

## PLAN INTERNATIONAL'S RECOMMENDATIONS ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT WITH A FOCUS ON EDUCATION

Human development was introduced by the United Nations around 30 years ago as a new way to measure progress, beyond economic growth. Instead, it focuses on the richness of people's life and on creating fair opportunities and choices for all people. Education is one of the three foundations of human development, together with health and a decent standard of living, that directly enhances people's ability to live a dignified life. The EU is committed to ensuring access to inclusive lifelong learning and safe, equitable quality education and training at all levels, including in emergency and crisis situations, in line with the European Consensus on Development and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In addition, in 2018, the Council adopted Conclusions on Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crises which we believe are key to fulfil the right to education for all children in all contexts.

Recently, in the external pillar of the new [EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child](#), the European Commission committed to dedicate 10% of overall funding under the NDICI in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Americas and the Caribbean to education<sup>1</sup>, and to continue allocating 10% of humanitarian aid funding to education in emergencies and protracted crises.

Within the context of the COVID19 pandemic that threatens to reverse progress on access to education for children worldwide, we welcome these developments and the initiative of the Council under the Portuguese Presidency to promote a debate on the importance of human development with a focus on education, health, and gender equality.

This document sets out Plan International's recommendations to EU Member States for their work towards the Council Conclusions on Human Development. **Plan International believes that all children and young people should have access and complete inclusive, quality and safe education at all levels, on the basis of equal opportunity and non-discrimination.**

### 1. Inclusive Quality education at all levels, for all children and young people,

Quality education has become more prominent through the Agenda 2030, in recognition that focusing on increasing access to education alone will not in itself improve learning outcomes. A quality education relies on a number of elements, such as curricula, teaching pedagogies and learning environments. Ultimately, we believe that a quality education is comprehensive, gender-transformative, empowering, promotes respect for all people, and includes wider life skills including citizenship education. A quality education should equip children with the skills and abilities to reach their full potential and maximise their chances of finding decent work. Access to inclusive quality education, in particular for girls, can open doors through increasing their mobility and confidence, knowledge about their rights and opportunities for leadership, and also improve health outcomes, especially relating to sexual and reproductive health and rights. This contributes to preventing the transmission of poverty from one generation to the next and to overall economic growth and prosperity. Lastly, Plan International believes that no child should be denied their right to an education due to conflict and disaster. Education in emergency responses should target those

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<sup>1</sup> Plan International contributed to the civil society position paper on education in the NDICI in March 2021.

disproportionally affected by emergencies, or at greater risk, in particular girls and children with disabilities.

We recommend the EU to support quality education through:

- Promoting an enabling learning environment that is safe, gender-transformative and inclusive in order to ensure education outcomes and children's wellbeing. To this end the EU must support partner countries to ensure that education, health and child protection systems work together to ensure the wellbeing of all children and young people, and to ensure that no child falls through the gaps.
- Supporting investments in teachers' training and support as well as measures to protect their wellbeing and economic security, as they are an essential factor contributing to a quality, equitable and inclusive education.
- Investing in improving the quality and effectiveness of education and Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET).
- Supporting targeted measures in partners countries, such as bursaries, scholarships or cash transfers, to ensure that the associated costs of education do not prevent any children, and particularly girls, from being able to attend formal or non-formal education.
- Ensuring quality education in conflict or emergency situation that adheres to the minimum standards developed by the Inter Agency Network for Education in Emergencies.
- Supporting refugee hosting countries to strengthen education systems to accommodate refugees.
- Promoting and supporting comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) that is gender-transformative accessible for all children, adolescents and young people, in both formal and non-formal educational settings. CSE should be stigma-free and be provided in an accessible way that is appropriate to the cognitive development of learners, including information on and referral linkages to sexual and reproductive health services.
- Strengthening national education systems by supporting partner country's through bilateral programming and relevant multilateral funding initiatives (Global Partnership for Education, Education Cannot Wait and No Lost Generation), giving priority to early childhood development, and addressing barriers in basic education, including poverty, violence and gender norms. System-strengthening is also an investment in the resilience of children to be better prepared and equipped for future crises and dealing with shocks and stresses, which contributes to bridging the gap between development and humanitarian interventions in which children often find themselves.
- Prioritising support for the most marginalised who are least likely to be able to access education: girls and young women, children and youth with disabilities, and those who are LGBTIQ+ , from low-income households, living in rural and remote areas, and from other marginalised and excluded groups.
- We welcome the inclusion of a 20% funding target on human development in the NDICI-Global Europe instrument, as well as the 10% funding commitments to education and education in emergencies, and call on the EU to ensure they are fully implemented.
- Ensuring the implementation of gender-responsive education sector plans to ensure education systems can adapt to new realities and become more resilient, including protected and increasing budgets where necessary: the EU should encourage partner countries to meet the minimum globally agreed benchmark of 20% of national budgets for education. Funds should

target and account for the disproportionate effects of school closures due to COVID-19 on girls and other marginalised children.

- We welcome the recent EU pledge for an additional €6.5 million for the Education Cannot Wait fund, and encourage the EU to ensure that this is complementary to development funding for education and does not divert funding committed elsewhere.

## 2. Girls' access to and completion of education

Every girl has the right to access quality education, in safe school environments that are free from gender bias, challenge discriminatory social norms and promote gender equality. However, before the COVID19 pandemic, there were already 130 million girls out of school around the world. At the peak of the pandemic, 767 million girls had their education disrupted. School closures due to the pandemic have exposed girls to higher risks of adolescent pregnancies, child marriage, and gender – based violence.<sup>2</sup> In addition, many children especially girls are at risk of not returning to school, with over 20 million girls at risk of never returning to school.<sup>3</sup>

We recommend the EU to remove gendered barriers to girls' access to education. This means supporting partner countries to:

- Ensure girls remain in formal education and help out-of-school girls in emergency settings access education by removing structural, practical and financial barriers. Specific measures include making schools free and easily accessible, ensuring girls' safety on their way to and from school, and persuading parents of the importance of girls' education and offering incentives to keep girls in school.
- Ensure that pregnant and married girls are able to continue their education, while taking necessary measures to address the issue of child, early and forced marriage and unions and adolescent pregnancy.
- Ensure access to water and adequate sanitation and hygiene facilities in school infrastructure.
- Ensure that teaching practices and curricula and school environments are free of gender stereotypes and promote equality.
- Ensure that children are able to participate in the decision making that affects their education – both within school governance mechanisms and in local and national-level policy making.
- Eliminate all forms of school-related violence and gender-based violence which are serious violations of child rights.

## 3. Digitalisation and education

As digitalisation is becoming ever more present in our daily lives, education plays a key role to equip children with digital and ICT skills that they need to participate in public life and the economy. This ranges from basic digital literacy, such as the ability to use a computer, to advanced skills such as data analytics or coding. However, the gender digital divide means that girls and young women lack access to technology and the internet, which can exacerbate existing inequalities in access to online learning. Without equal access to technology and the internet, girls and young women are not able to equally participate in our ever more digital societies. Holding back girls and young women in this

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<sup>2</sup> [“African Girls in the COVID-19 Pandemic”](#), Plan International, June 2020

<sup>3</sup> [“Malala Fund releases report on girls' education and COVID-19”](#), Malala Fund, 2020 & [“UNESCO COVID-19 education response: how many students are at risk of not returning to school?”](#), UNESCO, 2020

area affects every aspect of their lives; if girls and young women are not involved in creating digital tools and online content, they are also less likely to be able to meaningfully engage in the processes that affect their lives and access leadership opportunities. Additionally, technology is inherently biased contributing towards sexism and racism. Research has shown how technology is a reflection of its creators, such as algorithms that discriminate against women and girls. Therefore, it is critical that girls and young women have equal access to learning relevant technical skills and digital literacy in school and through training programmes to be able to take advantage of technology, digital tools and become creators of equality tech.

We recommend the EU to ensure digitalisation leaves no child behind by:

- Working closely with partner countries and the private sector to enable broadband access and connect classrooms to the Internet.
- Supporting the provision of resources and trainings for teachers and students to develop digital literacy skills and ensure technology is used to aid learning.
- Encouraging the inclusion of ICT and digital technology education in curricula, combined with the promotion of girls' participation in these subjects notably by addressing stereotypes and ensuring that digital technology including artificial intelligence-based systems advance equality.
- Supporting the adoption of appropriate equitable distance learning solutions through investments in appropriate low-tech, affordable and gender-responsive distance education methods, such as radio broadcasts and television broadcasts or sending reading and writing materials home. Ensure programme scheduling and learning structures are flexible and allow self-paced learning to support children and young people to work according to their own home schedules. Support partner countries to evaluate and strengthening accessible distance education strategies in anticipation of future school closures due to new COVID-19 outbreaks or other crises.
- Digital solutions to distance learning measures should consider the gender digital divide. The EU should encourage partner countries to ensure that all children are trained with the necessary digital skills, including those needed to stay safe online, and ensure online safety measures are put in place to protect girls from harassment and predators.
- Collaborate with partner countries and Mobile Network Providers to ensure educational content online can be accessed free of charge and that it is "zero-rated," meaning that access does not use up user data.

The EU must continue to recognise the critical linkages between inclusive quality education, gender equality and building a more resilient society for sustainable development. Young women and girls are often the most affected by shocks and stresses and make up the largest proportion of the informal economy, meaning they often lack social and economic protection. By improving and transforming girls and young women's access to education, countries will raise the position of girls and women in society, advance gender equality and improve the country's overall ability to recover faster from future crises and strengthen human development.

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