The impact of COVID-19 and the COVID-19 response on education in Asia – highlights of a regional situation analysis

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UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia
1. Impacts of COVID-19 and of responses taken by Governments in Asia:
   • Direct health impact
   • Education specific impacts: school closures and learning loss
   • Disruptions of non-education-related services in schools: School health and Nutrition, Child Protection, Mental Health
   • Secondary impacts: economic impact, poverty, job losses
   • Long term consequences: learning poverty, long-term economic impacts

2. Lessons learnt so far on school reopening
   • Epidemiological evidence on COVID-19 and children
   • Lessons learnt from various contexts in Asia

3. Challenges to continuity of learning for all

4. Broad key recommendations from the regional situation analysis
### Direct health impact (up to 25.07.2021)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Tot Cases/1 M pop</th>
<th>1 Case every X ppl</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>139,166</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mongolia</td>
<td>47,009</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>30,893</td>
<td>32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>27,835</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>23,674</td>
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<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>22,499</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>22,869</td>
<td>44</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>13,937</td>
<td>72</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>13,709</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>11,448</td>
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<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>10,879</td>
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<tr>
<td>Timor-Leste</td>
<td>7,685</td>
<td>130</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>7,106</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>6,930</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Tot Cases/1 M pop</th>
<th>1 Case every X ppl</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>6,867</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>4,827</td>
<td>207</td>
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<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>4,457</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>4,299</td>
<td>233</td>
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<tr>
<td>S. Korea</td>
<td>3,680</td>
<td>272</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>3,657</td>
<td>273</td>
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<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>3,610</td>
<td>277</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>3,180</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
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<td>673</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>966</td>
<td>1,035</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brunei</td>
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<td>1,377</td>
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<td>Taiwan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>645</td>
<td>1,551</td>
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<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>15,555</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In many countries of Asia, there are disproportionate risks to girls in terms of child protection issues (GBV, sexual risks, exploitation and trafficking). This has been exacerbated by the effects of COVID-19.
School closures and reopening in South Asia

*Bangladesh: Bangladesh started remote learning initiatives after school closures. Within less than two weeks, on 29 March and 07 April 2020 respectively, primary and secondary recorded classes were aired on a TV platform to ensure education continuity.

**India: 10 states in India have reopened schools for higher grades (from 9/9 to 12 grade) in July 2021.

*** Pakistan: Schools reopened in the first week of June except for primary schools in one province and schools in few high burden districts which later reopened with an alternate day schedule. Currently students are on summer holiday.

Updated 23 July 2021
How does COVID-19 impact on children and their learning?

The longer schools are closed, the greater the risk of:

- long term health issues and developmental challenges especially for youngest
- harm to vulnerable children especially children with disabilities and girls
- children dropping out and not re-enrolling
- increased mental health and wellbeing incidences
- irreversible learning loss.

Good communications with parents and teachers are essential: so that they understand the level of risk involved in opening schools and in keeping them closed.

Did you know?

- Learning losses due to school closures could continue to accumulate even after children return.
- Every uncompensated 3 months of schooling lost, can reduce long-term learning by up to one year.
- Short-term remediation could reduce that loss by half.
- Long-term system improvements could surpass pre-COVID-19 learning trajectories by “building back better”.

Source: Brooking Institute in Modelling the Long-Run Learning Impact of the COVID-19 Learning Shock: Actions to (More Than) Mitigate Loss | RISE Programme
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges to School health, nutrition, well-being and protection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Routine services such as <strong>vaccinations and diagnosis and treatment of illnesses</strong> were suspended&lt;br&gt;• School feeding programmes were interrupted and household incomes reduced affecting <strong>nutrition gains</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Well-being</strong>&lt;br&gt;• <strong>Learners</strong> of all ages faced increased levels of stress due to isolation, uncertainty and fear of the future&lt;br&gt;• <strong>Parents</strong> were stressed by economic challenges and home learning&lt;br&gt;• <strong>Teachers</strong> struggled to combine work and family commitments and learn new teaching techniques in a very short space of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Protection</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Increased <strong>physical and emotional abuse</strong> including online bullying&lt;br&gt;• Financial insecurity increased harmful social norms such as <strong>child labour and early marriage</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Safe school (re)opening</strong>&lt;br&gt;• <strong>Social distancing</strong> in large classes&lt;br&gt;• Lack of adequate <strong>WASH facilities</strong> and lack of data&lt;br&gt;• <strong>Schools</strong> and <strong>government</strong> lack a comprehensive real-time planning, monitoring and response system</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prior to COVID-19, investments in education were already insufficient in most Asia countries.

Economic growth plunged in 2020 for most Asian countries in 2020, hampering Government’s capacities to increase their budget allocations to education.
The World Bank predicts that the impact of COVID-19 will increase the number of extremely poor people (those existing on $1.90 per day) by 88 million to 115 million depending on the evolution of the pandemic:

“Most of the new poor at the extreme poverty line, as well as the higher poverty lines, live in South Asia”

The COVID-19 crisis has severely affected labour markets.

Globally, youth employment fell by 8.7 per cent in 2020 compared with 3.7 per cent for adults. Based on available country-level data, the fall in employment has been much more pronounced in middle-income countries.

The share of young people not in employment, education or training (the NEET rate) has risen in many countries and has not yet returned to pre-crisis levels.

Source: World Bank Data Blog

Updated estimates of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty: The effect of new data (worldbank.org)
Projected impact on learning poverty and long-term economic cost

• The world was facing a learning crisis before COVID-19.

• The learning poverty rate – the proportion of 10-year-olds unable to read a short, age-appropriate text – was 53% in low- and middle-income countries prior to COVID-19, compared to only 9% for high-income countries. (Source: World Bank)

• A year into the pandemic, COVID-19 related school closures are likely to increase learning poverty to as much as 63%.

• According to leading economist Mr. Hanushek: over the next century, the skill shock of 2020 will produce $25 trillion to $30 trillion of lost economic output in today's dollars, and the lifetime household incomes of the affected students will be 6% to 9% lower.
Despite the harsh reality and grim prospects, what have we learnt so far?

There is hope!
Lessons learnt so far on school reopening: epidemiological evidence

- Most COVID-19 infections in children and adolescents are **mild or asymptomatic**.
- Children and adolescents are **at low risk** of severe disease and death from COVID-19.
- Children are **not among the main drivers** of the pandemic.
- The **direct health benefits** from vaccination for children and adolescents are **substantially lower** than for older age groups that are at significantly higher risk of severe disease.
- At this stage in the pandemic, considering global vaccine shortages, the **primary objective is to reduce mortality and severe disease**, and the greatest benefits comes from vaccinating high-risk groups.
- **Vaccinating teachers as front-line workers should be encouraged.**

*Schools should close last, reopen first wherever feasible. Maintaining schools closed when all else is open, is not justified from an epidemiological standpoint.*
Lessons learnt so far on school reopening: evidence from the situational analysis

1. Protocols/guidelines for reopening developed, yet implementation challenged by resource constraints, especially in Low Income Countries.

2. Lack of WASH facilities has emphasized unequal education provision within many countries.

3. Close cross-sector collaboration and coordination + community mobilization strengthened the response.

4. Adapting national plans to local contexts and involving all stakeholders improves teacher, student and parental confidence for safe reopening.

5. Current monitoring systems in many countries unable to provide real-time information on safety and don’t link health and education data together.
Challenges to continuity of learning for all

Reach and coverage
- Governments challenged by vast digital divide
- Teachers and learners challenged with access to devices, digital literacy and support (esp. ECE)

Addressing marginalization and inequalities
- Governments lacked data to target different groups of marginalized learners.
- Each learner faced their own challenges: young learners, those with disabilities, girls, those who spoke minority languages or a combination of these factors.

Low Levels of learning + learning loss
- As learners go back to schools, there will be wider disparities in what they know, understand and can do.
- Governments and teachers have limited data available on the extent of the learning loss.
- Teachers faced multiple demands, but received insufficient training and support.
A unique opportunity for change

Areas for building back better

- Focus on the youngest and on marginalised learners
- Curriculum reform
- Teachers
- Alternative learning solutions
- Safe Schools
- Blended learning
- Use of data
- Education investment

A phased plan to increase funding to education

Information about learning for all groups and what’s working

Recognise that technology is not the whole solution

Investment in building skills and capacity for teachers and learning supporters

Deeper knowledge of fewer things, encouraging independent learning

Working in local partnerships with communities and parents

Prioritise wellbeing and safeguarding
Thank you.