businesses and farms to prevent an increase in child labour and provide financial assistance to children and their families to enable them to attend school-based, distance and remote learning?
- How will school transport be organised during the recovery period and while schools operate in shifts and/or staggered hours?
- What reasonable school transport accommodations for students with disabilities will be made when schools reopen?
- How will learning support be organised?
- How will access to distance and online learning devices be expanded for all children, particularly the most marginalised?
- What physical and socio-emotional well-being support activities and services will be made available by schools during school and after school reopening?
- What partnerships with local authorities, social services, child protection services, NGOs, the police, community groups and community leaders will be established to undertake outreach work for students who have not come back to school or those at high risk of dropping out?

Source: UNICEF (2020)

5 Additional resources

Reference documents:

UNICEF (2020) *Building Resilient Education Systems beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic: Considerations for decision-makers at national, local and school levels*. Geneva: UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia.

UNICEF (2019) *Schools Can Do It! Regional Training Modules on School Dropout Prevention*. Geneva: UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia.

UNICEF (2018) [*Early Warning Systems for Students at Risk of Dropping Out*](#). Geneva: UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia.

UNICEF (2017) [*Improving Education Participation: Policy and Practice Pointers for Enrolling All Children and Adolescents in School and Preventing Dropout*](#). UNICEF Series on Education Participation and Dropout Prevention, Vol 2. Geneva: UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States

UNICEF/UIS (2016) [*Monitoring Education Participation: Framework for Monitoring Children and Adolescents who are Out of School or at Risk of Dropping Out*](#). UNICEF Series on Education Participation and Dropout Prevention, Vol I. Geneva: UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Other resources from the region:

Bulgarian Ministry of Education/UNICEF (2018) *Guidelines for School Enrolment Teams*.

European Commission (2013) *Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support*. Final Report of the Thematic Group on Early School Leaving. Accessible at: https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/early-school-leaving-group2013-report_en.pdf

Jovanović et al. (2016) *How to be a caring school? A study on the Effects of Prevention and Intervention Measures for Preventing the Dropout of Students from the Education System of the Republic of Serbia*, Belgrade: UNICEF, Centre for Education Policy, Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development Accessible at: <https://www.unicef.org/serbia/en/reports/how-be-caring-school>

Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Kosovo and UNICEF (2014) *Equity in Education for All: Manual for School Prevention and Response Teams Towards Abandonment and Non-Registration in Compulsory Education*. Accessible at: <https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2015/12/manual-for-school-prevention-and-response-1.pdf>

Montenegro Bureau for Educational Services (2013) *Manual for professionals (teachers, professional associates, principals, Roma and Egyptian assistants) and all those who are interested in prevention of dropping out of schools in Montenegro*. Podgorica: Ministry of Education. Accessible at: https://issuu.com/aleksandraradoman/docs/manual_case_management_for_preventi/95

School Education Gateway <https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/index.htm>

UNICEF Kyrgyzstan (2016) *Children out of school in Kyrgyzstan. Guidelines for working with children who do not attend school*. Accessible at: <https://www.unicef.org/kyrgyzstan/ru/Отчеты/дети-вне-обучения-в-школах-кыргызстана> (in Russian).