

# COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND ITS IMPACT ON EDUCATION

## Policy Responses From ECO Member States

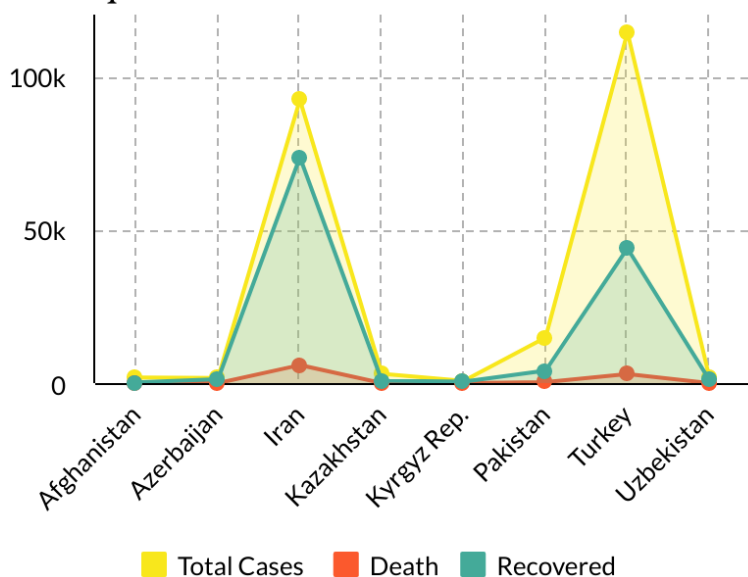


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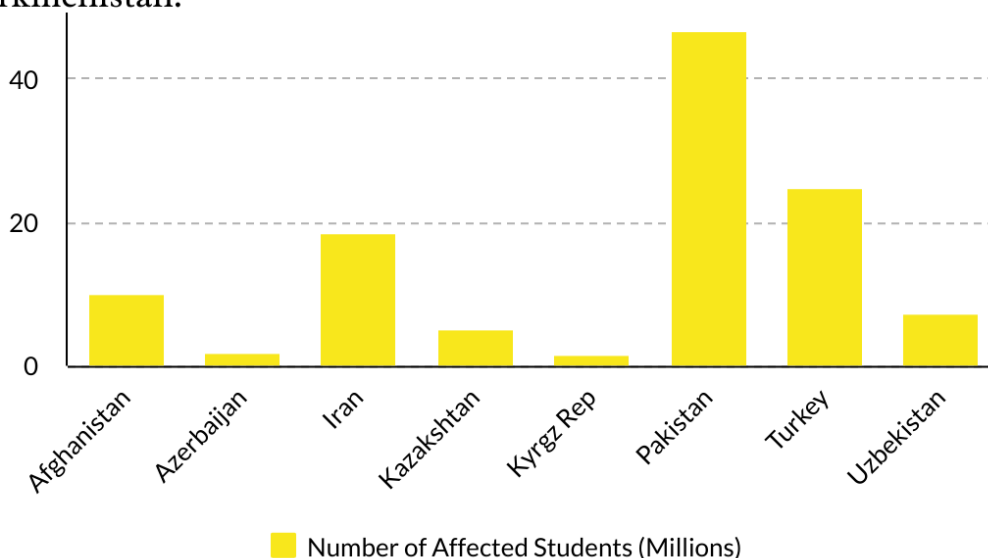
# THE IMPACT ON EDUCATION

The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak that started in China in December 2019 has shortly spread to the whole world and on 11 March 2020 declared by World Health Organization as a pandemic. The crisis prompted countries to lockdown their borders, quarantine people, implement travel restrictions and economic measures, and shut down schools. While the virus still maintains its importance and risks, countries continue to develop policy responses to protect their publics and to mitigate the consequences.



The pandemic's effect could be felt on almost all aspects of social and economic life, including education. The coronavirus has affected the education system globally when most governments have temporarily shut down their educational institutions. According to UNESCO, 91 percent of the students (1.5 billion) in the world are affected by the disruption of their education system.

As of 1 May 2020, 191 countries have closed their schools around the world due to the pandemic. Most ECO member states have also implemented localized or nationwide temporary closing of schools. From pre-primary to upper secondary, 44.9 million students in Pakistan, 17.7 million students in Turkey, 14.6 million students in Iran, and 9.6 million students in Afghanistan experienced the widest school shutdown due to their high population numbers. In Tajikistan, the government also declared a school shutdown on 23 April until 6 May, whereas schools remain open in Turkmenistan.



Source: Global Monitoring of School Closures caused by COVID-19, UNESCO (<https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>)

# EDUCATION INITIATIVES FROM ECO MEMBER STATES

Most countries adopted distance learning systems in an attempt to continue education under imperatives of isolation and social distancing. Governments have followed different home schooling methods. While Hong Kong initiated an interactive app for distance learning, China has created access to live television broadcasts for its students. Higher education institutions have switched to distance learning as well either through using their online platforms or through accessing already available systems. Video conferencing platforms, like Google Hangouts, Zoom, and Skype that enables virtual face-to-face meetings are also being used for teaching purposes. Some of these companies made some of its premium features free of access as a response to the coronavirus crises. ECO member states have also developed national distance learning platforms and tools.

## *Afghanistan*

Education Television, Radio Television, and private TVs in Afghanistan broadcast educational programs and teacher training programs with the agreement of Ministry of Education. Social science and language classes will also be air timed via local radios. Yet some schools in remote areas and without access to internet, TV or radio will remain open only for science lessons with practicing social distancing.

## *Azerbaijan*

Azerbaijani Ministry of Education has created an Electronic Textbook Portal ([Elektron Dərslük Portalı](#)) and a repository of free e-textbooks, e-tests, video lesson ([E-resurs](#)). Moreover, there is a website ([Video.edu.az](#)) recommended by the Ministry and includes video lessons for all school grades.

## *Iran*

Ministry of Education launched a free-messaging application, Social Network of Students (SHAD), to provide students with virtual education services. It is estimated that around 7.2 million students have joined the messenger app and formed about 1.7 million virtual online classes. The Ministry of Information and Communications Technology has also offered free internet packages to assist students and teachers with online learning. The state TV also broadcasts daily lessons for different grades. Moreover, the government of Iran has also prepared self-study packages and delivered to students with poor communication services.

## *Kazakhstan*

Kazakhstan has digital learning platforms called [Kundelik](#) and [sabaq.educon.kz](#) which have resources and materials for educators and students. Balapan and El Arna channels broadcast video lessons which will be available online as well. The internet access to these platforms made also free. The Kazakh Ministry of Education in the cooperation with local mayor offices plans to donate computers and laptops to students without access to necessary devices for e-Learning.

## *Kyrgyzstan*

Kyrgyzstan has developed two open education portals: iBilim for primary school and Bilim Bulagy for secondary school. Both have online video and audio lessons. While these video lessons will be available for free through a mobile app, students and teachers will be provided by SIM-cards in order to have free access to the education app. Mobile application "Matriculant RG", has been launched free for students and teachers of grades 9-11 for the training of admission tests (ORT). Private testing company CEATM has also launched online lessons for the preparation for admission tests.[1] Moreover, Ministry of Education of Kyrgyzstan has trained teachers to be able to work with Zoom, WhatsApp, and social media effectively.

## *Pakistan*

The government launched the Teleschool channel to broadcast educational programs for 1-12 grades during the school closures. Pakistan's Allama Iqbal Open University and Virtual University has also offered distance education systems as they were already experienced in online education before the pandemic. The Virtual University has a portal [Open Courseware](#) which has course materials organized by subject area.

## *Turkey*

Turkey also announced the use of Education Information Network (EIN) similar to China's Cloud Classroom. EIN had already been developed before the pandemic yet with the closing of schools and the need for distance learning platform, the EIN was enhanced with new features and applications. Currently the EIN platform offers 5,000 interactive books, 240,000 questions, tests and videos with interactive content and many more. It has integrated arts, sports and scientific activities as well as call center for psycho-social needs of children. In addition to EIN, Turkey also uses television broadcasts for grades 1 through 12. Moreover, online resources are also available for teachers and students on the Ministry of Education's website.

## *Uzbekistan*

Ministry of Public Education of Uzbekistan has provided access to electronic textbooks, video lessons, tests, virtual laboratories, audio lessons, educational games, lesson plans and other learning materials through its official portal [Eduportal.uz](#) and [UZEDU](#). Also three national TV channels broadcast educational programs in three languages for primary school students.

# DIGITAL GAP IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

The transition to distance learning brings up the question of access to equal education quality. Unfortunately not every student have access to online education due to the lack of internet and necessary devices. According to the World Bank, only around 60 percent of the world population is using the internet. Before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, RAND Corporation conducted a survey among American teachers about their use of digital instructional materials. Around 66 percent of teachers stated that students not having access to devices or reliable internet at home is a barrier to their use of digital material. Obstacles like lack of proper space to study, problems with reaching online resources and psychological challenges are only some of the setbacks for disadvantaged students.

The mediums used in distance learning relies on quality and breadth of the digital infrastructure in member countries as well as household access to those services. The digital divide refers to the inequality in access to technology that exists between communities due to regional and demographic differences, particularly socio-economic groups. In some ECO members, internet access is much higher than world average (50 %), in others only 15-20 % of the population have access to internet. In these countries, the socioeconomic inequality and digital inaccessibility widens the gap in access to quality education during distance learning, which may increase the learning gap between richer and poorer children.

Disadvantaged families have more problems in acquiring technological devices and good internet connection needed to access the digital learning platforms, which undermines the attainability of distance learning solution. Therefore, it is important to reduce the cost and burden on parents to access distance learning resources. In order to increase the access to quality internet, Turkey's Ministry of National Education offered free 8GB internet data to students to be able to access Education Information Network (EIN) and made EIN app accessible on mobile phones. Similarly, Kyrgyzstan authorities made 400 textbook available online for free and accessible through multimedia complexes iBilim (for primary school) and Bilim Bulagy (for secondary school) created by the Ministry of Education. Moreover, local deputies and officials in Kyrgyzstan have donated TV sets for low-income families in some districts when they detected that students could not attend distance learning platforms.

School closures also affected critical decisions such as exams, which determine students' continuation to the next grade or level, certification, graduation, and entry into higher education. With the interruption of exam system, questions of whether or not the exams will be held, the date on which they will be held, or whether a change will be made in the ways the exams are administered come to the fore. Many countries take measures like changing the exam calendar, cancelling or postponing the approaching exam dates, and changing the exam formatting. For example, UK Department of Education stated that for the GCSE exam grades, they will take performances on mock exams and assessments and other relevant data like attendance into consideration

In this scope, UNESCO has proposed considerations for countries when deciding on the alteration on exam systems based on safety, health and social emotional well-being of students and educational personnel<sup>[1]</sup>:

- (a) On-site examinations should maintain appropriate sanitary measures (e.g. sanitization, masks, physical distancing) in line with guidance provided by national health authorities.
- (b) Whether specific examinations are maintained, postponed, rescheduled on-site or transferred on-line, or whether they are cancelled and replaced by alternative modalities of continuous assessment or alternative approaches to exams and validation of learning, decisions must be driven by concern for fairness, equity and inclusion.
- (c) Continuous assessment appears to be relevant and should be encouraged, with measures to mitigate the risks of inequalities, for example by considering additional measures to offset bias from teachers in grading, and to support teachers, supervisors, invigilators to conduct exams in an unconventional way.
- Countries have to consider the logistic and financial burdens associated with organizing and conducting exams, such as those related to physical test facilities, making arrangements of invigilators, marking students' tests, etc. and weigh them against other consideration.

However, the world is far from an education that does not have exams at either the school or central level. When the epidemic ends, many exams will continue from where they left off. It is expected that the exam and testing practices carried out during the crisis period will remain mostly temporary. The shutdown of education institutions will cause unequal interruption in students' learning, disruptions in exams and assessments, and their replacement by an inferior alternative. It is crucial to mitigate these negative impacts and achieve sustainable, safe and inclusive exam system. Schools will need resources to rebuild the loss in learning. However how these resources will be distributed is also significant. Moreover, in order to avoid loss in time and support the new graduates' entry into labor market, governments should not cancel the important internal exams rather should consider postponing them to the earliest<sup>[2]</sup>.

[1] UNESCO. (2020). COVID-19 A glance of national coping strategies on highstakes examinations and assessments.

[https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unesco\\_review\\_of\\_high-stakes\\_exams\\_and\\_assessments\\_during\\_covid-19\\_en.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unesco_review_of_high-stakes_exams_and_assessments_during_covid-19_en.pdf)

[2] Burgess, S. & Sievertsen, H. H. 2020, 1 April. Schools, skills, and learning: The impact of COVID-19 on education. VOX CEPR Policy Portal. <https://voxeu.org/article/impact-covid-19-education>

# STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS



Özel Eğitim ve Rehberlik Hizmetleri  
Genel Müdürlüğü



Disruption of schooling and switch to distance education creates more of a challenge and greater risk of falling behind for children with special needs.

As schools are trying to adapt their systems to the new measures and distance learning due to the coronavirus, there are not any necessary accommodations and modifications for special education and they have been put in pause until schools figure out how distance learning could also serve special needs students. In U.S., some districts have started one-on-one lectures and created individualized education plans via virtual meetings for students in special education yet many others who cannot use technology independently do not have access to this option. An American teacher found useful to switch her virtual lectures to parent resources videos in order to allow parents to model her actions in the classroom.

In Turkey, there are no platforms for distance education of special needs students however, General Directorate of Special Education and Guidance Services announced interactive links to the parents and a mobile app called “Özelim Eğitimdeyim” (“I am Special and in Training”) so that students with special needs can learn at home. Besides this, there are some individual initiatives from special children education centers and foundations in Turkey in order to create online platforms for the communication between teachers, parents and students.





# SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS AND FAMILIES

Teachers are at the heart of education system as with the school closures, teachers are the only contact of students for learning. Yet, with the rapid changes in learning systems, exams and inclusion of technology in the picture, teachers also need support. Globally around 63 million teachers are affected by the school closures. [1] While adjusting the changes in education system, teachers experience problems with financial and professional uncertainties and anxiety, social wellbeing, adaptability and technological/technical competence. Governments and education leaders could play a powerful role to support teachers with arising issues during the pandemic. Studies show that school leaders who are autonomy-supportive empower teacher and help their adaptability and work-related exhaustion. [2]

Supports to teachers also include listening their needs in delivering online lessons, acknowledging issues and seeking their inputs, and providing necessary equipment and training. According to recent report by Brooking Institution, in Europe and Asia, only 20% to 30% of countries provide training on distance education to teachers.[3] In providing continuous support for teachers, UNESCO also indicates that the “support needs to be appropriate, effective, and ongoing to ensure that learning continues and that the post-crisis recovery is, in turn, as straightforward as possible”. [4] In this context, the support of the central administrations and official or private institutions to teachers and other education workers by guaranteeing the right to work and personal rights, meeting the needs of the crisis as an emergency will have a determining effect in terms of the future of education.

Families also need support and training in educating the children as a response to the crisis. It is crucial to communicate and work with families and other community members to ensure healthy educational period. Especially students and families in vulnerable and marginalized populations require support from the local authorities and school communities. Beyond the issues with social and emotional wellbeing during the crisis, families are having problems with allocating necessary time for teaching, requiring necessary skills and knowledge to support teaching, acquiring necessary equipment and online material for teaching of their children. Since disparities between families will affect the extent to which they can help their children learn, it has the risk to increase the inequality in education and human capital growth. [5]

[1] International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030. 2020, 27 March. Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak: Call for Action on Teachers. <http://www.teachersforefa.unesco.org/v2/index.php/en/ressources/file/470-response-to-the-covid-19-outbreak-call-for-action-on-teachers>

[2] Collie, R. Ve Martin, A. 2020, 7 April). Teacher wellbeing during COVID-19. <https://www.teachermagazine.com.au/articles/teacher-wellbeing-during-covid-19>

[3] Vegas, E. 2020, 14 April). School closures, government responses, and learning inequality around the world during COVID-19. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/school-closures-government-responses-and-learning-inequality-around-the-world-during-covid-19/>

[4] UNESCO. 2020). Provide continuous support to teachers, learners, and their families. <http://www.iiep.unesco.org/en/provide-continuous-support-teachers-learners-and-their-families-13375>

[5] Burgess, S. & Sievertsen, H. H. 2020, 1 April). Schools, skills, and learning: The impact of COVID-19 on education. VOX CEPR Policy Portal. <https://voxeu.org/article/impact-covid-19-education>

The long term effects of this global shutdown as well as the policies adopted to mitigate the learning loss, might have long lasting impact on the future of countries. As economies are getting hit, so does the government expenditures. As exceptional measures are being put in place to limit the damage to countries' economies and healthcare systems, education's share of public expenditure may suffer due to spending cuts. Therefore, we might expect lower prioritization of education, both nationally and internationally. According to UNESCO IIEP, low-income countries are the most vulnerable as they may suffer from an inadequate supply of education services. Insufficient teacher numbers or a decrease in education infrastructure spending may lead to a deterioration of education quality, which is sometimes already very low. Low-income countries will also be negatively impacted if the global economic slowdown leads to a reduction in official development assistance from high-income countries.[1]

As countries work on finding ways to adapt to the shift from classroom to distance learning, the increase in virtual experiences brought forward the pros and cons of teacher-centered classroom and lecture-based learning approaches. While virtual and interactive learning have the capacity to provide valuable resources for both teachers and students, it also poses some problems in assessment and digital gap. Yet, if these problems are worked out, digital education technologies could also serve common educational goals and reduce the gap in equal quality education.

Digital learning platforms, which are created as temporary or complementary solutions are now being tested at a global level. Once the pandemic is over, many teachers will have used distance learning-learning tools more than they have ever used, and they will have new experiences and skills. Therefore, the crisis might be an opportunity to reconstruct educational processes and use information technologies more effectively for learning purposes in the future. A new balance might be expected to emerge after the crisis: a good combination of face-to-face education and distance education. If this merge is done efficiently, the learning environment in post-crisis schools can evolve into a new format that includes distance learning tools, methods and contents.

[1] IIEP-UNESCO. 2020, 7 April. What price will education pay for COVID-19? <http://www.iiep.unesco.org/en/what-price-will-education-pay-covid-19-13366>

When schools are reopened, how educational institutions can effectively use distance learning together with face-to-face learning? The most determining factors will be our ability to adapt digital technologies to educational processes such as monitoring and evaluation based on input from students and parents. They should also be involved more effectively in the planning and implementation of teaching. Sharing and collaboration among teachers will be of vital importance as well. We also need to rethink issues and redesign processes such as improvement of the infrastructure, learning tools, learning resources, learning methods, support services for teachers and students, and cooperation between government, schools, institutions and organizations. After the crisis, closing the learning gap of the disadvantaged, disabled students and students with learning difficulties will be an additional difficulty. When schools are reopened, it is necessary to determine each student's learning loss and come up with ways to compensate this deficit. Deficiencies in measurement, evaluation and not making the necessary compensation can lead to serious negative consequences especially for those who need this compensation the most.



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