

# Media Update

12 July 2021

## UNICEF - UNESCO

PRESS RELEASE

### Reopening schools cannot wait

***Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore and UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay***

**PARIS/NEW YORK, 12 July 2021** – “It’s been 18 months since the COVID-19 outbreak started and education for millions of children is still disrupted. As of today, primary and secondary schools are shuttered in 19 countries, affecting over 156 million students.

“This should not go on. Schools should be the last to close and the first to reopen.

“In their efforts to limit transmission, governments have too often shut down schools and kept them closed for prolonged periods, even when the epidemiological situation didn’t warrant it. These actions were frequently taken as a first recourse rather than a last measure. In many cases, schools were closed while bars and restaurants remained open.

“The losses that children and young people will incur from not being in school may never be recouped. From learning loss, mental distress, exposure to violence and abuse, to missed school-based meals and vaccinations or reduced development of social skills, the consequences for children will be felt in their academic achievement and societal engagement as well as physical and mental health. The most affected are often children in low-resource settings who do not have access to remote learning tools, and the youngest children who are at key developmental stages.

“The losses for parents and caretakers are equally heavy. Keeping children at home is forcing parents around the world to leave their jobs, especially in countries with no or limited family leave policies.

“That’s why reopening schools for in-person learning cannot wait.

“It cannot wait for cases to go to zero. There is clear evidence that primary and secondary schools are not among the main drivers of transmission. Meanwhile, the risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools is manageable with appropriate mitigation strategies in most settings. The decision to open or close schools should be based on risk analysis and the epidemiological considerations in the communities where they are situated.

“Reopening schools cannot wait for all teachers and students to be vaccinated. With the global vaccine shortages plaguing low and middle-income countries, vaccinating frontline workers and those most at risk of severe illness and death will remain a priority. All schools should provide in-person learning as soon as possible, without barriers to access, including not mandating vaccination prior to school entry.

“Ahead of the Global Education Meeting on July 13, we urge decisionmakers and governments to prioritize the safe reopening of schools to avoid a generational catastrophe.

“Closing schools mortgages our future for unclear benefits to our present. We must prioritize better. We can reopen schools safely, and we must.”

#####

## About UNICEF

UNICEF works in some of the world’s toughest places, to reach the world’s most disadvantaged children. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone.

For more information about UNICEF and its work for children visit [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org).

Follow UNICEF on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)

## About UNESCO

UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It seeks to build peace through international cooperation in

education, scientific collaboration, cultural dialogue and the free flow of information. More information at [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)

**For further information, please contact:**

Najwa Mekki, UNICEF New York, +1917 209 1804, [nmekki@unicef.org](mailto:nmekki@unicef.org)

Clare O'Hagan, UNESCO, [c.o-hagan@unesco.org](mailto:c.o-hagan@unesco.org)