

# RESEARCH BRIEF:

## THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL CLOSURES UNDER COVID-19 ON CHILD PROTECTION AND EDUCATION INEQUALITIES IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

Proteknôn Foundation for Innovation and Learning, on behalf of the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (The Alliance) and in close collaboration with the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), has been commissioned to explore the following question:

*What education inequalities, child protection risk and protective factors, and adverse outcomes have been amplified as a result of school closures in humanitarian/crisis contexts during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

### Study goal and outcomes

The overall goal of this study is to ensure that children and their holistic well-being are at the centre of decision-making and planning processes for both present and future infectious disease outbreaks, particularly in regard to school closures and re-openings. This study examines the effects of school closures on child protection and educational inequalities. It is one of the first studies of its kind to prioritize the perspectives of those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and particularly children in humanitarian settings.

The research aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- **Outcome 1:** Children, families and communities are actively engaged in the research process and in co-developing strategic recommendations related to infectious disease-related school closures and re-openings.
- **Outcome 2:** Global- and national-level decision-makers are engaged in the research process and provided with findings on the impact of school closures on children's education and child protection outcomes and with recommendations on strengthening protection response plans including from the perspective of those affected.

- **Outcome 3:** Child protection practitioners, as well as education and social service workers, are provided with findings on the impact of school closures on children’s education and child protection outcomes and with recommendations on how to strengthen response plans, including from the perspective of those affected.
- **Outcome 4:** The social service workforce at global, national and sub-national levels are provided with findings concerning the impact of school closures on delivering case management in humanitarian settings during COVID-19 and with recommendations on how to strengthen case management, including from the perspective of those affected.

## Study design

This study is qualitative, guided by a participatory approach. It entails primary data collection in Democratic Republic of Congo, Colombia, and Lebanon. The focus is to understand the lived experience of those on the ground, including children, parents, teachers as well as education and social service workers in humanitarian settings who have been working during COVID-19.

## Qualitative and participatory study methods

The research methods are qualitative and participatory. Study findings will be principally informed by the perspectives and experiences of children, their caregivers, educators, and the social service workforce who will be engaged in the research, analysis and advocacy efforts.

The study methods also aim to ensure that we hear from the voices of those living on the margins. Sampling strategies and research methods will seek to account for factors such as age, gender, disabilities, literacy levels, legal status and experiences of displacement.

The study will engage stakeholders at the global, national, and sub-national levels in education, child protection and the social service workforce as key informants and in local and international advocacy efforts.

## A partnership approach with community-based organizations and local researchers

Primary data collection will be carried out in partnership with community-based organizations and researchers in each country, with ongoing supervision and technical support from Proteknôn.

### Summary of the research

- **Countries:** Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo and Lebanon
- **Key informant interviews** with global, national, and sub-national stakeholders in education, child protection and the social service workforce
- **Participatory research methods** and semi-structured interviews with children, including primary aged, secondary aged out-of-school children, stratified by age
- **Focus group discussions** with caregivers, educators and members of the social service workforce

Local collaborators will be chosen based on their knowledge of the linguistic and cultural context, relevant research experience, including with children, experience in child safeguarding and participation and community access. In addition to research support, the collaboration with community-based organizations will provide ongoing care and support to children and families in study sites, including through reporting and referral as necessary.

An **Advocacy Committee** will also be formed in each country, comprising of international, national and local actors and individuals that can support the dissemination and uptake of research findings and the implementation of key recommendations.