

UNICEF Việt Nam has called on the country to reopen schools for all age groups “without prerequisites”.



1st graders during an in-person class at Lê Hồng Phong Primary School in the Central Highlands City of Kon Tum. — VNA/VNS Photo Khoa Chấn

HÀ NỘI — UNICEF Việt Nam has called on the country to reopen schools for all age groups “without prerequisites”.

They says there are serious concerns of “learning loss and increasing risks of rising inequality for too many children” with the COVID-19 pandemic entering the third year.

In a public statement by UNICEF Representative to Việt Nam Rana Flowers, she cited a global report released late March by UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank, entitled which stressed the urgent and critical need to address the colossal loss to children’s learning worldwide.

With a combined 2 trillion hours of in-person school lost due to school closures since March 2020, students in more than four in five countries have fallen behind in their learning, according to the report.

Flowers said: "When children are not able to interact with their teachers and their peers directly, their learning suffers, their cognitive skills and brain development suffers, and the social and employment skills that come from interaction and communication suffer.

"After such a long period out of school this may become permanent learning loss if that interaction is not immediately addressed.

"The rising inequality in access to learning means that education risks becoming the greatest divider instead of the greatest equaliser.

"When we fail to ensure access to education for every child, we all suffer, our communities suffer, and our economies falter."

With numbers of new infections dropping and a high vaccination coverage of adults, the risks to children of being out of school are significantly greater than the health risks faced in school.

Citing health as the reason for school closures fails to recognise that the child's learning and development is negatively impacted every day they remain out of school, their mental health is impacted, while the risk of infection and serious disease remains lower among children.

UNICEF say: "It is a clear recommendation of UNICEF, all key partners, all educators, as well as of WHO, that schools for all age groups should be opened irrespective of vaccination status."

Flowers said UNICEF is well aware of the unprecedented challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to schools in Việt Nam, as crisis conditions are always difficult decisions that force difficult trade-offs.

"But the stakes are too high," she said.

"The country is effectively open for all except children whose learning poverty simply increases each day. We must collectively do everything we can to get all children, including pre-schoolers, back to school in every city, town and village, with no prerequisites.

"We know that the mitigating 5K measures help keep children safe. We know that around 99 per cent of COVID cases in Việt Nam are asymptomatic or with mild symptoms.

"Education cannot wait. We need bold action to enable every child to return to school."

UNICEF said it strongly encourages all school districts and, in particular, the private schools and kindergartens within those districts to put children first.

The official also raised concerns over the loss of teachers from the school system as they have gravitated to finding paid work after months of school closures, and called for an investment of Government support to the Ministry of Education and Training to attract trained teachers back to the classrooms and to invest in the kind of catch-up strategies that are now needed.

She said: "A solid learning recovery strategy is needed and should include comprehensive support to children with a particular focus on marginalised children in each community.

"This means schools implementing catch-up classes, mental health and nutrition support, protection, and other key services. And they ensure this support is focused not just on the older grades but on the youngest learners in preschools and primary schools, as they are among the worst impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Prioritising catch-up in the early years is essential to ensure the regression in children's learning caused by COVID-19 is addressed and does not leave a whole generation behind."

UNICEF Việt Nam calls for reopening of all schools

Sunday, 03 April 2022 20:19

Source: *VNN*