
Caritas and Focsiv: “Global educational emergency, the pandemic led to a 40-year step backwards”

September, schools reopen amidst uncertainties. The ongoing debate revolves around school desks, masks, and swabs, but less attention is paid to the fact that, in the years to come, young people will be the ones who will pay the highest price of the pandemic. While Covid-19 is mostly affecting the elderly, the most vulnerable, in the medium and long term the younger generation will bear the brunt of the "educational gap" of the past few months. It is the concern, involving world countries, of Caritas Italy and Focsiv, that focus on the theme of education this month, as part of the Campaign "Give us this day our daily bread", available on the website www.insiemepergliultimi.it. On 8 July, the two organizations announced an awareness-raising and fundraising campaign to finance 66 projects in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America and help local communities tackle the impact of the pandemic. Some €50-60,000 have been collected so far, despite the summer break. Greater involvement of dioceses and territories is planned for the coming months. **The figures.** UNICEF estimates that 1.5 billion students worldwide have been affected by the lockdown and at least

1 billion students globally have not yet returned to school.

UNESCO estimates that 23.8 million children and young people - from kindergarten to higher education - may drop out or have no access to school next year. At least 463 million children have not had access to remote learning, while 346 million children in least developed countries will not be able to receive the only full daily meal at school, providing adequate nutritional intake. **Educational emergency.** "Covid-19 has brought us back 40 years in terms of schooling and literacy - Massimo Pallottino, director of the Asia and Oceania Office of Caritas Italy, told SIR. We must now face a new emergency:

no one must be left behind, and it is important to ensure that those who left the path of education can return.

If not, our societies will be faced with a major problem of vertical mobility: those who don't go to school will have low-skilled jobs with low salaries - in other words, they will remain at the bottom of the social scale. As always, the most vulnerable will be affected the most, and inequalities will intensify. We are extremely concerned about the most disadvantaged families and the most vulnerable." As regards Italy and the impending reopening of schools on September 14, "we hope that everyone do their job, teachers and institutions alike, so that no student is left behind." **Literacy centres in the diocese of Djibouti, in the Horn of Africa.** Some of the 66 projects promoted by Churches and local organizations, to be funded by the "Give us this day our daily bread" Campaign, focus on educational activities. Such is the case of the literacy programs in the diocese of Djibouti, in the Horn of Africa, involving approximately 800 students each year. They engage street children, sons and daughters of migrants or children from very poor families, who would otherwise be excluded from the public education system. Caritas Italy has been cooperating with the diocese of Djibouti; donations collected through the Campaign will provide a greater scope to this project, approved by the local government.