



Recommendations: Integrating Gender and Social Inclusion into Distance Education Programming Guidance

**The Basic Education Coalition
Gender and Girls Education Working Group**

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The Basic Education Coalition (BEC) is a group of leading U.S.-based organizations and academic institutions working together to promote global peace and prosperity through education. By leveraging our collective technical expertise and combining advocacy efforts, BEC members raise a unified voice to ensure U.S. policy makers support and strengthen education for the developing world.



INTRODUCTION

Ninety per cent of the world's children are out of school due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Communities across the world are coming to terms with school closures, social distancing measures, and restrictions on goods, services and the movement of people. Most countries are considering distance education as a means to prevent the health crisis from becoming an education crisis. Disease outbreaks affect women, girls, men, and boys differently; pandemics exacerbate existing inequalities for women and girls, as well as the discrimination of other marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities and those in extreme poverty (UNFPA, 2020). Children with disabilities may be at risk of exclusion from education if remote/distance learning programs are not accessible and/or if they lack assistive devices to allow for participation and accommodate learning needs. In the context of COVID-19, measures that restrict movements and require families to stay home can increase violence against women and children within households due to the pressure of isolation and lack of outlets for interpersonal frustrations. It can also exacerbate longer-term intimate partner violence or start new incidences. This context must be kept in mind when responding to educational needs during COVID-19 (and beyond).

UTILIZING TECHNOLOGY EFFECTIVELY AND EQUITABLY

Distance learning through the use of technology is a natural response to the challenging realities the education sector is facing during COVID-19. UNESCO defines distance education as “an educational process and system in which all or a significant proportion of the teaching is carried out by someone or something removed in space and time from the learner.” Distance education requires:

- Structured planning
- Well-designed courses
- Special instructional techniques
- Methods of communication by electronic and other technologies

The Global Partnership for Education recently published [an article](#) (Burns, 2020) on the four most common distance technology for contractors, donors and educators who find themselves needing to explore distance-learning options: radio, television, mobile phones, and online learning. [A series of blogs by the World Bank](#) (Trucano, 2013) on introducing technology to remote, resource-lean education environments offer this practical advice:

"The best technology is the one you already have, know how to use, and can afford. When considering technology, anticipate and mitigate Matthew Effects. A greater value should be placed on the content, and how that content is used, rather than on any one particular device.*

This pandemic has presented enormous challenges to global education. However, if effectively and equitably designed, distance learning programs developed in response to the COVID-19 crisis could provide the education sector with the the opportunity to become more inclusive in general. Implementers and donors alike have the responsibility to take advantage of this opportunity. BEC's aim by compiling these recommendations is to help those designing distance learning programs to do so in an inclusive manner, with the hope that lasting, positive change may be gleaned from this crisis.

*Matthew Effects: those who are most able to benefit from the introduction of ICTs (e.g. children who live in prosperous communities with educated parents, are the ones who benefit the most).

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

In response to the increased risks for marginalized populations during the COVID-19 crisis, the Basic Education Coalition Gender and Girls Education Working Group produced this document to compile a list of recommendations, guidance, and resources (using the references listed on page 9) for integrating gender and social inclusion into distance education programming guidance. These recommendations include research and lessons drawn from collective experience to ensure that distance learning programs are equitable and inclusive. The recommendations include guidance around developing bias-free, safe distance learning environments that promote equality and inclusion through safety, equity, and empowerment. Some of these recommendations are specific to the education context, while others can be applied to the wider COVID-19 response. While compiled to address distance learning programming in response to COVID-19, the majority of these recommendations may serve as best practices in distance learning programming more broadly and are therefore also intended for use beyond the pandemic. These recommendations are preliminary and will need to be reassessed/adapted on an ongoing basis based on the duration of the crisis and severity in different contexts.

RECOMMENDATIONS OVERVIEW

The Basic Education Coalition (BEC) member organizations, partnered with USAID, have responded to the COVID-19 crisis, with a particular focus on continuity of education through a shift to distance learning. To maximize the impact of these distance learning initiatives, BEC has compiled recommendations (from the references listed on page 9) in the following areas of importance:

- I. Harmful gender roles & social norms
- II. Disability and social inclusion
- III. Sexual and gender-based violence
- IV. Equitable and inclusive distance learning strategies
- V. Materials development for gender and social inclusion
- VI. Well-being and health during a pandemic
- VII. Monitoring and evaluation
- VIII. Risk of dropout for girls

I. HARMFUL GENDER ROLES & SOCIAL NORMS

- Ensure response efforts do not reproduce or perpetuate inequitable gender roles, norms, or discriminatory practices. It's important to consider that during these times of social upheaval, women and girls often shoulder a heavier caregiving burden and are likely to experience additional strain on their physical and mental health.
- Key messages should be informed by a gender analysis, which will help identify appropriate and contextual messaging on priority gender equality issues, such as the equitable distribution of food, non-violence, and the importance of shared care work (particularly the positive impact of men and boys' role in equitable caregiving).
- Where possible, organize gender-balanced teams, especially if meetings or events are conducted online or by phone.

II. DISABILITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

- Identify/partner with relevant organizations, in particular, Disabled People's Organizations (DPOS) that can provide targeted support to persons with disabilities (PwD).
- Work closely with local committees on COVID-19 management to address the needs and priorities of the community, including boys and girls, men and women, PwD, and unaccompanied or separated minors.
- Design services, treatment, and communication to be accessible to all, especially those who are marginalized. For older individuals and those in low-resource environments (who may not have easy access to information on websites and social media), consider using adapted communications methods like radio, phone calls and pamphlets.
- Provide communications in the languages of ethnic minorities and migrants, in a manner that is simple and easy to understand, and ensure messages are adapted for visual/auditory impairments. Use multi-format methods (such as easy read formats, large print, and captioning)

to ensure minimum access for people with visual, hearing, or cognitive impairment.

- Ensure that the relevant public health information and communication on COVID-19 is gender-and-disability sensitive and that it is accessible to PwDs, minorities, and marginalized populations.

III. SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

- Prepare for possible surges in gender-based violence (GBV), especially intimate partner violence, as well as violence against children and other vulnerable populations, such as women and girls with disabilities.
- Incorporate economic support into programming. The economic impacts of quarantine and 'lock-down' measures can place women and girls at greater risk of exploitation and sexual violence, including forced early marriage and child labor as families try to cope with financial loss and make ends meet.
- Update GBV and child protection referral pathways to reflect changes in available services and ensure women have access to resources, hotlines, and shelters. Liaise with existing protection systems and identify alternative options for supporting these vulnerable groups.
- Conduct remote training for staff on Psychological First Aid (PFA) and GBV referrals. Ensure relevant staff are trained on how to handle disclosures of GBV in a compassionate and non-judgmental manner and know to whom they can make referrals for further care. This may involve training staff remotely and ensuring they are equipped to provide support in-person or remotely, as required.

IV. EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE DISTANCE LEARNING STRATEGIES

- Engage Ministries of Education (MoE) to understand what technologies will be best based on the context, and consider conducting a snapshot rapid analysis. When possible, ensure that distance learning utilizes delivery methods that require minimal connectivity and/or

low-cost technologies to avoid widening disparities.

- Ensure that girls and boys have equal access to any technology deployed for families to help students learn.
- Support parents in identifying appropriate child protection measures during increased use of online platforms to minimize safety risks to children.
- Engage parents and caregivers in a realistic manner, acknowledging that parents/caregivers are likely under stress and have less time. Focus on consistency and avoid overloading the family with large quantities of time spent online or on cell phones.
- Make distance learning platforms safe and accessible to children with disabilities and train teachers to support children with disabilities remotely. Include special education programs in continuity of education efforts.

V. MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT FOR GENDER AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

- When developing new content for distance learning, address gender and inclusion themes (i.e. equally feature male and female voices/characters, etc.), including the following:
 - ▶ Representation of characters from different subgroups in society
 - ▶ Gender equitable and inclusive illustrations
 - ▶ Use of gender-equitable and inclusive language
 - ▶ Representation of gender-equitable and transformational roles
- Consider how new or adapted learning materials can integrate social and emotional learning (SEL) messaging and activities, as children may be experiencing heightened stress, exposure to violence, or trauma. For example, integrate simple breathing and meditation exercises that parents and caregivers can do with their children.

VI. WELL-BEING AND HEALTH DURING A PANDEMIC

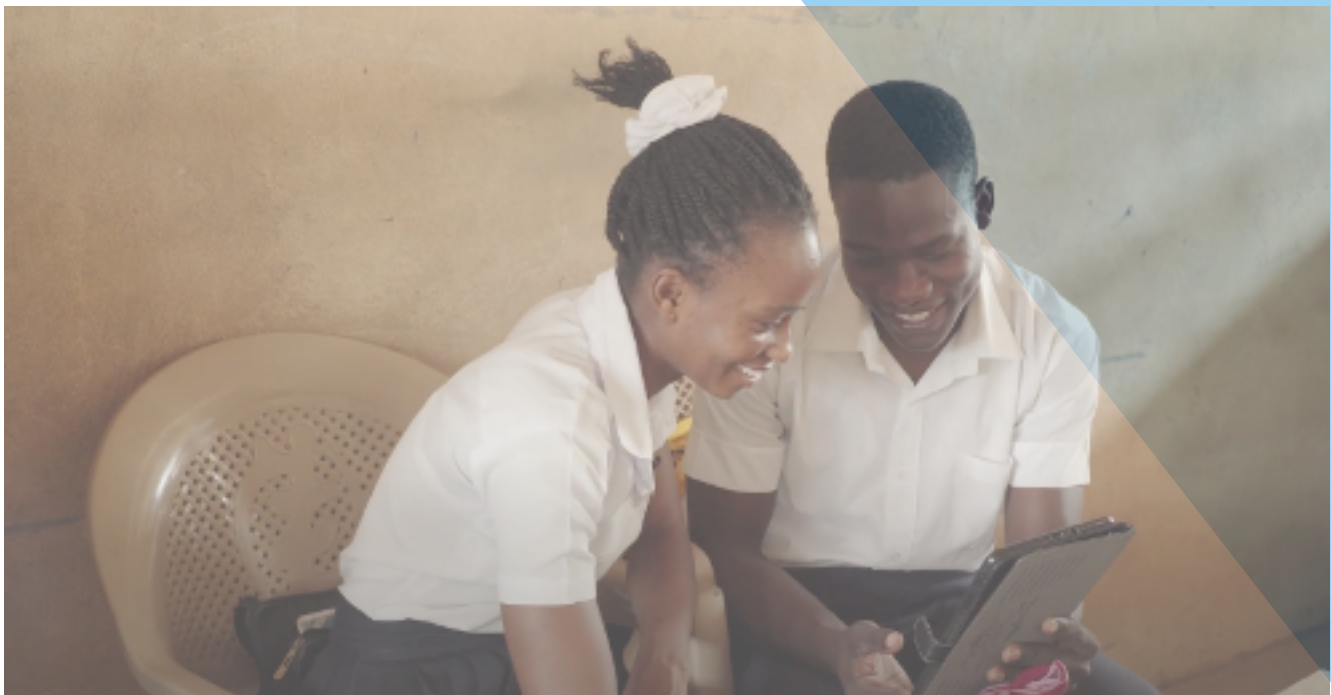
- Embed cross-cutting messages into educational materials to help students develop a positive and responsible attitude toward their well-being, as well as a respect for the rights of others, ensuring the messages and focus are age-appropriate. These may include water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), health and nutrition, sexual and reproductive health (SRH), HIV prevention, a culture of peace, life skills, human rights education, gender power dynamics and healthy relationships, visions/goals for economic and social development, and sustainable development.
- Promote guidance (or develop, as appropriate) on where to access the most accurate information about COVID-19 and how parents/caregivers can take steps to protect themselves and their families, practice good hygiene, and combat the spread of misinformation. Ensure this guidance is accurately translated into local languages and provided in multi-formats to be more accessible for people with visual, hearing, or cognitive impairment. Faulty or inconsistent translations can lead to confusion and stigmatization or even more serious and life-threatening outcomes.
- Provide guidance on how to talk about COVID-19 with children and family members. The fear around pandemics combined with being indoors for long periods is stressful (particularly for young children or children with disabilities), and it's important to provide families with tips on how to manage confinement and isolation. Additionally, avoid language that ties the pandemic to locations or ethnicity as this spreads harmful stereotypes, racism, and xenophobia. UNICEF offers practical suggestions on how to discuss COVID-19 without promoting bullying, discrimination or stigmatization.

VII. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- Share out and learn from existing data to allow for quick, informed, inclusive pivots.
- Use remote monitoring strategies to measure access and quality. Ensure this remote monitoring includes background and household level metrics to understand drivers and barriers to access and quality.
- Prioritize measurement and analysis of the equity dimensions to better understand how different sub-populations are affected. The Education Equity Research Initiative's [Practical Recommendations for Equity Analysis in Education](#) provides guidance on how to consistently measure poverty, socio-economic status (SES), gender, age, ethnicity, and language within education datasets. Although these resources were largely developed for school-based datasets, some recommendations may still be valid within home-based educational settings.
- Analyze and share education equity data quickly and responsibly. Use the data gathered to understand the dimensions of educational disadvantage, and quickly use this learning to inform more targeted distance learning, policy, and advocacy strategies to support marginalized groups.

VIII. RISK OF DROPOUT FOR GIRLS

- Consider the increased risk of dropout that girls face when the existing risk factors are coupled with a pandemic. Economic strains due to lost income brought on by health shocks, lockdowns, and social distancing measures may cause girls to focus purely on income-generating activities to support their households, including transactional sex and child marriage. Evidence has also shown that households may prioritize sending boys to school rather than girls—raising concerns about whether girls will come back to schools at all post COVID-19.
- Prioritize economic support to vulnerable girls and their households.
- Model (and adapt) distance learning interventions proven to benefit girls.
- Sustain or increase provision of sexual and reproductive health services.
- Plan to incentivize communities to encourage the return of girls to schools (e.g. waive school/testing fees, build awareness around the risk and downsides of dropout, etc.)
- Support efforts to remove barriers to girls' access to education. When schools can safely reopen, girls—including pregnant girls, married girls and young mothers— should be fully supported to return and continue learning.



GUIDANCE DOCUMENTS

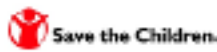
Title	Use/Summary of Document
A Guide for Strengthening Gender Equality and Inclusiveness in Teaching and Learning Materials	This publication provides guidance on how to represent members of all subgroups of a society in teaching and learning materials in equitable and non-stereotypical ways.
WHO Priority Assistive Products List	The WHO provides guidance a list of the top 50 priorities of assistive products that are needed by different individuals with disabilities.

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BEC 2020 MEMBERS

The Basic Education Coalition (BEC) is a group of leading US-based organizations and academic institutions working together to promote global peace and prosperity through education.





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