

# Documentation of Education Response in Türkiye during the COVID-19 Pandemic and its Effect on Children's Access to and Retention in Education

## Executive Summary

January 2023



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a significant period of disruption in face-to-face education, and this in return affected the education outcomes of children.**

To contain the spread of the virus, the schools were closed in countries around the world starting in February 2020. Due to the disruptions in face-to-face education, millions of children are predicted to experience learning losses and also lose on their lifetime earnings at the rate of 14% of global GDP today.<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> Evidence from learning assessments from countries including Mexico, Russia, Pakistan and South Africa and also global microsimulations of learning outcomes show important learning losses for children in different grades.<sup>3</sup>

**Türkiye has been one of the countries with longer durations of school closures compared to other countries.**

In 2020 and 2021, in Türkiye, schools were fully or partially closed for 49 weeks, placing Türkiye in the top 30% of countries globally, with the longest duration of school closures. The number of instruction days schools were “fully closed” or “partially open” was much higher (between 62 and 84 days longer) in Türkiye for all education levels compared to OECD averages as well.<sup>4</sup> The disruption in face-to-face education has been ended with the first semester of the 2021-2022 academic year, which continued face-to-face without any interruptions in all school levels.<sup>5</sup>

**Turkish Government implemented various measures to enable continuous access to education.**

Türkiye responded swiftly to COVID-19 outbreak by moving from face-to-face education to remote education and delivering classes and educational content via EBA TV and EBA Online Platform. The capacity of the online platform was also improved in the process to serve more children simultaneously. EBA Support Centers and Mobile Support Centres were established to facilitate the access of students with limited or no digital resources in their households. Tablets with embedded internet were distributed to students in need. International and national NGOs launched programmes to support the transition to online education and complement the central government’s emergency responses to the COVID-19 pandemic by supplying educational materials, hygiene kits and other kinds of supplementary resources to children and families in need.

**Despite the efforts of education stakeholders, children, teachers, and schools faced many ongoing challenges in the process.**

Access to the internet, digital devices, and educational platforms were the primary barriers to children’s retention in education during the COVID-19 pandemic in Türkiye. Children living in rural areas, children from disadvantaged households and refugee children were especially at risk of educational losses during the pandemic. Overbearing

<sup>1</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2021). Pandemic-related disruptions to schooling and impacts on learning proficiency indicators: A focus on early grades. Montreal: UNESCO-UIS.

<sup>2</sup> The World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF (2021). The State of the Global Education Crisis: A Path to Recovery. Washington D.C., Paris, New York: The World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF.

<sup>3</sup> The World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF (2021). The State of the Global Education Crisis: A Path to Recovery. Washington D.C., Paris, New York: The World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF.

<sup>4</sup> OECD. (2021). The State of Global Education: 18 Months into the Pandemic, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1a23bb23-en>.

<sup>5</sup> TEDMEM. (2022). 2021 eğitim değerlendirme raporu (TEDMEM Değerlendirme Dizisi 8). Ankara: Türk Eğitim Derneği.

challenges experienced by children, who had limited means to continue their education during the pandemic included not having access to basic needs at home, having problems with accessing stable internet and/or digital devices available to their personal use, having parents with financial instability or unemployment risk, not having a supportive home learning environment or having parents struggling with the official language for education.

**Pre-pandemic, certain household and individual characteristics of children were already associated with worse education outcomes.** Socio-economic status of the households of the children explained a certain amount of the variation in learning scores of the children, and children with better home learning environment achieved better results in global assessments compared to children with home learning environments of poorer quality, pre-pandemic.<sup>6</sup> Focusing on the home learning environment of children using DHS 2018, it was observed that Turkish children but especially Syrian children entered the crisis with considerable gaps in having a supportive home learning environment. These gaps ranged from the necessary infrastructure to access remote learning to adequate space to study at home and to quality adult interaction. For all child subgroups, even the children living in the wealthiest 20% of the Syrian population, the average HLEQI (Home Learning Environment Quality Index) is lower with 48.1 than the Turkish average of 61.7 (out of 100). Hence Syrian children overall, and Turkish children especially living in the East and who are in the bottom 20% of the population in terms of household assets have entered the pandemic with larger gaps in terms of having a supportive home learning environment that would be instrumental during remote learning.

**Gaps in the home learning environment could lead to considerable learning losses for children, according to the study estimations.** The analysis results using PISA 2018 suggest that the average score is 5.6% lower in math, 3.9% lower in reading and 4.2% lower in science compared to the counterfactual outcome (i.e. what could have happened if the pandemic did not occur). The inequalities among children with respect to learning outcomes is also predicted to rise given the variance in the students' home learning environment quality. Students living in the poorest households, students with no internet or those with parents with low levels of education, students speaking languages other than Turkish, living in villages or small towns are predicted to have experienced significant learning losses, on average, compared to their counterfactual scores. Students that are studying in certain types of schools such as multi-programme high schools, imam and preacher high schools, and vocational and technical high schools are also predicted to have larger learning losses in general as a result of the pandemic. Students studying in public schools are on average predicted to have learning losses, twice as high as students studying in private schools. The learning score gaps between low and high achievers are also expected to rise since students who initially had lower scores are predicted to have larger learning losses on average, while those with higher scores initially are expected to have much smaller learning losses, compared the counterfactual outcomes.

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<sup>6</sup> OECD (2019). Results from PISA 2018 Turkey Country Note. Accessed from: [https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018\\_CN\\_TUR.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_TUR.pdf)

TEDMEM. (2021). Türkiye'nin TIMSS 2019 performansı üzerine değerlendirme ve öneriler (TEDMEM Analiz Dizisi 8).Ankara: TEDMEM

**The pandemic has also resulted in some level of drop-out for children and also an increase in the risk of child labour, particularly for refugee children.** Looking at the official statistics, decreases in the net enrolment rates can be seen at the rates between 2.2% and 3.8% for 14-17 year olds when the same group of children is followed through in between 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years.<sup>7</sup> The analysis results also suggest that children at risk of school drop out and child labour are found to be at the 14-17 year old age group for Turkish children, whereas the children in younger age groups were also found to be at risk, though at a lower rate, for the Syrian population. Among the 14-17 year old Turkish children, children living in poor households, households with less-educated adults and with more children are at risk of drop out and also at risk of participating in child labour. For Syrian children, the risks are higher when they are in these groups, but the risks of drop-out and child labour also exist for younger age groups as well.

**Teachers and schools also experienced many challenges during the pandemic.** Teachers were unprepared for teaching online and struggled to transition to online education. Before the pandemic, many teachers had no experience with using the digital devices or materials for teaching online. Although the professional training programmes implemented by the central government targeted this problem, the number of teachers that needed professional support was larger than the programmes could respond to in a limited timeframe. Some teachers did not have access to digital equipment for their personal or professional use. On many occasions, these problems were dealt by teachers via alternative solutions such as using accessible devices (e.g., phones) and delivering classes on frequently used platforms (e.g., Whatsapp), or teaching face-to-face in outdoor public spaces or at homes. This being said, there are still ongoing needs on the professional support for the teachers.

**Challenges experienced during the pandemic point out to remaining gaps that could be addressed with policies and programmes.** Improving internet infrastructure in rural areas and expanding the digital device support until every child has access to digital learning is vital and is one of the most pressing issues. The capacity of the EBA platform should also continuously be extended to serve more children at the same time and also to cover early childhood education.

**Apart from ensuring access to digital infrastructure, improving the home learning environment of children, measuring and addressing learning losses and detecting and supporting children at-risk of drop out are other necessary measures.** Improving academic monitoring and evaluation of students across K-12 education and detecting educationally at-risk children at an earlier stage to provide support programmes is necessary. Policies and programmes could also be devised to address the inequalities in learning outcomes that arise during the pandemic, and different programmes could be designed for the specifically disadvantaged areas like villages and small towns and specific school types. Gaps in the home learning environment of children could be addressed through expanding digital training programmes and family support services across the country. Children at risk of drop out and child labour could be identified and supported by extending social services and setting up free school meal programmes for children in need.

<sup>7</sup> ERG. (2021). Eğitim İzleme Raporu 2021: Öğrenciler ve Eğitime Erişim. İstanbul: ERG



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