

BUILDING BACK BETTER: EDUCATION SYSTEMS FOR RESILIENCE, EQUITY AND QUALITY IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

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The COVID-19 pandemic presents a **deep and potentially long-term human development crisis with far reaching consequences**. Even before COVID-19 caused unprecedented interruptions in education delivery around the world, 258 million children of primary and secondary school age were out of school globally (UNESCO) and over half of all 10-year-old children in low- and middle-income countries could not read and understand a simple age-appropriate story (World Bank). With the spread of COVID-19, most countries mandate school closures impacting at least 1.5 billion children and youth that may cause **loss of learning in the short term that can lead to loss in human capital and diminished economic opportunities over the long term**.

Maintaining education services, public and private, has almost overnight transformed the skills that matter around the world in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic. **Hence education, skills development and lifelong learning have emerged as key drivers of national response initiatives**.

As a result, education is going through a massive transformation globally. Ministries of education are simultaneously tackling several challenges – protecting learning through distance education, building resiliency by improving and expanding online education, mitigating and recovering learning loss by targeting vulnerable groups, and initiating medium term reforms to curricula, pedagogy and assessments to deliver the skills demanded by the labor market. To enhance the capacity of education systems to provide distance learning during and following the COVID-19 pandemic in an equitable and effective manner, governments not only need to **support the immediate education response to the outbreak**, but also systematically **lay the groundwork for critical investments to preserve human capital over the longer term and to face future shocks**.

Elements of reforms that put countries ahead of the curve include efforts to **promote resilience, equity and quality**. Countries are coping with the crisis through remote learning at scale in the immediate term as well as efforts to facilitate effective blended learning after the pandemic is over. A recent example is Turkey's *Safe Schooling*

and Distance Education Project – designed specifically in this period – aligned to most recent evidence of how best to respond to emergencies by closing gaps between **(i) urgent social measures to protect the most vulnerable against shocks, and (ii) resilient recovery to restore livelihoods, equity and sustainable growth**. Based on the Turkey project design, components of an immediate emergency response, coupled with longer term goals to promote resilience, equity and quality can be summarized as:

INVESTING IN EMERGENCY CONNECTIVITY AND IT INFRASTRUCTURE FOR EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

This component focuses on interventions to: **(i) address the urgent response to the ongoing emergency** by expanding the existing public online education platform through immediate enhancements to its digital infrastructure, and **(ii) accelerate the transition to full-scale distance learning solutions required for post-pandemic recovery** through the development of a new system that combines universal access with equity and sustainable IT infrastructure with resilience to future shocks.

SUPPORTING DIGITAL CONTENT AND PEDAGOGY FOR SAFETY AND QUALITY

This component focuses on **supporting the development of distance education content** during the period of school closures and for a gradual return to classroom-based teaching in addition to **strengthening blended teaching and learning** (mix of classroom-based and on-line learning). This potentially includes feasibility and design studies for innovation hubs that promote development of digital materials for teachers and students. It can also help coordinate the research and development process for education technology innovations, as well as the strategy to involve teachers and schools to identify, test and evaluate innovations. Teachers' involvement can be organized as a unit through a professional learning lab that will support pedagogical and organizational improvements at the school level, including training of trainers and improvements to teachers' continuous professional development.

BUILDING BETTER INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY FOR EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY RESILIENCE

This component focuses on **strengthening the capacity for the coordination, management, monitoring and evaluation of remote or blended learning projects** and for the continued delivery of safe and equitable digital education services nationwide.

CROSS CUTTING CONSIDERATIONS

Any remote or blended learning project should prioritize equity interventions for students most vulnerable to learning loss due to school closures. The Turkey project addresses equity challenges through supporting TV-based delivery, providing content for visually and hearing-impaired students, supporting Ministry of National Education's catch-up learning programs, and financing awareness and outreach programs for school re-engagement in vulnerable communities.

In addition, teachers play a central role in realizing the goals of remote/blended learning. The Turkey project provides dedicated online spaces and other learning environments for teachers and provides teachers spaces to exchange knowledge and includes investments on teacher training and professional development, including in digital skills, blended classroom management, curriculum delivery, artificial intelligence and other EdTech skills. It targets all teachers but provides affirmative actions for female teachers and monitors impact by gender.

GOALS FOR IMPACT AND REACH

Remote or blended learning interventions can be scaled by increasing usage of existing remote learning platforms to a higher portion of users depending on scale, numbers, time, and resources. In the case of Turkey, the goal is to increase the usage of the online distance education from 26 percent (4 million plus students) during baseline (March 2020), to 45 percent (or 7.5 million students) by midline (2021-22), and finally to 70 percent (or 11 million plus students) by the end of the project, at least 50 percent of whom are girls.

Any potential intervention should also aim to increase the concurrent use of the online distance education platforms and provide certified on-line training to more teachers. In the case of Turkey, concurrent (weekly) use would rise from 300,000 during baseline to 1,000,000 by the end of school year 2021-22, to finally 5,000,000 by the end of the project and certify 900,000 teachers from a baseline of 80,000.

COSTS AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

To share a concrete example for breakdown of costs, for the above impact targets, the overall cost of the project in Turkey is \$160 million, divided across three components (60 percent of the overall budget is dedicated to *Investing in Emergency Connectivity and IT Infrastructure for Education in Emergencies*, 34 percent to *Supporting Digital Content and Pedagogy for Safety and Quality*, and 6 percent to *Building Better Institutional Capacity for Education Technology Resilience*).

The Turkey *Safe Schooling and Distance Education Project* has been designed in coordination with the Ministry of Education (MoNE) Directorate General for Innovation and Educational Technologies (DGIET) and World Bank (Education and Digital Development). More details of *Safe Schooling and Distance Education Project* can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

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