

A Continuum for Inclusion

Home learning, education transition, and
inclusive school-based learning



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Enabling Education Network

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The EENET Team

About this document

The original plan

For several years the Enabling Education Network (EENET) has encouraged discussions around making education transitions more inclusive. Grants from Open Society Foundations (OSF) helped us to support organisations to research transition issues, create an 'Inclusive Transition' poster, and make a video-based training on inclusive transition.

In 2020, with OSF's support, we planned to publish some stories about the transition experiences of young learners featured in the video. The COVID-19 pandemic made this plan rather challenging but provided an opportunity to be more creative with preparing this document!

What we did

In 2020, we worked with another partner – Norwegian Association of Disabled (NAD) – to develop materials to support families with the challenge of home learning. Read more about this on page 5.

By 2021, we could finally follow up some of the learners from our inclusive transition video. We spoke to families of learners in Ukraine and eSwatini to find out about their education transition experiences since filming them in 2019. We also spoke to stakeholders in Armenia who have been developing inclusive transition approaches.

We then reviewed the inclusive home learning project. We looked at how families in Uganda, Zambia, and Zanzibar used the EENET/NAD home learning materials, and we reflected on the connections with education transition.

All the stories were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic. They document where transitions to new schools were, or were not, facilitated. And they illustrate how the home learning materials supported learners with the transition from school to home-based learning and back again.

Most of the stories highlight the scale of disruption, changes, and challenges – and the creativity and resilience of learners, families, and teachers. The stories help us understand some of the many connections between effective and appropriate home learning, educational transitions, and inclusive school-based learning.

About education transition and home learning

Education transition

Transitions happen all the time in education. Children go to their first school, move between grades, go to new schools, and eventually transition into work. They also face small transitions every day in school, like going from break time into a lesson. For many children, big and small education transitions are difficult. They may need emotional and practical support during these transitions.

In recent years, education managers, teachers, and parents have become more aware of the impact transitions have on learners, especially those with additional

needs, such as learners with disabilities. More education systems now understand that they should support learners' during transitions. They try to ensure these periods of change do not cause significant barriers to learning, or even cause learners to drop out of education altogether.

EENET made a video that shares practical advice on making education transitions more supportive and inclusive.

We also have a poster presenting children's views about transition.

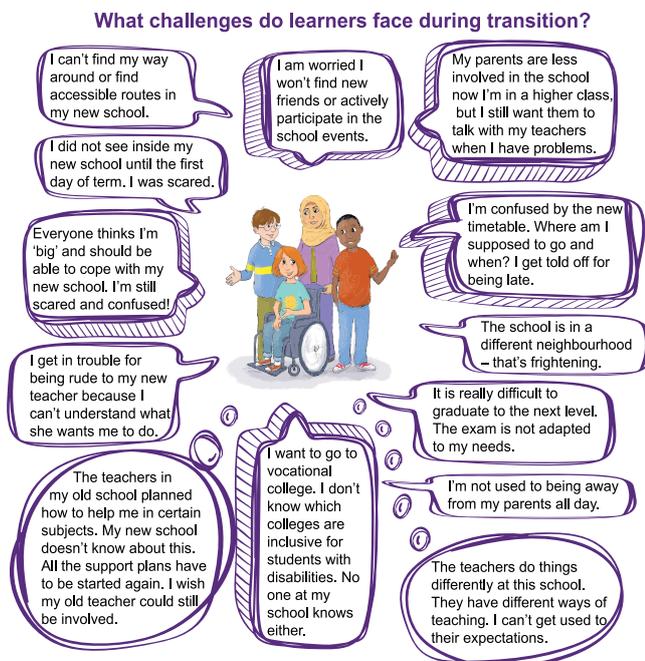


Diagram from EENET's 'Inclusive Transition' poster (see box for details).

Useful resources from EENET's website – www.eenet.org.uk

Inclusive Beginnings: Inclusive Transition (video and training manual)
<https://bit.ly/eeneth1>

Inclusive Transition poster (available in 14 languages)
<https://bit.ly/eeneth2>

Transition Guidance to Support Smooth Transition from Pre-school Institutions to Primary School (Bridge of Hope) - <https://bit.ly/eeneth3>

Home learning poster (available in 10 languages) - <https://bit.ly/eeneth4>

Home learning activities booklet (available in 10 languages)
<https://bit.ly/eeneth5>

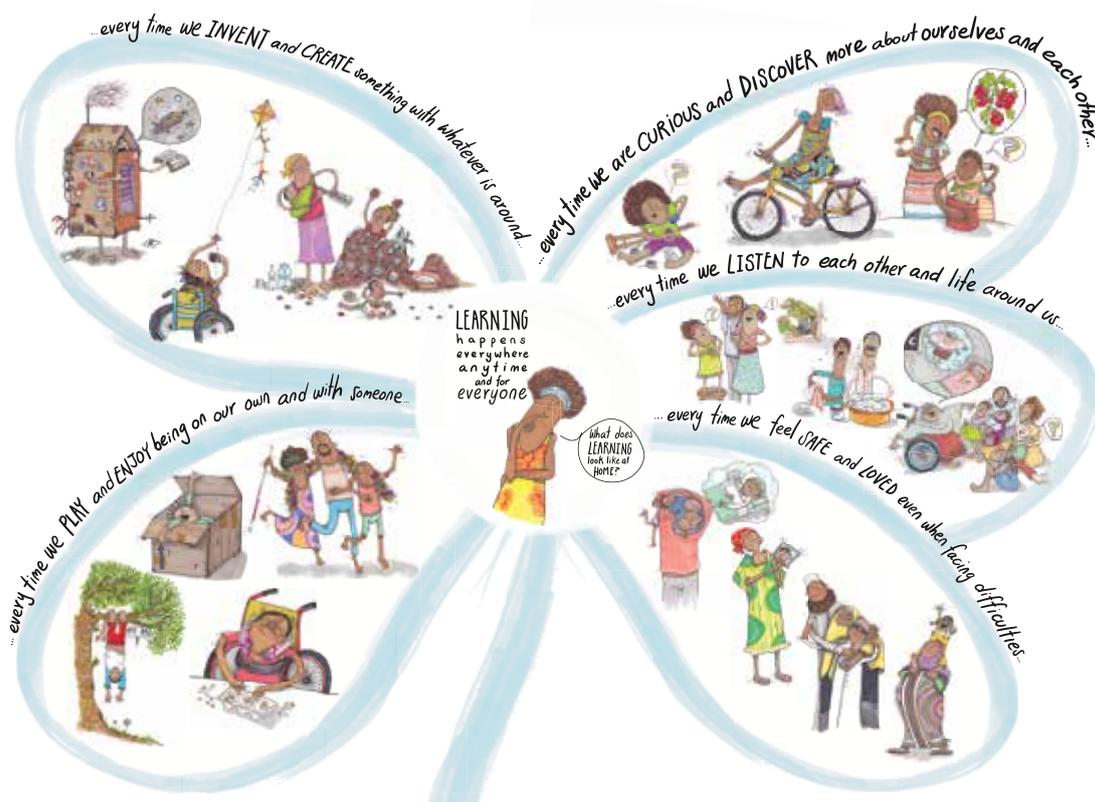


Image from the home learning poster published by EENET and NAD (see box on p4 for details).

Home learning

Until 2020, most of us saw home learning as something that happened when individual learners were excluded from school, or when parents chose to home-school for social, ethical, or political reasons.

Then, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close, learners worldwide faced the unexpected transition to home learning. No one was prepared. Education systems scrambled to create affordable solutions. Teachers struggled to facilitate remote lessons, online learning, and self-study. Parents faced immense pressure to become educators and continue to be workers and caregivers.

The shock of this emergency transition was underestimated. Solutions often did not sufficiently support learners, parents, and teachers to cope emotionally and practically. In most countries, efforts focused on replicating classroom learning at home: maintaining academic standards and exam preparations.

EENET was worried about the growing pressure on parents, teachers, and learners, so we developed our home learning project in partnership with NAD. We created a poster and a booklet of simple, low- or no-cost learning activities that all families can do. The activities were fun, non-academic, and helped children with and without disabilities to keep learning useful things while their schools were closed.

Our home learning materials highlighted that learning and education mean more than just going to school. Learning happens everywhere, all the time. Young children learn at home before they go to school. They continue to learn at home and in the community throughout their school career and into adulthood. Learning at home does not have to mean creating a formal classroom atmosphere and academic activities in the home. And learning at home should not just be seen as a temporary or emergency option.

Learners' stories*

Transition support during the pandemic

The planned transition for Denys was disrupted by the pandemic

Children with disabilities often need extra support when transitioning to a new school. In Ukraine, 7-year-old Denys, whom we met in the EENET inclusive transition video, did not get the support he needed because of the pandemic. He and his family had been excited that he would move from his inclusive pre-school to a mainstream primary school. Denys has a rare genetic condition and an intellectual impairment. His education transition had to be well planned and supported, but it seemed possible, and preparations had started.

Unfortunately, the pandemic closed schools and local municipality offices. Denys's application for additional support was not completed. This meant he could not move to the new school with his friends when it re-opened. He stayed in the pre-school, but in a different classroom with younger children. He also had a different teacher who lacked experience of teaching children with additional needs. It took at least two months

for Denys to settle into this new class, despite being in the same pre-school.

In a very short time, Denys experienced the disruption caused by the pandemic and the upheaval of learning in a different class while being denied a move to primary school with his friends.

"It was perhaps a relief that he didn't have to transition to a new school during a pandemic, but at the same time he did still have to change classes and, of course, will still have to transition to a new school this year as well."

Denys's mother, Ukraine

Denys's behaviour became difficult as he struggled to understand all the changes. His parents tried hard to support him while working at home and home schooling his sister. It was a very challenging time for all of them.

* Some names have been changed to protect identities.

Contact with families meant transitions were supported in Armenia, despite the pandemic

Despite the pandemic, learners in Armenia received support when transitioning from pre-school to primary school.

“We made the best of a bad situation when COVID-19 struck. The fact we had good relationships with parents, children, and other schools before the pandemic hit made it so much easier to support the children when they did return to school.

We may have had shorter lessons, or smaller classes each day but luckily all municipality offices stayed open so transition paperwork could be completed. And we stayed in constant contact with families and primary schools to facilitate transitions (back into classrooms as well as into new schools) as best we could. The parents appreciated our efforts and stayed engaged in the process.”

Teacher, Achajur Community Kindergarten, Armenia

Achajur Community Kindergarten in Yerevan, Armenia, uses personalised education transition plans for each student, to address their personal development needs. The plans are developed with teachers from the current and future class, the parents, and the child.

With support from Bridge of Hope Foundation, (a partner of the Ministry of Education and Sciences which advocates for inclusive education in Armenia) school staff have been trained to accurately assess children’s achievements and areas for further support.

“The three-way communication between the school, the family, and Bridge of Hope has helped us tremendously to offer tailored advice and support for a specific child and their individual needs.”

Principal of Achajur Community Kindergarten, Armenia



Denys playing at his pre-school in Ukraine during the filming of Inclusive Beginnings.

Challenges and positive steps in eSwatini

“COVID-19 presented many challenges for us. Obviously, the schools were closed for a large part of the year and although the government tried remote lessons through radio and newspapers, this was hit or miss, especially for the younger children. Even when schools reopened, they only partially operated, with classes following a rotational schedule with set grades attending every other day. The pandemic definitely affected their transition up to the next school as they missed out on so much throughout the year.”

Grade 1 teacher, Mabasa Primary School, Malindza, eSwatini

“This year we were invited by Malindza Primary to support the transition process by passing on our knowledge of the children who were moving up to the school from our pre-school. This is a positive development as it will help the new teachers understand the child’s needs better.”

Teacher, NCP (kindergarten), Malindza, eSwatini

Creative home learning activities encouraged John to feel more positive about returning to school

John is an 18-year-old from Southern Zambia. He was born with a visual impairment which meant he experienced reading difficulties. He was enrolled in a primary school and had progressed to Grade 6, but did not attend school regularly. His overall performance in class was below average. He would loiter around his neighbourhood with friends. This worried his parents and teachers. John’s behaviour worsened in 2020 when schools closed.

John’s parents received advice on using the EENET/NAD home learning booklet and poster. They started doing the home-learning activities with John, alongside

everyday life skills to help him function more independently.

After engaging with the home learning materials, John’s interest in school increased. The school monitored the use of the home learning materials and provided support where necessary, which encouraged John and his parents further. His grasp of concepts improved, as did his reading, writing, and drawing. John’s creative skills were enhanced and he made toys using locally available materials. There was a noticeable change in his behaviour; his family said he no longer loitered with his peers.

Transitions involve more than just changing schools

Oleksandr was resilient during the big transition to a new home and a new school

Oleksandr is an 8-year-old boy from Ukraine. He lived in a town with his family. In 2020, Oleksandr was due to transition from his urban pre-school to first grade in a nearby primary school. When the pandemic forced schools to close during the first lockdown, his mother Oksana needed to stay at home to look after both her children, but she also had a full-time job. When the second lockdown happened she decided to move them all out of the city and into her parents' home in a village. This was a big decision to make.

"I think the move was more difficult for me than Oleksandr really. There was so much to work out and organise and it was quite stressful. During the first lockdown we were stuck in our apartment altogether, nothing was open, we couldn't go out and the school had not yet organised online learning. It

was very difficult. That's when I realised we would have to move in case the schools shut down again. I couldn't cope with that situation again.... I would stay awake at night and worry what effect it would have on him. His whole life changed during COVID-19. He left his school and his home, and we went to his grandparents' village. What was this going to do to his well-being?"

Oleksandr's mother, Ukraine

Faced with a transition to home learning and a move to a new home, Oleksandr was surprisingly resilient and flexible. He recalls:

"I liked the lockdowns and not going to school. I wanted them to last for ever, especially when we were in the village with my grandparents. I didn't miss school. I liked playing football with my sister."



Better communication could have reduced the stress of all the small changes Denys faced every day

For some children, seemingly simple transitions, such as the daily move between home and school, can be upsetting or confusing. The different behaviours expected during the pandemic exacerbated this, as Denys's mum explains:

“It wasn't just the class that changed of course during the pandemic; everything around it did too. Denys had to get used to sanitising his hands more and his teachers wearing facemasks.

We used to stop off at a bakery every morning on the way to school. It was a wonderful way to start the day and Denys

could take the biscuits in to share with his class. Of course, during COVID-19 this could not happen. Denys also loved to take in his teddy bear from home which gave him a sense of comfort during the school day – this was no longer allowed.

Even dropping him off at school was different as I had to wait outside. It wasn't until a few months into the school year that someone told us that actually parents of children with special needs could go in. This small but crucial communication issue caused a lot of unnecessary stress for our family.”

Denys's mother, Ukraine



Denys and his mother walking to school during the filming of Inclusive Beginnings.

Relationship building is important during transition

Teachers reached out to Artem and his family via Zoom when school visits were impossible

Artem and his mum live in a small town in Ukraine. The school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic could have hindered Artem's transition from pre-school to primary school. Artem thrives on routine and familiarity. His mother was concerned for his well-being when all the school's 'get-to-know-you' visits were cancelled over the summer.

"The school and home visits are so important and would have been beneficial for Artem. They didn't happen because of COVID-19 and so it was hard.

Artem didn't even get to have his pre-school graduation celebrations to mark the end of one school and the beginning of the next. This would have been great for Artem to recognise the changes that were coming.'

Artem's mother, Ukraine

However, because of the long-standing relationship between the pre-school and primary school, the teacher was able to reach out to Artem and his family using

Zoom. This meant Artem could see what his new teacher looked like, and she had previously taught Artem's sister.

When school started, the first few weeks centred around play to ensure a slow and steady entry into the classroom lessons. Artem is now thriving despite the lockdowns.

"I can't tell you how pleased I am that Artem has settled in so well at his new school. His teacher was so helpful and supportive and seemed to really understand what we go through as parents, worrying about changes for our children, especially Artem who needs routine.

It goes to show how crucial relationships are for transitions and as long as you keep communicating it is still possible to fully support a child and their needs, even during a pandemic."

Artem's mother, Ukraine

Building relationships with teachers and neighbouring children helped Oleksandr prepare for the transition to a new school

When Oleksandr's mother decided to move the family to her parents' village during the pandemic, she prioritised supporting her son to build relationships to help him deal with the changes.

“During COVID-19, I moved with my children out of our apartment and back to my parents' village where they knew no one. I realised that relationships would be central to my son's successful transition to the village

school and so through the holidays I made sure to have playdates with neighbouring children who would be in his class and to meet with the teachers before school started. This way they better understood the upheaval he had been through recently. My son has adapted well to the new environment, so I think this relationship building was an important factor in that.”

Oleksandr's mother, Ukraine

Playing with peers helped Peter stay focused and learn about numbers through play when he transitioned to home learning

Peter from Uganda is ten years old. He has autism and is hyperactive. He used to 'disappear' from home to hunt birds and play with friends. His family received a copy of the EENET/NAD home learning poster and booklet. Peter looked at the pictures keenly, and tried out some activities.

He was inspired by the 'counting game' on the poster and in the booklet, so he dug

thirty-two holes under a mango tree to create a board game known locally known as 'Ozero'. The game is played by two people and has sixty-four stones.

At first, he played with his mother and brother, and they helped him to count, add, subtract and divide. Now many children come from the neighbourhood to play and he welcomes everybody to the game.



Home learning activities helped Halima interact more confidently with peers, both at home and in school

Halima lives with her father, mother, and five siblings in Zanzibar. She experiences intellectual and behavioural challenges that often make her feel uncomfortable in class. Her teacher said that Halima generally paid attention and tried hard to complete her class work, homework, and other academic assignments each day. However, she was often shy and timid, and refused to “stand up for herself” when interacting with her peers. She rarely volunteered to participate in group activities in class or in the playground. Instead, Halima would avoid or withdraw from social situations.

Since using the EENET/NAD home learning booklet and poster at home, some of this behaviour started to change. Halima has been reading and using the materials, especially activities involving maths, drawing, and making toys from local resources. The materials helped build her confidence and enabled her to interact with her fellow students through the games and activities. She has even been teaching younger learners in class.



Sock puppets are one of the home-made toys suggested in the home learning activities booklet.

The importance of school visits

Without school visits, Denys's family had to work hard to help him settle into a new class

Although Denys stayed in the pre-school for an extra year, rather than moving to primary school with his peers, the transition to a new class and teacher was challenging. The situation was made harder because the pandemic prevented Denys visiting his new class and teacher in advance.

“The prolonged absence away from school and socialisation for Denys meant it was difficult for him to go back to the classroom environment. We really missed the school

visits that would normally happen before children go to big school. These visits are so important for the children to understand where they will be next semester. I worked hard with the new teacher to ensure Denys settled in ok, but it took time and effort. Especially as nothing could be done in advance with the lockdowns. The year was a big upheaval for Denys and was a stressful time for our family.”

Denys's mother, Ukraine



Pre-school learners in Ukraine visited primary schools during the filming of Inclusive Beginnings. COVID-19 then prevented these visits from happening.

Kindergarten staff organised fun activities for children to meet their teachers and peers

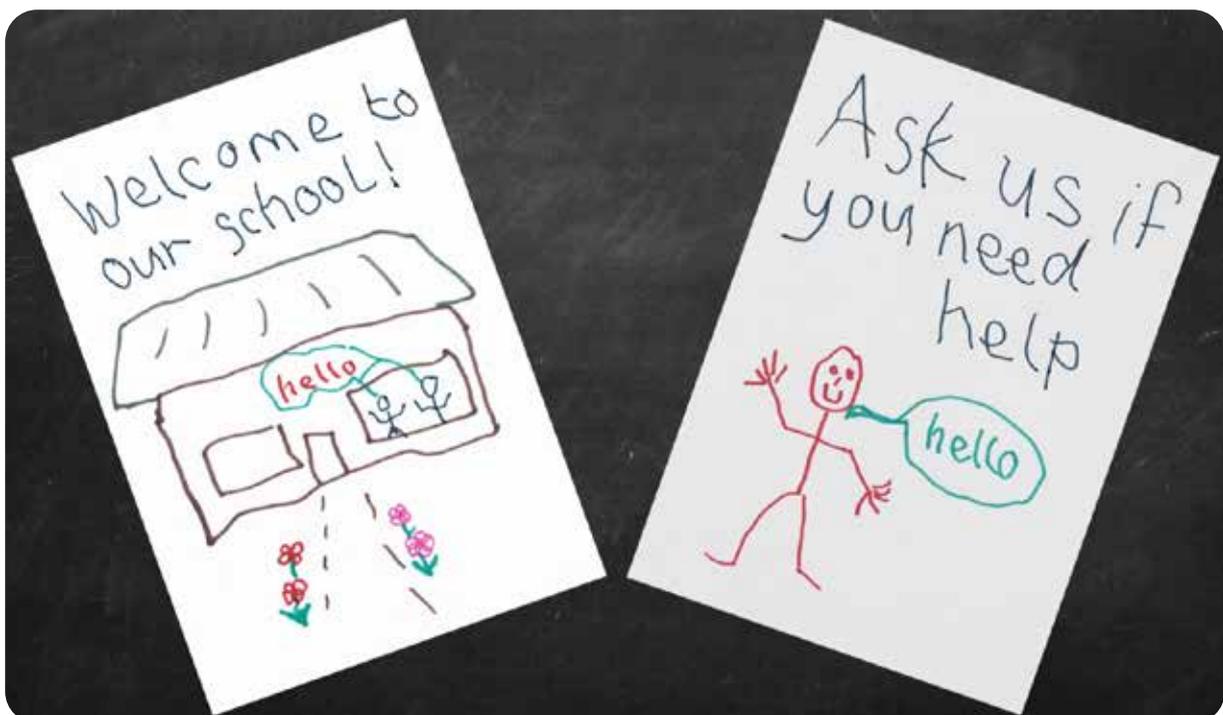
Inclusion specialists in a kindergarten in Tavush Province, Armenia ensure children transitioning to the primary school get to know the school and teachers before the new school year starts.

After a two-year project with Bridge of Hope, staff at Achajur Community Kindergarten in Yerevan feel confident to support transitioning pupils. They help them get to know the new classroom and teacher in the summer term before the holidays. These simple measures help ensure the children feel safe and secure in their new setting, which aids learning and development.

“We hold a sports day with teachers as ‘judges’ so that the children can meet the teachers, then when we get to the classroom they recognise their faces.”

“In the last semester we facilitate school visits so the child can meet their new teacher and peers and visit their new classroom. Parents with children with special needs used to prefer to hold their children back in the kindergarten, to facilitate their growth in the safer, more familiar environment. Now the parents and children can visit the new classroom in advance and by advocating for inclusion, the children now move up with their peers.”

Psychologist and teacher, Achajur Community Kindergarten, Armenia



Older children can find ways to support younger children during periods of transition.

Transition resources and guidance

Updated transition guidance helped teachers in Armenia to prepare their classrooms and improve support plans for transitions

Bridge of Hope in Armenia works with primary schools and kindergartens. They noticed there was a fragmented understanding about inclusive transitions. This was due to outdated guidance materials.

They provided up-to-date resources which helped schools learn about all kinds of transitions. Teachers learned there were not just transitions from school to school but

also smaller daily transitions, such as from the classroom to the lunch hall, or from one activity to the next.

This understanding helped them to provide better support plans for children who found these transitions difficult. The guidance also gave tips on making classrooms accessible and how to better organise the learning materials and equipment for the children.

Schools and kindergartens received tools and guidance to support each child with their transitions

With funding from OSF, one branch of Bridge of Hope, based in the town of Ijevan in Tavush Province, connected with over 20 primary schools and 30 kindergartens to offer much-needed training on the meaningful inclusion of all children within their classrooms.

Over two years, Bridge of Hope worked with the education settings, observing and assessing the children and families to understand the systems and procedures. They then trained school staff on how to foster inclusion and support children with different needs. The training also focused

on communication skills and developing relationships with all parties involved in transitions.

“It is always crucial to monitor each school and the pupils before trainings to really understand where guidance is needed. Then we are able to provide the correct assessment tools and mentoring that the education staff need in order to fully support a child in transition from pre-school to primary school.”

Branch Representative for Bridge of Hope,
Armenia

Using home learning resources, Petra's mother helped her build confidence, skills and friendships that will be useful when she transitions back to school

Petra is 13 years old and lives with her mother in Zambia. Petra was born with a physical impairment. Before the pandemic she was attending an inclusive primary school. It was far from her home because there was no nearby school that would welcome her.

Petra used to avoid helping around the home. She also lacked motivation and confidence to read and learn. Children and other people used to laugh at her and make her cry. It was difficult for her to walk the long distance to and from school and she sometimes missed school because of this.

During the pandemic, her mother received the EENET/NAD home learning materials and guidance. Petra was interested and started spending more time with her mother. She practised reading with her mother's help and enjoyed doing the activities in the booklet. Her reading improved and she was able to show others how to read.

The pictures and stories in the materials helped her understand that although she has a disability she can still do things like other people. She started helping her mother with household chores and learned how to write a letter from one of the activities in the booklet. She was able to write a letter to her grandma wishing her a 'happy birthday'. Petra also developed an interest in gardening from the activity on taking care of nature, and she plants seeds and takes care of the vegetables in the home garden.

Petra no longer cries. Her peers come to learn from her, and they do the activities together.

"Neighbouring friends have been coming to our home to do activities in the home learning booklet and learn how to read from Petra."

Petra's mother, Zambia



Brenda's core skills improved when she participated in home learning activities. This helped her peers, family, and teachers notice her abilities

Brenda is a 9-year-old from Zambia. She is cared for by her grandfather and was born deaf. She enrolled in her current primary school in 2019.

Brenda's grandfather received the EENET/NAD home learning materials in June 2020, along with extensive guidance in using them. Brenda's grandfather and his wife started teaching Brenda at home when the school was closed. They continued in the evenings when school re-opened.

After using the home learning materials for some months, the family observed changes in Brenda. Her communication improved, and she was better at following instructions and reading. Her family and peers began to recognise her abilities, such as taking care of herself, cleaning the house and gardening.

When Brenda went back to school after the closures, her teachers noticed abilities they had not previously seen. Her grandfather has also noticed her interest in mathematics, English and the creative arts since using the home learning materials.

"Previously my granddaughter was unfairly treated at home. The other siblings were very impatient with her. They used to call her names and complained that she wasn't responding to their communication and following instructions. [After using the home learning materials] from what I have observed about her work, I feel Brenda will be a maths teacher or an artist, due to her love for maths and creative art."

Brenda's grandfather, Zambia.



The future

The brief stories in this booklet remind us of the education transition and home learning challenges and resilience experienced in almost every school community globally during 2020 and 2021.

What would have happened during this crisis if more education systems had already embraced the idea that learning happens on a continuum from home to school? What would have happened if more education systems already acknowledged that academic and non-academic learning is valid and valuable wherever it happens?

Perhaps the transition to home learning during the pandemic would have been less distressing for everyone. Maybe we would already have had more methods and resources in place to support and value appropriate ways of learning at home. Maybe education would not have been so disrupted.

Of course, it is easy to say these things with hindsight! However, we can expect situations like COVID-19 to happen again. For example, we may face climate change crises or other humanitarian situations that disrupt our education systems. The pandemic has provided a unique opportunity to learn about home learning in different situations globally.

Most countries are now returning to school-based learning. Some are alternating between periods of school- and home-based learning. This means ongoing stressful education transitions for learners, parents, and teachers. They need continued support.

Our education systems must become more resilient in future. To do this, we must improve how we integrate home learning with school learning. We should build education systems that weave together and support opportunities for school-based, community-based, and home-based learning for every learner. When schools have to close in future, the transition to home learning – or the transition back to school when they reopen – must not be such a shock for everyone.

And of course, better ways of integrating home-, community-, and school-based learning will benefit many learners all the time, not just during an emergency. It will make all transitions less stressful, and make education more flexible, more inclusive, and more able to respond to learners' diverse needs.



Pre-school learners in eSwatini during filming of *Inclusive Beginnings*.

A Continuum for Inclusion

Home learning, education transition, and inclusive school-based learning

Education transitions are difficult and upsetting for many learners, families, and teachers, and can lead to learners' exclusion within or from school. Policy and practice change is needed to ensure that all education transitions are supportive and inclusive. Learning at home is a key part of the continuum of flexible and inclusive education and transition support. This document features a small selection of experiences from Zambia, Zanzibar, Ukraine, Uganda, eSwatini and Armenia during the COVID-19 pandemic – all highlighting crucial connections between home, school, and education transitions.

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“I realised that relationships would be central to my son’s successful transition.”

“Good relationships with parents, children, and other schools before the pandemic made it much easier to support children when they did return to school.”

“I liked the lockdowns and not going to school. I didn’t miss school.”

“The prolonged absence from school and socialisation meant it was difficult for him to go back to the classroom environment.”

