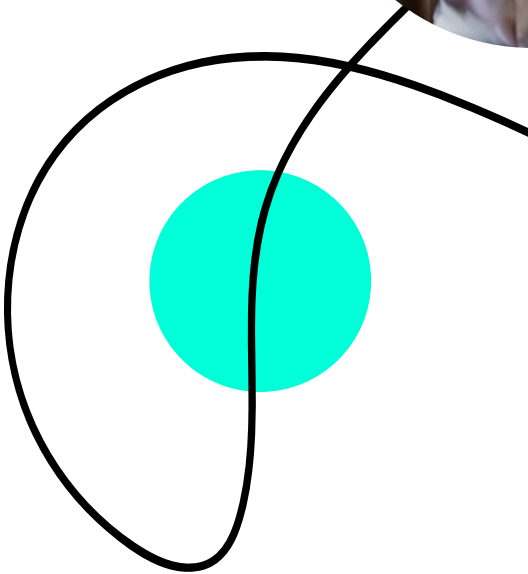
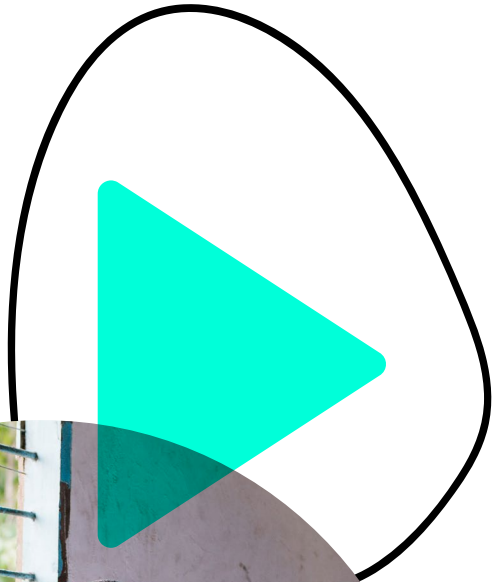


Rewriting the future for 70 million children



At the peak of COVID-19, 1.6 billion children were pushed out of school.¹

Everyone, everywhere has suffered. For some, the weight of the impact will diminish over time; while others - the poorest children in the world - will never recover. Children in some of the poorest countries have missed out on nearly a sixth of their expected lifetime education.²

What's worse is that many of these children will fail to meet one of the most important milestones on their education journey. Reaching the age of 10 should be a pivotal moment in a child's life: the moment when she stops learning to read and starts reading to learn.³

This make-or-break moment allows a child to go from simply reading words on a page to understanding a quiz, a health leaflet, or a fairytale. It is a crucial transition that sets millions of children up for a better life - one of continuous independent learning. It is a moment that creates the doctors, nurses, public health experts, and teachers of the future, maybe even presidents and prime ministers too.

But these dreams are dashed for millions of children who fail to acquire basic literacy skills by the age of 10, what has been termed as learning poverty.⁴ Their intellectual growth is stunted and with it their ability to acquire essential knowledge.

What's the scale of the problem?

New analysis from ONE shows that **70 million children in 2021 alone - over half the world's 10-year-olds - could lack the basic literacy skills expected of a child at that age** if the worst impacts of COVID-19 on education systems are realized. To put that in context, this would be equivalent to the entire population of the UK left with a life-long brake on its future potential this year alone.⁵

If the current pace continues, our estimates show that the number of children at risk will increase to 750 million between 2020 to 2030, or nearly 1 in 10 people worldwide.⁶

COVID-19 contributes nearly 17% to that figure as the pandemic has shuttered schools across the world, putting a pause on learning and reducing government spending on education. Girls in particular are most at risk of falling through the cracks; 20 million may never return to school.⁷

Not only will these children carry the weight of lost learning into adulthood - affecting their ability to start businesses, get well-paid jobs, and provide for their families - but lost learning will also have a huge impact on the whole of societies. Learning losses due to COVID-19 could lead to US\$10 trillion dollars in lost labor earnings for the school children affected by the pandemic.⁸ And

lost learning could reverberate for decades: the loss of learning that schoolchildren who were impacted by World War II experienced still had a negative impact on their earnings even 40 years later.⁹ The children of today are the health workers of tomorrow, but they are unlikely to join the health workforce if they cannot read at 10 and cannot catch up later in life. So the fact that over half of the world's 10-year-olds could fall into learning poverty in 2021 could subsequently halve the global recruitment pool for skilled health workers by 2030.

This is a fundamental barrier to the fight against extreme poverty. If all students in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills, 171 million people could be lifted out of extreme poverty.¹⁰



How badly has sub-Saharan Africa been impacted?


By 2050, sub-Saharan Africa's population is expected to more than double. Half of its population will be under 25 years old.¹¹ Yet, this year, 40% of the world's 10 year olds without basic literacy skills are in sub-Saharan Africa. These are the children who will be set back in life, who will be far less likely to contribute to the demographic dividend on the continent.

Public financing can help reverse the damage. But two-thirds of low- and lower-middle-income countries have cut their education budgets since COVID-19 began as they face impossible tradeoffs between debt repayments, paying for healthcare costs, or paying teachers' salaries.¹² Nigeria's Federal government reduced its education budget by 10% in 2021, forcing public schools to dismiss hundreds of temporary staff and causing school fees to skyrocket.¹³ Aid to education - which makes up nearly one-fifth of education spending for low-income countries - is likely to decline by 12% as economies contract.¹⁴



How can we stop this?

It is a travesty that it may be too late to change the learning trajectory for over half the 10-year-olds on the planet this year. But we can do something about the children counting the days to their tenth birthday next year and every year after.



The ONE Campaign is calling for all governments to take action to stem the tide of this hidden crisis and deliver a future in which every 10-year old child is able to read and understand a simple story.

- 1.** G7 leaders should endorse the girls' education global targets set out by the UK - who will host the Summit in 2021 - to ensure 40 million more girls are accessing school and 20 million more girls (an increase of a third) are able to read by age 10 by 2025.¹⁵

- 2.** Donor governments should pledge generously to ensure a fully funded Global Partnership for Education. An investment of US\$5bn could enable 175 million girls and boys to learn between 2021-2025.¹⁶

- 3.** G20 Finance Ministers should offer a comprehensive stimulus package to low- and middle-income countries by extending the Debt Service Suspension Initiative until the end of 2021 and backing the creation of US\$650bn Special Drawing Rights with a mechanism to transfer them to low and middle-income countries. This would free up much needed funds to respond to the pandemic and the sectors most affected, including education.

- 4.** Low- and middle-income countries should commit to protecting their education budgets and using any stimulus packages created to urgently address the learning crisis while responding to the pandemic.

- 5.** Funding alone is not enough; it must be spent in a targeted and efficient manner based on evidence of what works and addressing context-specific realities. Governments should commit to ongoing evidence gathering, quality spending and should take steps to better measure the global learning crisis. We cannot fix what we can't measure.

Annex 1: The number of children with lost potential by world region

	2021	Percent	2020-2030	Percent
East Asia and Pacific	6,967,014	10.0%	66,865,711	8.9%
Europe and Central Asia	1,672,672	2.4%	16,919,276	2.3%
Latin America and the Caribbean	5,623,814	8.1%	58,083,606	7.7%
Middle East and North Africa	5,717,940	8.2%	63,975,033	8.5%
North America	331,436	0.5%	2,653,635	0.4%
South Asia	22,961,111	32.9%	238,859,474	31.8%
Sub-Saharan Africa	26,579,795	38.1%	303,669,254	40.4%
TOTAL	69,853,783		751,025,989	

Annex 2: How did we calculate the number of children falling into learning poverty?

To calculate the number of children falling into learning poverty:

- We use the World Bank's and UNESCO Institute of Statistics' Learning Poverty estimates (released 2019)¹⁷ and multiply this by the population of 10 year olds (using UN Population projections, medium variant).¹⁸
- For countries where no learning poverty rate data are reported, we use a weighted mean of the countries within the same income group and geographic region, weighted by the population of ten year olds, on the proviso that this was averaging at least three data points, otherwise only the income group weighted average was used.
- It is assumed that the learning poverty rate falls by 0.77 percentage points a year as per World Bank estimates.
- These estimates include the impacts of COVID-19 as per World Bank projections of the impact of the pandemic on learning poverty.¹⁹

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