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UN Report on the Impact of Covid-19 on Children

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Why in News

According to the recently released **UN Report on the Impact of Covid-19 on Children**, almost **24 million children could drop out** or not have access to school next year due to the **economic impact of Covid-19**.

Key Points

- **Impact:** The Covid-19 pandemic will impact the children all over the world in multiple ways:
 - **Economic:** An estimated **42-66 million children could fall into extreme poverty** as a result of pandemic
 - The economic loss might reach **16,000 USD of lost earnings over a student's lifetime**, translating over time into 10 trillion USD of lost earnings globally.
 - **Learning:** 188 countries have imposed countrywide school closures, affecting more than **1.5 billion children and youth.**
 - More than two-thirds of countries have introduced a national distance learning platform, but among **low-income countries the share of distance learning is only 30%.**
 - **Online learning is not accessible** for poor children, children from remote and conflict areas and children with disabilities.
 - A **loss of learning by one-third** (equivalent to a three-month school closure) **during Grade 3** might result in 72% of students falling so far behind that by Grade 10 they will have dropped out or will not be able to learn anything in school.
 - **Survival:** Economic hardship experienced by families as a result of the global economic downturn could result in **hundreds of thousands of additional child deaths in 2020,**
 - This will reverse the last 2 to 3 years of progress in reducing infant mortality within a single year.
 - **Health: Rising malnutrition** is expected as 368.5 million children across 143 countries **rely on school meals** for a reliable source of daily nutrition.
 - There is a reduced access to essential reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health interventions.
 - **Suspension of all polio vaccination campaigns worldwide and measles immunization campaigns** in at least 23 countries will set back the decades-long effort to eliminate these diseases.
 - The effects of physical distancing measures and movement restrictions on children's **mental health** represent another cause for concern.
 - **Safety:** Lockdowns and shelter in place measures come with heightened risk of children witnessing or suffering **violence and abuse.**
 - Children's reliance on online platforms for distance learning has also increased their **risk of exposure to inappropriate content and online predators.**
 - Susceptibility to **child marriage, early pregnancy and gender-based violence** will also increase.

- **Uneven Distribution of Impact:** The Covid-19 Pandemic has **increased the existing socioeconomic disparities.**
 - During the second quarter of 2020, **86%** of children at the **primary level** have been effectively out of school in **poor countries**, compared to just **20%** in **highly developed countries.**
 - The Covid-19 crisis is likely to **increase the financing gap between** education budgets and the money available to reach the **Sustainable Development Goal of quality education by up to one-third.**

The low and middle incomes already faced a **USD 148-billion** of the said financial gap.
 - Apart from the poor children, other **vulnerable groups of children** like migrants, the displaced, refugees, minorities, slum-dwellers, children living with disabilities, children living in refugee settlements, and children in institutions are likely to face a more severe impact.
 - The impact of Covid-19 is going to be more damaging for girls than boys, widening **gender inequality.**
 - Earlier this year, **the Global Education Monitoring Report, 2020** was released by UNESCO which highlighted that the Covid-19 had worsened the inequalities in education systems worldwide.

Suggestions

- Immediate rollout or **expansion of social assistance** to families, preferably through the use of universal child grants to prevent extreme poverty.
- **Securing food supply chains** and local food markets, to protect children from a food security crisis.
- Urgent **adaptation of standard physical distancing and lockdown strategies** in low-income and high population density settings.
- Prioritizing the **continuity of child-centred services**, schooling, nutrition programmes, immunization and other maternal and newborn care, and community-based child protection programmes with a particular focus on **equity of access.**
- Putting in place **specific protections for vulnerable children.**
- Providing practical **support to parents and caregivers** to support the mental health and learning of the children.
- Ensuring that **children, adolescents and young people have access to Covid-19 testing, treatment and vaccines** as and when they become available.

Way Forward

- To avoid the outcome of the pandemic, progress on three fronts is required : **Information, Solidarity and Action.**

- It is critical that education is at the heart of international solidarity efforts, from **debt management** and **stimulus packages** to **global humanitarian appeals** and **official development assistance**.
- Now is the time to **step up international solidarity for children and humanity**— and to lay the foundations for a deeper transformation of the way we nurture and invest in our world’s youngest generation.
- **India** as a lower-middle-income country needs to use education as an equalizer for its widespread socioeconomic inequalities. Focus on increasing education budget in **New Education Policy** budget and **decreasing digital divide** are welcome steps to achieve this goal.

Source: TH