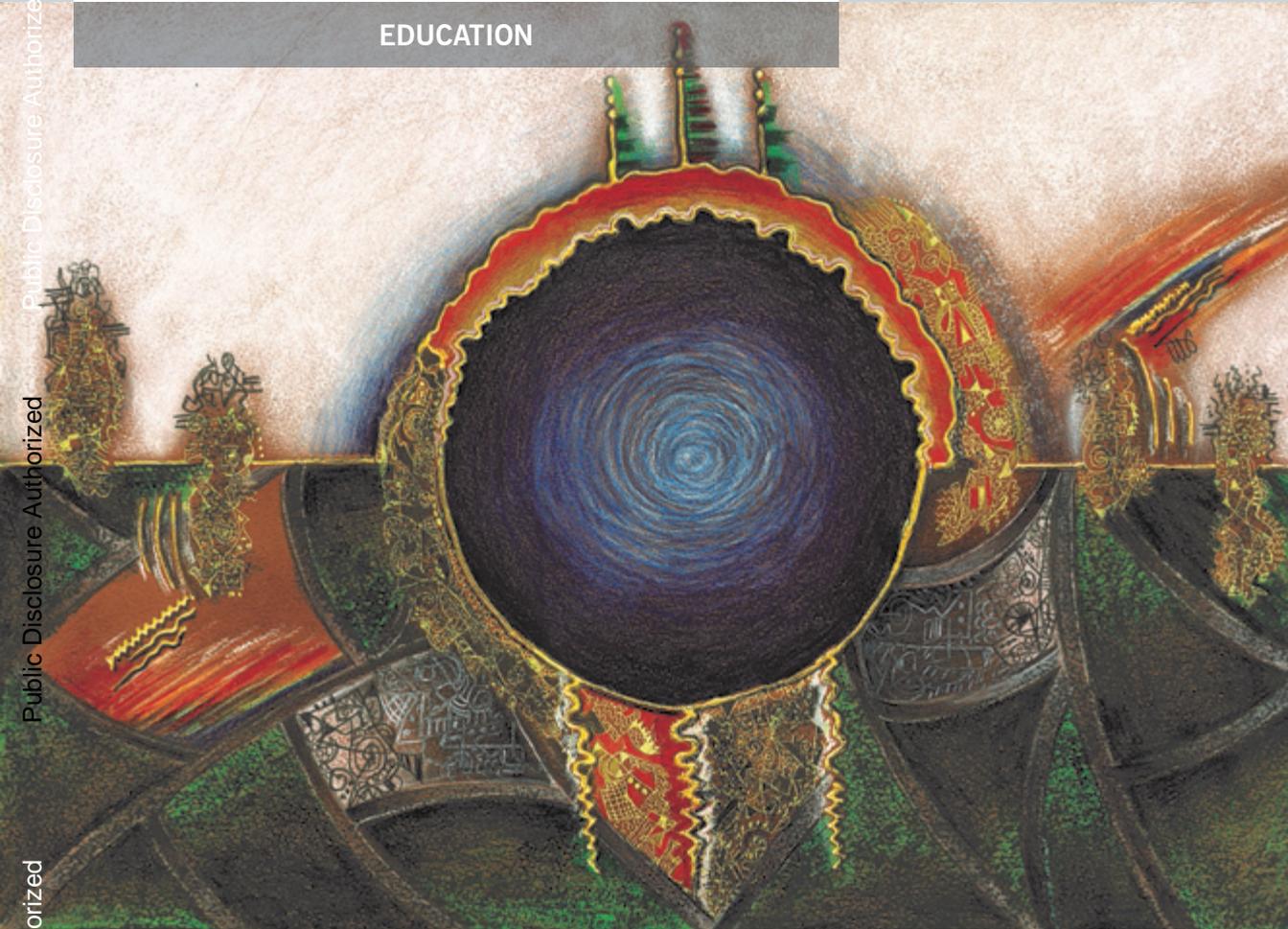


The Economic and Social Impact of COVID-19

EDUCATION



“You and me” by Tanja Burzanovic (Montenegro)

The RER No. 17 is a collection of notes on the Economic and Social Impact of COVID-19 that will be published in three parts. The first part was launched on April 29 and focused on the macroeconomic impact of COVID-19. This second part shows how the macroeconomic impact affects the people in the region. It discusses the social impact of COVID-19 in the Western Balkans in six separate RER notes on poverty and welfare, labor, health, education, air pollution, and social protection. The third part, to be launched in early June, will focus on specific economic policy response areas—fiscal, external, and financial sector—and the crisis impact on the private sector as reported by firms.

Estimated Impact of COVID-19 on Education and Country Responses¹

- The COVID-19 pandemic shocks to the education systems will have negative short and long-term impact. Economic gains might falter, human capital growth will likely decline or come to a standstill and current gaps in learning equity will widen.
- All Western Balkan countries have responded to the disruption in education delivery by introducing various remote teaching modalities. Yet despite prompt action, learning loss will be unavoidable and considerable, disproportionately affecting the disadvantaged, with a larger share of students falling back into functional illiteracy and potentially dropping out of school altogether. Estimates suggest that those below basic proficiency in reading may increase from the current 53 percent to 61 percent.
- While schools remain closed or partially reopened, strengthened delivery of remote learning and support to teachers and parents can mitigate learning loss. Accelerated learning programs to compensate students for learning loss and adequate education budget to ensure minimum conditions to deal with additional post-COVID-19 costs will be critical to ensure that students catch up and further inequalities are prevented.
- Western Balkan countries should also seize the opportunity to make education more effective, inclusive and resilient. Improving and scaling up COVID-19 response policies that have worked, including reducing the digital divide and building teachers' digital skills would build system resilience to future shocks. Additionally, focusing on dropout prevention, enhancing early education and care services with a focus on disadvantaged children, strengthening teacher training, enhancing education financing and performance monitoring will lead to improvements of education quality and equity in the medium-term.

How are education systems in the Western Balkans responding to COVID-19?

The impact of the pandemic stem largely from school closures and the transition to remote learning. Closures are affecting over 91 percent of the world's students and 1.6 billion learners not in school.² The current

school closures will result in learning loss for all students, while disproportionately affecting disadvantaged students, who are more likely to drop out or leave school early. These negative impacts will have both short- and long-term implications. Economic gains might falter, human capital growth will likely decline or come to a standstill, and, most important, current gaps in learning equity will widen.

Countries in the Western Balkans have combined preventive measures to curb the virus's spread with mitigation measures to provide continuity in education. All countries in the region moved quickly to close schools and adopt other preventive measures as

1 This note has been prepared by Flora Kelmendi, James Gresham and Syedah Aroob Iqbal. The note benefitted from comments and contributions from Harry Patrinos, Jamele Rigolini, Maria Pomes Jimenez, Amer Hasan, Alexandria Valerio, Bojana Naceva, Angela Demas, Edith Kikoni, Marc Schiffbauer, Jasmin Chakeri, Enrique Blanco Armas and Gallina Vincelette.

2 Figures correspond to number of learners enrolled at pre-primary, primary, lower-secondary, and upper-secondary levels of education [ISCED levels 0 to 3], as well as at tertiary education s [ISCED levels 5 to 8]. Enrollment figures are based on the latest UNESCO Institute for Statistics data.

Box 1. What Is Happening with Tertiary Education?

Higher education institutions in the region have temporarily closed, and more than 600,000 university students have seen their classes moved abruptly online to mitigate the campus closings.

In general, education system capacity at the tertiary level is much higher, and so are technological access and skills, as well as the autonomy, of the students. Thus, classes are being delivered online. Western Balkan universities have mostly relied for teaching on external video conferencing tools such as Zoom, Skype, and most often Google Classroom. However, courses that require practical experience, laboratory work, or clinics cannot be given. Manuals and other guidance have been prepared to assist professors in the move online (e.g., in Kosovo the University of Pristina issued directions for online provision of instruction, such as how to create online lectures in the Google platform).

soon as the first cases were confirmed (March 9–13, 2020). In the Western Balkans, all higher education institutions (Box 1) are closed and 2.7 million pre-university students are directly affected.

To ensure continuity in learning while schools are closed, countries have introduced a variety of modes for emergency remote teaching and learning. Distance learning measures include an array of delivery mechanisms: TV or radio broadcast, resources uploaded to dedicated websites, classes delivered online, and contacts with students through mobile phones. Most often, countries have opted for a combination of methods. In the region, to reach the most students governments relied heavily on TV broadcasts of recorded lessons. However, to provide TV lessons at scale, both the subjects covered and the instruction time have been considerably abridged. Resources for teachers to adjust to remote teachings are also being made available online on dedicated platforms and websites. Some countries that were preparing the system for online learning have fast-tracked those efforts to better respond to current circumstances.^{3,4} Countries have

also moved to mitigate disengagement and learning loss for the most vulnerable students,⁵ and are considering proposals for altering the school calendar, adjusting vacation days, and providing ICT equipment to students.⁶

Despite prompt action throughout the region, school closures and less effective forms of remote teaching will invariably lead to learning loss and widen equity gaps. Transitioning to online learning at scale is very difficult because it is highly complex even in the best of circumstances.⁷ In the pandemic, the move to emergency remote learning was sudden. The readiness of countries to deliver quality education for all using remote and online modalities is central to assessing how the COVID-19 response will impact human capital accumulation over the medium-term.

3 <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/tekst/en/137330/esdnevnik.php>.

4 <https://montk.gov.ba/odluka-o-organizaciji-online-nastave-i-instrukcija/1812/>.

5 For example, Montenegro is considering an agreement with telecom operators to provide unlimited data plans for the students least likely to have reliable broadband access. Support is also being provided for refugee and migrant children in temporary reception centers in Bosnia and Herzegovina. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1060982>.

6 <https://enastava.skolers.org/> <http://www.eobrazovanje.com/vijesti/Pages/nastava-na-daljnu.aspx>.

7 World Bank (2020). Rapid Response Briefing Note: Remote Learning and COVID-19 Outbreak (English). Washington, DC: World Bank Group.

How prepared are countries to deliver quality education for all, using remote and online teaching modalities for an extended time?

Although how the pandemic will evolve in the Western Balkans is unknown, it is expected that schools will remain closed into the summer months, possibly not reopening until the next academic year. It is also likely that localized disruptions will continue into the next academic year, with staggered and partial school reopenings. Education systems will need to continue responding to the disruption while also preventing and minimizing learning loss and safeguarding equity and inclusion. Achieving all this effectively requires several preconditions, such as (1) ICT access and connectivity; (2) availability of quality online content; (3) teachers skilled in remote and online instruction; (4) parental support for remote and online instruction; and (5) sufficient instructional time.

ICT Access and Connectivity

While Western Balkan countries have widespread access to television, which helps to guarantee a minimum level of equity, this medium is not sufficient for quality instruction. By design, TV-based instruction and pre-recorded televised lessons are not interactive and do not adapt to learners' individualized needs; however, it does provide for more equitable access to content because TV is widely available across the region.⁸ Online learning has the potential for being far more interactive than televised

lessons but its effectiveness depends on access to digital devices, Internet connectivity, the quality of content design, and teacher digital skills. The move to online learning at scale will disproportionately benefit students who are already advantaged (e.g., rich over poor, urban over rural) as financially better-off families are more likely to be able to have computers and Internet at home than students in poorer families.

Students in the Western Balkans have less access to high-speed connectivity than their EU peers, and regional data present a clear equity challenge. On average, in the Western Balkans, about 60 percent of households have fast enough connection to sustain requirements for online learning, defined for this analysis as 10 mbps and higher.⁹ However, it should also be noted that 10 Mbps is lower than the standards acceptable in the USA (25 mbps) or in the EU (30 mbps). Using these higher benchmarks, most households in the region are not equipped with high speed Internet. Even at 10 mbps, there is significant variation within the region: only 35 percent of households in Bosnia & Herzegovina have that Internet speeds, compared to 48 percent in North Macedonia and 64 percent in Serbia.¹⁰ There is also a large share of Western Balkan students—about 22 percent—who report little¹¹ or no home Internet access, compared to just 11 percent in the EU27. More significantly, although students in the top economic, social, and cultural status (ESCS) quintile have almost universal access to the internet (including 100 percent of those students in BiH, North Macedonia, MNE, and Serbia) that is not

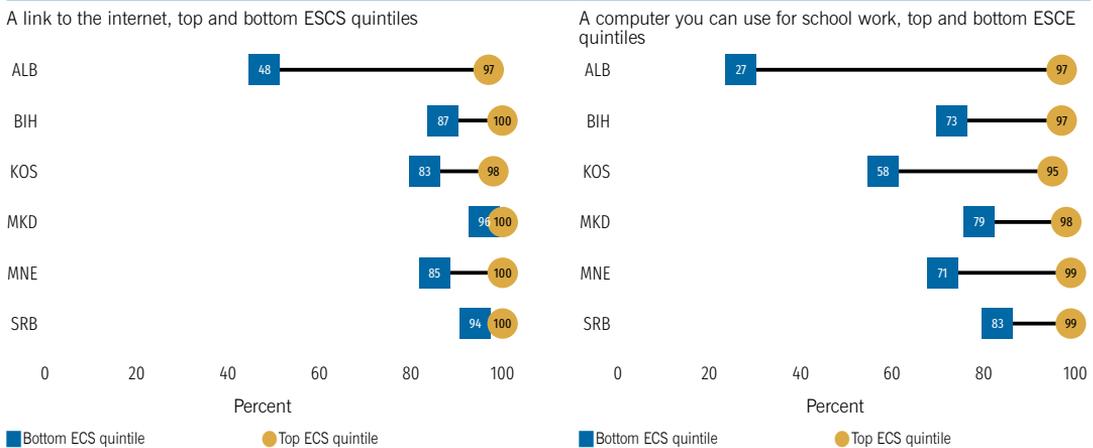
8 For primary education students, TV ownership is widespread in the Western Balkans (at 98%), which is encouraging as mass broadcast is the preferred emergency delivery mode for primary students.

9 Data are based on the most recent reports from the national regulators of electronic communications.

10 Ibid.

11 Less than one hour.

Figure 1. Internet Connectivity and Access to ICT Equipment in the Western Balkans



Source: PISA 2018.

the case for their counterparts in the bottom quintile, and differences can be as large as 50 percentage points (Albania).

Sustaining effective learning through remote and online modes, particularly over months while the pandemic continues, will also depend on whether households have ICT resources available for educational purposes.

PISA 2018 data, though limited to secondary school students, provide an estimate of household readiness for online education. On average, one in ten households with Western Balkans students do not own a computer; in Albania this rises to almost a third, 28 percent. Ownership of ICT resources is far different from their use for education. While an average of 86 percent of students report having access to a computer they can use for schoolwork, the percentage is likely to be lower in the lockdown scenario when there are competing demands on those resources (e.g., parents' home-based work, siblings' education). More significantly, the socioeconomic gap in access to ICT can be large. Students in the top ESCS quintile have almost universal access to the Internet and widespread access to computers they can use

for work. However, as Figure 1 shows, these figures are much lower for those in the lowest quintile.

Provision of Digital Content

In addition to limited connectivity, the availability and quality of digital content are also questionable. Although there is little cross-country information, PISA 2018 results suggest that such content and its organization for online support is quite limited. They also make it evident that most students do not attend a school which offers an effective online learning support platform (Figure 2). The sudden transition to remote online instruction during the pandemic forced schools to scramble for a next best alternative, such as recorded lessons and distribution of electronic learning materials by email. It is not clear whether such materials were designed for use in remote online instruction or had to be improvised.

Figure 2. Availability of Effective Digital Educational Content from the Perspective of School Principals



Source: PISA 2018 results showing the proportion of students whose principals agree or strongly agree with the statement.

Teachers' Digital Skills

Although no cross-country data are available, there are clear indications that teachers in the Western Balkans are not prepared to support effective remote and online learning for long.

All Western Balkans countries acknowledge the importance of digital skills, though they have taken different approaches to building such skills in the teacher workforce. Serbia, for example, has a specific digital competence curriculum for teachers, and also checks their ability to use digital technologies for student assessment. In Montenegro and North Macedonia, digital competencies for teachers are among general teacher competence criteria, though that is not true of Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹²

Even in the EU, where digital connectivity in schools is more common than in the Western Balkans, only 20–25 percent of students are taught by teachers who are confident with technology.¹³ Teachers across the European Union repeatedly cited ICT skills as an area

where teacher professional development is needed. The ICT in Schools Survey in Europe found that more than 6 out of 10 European students are taught by teachers that develop their ICT skills *on their own time*.¹⁴ EU teachers also cite (1) lack of pedagogical models on how to use ICT for learning, (2) lack of adequate skills among teachers, and (3) insufficient technical support as among the worst pedagogy-related obstacles to ICT use in teaching and learning.¹⁵ Again, the problem is likely to be even larger in the Western Balkans. Even in Serbia, where digital skills are explicitly identified as teacher competences, 56 percent of VET teachers surveyed reported that they require at a high or moderate level professional development in ICT-related fields.¹⁶

Parental Support

Parents, now de facto teachers, may not have the ability, or the time, to assist students. This is especially true for younger students, lower-

12 Source: Eurydice (2019). Digital Education at School in Europe. No information is available for Kosovo.

13 [ps://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/digital-education-action-plan-action-2-selfie-self-reflection-tool-mentoring-scheme-for-schools_en](https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/digital-education-action-plan-action-2-selfie-self-reflection-tool-mentoring-scheme-for-schools_en).

14 <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/2nd-survey-schools-ict-education>.

15 European Commission (2019). 2nd Survey of Schools: ICT in Education. Objective 1: Benchmark Progress in ICT in Schools. Final Report.

16 ETF (2017). Digital Skills and Online Learning in Serbia. Digital Factsheet October 2017.

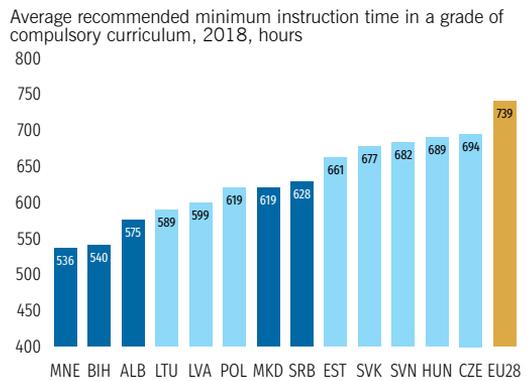
performing students, and those with special needs. Even in the best of circumstances, many parents are not prepared to cope with distance learning and home-schooling, particularly those who are not technologically savvy, have limited education and resources, have several children to support, and must make decisions about how to allocate a shortage of IT devices. For example, the share of adults who have basic or better digital skills range from 24 percent in Bosnia and Herzegovina to 32 percent in North Macedonia and 46 percent in Serbia, compared to 56 percent in the EU27 and over 70 percent in countries like Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands.¹⁷

Minimum Instructional Time

Instructional time, a key determinant of learning, is also crucial for helping to sustain the quality of education during the pandemic, but Western Balkans countries already have relatively little instructional time for the core curriculum. Before the outbreak, their school systems had relatively low minimum instructional hours per grade in the compulsory curriculum compared to neighboring EU countries. For example, as of 2018 average recommended minimum instruction times per grade were 739 hours in the EU28, 628 in Serbia, 575 in Albania, and 536 in Montenegro.¹⁸ During normal times, then, depending on the Western Balkan country students attending school as expected

would receive 110 to 200 fewer hours of instruction than European peers—equivalent to 4 to 7 fewer weeks of instruction per school year than the EU average. The transition to remote and online teaching will squeeze out even more instructional time, particularly for disadvantaged students.¹⁹

Figure 3. Instructional Time in Western Balkans and Comparators



Source: Eurydice and OECD.

Learning Loss: What is the estimated impact of COVID-19 on learning in the Western Balkans?

Before the global pandemic broke out, Western Balkan education systems already faced serious challenges. To varying degrees, they do not deliver the skills the labor market needs. A review of PISA 2018 scores by country shows that on average 53 percent of students do not acquire the basic skills necessary to function effectively in a modern labor force, compared to 23 percent in OECD countries (Annex 1). Over 78 percent of 15-year-olds in Kosovo, and over 50 percent in Albania, North Macedonia, and Montenegro are functionally illiterate (performing below Level 2 of proficiency in

17 Data from Eurostat. Overall digital skills are measured by the EU survey of ICT usage in households and by individuals. This is based on a composite indicator derived from selected activities performed by individuals aged 16–74 on the internet in four specific areas: information, communication, problem solving, and content creation.

18 Eurydice (2018) and OECD. *Note:* Recommended minimum instruction time is the instruction time specified in the regulations or policy documents of education authorities.

19 There is already anecdotal evidence of official recommendations to reduce the curriculum based on the challenges of trying to fulfill curricular expectations in current conditions.

PISA).²⁰ Even in Serbia, the top performer in the Western Balkans, 38 percent of students are functionally illiterate. Moreover, there were persistent inequities in learning outcomes by gender, location, and income group. Lack of proficiency in basic cognitive skills undermines the ability to acquire higher-order skills to succeed in a rapidly changing knowledge economy.

The current school closures are expected to result in considerable learning loss. Not attending school has two impacts: students do not learn anything new, and they forget what they had already learned. Experience from previous crisis shows that school closures depress learning and disproportionately affect the disadvantaged. In the U.S., the impact of the 2007–09 recession on disadvantaged subgroups suggests a long-term small but significant negative impact on test scores attributable to the recession.²¹ In 2014 severe flooding in 2014 closed schools in Thailand for up to a month and reduced student achievement, depending on the subject and level, by 7 to 25 percent.²² The erosion in learning during a long gap in the school year, for example, a typical summer break, has been documented and quantified. On average, during a typical three-month summer break student achievement scores declined by one month’s worth of school-year learning.²³ More recently, using data from over half a

million students in grades 2–9 in a southern U.S. state (in 2008–12), a study found that over the summer, students on average lost 25–30 percent of their school-year learning—about 3 months of learning. The study also establishes that historically disadvantaged students lose more learning than the rest.²⁴ The current school closures and resulting learning loss will take months or years to recover from, which will necessitate immediate policy responses to mitigate the impact, especially for those who suffered the most during school closures. Failure to do so will likely undermine human capital in the medium term and diminish economic opportunities in the long term.

Because they are emergency responses, remote learning measures may not be as effective as classroom instruction—especially if they must be sustained for a long period. Schooling raises earnings, especially when it is associated with quality, typically measured using test scores. Using PISA 2018 reading scores,²⁵ the potential loss in learning can be estimated.

Average scores may drop in the short term, returning some countries to levels last seen in 2015 or earlier. Assuming a student gains on average 40 PISA points of learning in a school year (Box 2); schools are closed for four months, through June; and that there is no remote teaching, on average learning in the Western Balkans would drop by an estimated 16 PISA points. In the same scenario but with remote teaching in place, and it is assumed that remote teaching is not as effective as face-to-face teaching, on average learning drops by about

20 Level 2 is the baseline, the level of proficiency at which students begin to demonstrate the competencies that will enable them to participate effectively later in life as continuing students, workers and citizens, OECD 2017.

21 Shores, K. and M. Steinberg. 2017. “The Impact of the Great Recession on Student Achievement: Evidence from Population Data.” https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3026151.

22 Thamnanajit, K. 2020. “The Impacts Of Natural Disaster On Student Achievement: Evidence From Severe Floods in Thailand.” *The Journal of Developing Areas* 54(4): 129-143.

23 Cooper, Harris, Barbara Nye, Kelly Charlton, James Lindsay, and Scott Greathouse. 1996. “The Effects of Summer Vacation on Achievement Test Scores: A Narrative and Meta-Analytic Review.” *Summer Vacation*, 42, pages.

24 Alexander, Karl, Sarah Pitcock, and Matthew C. Boulay. 2016. *The Summer Slide: What We Know and Can Do About Summer Learning Loss*. Teachers College Press.

25 Reading scores are used for this analysis because that was the main subject for PISA 2018.

Box 2. Estimating the Impact of COVID-19-Induced School Closures on Learning Loss*

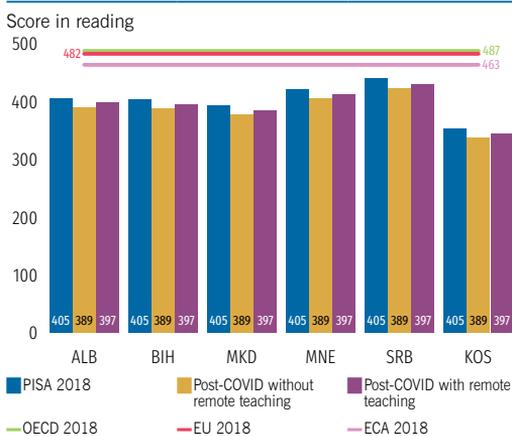
The methodology for estimating learning loss is based on four assumptions: (1) learning gains are linear throughout the school year; (2) the PISA household asset ownership database provide a reasonable approximation of access to remote modes of instruction; (3) remote modes of instruction are not as effective as face-to-face classroom instruction, and (4) their effectiveness varies by student socioeconomic status. On average, students gain about 40 PISA points for every year of schooling. These numbers are used to estimate learning loss in two scenarios: (1) all schools are closed, and no remote options are offered; and (2) a range of teaching modalities are offered with the possibility that some students are still in schools and the others benefit from remote teaching.

Because there are several simplifying assumptions made in this approach, the estimates that emerge are likely to be a lower bound of the true learning loss. This is especially true if job loss and resulting lower incomes cause more students to go hungry or households to be in stress—both factors known to limit learning.

* Azevedo, Geven, Hasan, Iqbal (Forthcoming), *Estimating the Impact of COVID-19-Induced School Closures on Learning Outcomes, 2020.*

9 PISA points in the short term (Figure 4). For Kosovo, this would mean push the country’s reading score below its 2015 level (347 PISA points), and for Albania the reading score will drop close to its 2012 level. These estimates are likely to be a lower bound of the true learning loss due to various simplifying assumptions being made in this approach, though the model does not account for learning recovery measures discussed in Section 4.

Figure 4. Estimated Impact on PISA Scores due to COVID-19, with Four-Month School Closures

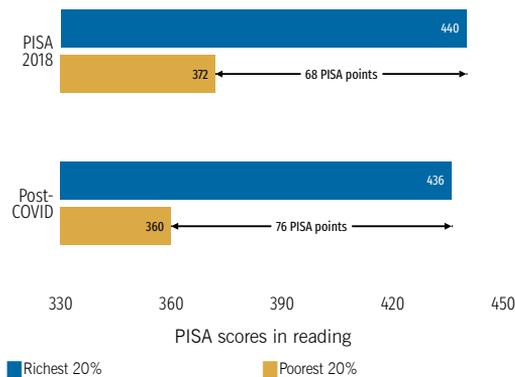


Source: PISA 2018 data and World Bank staff calculations.

School closures will widen already large learning inequality. The achievement gap between the poorest and richest students, which already ranges from 1.5 years of schooling in Albania, BiH, and Kosovo (66 PISA points) to over 2 years in North Macedonia (90 PISA points) will increase further since students from poorer backgrounds are less likely to benefit from remote learning modes. If schools remain closed through June, the estimated regional average learning gap between students in the top income quintile and those in the lowest is expected to increase from over 1.5 years schooling (68 PISA points) to almost 2 years (76 PISA points) (Figure 5).

Many students may fall back into functional illiteracy. All Western Balkan countries have a very high share (average 53 percent) of students below basic proficiency, compared to about 23 percent in OECD countries. Figure 6 shows by how much the average learning loss discussed above can affect the share of learners that fall below proficiency Level 2, considered as the threshold for functional literacy. Assuming that students who have lower scores will have higher

Figure 5. A Learning Gap Between Poorest and Richest, Four-Month School Closure, Western Balkan Average



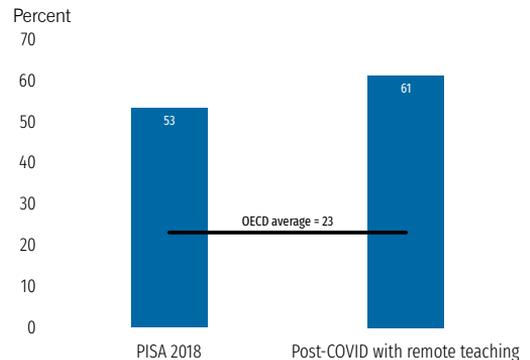
Source: PISA 2018 data, World Bank staff calculations.

Note: 40 points in PISA scale ~ 1 year of schooling. ESCS: Economic, Social, Cultural Status.

learning loss, the average number of students performing below basic proficiency in reading may increase from the current 53 percent to 61 percent. The policy implications of this result are significant: it implies that when schools reopen, more students might not meet the minimum expected level of proficiency for their age.

Protracted school closures are likely to push up school dropouts, particularly for disadvantaged students nearing education transition points. Extensive research on dropout risks highlights both supply-side issues related to school conditions and demand-side issues related to student personal characteristics and home conditions. *The main school-related risk factors* are poor attendance and absenteeism management systems, little academic and learning support for low achievers, a poor school climate, low student participation in school governance, and limited parental engagement. *The main student- and household-related risk factors* are being over-age relative to peers, illness, behavioral problems, poor academic

Figure 6. Increase in Students below Basic Proficiency, Four-Month School Closure, Western Balkans Average



Source: PISA 2018 data, World Bank staff calculations.

achievement, low socioeconomic status, large-families, and single-parent households.²⁶ Struggling students may be less interested in going back to school because they feel they will not be able to catch up.²⁷ The widespread unemployment and income loss from COVID-19 will severely test household ability to pay school fees. Budget constraints may cause the poorest households to keep children out of school even when schools reopen. All school-related risk factors are intensified in the current situation where students learn remotely outside the typical school environment for weeks and months, putting more pressure on their home environments, particularly in disadvantaged households.

Long-term school closures are also likely to have differential impacts on boys and girls.

Because closures will increase care-related tasks, girls will often be more affected than boys, which will affect their ability to stay engaged in

²⁶ World Bank (2019); UNICEF (2017); UNICEF (2016).

²⁷ World Bank, *The COVID-19 pandemic: Shocks to Education and Policy Responses* (version as of April 12, 2020).

education in the longer term. However, school dropout pressures are likely to have more impact on boys, who tend to be more pressured to contribute to family income, particularly as economic conditions tighten. This could lead to boys to drop out permanently, particularly those in upper secondary.²⁸

What education policy responses can countries use to mitigate the impact of COVID-19?²⁹

The COVID-19 pandemic has already had profound impact on education and will exacerbate pre-existing learning issues and inequities in the region. Minimizing the potential negative impacts requires aggressive policy responses, and Western Balkan countries have already begun the mitigation efforts. While how the pandemic will evolve is unknown, it is possible that schools in the region will not reopen until the next academic year, and that localized disruptions to education will continue into that academic year, leading to staggered and partial reopening of schools. Education systems must then continue responding to the disruption while preventing and minimizing learning loss and safeguarding equity and inclusion. However, there are major policy responses governments could consider during the *coping phase*, while schools remain closed, and then in the *managing continuity phase* of staggered school openings or fewer restrictions on mobility. Also identified are mid-term policies to build resilience and mitigate human

capital loss during a post-COVID-19 recovery stage when schools are open.

What to Do in the Coping Phase

Continue to deliver remote learning and mitigate learning loss as equitably as possible.

As all countries aggressively pursue efforts to deliver multimodal³⁰ remote learning, equity considerations should be prioritized. Students from poorer backgrounds have less access to Internet connections and to a computer at home, and therefore fewer opportunities to engage in more interactive learning. To prevent further inequities and reduce the dropout risk, countries could consider providing these countries with access to the Internet and digital devices. North Macedonia is already providing Internet access to poorer households. Closing the digital gap would help address issues arising while schools remain closed and in future intermittent lockdowns, and thus build system resilience to respond to similar situations should school closures continue into the next academic year.

Strengthen current support to teachers and parents so they can help children to stay engaged in school.

Governments in the region have issued guidance to teachers on remote and online instruction approaches. As school closures continue, sustaining these efforts and supporting teachers is key. For example, in other EU and North American countries, school systems are offering teachers practice sessions for online classes, reallocating workloads, and coordinating across teachers to reduce burdens; creating content for teachers

28 World Bank, Gender Related Inequalities emerging from COVID-19, Poverty and Equity Global practice (April 6, 2020 draft).

29 This section draws on (1) World Bank, The COVID-19 pandemic: Shocks to Education and Policy Responses 2020; (2) World Bank, Guidance Note: Remote Learning and COVID-19 (April 7, 2020); and (3) Education Response Note to COVID-19 in Europe and Central Asia (updated on April 13, 2020).

30 A multimodal approach implies combining creatively the use of radio/TV, SMS and social media, online instruction, and printed materials to reach everyone, even those without connectivity.

on how to deliver remote learning, running live mentoring and group sharing sessions, and partnering with software providers. Similarly, support to parents with information and guidance³¹ is critical to maximize their critical role in supporting learning when schools are closed. This is especially true for younger children³², lower-performing students, and those with special needs.

Adjust the national assessment system to ensure a smoother transition between grades and cycles. All countries in the region are reviewing options to address this issue, especially related to high-stakes exams (such as the high school completion test). Internationally the response has varied. Many countries have chosen to cancel or postpone national examinations for the school year to ensure a smooth transition for all students, especially for those at risk of dropping out.³³ Other countries are introducing a modified format for examinations. While there are several options to consider, it is important that solutions be tailored to each country and take into account the purpose of the exam. For example, to facilitate decisions for class transitions, in-class formative assessments carried out by the teacher could be used to make decisions. In these cases, teachers should be given clear guidance to ensure that students assessments follow common guidelines. In making these decisions, it is particularly important to focus attention on students who need to apply into the next level of education in

school years 2019/2020 and 2020/2021. The transition between levels will also require more learning support in the following school year, provision of summer school, or other types of remedial support.

When schools reopen, careful policy considerations and review of experiences of countries that have already reopened schools is important. Where schools have reopened, critical adjustments to prevent the spread of the virus have been organizing learning in smaller class sizes or sub-groups, limited movement around the school, sequencing of school breaks, and enhanced hygiene protocols for staff and children. For example, in Denmark, which reopened primary schools, classes are divided into sub groups; children each have their own desks placed about 2 meters apart (two yards); teachers work with the same group throughout the day and do not switch; children play only with kids from their class, and only in small groups; teachers do not gather in the staff room; and everyone is required to wash their hands at least once an hour during the six hours of school. These countries have prioritized different age group to return to schools as they reopen. Although the majority have reopened schools for younger cohorts, Austria as of early May 2020 has prioritized students preparing for high-stakes exams. Overall, decisions on the timing of school reopenings should be guided by local public health considerations and should be context-specific. The Framework for Reopening Schools³⁴ provides a detailed overview of timing and approach considerations.

31 Several resources available online can be adapted. For example, the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) has compiled a list of learning resources in several languages to help guide parents. <https://inee.org/resources/home-learning-support-parents-and-guardians>.

32 It will be critical to support parents in providing early stimulation, learning support, and opportunities for children to learn through play to ensure that they will be ready for learning.

33 High-stakes school exams during COVID-19 (Coronavirus): What is the best approach? <https://bit.ly/2xFslq0>.

34 <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/625501588259700561/Framework-for-Reopening-Schools-APRIL27.pdf>.

Managing continuity and building resilience

Provide summer school programs and other accelerated learning programs to compensate students for learning loss, especially those at risk of falling behind. When the restrictions on movements are lifted, there will be a need to accelerate teaching and learning as systems prepare to reopen schools. Summer school programs can be used as an opportunity to target the most disadvantaged students. Governments could consider using formative assessments to assess learning lags and help orient schools on where to direct individualized remedial support, tutoring, or counseling. Once schools reopen, there will be a need to extend the learning day so that all students can catch up with learning loss, especially those who fall behind. Teaching should take place at the right post-COVID-19 level; it will be critical to conduct diagnostic formative assessments to assess learning losses, focus on learning recovery, and use the results of formative assessments to inform teaching and better respond to student learning needs, and meet urgent needs like foundational skills and preparation for standard exams.

Ensure adequate financing to support new recovery needs, especially for disadvantaged students, once schools open. Reenrollment drives and campaigns may be necessary to bring students back to school, and enhanced measures will be required to deal with the learning lost while schools were closed. Since COVID-19 is likely to have differential impacts on girls and boys, *financial incentives* to ensure that girls, or boys, depending on the context, return to school when institutions reopen. Such incentives as conditional cash transfers and scholarships must be identified ahead of time. Supply-side programs delivered through the schools will in some cases be the

most efficient way to cushion the crisis. These might include *block grants to schools* to ease financial constraints that negatively affect quality of learning. They could be awarded to public schools have a higher share of students from disadvantaged background, Roma communities, or other forms of vulnerability.

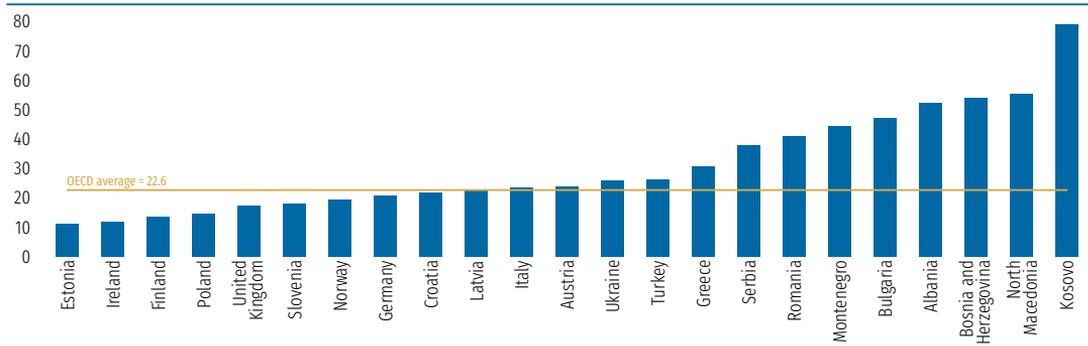
Safeguard and enhance education financing to alleviate and prevent further loss in learning and sustain improvements. Experience from past recessions shows that as government budgets are hit, so is per-capita student spending. To varying degrees, education systems in the Western Balkans need to spend more efficiently, but some, like Albania and Kosovo, also need to invest more in their systems. Providing an education budget that is adequate to ensure minimum conditions to deal with additional post-COVID-19 costs will be critical to ensure that students catch up and further inequalities are prevented. At the same time, countries could reevaluate current school financing, including funding formulas to improve efficiency, and complementary financing to compensate for preponderant numbers of vulnerable students. It is important to narrow the gap between urban and rural inequities that are prevalent throughout the region.

The crisis could create opportunities for reforms that will improve the performance of education and build resilience over the medium term. As countries develop crisis-recovery measures to return the system back to scale, it will be critical to give priority to strategies that have promise for long-term improvements. The situation also offers an opportunity to introduce innovations that are sustainable in the long term. Some possibilities are (1) enhancing capacities for distance

learning at scale and digitization of education to increase both efficiency and system resilience to future shocks; (2) efficient use of technologies to introduce models that blend remote learning and other uses of technology with teacher-led instruction; (3) roll out training programs to enhance the digital and distance learning skills of teachers; (4) enhance early childhood education and care services, especially for disadvantaged children, to better prepare them for school, especially since emphasis on early childhood education may have declined as parents prioritized the learning of older children; and (5) measure efficiency in the education system and increase the quality of management data.

Annex 1.

Students Scoring Below Minimum Literacy Level, PISA 2018



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You and me

by Tanja Burzanovic (Montenegro)

Dr. Tatjana Burzanovic has a wide experience in the fields of graphic design, graphics in architecture, interior design. She has worked as an art editor, interior designer and graphic designer at various levels. Many of her art exhibitions have taken place at different places. She has received many awards for her arts and literary works. She has published a book with a title *The Interrelation between Art Worlds*, with the support from the Embassy of India for Austria and Montenegro in Vienna. Her artistic philosophy includes displaying of interrelationship between art worlds (spatial and temporal arts). The artist thus meditates between nature and the spirits and yet stems from the absolute idea and serves the goal of realization of absolute spirit. 'Grasping the meaning through the form' is a task of the art set by a contemporary thinker to demonstrate that building forms and creating sense are two simultaneous, intertwined, and absolutely inseparable processes in Arts. Without that recognition it is not possible to take any further step in investigating the nature of art and literature. She believes that art is a way to search the truth. Art is inseparable from searching the truth.

People forge ideas, people mold dreams, and people create art. To connect local artists to a broader audience, the cover of this report and following editions will feature art from the Western Balkan countries.