World Health Day this year comes at a very difficult time for all of us.

My message today is to our health care workers -- the nurses, midwives, technicians, paramedics, pharmacists, doctors, drivers, cleaners, administrators and many others -- who work, day and night to keep us safe.

Today, we are more deeply grateful than ever to all of you, as you work, round the clock, putting yourselves at risk, to fight the ravages of this pandemic.

2020 is the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife, and I want to recognize their specific expertise and commitment.

We have all had reason to give thanks for the care and professionalism of nurses and midwives. I know I do.

Nurses shoulder some of the biggest healthcare burdens. They perform difficult work and endure long hours, while risking injury, infection and the mental health burden that accompanies such traumatic work. They often provide comfort at the end of life.

Midwives provide comfort at the beginning of life. During a pandemic, their work is even more challenging, as you bring our newborn safely into this world.

To the nurses and midwives of the world: thank you for your work.
In these traumatic times, I say to all healthcare workers: we stand with you and we count on you.

You make us proud; you inspire us. We are indebted to you.

Thank you for the difference you are making, every day and everywhere.


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UNICEF
PRESS RELEASE

Urgent need to secure learning for children across South Asia

KATHMANDU, 6th April 2020 – Even before the COVID-19 crisis, the region had a chronic education crisis with 95 million children of school age being out of school. With the current COVID-19 crisis unfolding, many of the 430 million children affected by school closures in South Asia are now in danger of dropping out of the education system.

Vulnerable and hard to reach children may never return to school if they get further behind due to not being reached with alternative ways to learn during school closures.

Although COVID-19’s impact on the region’s school children has been mitigated in the short term by creative approaches to term breaks and examinations, countries across South Asia urgently need to develop plans for continued education at home to be prepared for possible longer closures. This means implementing plans to continue education through a mix of radio, television and mobile technology, as well as the home delivery of printed learning materials for those who are excluded from technology for the most vulnerable students.
"We are concerned that prolonged school closures could hit girls and the most vulnerable, including those with disabilities the hardest. Girls are often obliged to take care of household chores and look after siblings. We are also concerned about the psychological impact on children of increasing incidents of domestic violence during lockdowns,” said Jim Ackers, Regional Education Adviser at UNICEF’s Regional Office for South Asia.

While most countries in the global north are continuing education at home through online learning, South Asia faces additional challenges due to limited connectivity. Only 33% of the people in the region have access to the internet. Access to both radio and television is limited in some parts of the region. For example, only 35% of rural Nepal has access to television. Children who currently do home learning can also find it hard to get the necessary help if parents are illiterate or did not complete their own education.

UNICEF is working to support governments in the region to ensure that children can continue with their education at home in partnership with other agencies. Most countries in South Asia have received external funding for this purpose, including through the Global Partnership for Education and bilateral partners. Some countries are rolling out innovative approaches to education.

“Both Afghanistan and Nepal have started organising the home delivery of learning materials to reach the most excluded. Bangladesh is using TV, radio, mobile phone and internet platforms to reach a maximum number of students and make the learning interactive, engaging parents and learners,” explained Jim Ackers. Such measures are required to ensure quality learning.

“The coronavirus has turned into a complex emergency that threatens children and young people in many ways – including their right to learn,” said Jean Gough, Regional Director of UNICEF in South Asia. “We need to see urgent action across the region to ensure that children’s futures are not compromised.”

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About UNICEF
UNICEF works in some of the world’s toughest places, to reach the world’s most disadvantaged children. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone.

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