



SUPPORTING A SAFE RETURN TO LEARNING

Snapshot of USAID's COVID Response Activities

This brief summarizes USAID's response to COVID-19 in the education sector. To build resilience and support a safe return to learning, especially for the most marginalized, USAID supported a robust spectrum of programs and partnerships in more than 50 countries, from pre-primary through higher education. As education systems continue to rebuild, USAID is working with partners to mitigate learning loss and create more resilient and equitable systems and societies that can better manage future shocks. The data for this brief come from the fiscal year 2020 Performance Plan and Report (PPR) and a survey of USAID Missions.

Over
24 million

learners reached across the education continuum

Over
4 million

girls reached in crisis and conflict settings

Over
128,000

learners with disabilities reached*

Over
55

resources published in response to COVID-19

Click [here](#) for additional resources on education and COVID-19.

*As USAID recently revised its [Education Reporting Guidance](#), the Agency anticipates more Missions will report on the number of children and youth with disabilities reached in future years.

Click on a category to learn more about USAID's response.



Note: Category sizes reflect the number of countries supported in each category.

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PARTNERING WITH MINISTRIES TO SAFELY AND RESPONSIBLY REOPEN SCHOOLS

USAID partnered with governments around the world to safely reopen schools and other educational institutions with personal protective equipment and water and sanitation facilities. As each country's context has evolved, USAID ensures reopening plans center learning as a priority for all children and youth, especially the most marginalized, including girls and young women, children and youth with disabilities, gender and sexual minorities, child laborers, and unaccompanied children. Read below for examples.



20

countries supported

Guatemala



USAID supported 2.4 million primary and lower secondary students in the public education system to transition to a virtual learning platform under the Ministry of Education's Aprendo en Casa (I Learn at Home) strategy. In addition, USAID partnered with the Ministry of Education to develop protocols to safely and responsibly open schools. These protocols include guidance on emotional support, school sanitation, and the provision of face coverings to all students, teachers, and administrators in half of Guatemala's public primary schools.

Kosovo



To address the challenges of returning to school during COVID-19, USAID, in partnership with UNICEF, implemented the "Back to School" initiative to supply education institutions with protective kits against COVID-19. USAID and UNICEF have distributed about 10,000 kits containing masks, hand sanitizer, and other hygiene materials to students and teachers across Kosovo. This assistance is part of a \$1.6 million aid package to increase Kosovo's response capability and prevent further transmission of COVID-19.

South Sudan



USAID and other donors collaborated to initiate a School Reopening Working Group with the Government of South Sudan to enhance donor coordination and safely reopen schools. The working group's members shared information about safe school reopening status and the needs of students, teachers, and communities to continue to support delivery of quality education across South Sudan during the pandemic. USAID also provided 32,000 radios to allow students to access radio-based instruction from home, and continued to focus on reaching internally displaced children, girls, nomadic communities, and other marginalized populations.

USING ACCESSIBLE DISTANCE LEARNING PLATFORMS

To mitigate the impact of disruptions on school participation and learning loss, USAID quickly pivoted its programming and support to keep even the most marginalized learners engaged. A variety of distance learning modalities show promise in this endeavor, including radio/audio, television/video, online, mobile, and accompanying print and digital text kits. Some activities have bolstered the accessibility of distance learning platforms by integrating principles of Universal Design for Learning, including features such as captions, local sign language content, and braille books. Read below for examples.



52

countries supported

Morocco



USAID strengthened the Ministry of Education's efforts to reach deaf and hard of hearing students in grades 1–12 during school closures. USAID supported sign language interpretation services to adapt distance lessons for deaf and hard of hearing students, filling a critical education gap for deaf and hard of hearing learners in Morocco caused by COVID-19. The U.S.-Moroccan cooperation is on track to produce almost 600 adapted lessons in math, science, Arabic, French, and Islamic studies, which are shared on a national television channel, website, and app.

Philippines



At the outset of school closures related to COVID-19, the Department of Education (DepEd) mobilized teachers to begin developing digital materials for distribution through the DepEd Commons, an online platform for distributing digital educational resources. All Children Reading (ACR)—Philippines supported the production of more than 200 digital resources for DepEd Commons, in the form of interactive e-books and educational videos. Through the Gabay (Guide) activity, USAID also piloted a Filipino Sign Language curriculum with the DepEd, moving training and support for teachers online due to COVID-19.

Senegal



In response to school closures, USAID supported the Ministry of Education to develop radio- and television-based educational content to help students continue to learn from home. The program created a one-stop shop for teachers to access distance learning resources from home and provided ongoing support through text messages. As schools began to safely reopen, USAID supported the Ministry's back-to-school communication campaign and worked to ensure teachers were equipped with tools to stem learning loss caused by the COVID-19 crisis.

PROVIDING PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT AND PROTECTION SERVICES

Regular access to education creates a sense of order and stability and supports caring relationships that are prerequisites for learning. To sustain these functions during education disruptions, USAID quickly developed public service messages and programs to help parents and caregivers support the psychosocial well-being of children and youth, and to help educators cope with impacts of COVID-19. As learners return to the classroom, USAID is partnering with Ministries of Education and other relevant ministries to prepare educators for heightened learner distress and to deploy school-based strategies to help learners recover. Read below for examples.



30

countries supported

Democratic Republic of the Congo



USAID's ACCELERE!1 launched a radio pilot program to support distance learning, literacy, and social-emotional skills for students during the pandemic. Since the content was already scripted, the process of turning it into audio was relatively quick. However, the program added new information about preventing COVID-19, stopping and reporting sexual exploitation and abuse, and ending gender-based violence. In the absence of in-person teachers and administrators, ACCELERE!1 developed a three-pronged support system for students and caregivers, including family facilitators, community liaisons, and project communications and logistics agents.

Honduras



COVID-19, as well as recent destructive hurricanes, has taken a toll on Honduran youth, driving many to drop out of school and migrate to the U.S. In response, USAID's Asegurando la Educación (Ensuring Education) project helped the Ministry of Education launch an Early Warning and Response System (EWRS), to train educators to recognize warning signs in vulnerable youth and help them stay in school. Preliminary data suggest drop-out rates in 2020 were much lower than expected, with educators crediting efforts such as EWRS that support the emotional health of students.

Uganda



In Uganda, USAID addressed a key gap in the implementation of the Ministry of Education's COVID Preparedness and Response Plan: the provision of psychosocial support to teachers, parents, and learners during school closures and in preparation for the safe reopening of schools. With the Ministry of Education, USAID helped establish a call center managed by professional counselors who provided COVID-19 response-related messages to more than 35,000 teachers. Of this group, more than 25,000 teachers received psychosocial support services through interactive voice messaging and more than 12,000 teachers received guidance and counseling services from call center counselors.

BUILDING EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE CAPACITY

USAID is committed to strengthening the capacity of local education leaders and systems to prepare and implement data-driven emergency response plans. This improved capacity will help minimize disruptions to learning and protect hard-fought gains in education access and learning for all populations. USAID's important pivot toward greater investment in emergency preparedness and response capacity will build on the Agency's experience helping communities and education authorities build back better following disasters in places like Haiti, Nepal, and Pakistan. Read below for examples.



21

countries supported

Haiti



In Haiti, the impact of COVID-19 was exacerbated by food insecurity, economic hardship, and school closings due to security concerns before the pandemic began. In this ever-shifting environment, USAID has learned to engage strategically with stakeholders. Read Haiti is a Global Development Alliance (GDA) partnership with the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and an anonymous foundation, leveraging \$7 million from the private sector. The GDA enabled USAID to mobilize quickly during the pandemic, developing a radio distance program and evaluating the effectiveness of that program. The lessons learned will inform future education programming in response to shocks.

Liberia



With support from USAID and other development partners, Liberia's Ministry of Education published an education emergency response plan incorporating lessons from the 2014–2015 Ebola virus outbreak. The plan provides strategies for emergency response, remote learning using radio, school reopening, and system strengthening. USAID also provided \$50 (USD) stipends to nearly 40,000 grade 12 students so they could complete the West African Senior School Certificate Examination and graduate from high school. The stipends helped students cover the cost of transportation, daily food, and other basic needs as they prepared for the exams.

Nepal



USAID is restoring access to education for children disrupted by both the 2015 earthquakes and the COVID-19 pandemic. Programs include safe school construction and monitoring so that students, especially girls and children with disabilities, can return to safe learning environments after the pandemic. USAID is also piloting remedial education to help young girls at risk of early and forced marriage to catch up on lost learning due to COVID-19-related school closures and prevent school drop out. The program will offer supplemental instruction to girls in the core subjects of Nepali, Math, Science, and English.

INSTITUTIONALIZING REMEDIAL AND ACCELERATED EDUCATION TO INCREASE EQUITY

Given the risk of long-term learning disparities with educational disruptions, USAID is committed to helping learners, particularly those who are the furthest behind, to catch up and recover from learning loss. Building on USAID's expertise and experience as the largest bilateral donor in accelerated learning, these efforts will include support to remedial and accelerated education policies and programming, as well as training and coaching educators to prioritize core curricular content, assess learners' skills, and adapt instruction to help learners get back on track. Read below for examples.



26

countries supported

Jordan



In response to COVID-19, USAID trained approximately 9,000 teachers on how to deliver a reading and math catch-up program to kindergarten through grade 3 students. USAID also distributed academic workbooks to 3,600 students, including in refugee camps, who are entering first grade and did not attend kindergarten. With USAID support, the Ministry of Education made a deliberate effort to prioritize children with disabilities in its School Readiness Program. In addition, the Agency's shift to online platforms resulted in increased enrollment of girls from conservative households, as they do not have to leave home to attend online lessons.

Mali



The Education Recovery Support Activity (ERSA) closed in 2020 after conducting 299 accelerated program classes through the Adapted Program for Resilience and School Entry initiative. During the COVID-19 pandemic, ERSA developed a strategy for local technical training to mitigate the lack of formal training opportunities and to limit youth travels. Staff made huge efforts to organize training as locally as possible, especially for women who usually face more constraints in their ability to travel. Months after the end of the activity, many participants who started businesses are still using their skills and startup kits.

Zambia



USAID supported the Ministry of General Education (MOGE) to sustain the Teaching at the Right Level/Catch-Up (TaRL) activity in two provinces. Based on key lessons learned, the MOGE has fully adopted TaRL as Zambia's model for remedial instruction, with the intent to ultimately scale the program nationwide. In fiscal year 2020, the MOGE acquired additional support through The LEGO Foundation and the Global Partnership for Education. As a result, the program is being scaled to an additional two provinces and is being deployed in accelerated learning programs in response to the COVID-19-related school closure.

ENGAGING YOUTH AS LEADERS IN THE PANDEMIC RESPONSE

Youth can play a vital role in mitigating the long-term health, economic, and social costs their generation faces by leading the pandemic response in their communities. At the heart of USAID's youth efforts is the [Positive Youth Development](#) approach, which ensures meaningful opportunities for youth to contribute to resolving issues and promoting positive change. Across its programming, USAID supports youth as leaders to mobilize their knowledge, innovation, and capacity to contribute to COVID-19 response efforts. Read below for examples.



countries supported

Dominican Republic



USAID's At-Risk Youth Networks create opportunities for youth, including members of the LGBTI+ community and people with disabilities, to build a better future and break the cycle of crime and violence. As COVID-19 infections started circulating and the country started its curfew and quarantine process, the At-Risk Youth Networks quickly adapted. Youth leaders engaged people through digital workshops and used social media to motivate youth outside the networks to participate. Through virtual meetings and conferences, the networks also brought together young people to promote conflict mediation, pandemic donations, and female empowerment.

Pakistan



Medical graduates of USAID's Merit and Needs-Based Scholarship Program (MNBSP) are now on the front lines of Pakistan's fight against COVID-19. As nurses and other medical staff, they provide care and emotional support to patients. MNBSP has provided higher education opportunities for talented youth from lower-income families to study in 30 top Pakistani universities across five fields of study, including medicine. The program has contributed to equitable access to higher education for more than 5,300 young Pakistanis, especially women, enabling youth to play a vital role in Pakistan's economic and social development.

Turkmenistan



Through the Enriching Youth for Tomorrow activity, USAID is investing in youth to help them find economic success. The activity unveiled a new course for Turkmen entrepreneurs to become certified soft skills trainers and help other young Turkmens succeed in business. When the COVID-19 pandemic made in-person training impossible, USAID worked with trainers to develop an innovative web platform to train youth via an interactive webinar. USAID is teaching trainers how to publicize and conduct webinars so they can move forward with equipping youth with the skills they need to succeed.

ENGAGING HEIs AS CENTRAL ACTORS IN LOCALLY-LED DEVELOPMENT

USAID supports partners and HEIs to mobilize their knowledge, innovation, and research capacity to contribute to COVID-19 response efforts and to utilize higher education across development sectors. Responding to the impact of COVID-19 has highlighted the critical role of higher education systems and institutions in locally-led response. It has also demonstrated the potential for higher education to serve as a central actor in both crisis response and locally led-development through research, innovation, workforce training, continuity of learning, and strengthening networks and communities. Read below for examples.



31

countries supported

Egypt



In coordination with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, USAID and the American University in Cairo are establishing 20 career development centers through the University Centers for Career Development (UCCD) activity. As universities shifted to online learning, UCCD offered online employability skills, entrepreneurship, and language classes, including for students with disabilities. UCCD also hosted Egypt's first online career fair, bringing together 45 employers and 4,000 students, and developed a virtual exchange program with the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, hosting online learning sessions and cultural exchanges between Egyptian and U.S. students.

Georgia



USAID recently launched the Basic Education Program to sustain reforms in student-centered instruction at Georgia's pedagogical universities. The COVID-19 pandemic arrived not long after the program began, requiring a pivot to delivering training modules online. Despite the challenge, the activity continued to engage teachers, with many jumping at the opportunity to strengthen their computer and internet skills, including the ability to search online for learning resources. The program will strengthen the technical and institutional capacities of the universities, enabling them to use the new teacher training modules and develop a high quality and sustainable system of in-service and pre-service training for primary grade teachers.

Malawi



USAID funding through the Innovation Scholars Program led to the development of two innovations to help in the local fight against COVID-19. The program invited proposals from university faculty and students related to preventing the spread of the virus as well as tracking infections. A faculty scholar designed a solar-powered mobile hand-washing station, which the United Nations Development Program agreed to purchase to distribute across the country. In addition, a group of student innovators developed a technology platform that allowed health officials to track disease hotspots, trace cases, and generate data for decision making.

ADVANCING EQUALITY AND INCLUSION IN SCHOOL PARTICIPATION AND LEARNING

USAID responded to COVID-19 with investments to build more equitable and inclusive education systems for girls, children with disabilities, and other marginalized groups. School closures have left some of these learners without access to the support services necessary to pursue their education, and distance learning modalities are not universally accessible to all learners. USAID responded by developing accessible teaching and learning materials, providing accessible distance learning, and taking other steps to address barriers to participation and learning for marginalized children and youth. Read below for examples.



countries supported

Cambodia



USAID's All Children Reading—Cambodia (ACR) developed an early grade reading program that helps children with and without disabilities to access quality Khmer literacy lessons. The program has been integrated into both in-service and pre-service teacher training, benefitting more than 16,500 children with disabilities, about half of them girls, and training nearly 5,000 preschool and grade 1 and 2 teachers on inclusive early grade literacy instruction. ACR developed accessible teaching and learning materials, piloted literacy assessment tools for children with disabilities, and provided accessible distance learning during COVID-19-related school closures.

Kenya



With COVID-19 forcing children out of school, many are learning via state-sponsored television programming. While this may seem like an excellent solution, for those who are deaf or hard of hearing, viewing television content without Kenyan Sign Language is a frustrating challenge. Through All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development, USAID supported Digital Story Time, a series of storybooks in Kenyan Sign Language. The series airs morning and evening on Kenyan television and on demand on YouTube and ekitabu.com/tv so that children who are deaf have access to learning during the pandemic.

Tajikistan



Before COVID-19, efforts were already underway in Tajikistan to ensure that children with disabilities could enjoy digital and printed storybooks in accessible formats. The availability of these storybooks proved paramount when the pandemic hit. During school closures, USAID distributed 600 braille books across the country, allowing students to continue reading and sharing their learning with family members. USAID also took creative approaches during the pandemic, collaborating with Tajikistan's Ministry of Education and Science, the State Puppet Theater, and Children's and Youth Television Network "Bahoriston" to develop a series of television reading programs incorporating sign language content and captions.

ENGAGING CAREGIVERS, COMMUNITIES, LOCAL LEADERS, AND HEALTH OFFICIALS

Through trainings, COVID-19 prevention tips, motivational messages, and other forms of engagement, USAID is collaborating with caregivers, educators, communities, and other stakeholders during the pandemic. This is essential to understand local needs, generate buy-in for decision making, and build trust with communities. Multiple technologies (SMS, radio, television, social media, and in-person) are helping USAID programs to connect with communities, sharing lifesaving and life-sustaining messages with families, learners, and educators. Read below for examples.



38

countries supported

Mozambique



A core objective of USAID's Vamos Ler! (Let's Read) activity is to engage parents and communities to transform schools into responsive centers of learning. Before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, forcing schools to close, the activity provided leadership training to educators and worked closely with parents to promote bilingual education. When schools reopened in March 2021, the solid relationships the activity fostered proved crucial. School directors, teachers, parents, and other members of the community worked collaboratively to ensure their schools met the government's minimum standards of safety and sanitation to reopen safely.

Somalia



The Alternative Basic Education Program (ABE) equipped pastoralist communities with materials to operate mobile schools, maintaining students' ability to learn while on the move. When COVID-19 led to school closures, ABE integrated COVID-19 prevention messages into its existing instructional, health, and well-being messages in standard Af-Mahatri, as well as the underserved Af-Maay language, principally spoken in southern Somalia by ethnic minorities. In addition to raising awareness about COVID-19, the messages motivated parents to be more involved in their children's education and highlighted the positive impact of education to local communities.

Uzbekistan



To help children better understand COVID-19, USAID and the Ministry of Education partnered with Sesame Workshop, the non-profit educational organization behind Sesame Street, to produce the "Caring for Each Other" media package. The package, adapted for Uzbek audiences both in English and Uzbek languages, consists of 11 videos about proper handwashing, sneezing, coping with illness, stress, and adjusting to a new reality. More than 75 percent of parents found the videos to be extremely useful for children, helping to address challenges such as worrying about a sick parent, social distancing, and parents returning to work.

ENGAGING THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The private sector's unique expertise and access—to people, technologies, distribution networks, and more—can save lives, mitigate social and economic impacts, and build resilient individuals, communities, and organizations. The business community is a stakeholder that can invest in these goals, whether through their core business, corporate social responsibility, or philanthropic strategies. USAID is committed to working with the private sector to leverage investments in early childhood education, align workforce training with employer needs, and take other steps to strengthen education systems and the delivery of quality learning opportunities and skills. Read below for examples.



22

countries supported

El Salvador



USAID's Bridges to Employment activity collaborated with the private sector to enhance life skills and on-the-job training for youth, as well as develop a new curriculum aligned with employer needs. When COVID-19 hit, one of the activity's partners, INTRADESA, shifted its production from casual clothing to much-needed face shields, bags for protective gear and waste, plastic bottles for hand sanitizer, soap, and other hygiene supplies for the government of El Salvador. Another partner, Termoencogibles, produced about 2,000 protective smocks per day using machinery and equipment purchased with USAID grant funds.

South Africa



USAID's Kago Ya Bana activity, meaning "building for children" or "children development," is an innovative approach to improving early childhood development (ECD), working with the government and private sector to kickstart viable ECD microenterprises. The activity's ECD Enterprise Incubator and partner SmartStart have established 750 ECD Centres, increasing access to education for 5,350 children and creating more than 1,500 jobs. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the activity focused on supporting the ECD Centres through the lockdown periods and designed a sanitation and hygiene solution to allow the centers to comply with government reopening requirements.

Vietnam



The USAID Improving Access, Curriculum and Teaching in Medical Education and Emerging Diseases (IMPACT-MED) Alliance partnered with the global healthcare company Novartis to train nearly 2,500 final-year medical students at 10 Vietnamese medical schools on COVID-19 care and treatment. To better respond to the pandemic, the Danang Department of Health enlisted 700 senior students who were trained through IMPACT-MED to work in local hospitals and help deliver care and treatment services to COVID-19 patients.



For questions about this brief,
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