



© UNICEF/UNI330895/Frank Dejongh

School closures from 16 March 2020 and new school arrangements have affected 6.3 million children in Côte d'Ivoire, 47 per cent of whom are girls. UNICEF has supported the Ministry of Education to finalise the COVID-19 education response strategy, national protocols for reopening of schools and a community-based monitoring system.

Ensuring that girls return to school safely is a key pillar. In Côte d'Ivoire, the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated unequal access to educational opportunities, especially for girls. Already, 55 per cent of out-of-school children ages 6 to 16 are girls, and only 30 per cent of girls have access to upper secondary compared to 39 per cent for boys. Due to the lockdown, families now have less income, adding pressure on girls to earn money, get married or stop school and look after their siblings. The risk of early pregnancy increases accordingly. [Girls](#) have been cut off from essential services and networks, and school closures have increased their vulnerability to violence at home and in their communities, making it even more important to support their transition back to school.

KEY FEATURES

- **Gradual approach to reopening** – After a two-month shutdown, Côte d'Ivoire became one of the first countries in West Africa to restart some in-person schooling on 18 May to enable exams. With exams completed, secondary students returned home for the school break which will run until September. Distance learning options will continue to be available for the phased reopening expected in the 2020-2021 school year, through "[Mon école à la maison](#)" ("My school at home") via TV, radio, WebTV and a free-of-charge SMS-based platform. As of 3 July, 391,022 children in primary school and 448,913 in secondary school were benefiting from home-based learning.

- **Ongoing rapid surveys** – To gather information on girls and children with disabilities related to the digital divide and social norms, the Ministry of Education conducted a national, gender disaggregated survey on the reopening of schools and will share trends. UNICEF has also assisted in implementing a real-time monitoring system involving communities and young people to provide feedback on schools reopening, paying close attention to the various [challenges](#) that girls face as they return to school.
- **Putting girls' education at the centre of the response** – Following the launch of TV and radio distance learning programmes, UNICEF Côte d'Ivoire worked with Caritas, a local NGO, to establish a community-based monitoring system covering the most vulnerable regions in the West and North of the country. Serving as an early warning mechanism for girls' learning, this system keeps an eye on self-directed learning, teacher and peer support, protection such as gender-based violence and early marriage, health such as early pregnancies and life skills. It relies on village education committees comprising teachers, mothers, community health workers and community leaders to track efforts towards mitigating the impacts of the pandemic on students and their families. As schools gradually reopen, this early warning mechanism also helps monitor girls' attendance and absenteeism, including in the next school year.
- **Investing in intersectoral work** – Strong intersectoral coordination is integral to UNICEF's education response. This includes feeding into the country's COVID-19 awareness campaign and other communication work, as well as child protection measures to mitigate violence against girls linked to school closures. UNICEF is also working with Caritas to develop specific guidelines that address the various challenges girls face related to inadequate water and sanitation facilities in schools.

EMERGENT LESSONS LEARNED

- **Addressing exclusionary drivers during reopening.** Social norms, violence and poverty remain the key drivers that influence girls' educational experience. School reopening should be leveraged to overcome longstanding gender gaps in education. This includes accommodating girls who were previously enrolled as well as those who had dropped out before the COVID-19 crisis. Gender-responsive distance education must be scaled to reach the most marginalised girls, who often have less access to technology. Safety and violence risks to girls in remote learning must be identified and protection approaches incorporated, including digital safeguarding flows in tech platforms.
- **Engaging male allies, parents and teachers.** Engagement of boys and men, especially male leaders, is essential to help change pervasive and harmful gender norms that hold girls back from attending school. Teachers must be trained and prepared to work in these new forms, and families must remain engaged to ensure student learning.
- **Listening to girls, their communities, and caregivers before and after reopening.** SMS-based tools, such as RapidPro and U-Report, combined with awareness raising on community radios help provide information to engage communities and caregivers actively in supporting girls to go back to school.

OTHER RESOURCES

For other resources, including more case studies, please click [here](#) and filter by "Area of Work" (Education).

For more information, please contact:

The Côte d'Ivoire Country Office: abidjan@unicef.org

© UNICEF July 2020