

# COPING WITH COVID-19

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

5 May 2020

# OVERVIEW

## Highlights

The lockdown continues in most countries of the EU neighbourhood and Central Asia. In Belarus, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan schools remained open after extended spring breaks. In Albania, Egypt, Israel, Jordan and Tunisia, plans are in place for the start of phase two, which, in some countries includes a return to school, extension of the school year, or measures to ensure final examinations. Most countries, however, have confirmed there will be no return to school this year, and are putting in place detailed measures for final exams, as well as preparing scenarios for the new school year.

Most countries have moved beyond the crisis management phase, except Belarus, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, where plans are only now being made to manage a possible outbreak affecting the opening of schools. In all other countries, we can see a clear trajectory and common challenges.

In a first phase, countries reacted, with a faster response in countries, such as Azerbaijan, Israel, Montenegro and Turkey, where a digital strategy and clear guidelines were already in place and could provide a basis for further action. Other countries, such as Egypt, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, or Uzbekistan, have taken 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 both through TV 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 emergency:

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 are still in the process of making decisions about the closure of the school year, final exams and certification, as well as preparing for 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.

In this stage, there are three critical issues:

1. Ensuring that scenarios on future education are developed, building on the lessons learned during the emergency, 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. Re-establishing international cooperation, including crowdsourcing and sharing of resources, methods, and approaches, to ensure continuous exchanges between global and local education and training.

As the emergency is subsiding as regards general education, issues remain for vocational and adult training. The interruption of economic activity and its foreseeable impact on the labour market, employment opportunities and social welfare, will force countries to look beyond schooling. 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 are being taken in many 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.
- **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, 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 <sup>1</sup> Montenegro North Macedonia Serbia Turkey	Armenia Azerbaijan Belarus Georgia Moldova Ukraine Russia	Algeria Egypt Israel Lebanon Palestine <sup>2</sup> 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 some providers will be allowed to open from 4 May, if they can ensure social distancing. 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 defined. 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.

Provision of general education is being delivered centrally, while in most countries vocational training in the crisis situation 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-

<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>2</sup> 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

April, the number of live lessons conducted on the [Turkish EBA platform](#) was over 650,000. Furthermore, using artificial intelligence, Turkey has enabled personalised learning online for students of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades (over 1 million students are enrolled).

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 lifelong guidance response in the emergency 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. 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 these countries training for online assessment has also started, in order to help decision making around the organisation of final examinations and certification of learning achievements. In Serbia, the challenge of the emergency 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](#) of the country.

## 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 prolonged spring break, with some measures to ensure social distancing and avoid mass gatherings at universities. Countries in the region have quickly organised their response to the emergency, issuing state orders with clear measures, and while Armenia and Ukraine have already issued specific decrees waiving final exams for the year 2019-20, in other countries actions are under way to prepare and provide guidance for final examinations and certification. In most countries, there are specific platforms and services focusing on vocational training, building on existing strategies and pilot projects. [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 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. Following the stabilisation of the provision of general education and general vocational subjects, the Ministry of Education is now addressing the specific needs of vocational training providers and designing specific measures. In Moldova, the government has made progress in the preparation of online support to the 2020 exams. 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.

In the whole region, peer learning is being promoted amongst providers. In addition, 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 initiative [Edcamp](#) concluded, with recommendations on the future of education after the COVID-19 emergency. 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 emergency, with plans for implementing final face-to-face exams in Egypt, under specific new guidelines developed in May, and adopting a plan for blended learning and new guidelines for classroom-based education in Israel, where schools will start reopening gradually from 3rd May. In Tunisia and Jordan, plans are being made to ensure the closure of school year. In the region, the emergency response has been variable, with Egypt and Israel being the two countries with a more organised plan and speedier implementation, and all countries are engaging with the private sector and civil society organisations to ensure access and involvement of all students.

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 baccalauréat-level students. They are expected to resume their classes by the end of May and take the exams in July.

In Lebanon, despite the difficult socio-economic situation, which already existed before the COVID-19 emergency, 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.

In Egypt, where management of the emergency 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-emergency 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 the 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. Decisions are being formed on the final examinations, and the plan for reopening schools. The 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 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 reopen as of 3 May, with the implementation of an articulated plan that will allow for 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 due in particular to the number of hours of interaction.

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](#).

## Central Asia

In Central Asia, the outbreak of the emergency coincided with spring holidays, which ended on 6-8 April. The spring break allowed countries in the region to prepare their response. Schools have resumed normal operation in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, with medical checks and other health precautions in place. An overview of regional responses from the voice of teachers is available [here \(in Russian\)](#). Tajikistan is nevertheless preparing an emergency plan, should COVID-19 cases impact on the decision to keep schools open. These plans include the development of digital and TV classes under internationally supported programmes, which will reinforce future delivery also beyond the emergency. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan used the break to get ready to deliver distance and online learning. In [Uzbekistan](#), the government has involved honourable 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 emergency by organising several education portals covering multiple language needs and providing also sign language support for resources available.

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. Megacom will make an online platform available. A key role is played by its six Competence Centres (Tsentry 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 have 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. A special report on Kazakhstan is available [here \(in Russian\)](#).

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