RETURNING TO LEARNING TOOLKIT: ADVOCACY BRIEF

USAID has developed the [Returning to Learning during Crises Toolkit](#) to support education planners, including USAID Mission staff, Ministries of Education/Higher Education, and implementing partners, to plan and make key decisions on the return to learning during and after crisis-caused education disruptions in a way that is equitable, inclusive, and builds the resilience of education systems.

WHY USE THE RETURNING TO LEARNING TOOLKIT?

Crisis situations such as conflict, natural disasters, or health epidemics regularly force education institutions around the world to close. Even when these closures are temporary, their effects on learners can be permanent. School closures disproportionately affect marginalized learners, exacerbating educational inequity for girls, learners with disabilities, those in rural areas, learners experiencing poverty, displaced learners, and others. That is why returning to learning is a top priority for learners, parents, educators, and education authorities alike.

Closures of Education Institutions as a Result of Crises

92 percent of children	The COVID-19 pandemic caused **91.7 percent** of children globally to be out of school
6-9 months	The 2014-2015 Ebola epidemic in West Africa shuttered school doors for **6 to 9 months** in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea.
10,000 schools	Nearly **10,000 schools** in parts of West and Central Africa were closed as of June 2019 due to threats and attacks against schools, learners, and educators.

Sources: UNESCO (n.d.) *COVID-19 Impact on Education*; UNICEF (2019) *Education Under Threat in West and Central Africa*

USAID's Returning to Learning Toolkit provides USAID Missions, implementing partners, and Ministries of Education/Higher Education the tools to mitigate learning loss and prevent dropout that results from crises. By presenting a clear framework highlighting key considerations, the toolkit guides education planners through the critical steps to safely and equitably return to learning during and after a crisis.

Compounding Learning Loss and Dropout due to Crises

As a result of COVID-19:
- Learners who miss three months of school may fall more than **one full academic year behind**
- **24 million learners** (pre-primary to tertiary age) are at risk of dropping out entirely

Sources: Kaffenberger, M. (2020). *Modeling the Long-Run Learning Impact of the COVID-19 Learning Shock: Actions to (More Than) Mitigate Loss*; UNESCO. (2020). *How many students are at risk of not returning to school?*

WHAT IS IN THE TOOLKIT?

While school closures happen quickly during a crisis, reopening schools is a complicated, time-intensive, and likely political endeavor. USAID'S Return to Learning Toolkit helps education planners take a holistic view in planning for the return to learning by providing decision-making tools, guidance, and evidence related to:

- **Priority 1:** (Re)Engage all Learners, Especially the Most Marginalized
- **Priority 2:** Develop Education Reopening Plans
- **Priority 3:** Adapt Instructional Time, Curricula, and Learning Supports
- **Priority 4:** Modify Exams and Learner Promotion Practices
- **Priority 5:** Re-Engage Educators and Prepare the Learning Space

In each priority area, the toolkit guides education planners through making key decisions, ensuring that the return to learning promotes equity and inclusion, prioritizing the safety and wellbeing of all, and building resilience of education systems.

HOW WILL THE TOOLKIT HELP BUILD RESILIENT EDUCATION SYSTEMS?

Education planners should leverage the crisis as an opportunity to address historic educational disparities faced by the most marginalized and transform education systems to be more resilient in the face of future shocks and stressors.

Helping learners re-engage in education and catch-up on missed learning is essential in ensuring all children access their right to high-quality education.

- **Start planning early** so that the return to learning during and after a crisis ensures equitable access to high-quality education for all learners.
- **Regularly update back-to-school plans** as new information about the crisis emerges and local and global policies, guidance, and practices are developed.
- **Build on existing resources, policies, and practices** where possible.
- **Ensure all interventions are safe, equitable, and inclusive.**
- **Link short- and medium-term interventions to long-term goals and priorities** to strengthen the resilience of the education systems.