

COPING WITH COVID-19

Mapping education and training
responses to the health crisis in ETF
partner countries

20 May 2020

OVERVIEW

Highlights

The end of the school year is approaching in most countries of the EU neighbourhood and Central Asia. Most countries closed schools and all forms of face-to-face education and training in mid-March/early April. In Belarus, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, schools remained open after extended spring breaks. The media and authorities in Belarus report that between 30-40% of students are staying at home. In Tajikistan schools closed in mid-May, leaving only Turkmenistan providing normal service in the region. Most countries have confirmed there will be no return to school this academic year, and are putting in place detailed measures for final examinations, as well as preparing scenarios for the new school year. In Albania, schools started reopening from 4 May, but few could meet the strict requirements to ensure safety and social distancing. In Israel schools started back under strict safety measures.

As the crisis progresses, a stable picture is emerging. Countries have passed through similar stages since the outbreak: being confronted with quick decisions to be made; prioritisation and mixed measures at central and provider level; an increased stabilisation of provision. Finally, countries have started to collect data, identify issues to be addressed through legislation or specific actions (such as buying equipment or increasing training), and have made decisions on end-of-year arrangements.

In the initial phase all countries reacted quickly, with Azerbaijan, Israel, Montenegro and Turkey, where a digital strategy and clear guidelines were already in place, able to react faster. Other countries, such as Egypt, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, or Uzbekistan, took advantage of school holidays to plan an organised response and ensure coverage. Generally speaking, in all countries, general education has been the first priority with classes being provided through both TV and e-learning portals. Providers are expected to organise provision themselves, with resources made available centrally, including training, digital materials, and access to learning platforms. In all countries, there is ongoing concern about the preparedness of and support for teachers and trainers, and the quality of and access to provision. Action is being taken, but these remain the most important challenges facing all countries.

Four elements have been important in addressing the crisis:

1. Clear indications by central authorities and a single source of information;
2. Setting up digital platforms and supporting teachers and trainers in using them, both centrally and at provider level, including peer support;
3. Cooperation with private sector and civil society organisations to maximise use of pilot initiatives, as well as public-private partnerships to address access to equipment and connectivity for both students and teachers;
4. Monitoring and feedback both at provider and system level to adjust measures and inform future planning.

Most countries have made decisions about the end of the school year, final examinations and certification, as well as preparing for post-crisis scenarios. Also, during the last few weeks, countries have identified legislative gaps, allocated resources and established task forces to work on the post crisis scenarios. All countries report the need and willingness to capitalise on the efforts made as

regards teacher involvement, digital materials produced and new teaching and learning methods. The coming months will be crucial to build on the experience gained and focus on factors that could trigger a move towards life-long competency-based education and training.

In this stage, there are three critical issues:

1. Ensuring scenarios on future education are developed, building on the lessons learned during the crisis, in particular collecting evidence in a transparent way and using it to inform policy choices and actions on future education and training;
2. Focusing on the sustainability of actions and measures adopted, including the maintenance of equipment and updating of portals and materials produced, and the continued commitment to ensuring accessibility and coverage for all students and teachers;
3. Addressing shortcomings in education and training systems highlighted by the crisis, in particular the question of equity and access, the need to strengthen competence-based learning, the specificity of practice-based learning.

Whether COVID-19 actually triggers transformation will depend on these three critical issues. Re-establishing international cooperation, including crowdsourcing and sharing of resources could speed up and support this transformation.

The key takeaway from the remarkable reaction to the COVID-19 crisis is the realisation that the transformation is not about 'moving online' but it is about switching to learning throughout life and ensuring that learning is accessible to all.

The interruption of economic activity and its foreseeable impact on the labour market, employment opportunities and social welfare creates new challenges for education and training systems, including addressing the skills needs of employers and employees, and access to opportunities for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in the population. Most countries are lagging behind in this area and will need to cooperate closely with the private sector, social partners and [international bodies](#), to address the demand for skills development, upskilling and changes in the world of work. An overview of challenges facing employers is available [here](#).

Highlights include:

- **Decisions taken in most countries regarding the management of end of year examinations.** In some cases, these will be managed online, in others, partially online and partially under a dedicated programme of return to school, extension of the school year or postponement of exams to the end of the summer. In some countries, legislation has been adopted waiving school exams for the year 2019-20. A special report on end of school exams is available [here](#).
- **In many countries evidence is being collected on digital and online learning as a basis for decisions on the future.** Facts are the most important ingredient in an effective response to emergencies, as well as in preparing for the future. In several countries, in partnership with international organisations, surveys are being conducted and task forces are in place to prepare scenarios and responses on the end of the year, preparation for next year, legislation on distance and online learning, as well as scenarios on the future of education.
- **A large number of platforms and an impressive quantity of digital resources are available across countries.** These will require effort to ensure their sustainability and integration into

practice post-crisis. The sharing of digital and online learning tools, material and training between countries is an issue to be explored.

- **Emotional and social proximity** is a concern for many countries, and programmes addressing this have been implemented. However, in most countries, the main effort has been on ensuring the continuity of teaching. The social and emotional impact, in particular on the most vulnerable students at risk of dropping out of education, will require great attention as we move towards the new school year.
- **Practice based training** is receiving attention in many countries with several solutions being adopted, materials developed, and partnerships established with the private sector. These efforts will open up opportunities to expand work-based learning and open it up to virtual and augmented reality solutions.
- **Cooperation with the private sector and civil society has accelerated during the crisis** in exploring opportunities to ensure coverage, access and innovative solutions to education and training provision. This will benefit education and training systems if countries are able to build on the lessons of the crisis and engage in long-term cooperation to the advantage of learners and future skills.

Information is available for the 27 countries listed here:

| South Eastern Europe and Turkey | Eastern Partnership and Russia | Southern and Eastern Mediterranean | Central Asia |
|---|---|---|--|
| Albania Bosnia & Herzegovina Kosovo ¹ Montenegro North Macedonia Serbia Turkey | Armenia Azerbaijan Belarus Georgia Moldova Ukraine Russia | Algeria Egypt Israel Lebanon Palestine ² Jordan Morocco Tunisia | Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan Tajikistan Turkmenistan Uzbekistan |

South Eastern Europe and Turkey

Nearly all countries in the region have confirmed that education and training providers will remain closed until the end of the year, with the exception of Albania, where schools have been able to open since 4 May, however very few have been able so far to implement social distance guidelines. Since their closure in March, education and training providers have rapidly organised delivery of general education classes mainly through TV and e-learning, either by creating ad-hoc websites or building on existing platforms and social media. Preparation is ongoing for the end of the school year, with clear assessment criteria and modalities for final exams being finalised. Furthermore, in most countries, thoughts are turning to the next school year. This means taking decisions on how to manage assets acquired during the crisis, in particular how to maintain and track ownership of devices purchased, and how to manage digital and online resources developed during this period.

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

² This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual position of the Member States on this issue

Provision of general education is being delivered centrally, while in most countries during the crisis vocational training is being organised by individual providers. The exceptions are Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey, where resources are being provided centrally, also to support practice-based training.

An overview of actions involving teachers and trainers in the region is available [here](#). In Montenegro, the government has launched an initiative called [#ucidoma](#), which follows up on actions already planned under the Western Balkans Digital Agenda. In Turkey, the government is building on the Turkey Education 2023 strategy and accelerating access to and use of e-platforms, namely [‘Turkish VET map’](#), [‘E-graduates website’](#), as well as platforms for [teacher training](#) and ICT based curricula. The Turkish private sector is working closely with vocational schools, many of which have [switched to designing and producing materials](#) such as surgical masks and disinfectants to cope with the pandemic. An overview of actions and results being achieved in Turkey is available [here](#). As of mid-April, over 650,000 live lessons were conducted on the [Turkish EBA platform](#). Furthermore, using artificial intelligence, Turkey has enabled personalised learning online for students of the 11th and 12th grades, affecting over one million students.

In Montenegro, an online platform was developed through cooperation with the private sector, volunteer contributions and shared digital materials and video lessons carried out teachers and trainers. In Turkey, mobile service providers are providing free connectivity to facilitate access to online platforms for students and teachers. With the prolonged closure of education and training providers, greater attention is also being given to practice-based training, career guidance and emotional support. Turkey released [three booklets](#) to target the specific needs of young people, adults and parents, and put in place several initiatives to address special education, career guidance and psychological support. In Serbia, through the [digital solidarity portal](#), several services supporting guidance, psychological as well as coaching needs are offered. The recent note from [Cedefop](#) on the lifelong guidance response in the crisis provides useful references and examples of good practice.

In Turkey, as well as in [Serbia](#), [Albania](#) and North Macedonia, actions are being implemented to address practice-based training, including producing dedicated video and digital materials to ensure the continuity of this important component of curricula. In [Kosovo](#), with the support of GIZ, the government is supporting training for in-company trainers. The University for Business and Technology (UBT) in Kosovo and [EONReality](#) have launched a partnership to create an AVR hub focusing on education and training applications.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the [COVIDjea](#) (Covid ideas) initiative, supported by local organisations and international donors and hosted by a business accelerator, has been launched. It aims to scout for entrepreneurial, game-changing ideas to address challenges presented by COVID19, suggestions for counteracting informal employment during lockdown and ways of re-framing remote working due to mobility restrictions. In Serbia, the National Alliance for Local Economic Development (NALED), in cooperation with the government, donors and civil society organisations, launched a competition for the best example of distance learning, [“Magic is in the hands of the teacher”](#).

In these countries, training for online assessment has also started, in order to help decision-making on the organisation of final examinations and certification of learning achievements. In Serbia, the challenge of the crisis is being transformed into an opportunity to reinforce future forms of learning and prepare content that will be integrated into programmes in the next academic year, supporting the preparation of video lessons including up to 150 hours of theoretical knowledge and 80 topics for work-based learning/practice tutorials. Governments, as well as researchers, in the region are focusing on data collection through surveys. In Albania, for example, the results of a [survey](#) of 500

teachers has been published, collecting information on the delivery and the sustainability of measures. In Turkey researchers are sharing ideas on the impact of COVID-19 and its relation to the progress of reforms in the country. The recently published articles by Mahmut Ozer, Deputy Minister of National Education, Vocational Education and Training, focus on the [major initiatives and challenges](#) that vocational training is facing in the country and the [policy response](#).

Eastern Partnership and Russia

Schools are closed in all countries of the region, except Belarus, where the education and training system continues to operate after the extended spring break, with some measures to ensure social distancing and avoid mass gatherings at universities. According to the figures given in the media and by the Ministry of Education, only around 30-40% of secondary school students returned to school while the others continue studying at home. While schools remain open officially, the National Institute of Education published a guidance note indicating different platforms and resources for distance and online learning. Countries in the region have quickly organised their response to the crisis, issuing state orders with clear measures. As the situation evolves, countries are focusing efforts on ending the year and providing specific guidance on examinations, as well as taking measures and allocating resources to for prepare the next school year. In Armenia and Ukraine decrees have been issued waiving final exams for 2019-20 for general education. In Armenia there will be no examinations for VET, only the final assessment will be in place, based on previous marks. In Moldova, the government has made progress in the preparation of online support to the 2020 examinations. The regulation for VET foresees online teaching and assessment. However, the Ministry hopes that the situation will allow for regular exams to take place from 15 June or at the end of August for those graduating.

In other countries actions are under way to prepare and provide guidance for final examinations and certification. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova are providing specific e-platforms and e-learning for teachers and trainers and developing digital content, which is growing as the closure of schools is prolonged. In Georgia, measures cover general education in particular, while for vocational training, specific measures are being adopted in cooperation with international partners. A report by the Caucasus Research Resource Centre on a national survey online learning provision indicates that 92% of respondents report children being involved in online education and 63% following public broadcasting. Only 30% of respondents report children using only one form of distance learning. Yet inclusion issues remain. Differences in access between rural areas and the capital, Tbilisi, is one of the concerns raised.

A specific focus on the COVID-19 response in Azerbaijan is available [here](#). The huge variety of vocational training programmes has made it difficult to provide homogeneous support across the country. After stabilising provision of general education and general vocational subjects, digital material for VET has been created, for example through the Baku State Vocational Training Center for Industry and Innovation. The institute provides a distance learning process by joining the Microsoft Teams platform offered by the Ministry of Education to provide educational programmes to students during the educational process. On 8 May, the government allocated funds to support the refurbishment of schools in the country to prepare them for the new school year.

In Ukraine, the government has made digital content available and is counting on regional authorities and providers to define details of how to deliver it. It has called upon teaching staff to use this time for their professional learning and development. Furthermore, in Ukraine the Ministry of Digital Transformation launched an online platform "[Action. Digital Education](#)." providing access to free digital educational content for the population.

In the whole region, work-based learning arrangements are suspended, except for some professions where the practice training could be organised remotely. Ukraine has issued specific guidance on work-based learning and apprenticeships to ensure continuity, wherever possible, in practice-based training for specific professions. In Ukraine, on 17 April, the [Edcamp](#) initiative concluded, with recommendations on the future of education after the COVID-19 crisis. In Armenia, the National Centre for Educational Technology Development is providing online training for teachers. In cooperation with the NGO National Network for Distance Learning, an online introduction to e-learning has been delivered involving 158 teachers from technical colleges and crafts schools. In Russia, following the order of 14 March recommending online education, regional authorities issued specific orders to organise online provision. Various resources are being used, including online platforms, simulations and a number of platforms providing guidance to teachers and learners.

Southern and Eastern Mediterranean

Countries in the region are preparing phase 2 of the crisis, with plans for implementing final examinations being agreed in all countries in the region, and preparation for the new school year already under way. In the region, the crisis response has been variable, with Egypt and Israel being the two countries with a more organised plan and speedier implementation, while some other countries had a slower response.

In Tunisia, vocational training programmes are suspended until further notice, while general education provision is continuing online. The school year is considered completed for all levels of education from the first basic year to the third year of secondary school. Student assessment will be based on the average grades of the first and second trimesters. Special arrangements will be made for final year students. They are expected to resume their classes by the end of May and take the examinations in July.

In Lebanon, despite the difficult socio-economic situation, which already existed before the COVID-19 crisis, provision has been organised through TV and online delivery, while for vocational training it is reported that only 37% of students have access to the internet, and fewer actions are in place for the sector. A Learning Readiness Rapid Assessment has been completed with UN support and the participation of over 10,000 Syrian families. Partners also collaborated with the COVID education Response Task Force and participated to the Rapid Learning Readiness Assessment. The results of the assessment are under consolidation. Increased resources are also available for VET providers, including through cooperation between donors, civil society organisations and the government. An important activity is under way to ensure continuity of career guidance services, including supporting students in their university applications. The Career Guidance team for the elementary cycle is currently revising the first draft of a tool kit on career guidance activities.

In Egypt, where management of the crisis started in March, with two weeks dedicated to the preparation of teachers and trainers through online and onsite learning (with a focus on peer support), actions are ongoing to prepare a post-crisis plan with international partners, including blended learning. Online provision has been rolled out using the Edmodo platform. Final general education exams will take place online, while for vocational training as of 9 May, a plan for the partial re-opening of schools to allow for examinations has been finalised. For this several measures related to safety and exceptional scheduling of exams over a longer period have been prepared to allow social distancing to be respected. The network of Applied Technology Schools (ATS) is involved in supporting other schools in online delivery. These 11 Centres of Vocational Excellence seem better equipped to respond, with teachers preparing online schooling together with partner companies. In

general, these ATS are able to deliver more focused provision in these challenging times. The ATS in hospitality is getting students to send in videoclips of their cooking assignments at home and the ATS partnering with IBM is organising comprehensive coursework online. Investment over the past few years in the online Egyptian Knowledge Bank library, is bearing fruit with a wide availability of online resources now being used extensively, also for vocational training.

In [Jordan](#), a survey conducted by the Ministry of Education indicates that 78% of students are following distance and online education, delivered through TV channels as well as e-learning for general education as well as for vocational training. The Ministry implemented online testing and confirmed that there will be no delays or postponement of the secondary [school final examination](#) (Tawjihi). Two major challenges are to be addressed: how to reach all students and how to provide them with quality education. Authorities, alongside international partners and civil society, are paying a lot of attention to ensuring adequate access to equipment and connectivity as well as to education [quality for all students](#). The University of Jordan has carried out a poll of online students and [results](#) indicate that 83% of university students are making use of the educational platforms provided by their universities, with a 42% satisfaction rate.

In Tunisia and Palestine, there are bottom-up initiatives in cooperation with international donors, civil society organisations and the private sector. In Tunisia, a [hackathon](#) has been organised, while in Palestine, the internet service provider, Mada, has launched a community initiative to provide free internet access for three months to schools and university students and teachers. Other actors are supporting the provision of online learning and training of teachers. The Palestinian telecommunications company, Paltel, launched an initiative to increase internet speed for subscribers free of charge to support e-learning. The Ministry of Education is currently preparing the launch of a Facebook page “Ta2ammal” to bridge the physical distance with students and receive feedback on their progress as well as their challenges during this outbreak. A special focus on Palestine education is available [here](#). In Palestine, the national end-of-year examination, the Tawjihi will take place in schools (or other buildings) and safety measures will be put in place. For VET, practical examinations for 12th grade students that were supposed to take place at the end of April, have been postponed to June. Vocational students in the Kafa'a stream are supposed to do an end-of-year project. The examination commission will decide soon if the project will be replaced by a practical exam.

In Morocco, all three telecom operators have granted free access to the internet to facilitate the connectivity of students and use of digital tools. Together with TV programmes, there are a number of online resources. The government has launched an online consultation on the future of education in the country. Also in Palestine, reflections on the future have started with the launch of the Distance Learning task force.

Israel, which is already technologically advanced, has been fast in implementing online and digital education solutions. Schools will gradually re-open from 3 May, with the implementation of plan that will enable increased blended learning, including the extension of the school year by one month, particular attention to the most at risk students, and implementation of safety measures in all premises through the innovative use of physical space and the provision of a more flexible schedule. Ministries and vocational education networks such as ORT and AMAL are providing support to teachers and trainers. A [study](#) shows the variety of coverage of distance education, and effectiveness has been rated at around 20% over presence in schools, this is due in particular to the number of hours of interaction. Due to the crisis, changes have been made to the Bagruth examination nationally. It will no longer cover all topics, but only 70% of them. The topics covered will be decided by the general subject inspectors (in cooperation with teams of teachers). Another change is that the assessment of

the practical training component of TVET courses, such as project work, will be done on-line on a one-to-one basis instead of face-to-face with 2-3 examiners.

In the region there is a great deal of focus on inclusion and equality of access. Efforts are being made to provide education through multiple channels, to involve teachers in reaching out to students, including emotional support. In Israel, the authorities together with the private sector and civil society have implemented actions to support the availability of adequate equipment and connectivity among all teachers and students. In Algeria, from April the provision of distance learning began covering all grades mainly through TV and a [dedicated platform](#) for students in their last year to prepare them for final exams. Both the teachers' Union, Satef, and the parents' association have raised concerns over inclusion and equality of provision through online and digital solutions. In Jordan, general education is provided through TV broadcasts, while online courses have been launched by schools, universities and community colleges. However, the service is not provided by all schools, and there are issues of coverage and accessibility for both teachers and students. In addition, the public sector has raised concerns over the effectiveness of measures and the [readiness of teachers](#). The Minister of General Education has started consultations with social partners and civil society, including a proposal on the end of the school year, cancelling evaluations and postponing the "baccalauréat" (upper secondary leaving certificate) until September. The decision on the BEM "Brevet de l'enseignement moyen" (for 15 year-olds) is still pending

Central Asia

In the region we observe two different responses to the COVID-19 outbreak. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan were the first to close schools immediately after the Spring break that ended at the end of March/first week of April. All three countries used the break to prepare the shift to broadcasting school content on national TV channels as well as developing measures for distance and online learning. In contrast, schools in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan resumed normal operation after the holidays with medical checks and other health precautions in place. In Tajikistan, schools closed in mid-May and the government prepared to shift to TV-based delivery, while online services will focus on students of 9th and 11th grade who are preparing state examinations. An overview of regional responses from the voice of teachers is available [here \(in Russian\)](#). As the end of the school year is approaching, Kazakhstan has already issued clear guidelines on end of year exams, while other countries are in the process of making final decisions.

In [Uzbekistan](#), the government has involved award-winning teachers, state award winners and authors of textbooks to prepare video lessons. Mainly focused on general subjects, these are broadcast nationwide on TV and radio. The country has responded to the crisis by organising several education portals covering multiple language needs and providing also sign language support for resources available. The latest decree issued by the Prime Minister allocates 7 million dollars to ensure uninterrupted access to education for all, learn from other countries to improve distance learning in the immediate term and get ready for the reopening of schools in the autumn.

In Kyrgyzstan, The Ministry of Education has set up several online education portals for each subsector of education. Furthermore, it has reached an agreement with one of the main telecommunication companies, Megacom, to provide free SIM cards to all pupils/students and teachers, to improve access, as well as support the creation of an e-learning platform. A key role is played by its six Competence Centres (Tsenry per dovovo opyta – CoVEs) which had been set up prior to the crisis. The six centres, which are all located in Bishkek serve as sectoral focal points and have a lead role in developing teaching materials (including under the new situation for distance

education) that can then be used by other vocational schools. The Republican Scientific Methodological Centre (RNMC) under the Agency [will set up a site for video lessons](#).

In Kazakhstan, the government followed a preparation plan, including a survey of all vocational education and training providers to check on both equipment and preparation of teachers and trainers. Kasipkor (now renamed Talar) has, based on its mapping of vocational colleges, been able to identify the main platforms used. The mapping also showed considerable regional differences. In two regions out of 17, a single dedicated platform is used. In four other regions, the vast majority of providers (ranging from 77%-96%) use one main platform. In the remaining 11 regions, it is mainly up to providers to select a platform. Among the 800 vocational training providers in the country, 3% do not yet use any platform, but will start doing so soon, while 6% of providers in view of their specific target groups and mission are not required to use online platforms (for example vocational training providers in penitentiary institutions or serving special needs students). The mapping of vocational teachers and students has shown that only 1.5% of them do not have access to equipment for distance and online learning, including mobile phones. Regional administrations purchased devices, based on needs and distributed for use on a temporary basis. By the end of March and for the entire education system, the Ministry of Education and Science, together with the Ministry for Digital Development had reached agreement with telecom and internet providers as well as specialised providers on free of charge access to 20 education platforms. In Kazakhstan, the government has also encouraged cooperation with the private sector and telecom operators to facilitate connectivity, and procure and distribute equipment for teachers and trainers as well as students. In early May, the Ministry of Education and Science adopted a decree on end of year examinations, including a major role and autonomy for VET providers in deciding on assessment methods. A special report on Kazakhstan is available [here \(in Russian\)](#).

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