

# Impact of COVID-19 on Education

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## **INTRODUCTION**

*... The international community faces a looming education crisis that threatens to reverse decades of progress in expanding learning opportunities worldwide... As the UN Decade for Action begins under unforeseen circumstances, **this crisis is an opportunity to build back better, putting equity and inclusion at the center of all education policies, as well as to make learning transformative for people, planet and prosperity.***

*Over the past four months, education has experienced the most severe disruption since the creation of the United Nations. At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, schools, universities and other learning institutions were closed in more than 160 countries, affecting 1.6 billion students. The crisis has exposed the vulnerability of education systems and amplified social, gender, learning, and digital inequalities...*

*Source for the statement above: The Group of Friends for Education and Lifelong Learning*

## **ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED:**

### **DIGITAL ACCESS**

**Need for Connectivity:** How to affordably connect all schools to the internet?

- Globally, 29% or 346,000,000 young people aged 15-24 years are not online. Africa has the least connected (60%) compared to 4% in Europe.
- Not all African countries are comparable – 85% of Mauritius has connected schools compared to 2% in Ethiopia.
- In poor urban areas men can outnumber women 2 to 1 in terms of internet use.

### **Opportunity**

- Internet connectivity is cheaper than ever before.
- There are more ways to connect rather than laying down cables, including mobile handset, wi-fi hotspots, low-orbiting satellite signals, balloons, drones, and lasers (many come with issues related to trust and privacy).

- Increasing the percentage of the total population connected to the internet from 48% to 75% would add \$2 trillion US dollars to world GDP and help create 140 million jobs.

### **Digital Literacy**

- Most adults in low- and middle-income countries lack basic computer skills. In 2016 only 4% of adults in Sudan and Zimbabwe had basic digital skills. Even in the EU, 45% of all citizens and 37% of the workforce have insufficient digital skills
- Barriers include (a) not having an agile curriculum (b) a lack of qualified trainers (c) slow response of the formal education sector

*Source for the information above: Digital Connectivity: UNICEF & Generation Unlimited. (/sites/unicef.org/genunlimited/files/2019-03/Generation%20Unlimited%20Promising%20Ideas%20%-205%20Feb%202019.pdf)*

### **FINANCING**

COVID-19 has already placed severe strains on local, state, and national budgets. There is a strong probability that funding for education may be seriously diminished in the immediate future, not only placing the SDG 2030 goals at risk but also jeopardizing the progress made. That said, we need to consider how to maintain or increase educational funding in the face of the pandemic and the dire effect it is having on world economies.

### **ATTENDANCE**

How do we keep girls in school or extend adult women's learning in the face of overwhelming economic pressures? How do we prevent millions of girls being forced into early marriage now that they are no longer in school?

### **DATA**

The most challenging issue under COVID-19 is to ensure that equity in access and learning are not set back. Equity and inclusion in learning needs to continue being a key objective in crisis management.

Statistical institutes in low- and middle-income countries are under significant pressure to collect education data during COVID-19. Education data is needed to reflect the consequences of school closings and distance learning. Given the stress countries are under, data institutes need to determine which are the most essential education variables that can be collected for immediate use and to monitor possible longer-term structural change.

The following are problems associated with school closings, especially for poor and marginalized students:

- interrupted learning
- lack of preparation in parents

- increased stress among teachers
- increased stress among parents
- increased possibility of student drop-out
- child malnutrition

Additional data to assess:

- What has changed in education delivery since COVID-19 began?
- How do these changes affect learning and learning equity?
- Who is enrolled in distance education but not participating? Why not?
- Who is participating in distance education but not learning? Why not?

In addition to differences in learning between well-off students and those in vulnerable conditions, learning losses could be disproportionately larger in the first two to three grades of primary. As a result, learning should also be analyzed across ages as well as gender and income.

The type of online education methodology – phone apps, emails, social media – as well as new assessment approaches may be needed such as sampling, new instruments, immediate feedback after testing, confidentiality protocols.

Due to the crisis only crucial data should be collected and non-traditional methods may be needed.

1. Focus on only a few key indicators and collect data from samples of the school and student population.
2. Oversample vulnerable students to monitor equity.
3. Frequently measure learning through short, efficient tests.
4. Establish country-level strategy to collect disaggregated data on student participation, teacher participation, learning outcomes.

***Source for the information above:*** *The Need to Collect Essential Education Data During the COVID-19 Crisis*; UIS/2020/ED/FS/58

### **INNOVATION & COLLABORATION**

UNICEF and Microsoft Corp. are launching a global learning platform to help children and youth affected by COVID-19 continue their education at home. *The Learning Passport* was initially created in conjunction with the above as well as the University of Cambridge to provide education to displaced and refugee children through a digital remote learning platform. It has expanded to facilitate country-level curriculum and key resources for teachers and educators. Content available to children includes online books, videos, and additional support for parents of children with learning disabilities.

***Sources for the information above:*** *UNICEF and Microsoft launch global learning platform to help address COVID-19 education crisis* <https://www.unicef.org/about/legal.html>); 4/20/2020; [gthompson@unicef.org](mailto:gthompson@unicef.org); <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>

***Additional source material:*** *Children Living in a Digital World*; [www.unicef.org/SOWC2017](http://www.unicef.org/SOWC2017)