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COVID-19 Analytical Snapshot #60: Disruptions to migrants' education

Understanding the migration & mobility implications of COVID-19

These COVID-19 Analytical Snapshots are designed to capture the latest information and analysis in a fast-moving environment. Topics will be repeated from time to time as analysis develops. If you have an item to include, please email us at research@iom.int.

New research & analysis on migrants' education and COVID-19

What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on immigrants and their children? by OECD

Global Education Monitoring Report 2020 by UNESCO

Four ways refugees have kept their education going during lockdown by Filippo Grandi

A "no-win" situation

A decision to return to classes during a pandemic places all stakeholders—students, parents, teachers, supporting school staff—in a no-win position.

⇒ School closures lead to learning loss which could affect a generation. Based on pre-pandemic attendance data, noticeable losses in math and reading are inevitable. Without in-person instructional accommodations, students with learning disabilities face particular obstacles.

⇒ On the other hand, while data suggest schools are not the significant virus hotspots many feared, every reopening runs the risk of an outbreak.

Migrant adolescent students face additional trade-offs. In some cases, the pressure to work during the pandemic to relieve a household's economic hardship can lead to diminished class engagement.

Education, interrupted

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures have disrupted the educational programs of an estimated 826 million students globally. While schools have reopened in some countries—an update to the worldwide closures reported in Analytical Snapshot #17—school systems throughout Africa, the Americas, and parts of Asia remain closed or only partially open.
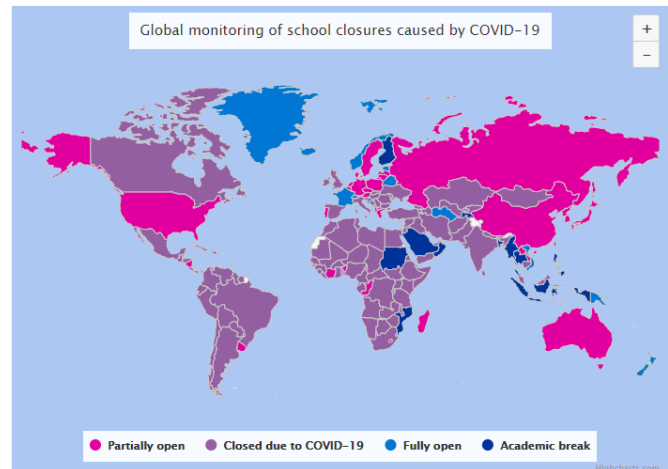
To access the interactive UNESCO map, click here.

For migrant students, school closures further exacerbate inequalities in education, both in cities and in rural areas. According to a recent policy report from the OECD, students from migrant families enter the classroom with greater socio-economic disadvantages than native-born families. Migrant students may lose language learning opportunities and skills in foundational areas may regress. For example, a recent study of educational outcomes in one border city of Colombia found that Venezuelan students are struggling to retain literacy and numeracy skills due to school closures.

Sustaining girls' education during a pandemic

In late June, the Malala Fund estimated that up to 10 million more girls may no longer be in school by the end of the pandemic, with migrants and refugees most vulnerable to chronic absenteeism. Based on analysis of ten refugee-receiving countries which publish gender-disaggregated data, about half of all girls were not expected to return to classes. Among its recommendations to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, the Malala Fund and other stakeholders have emphasized the importance of gender-sensitive curricula and the continued financial support for schools and educational initiatives in disadvantaged communities.
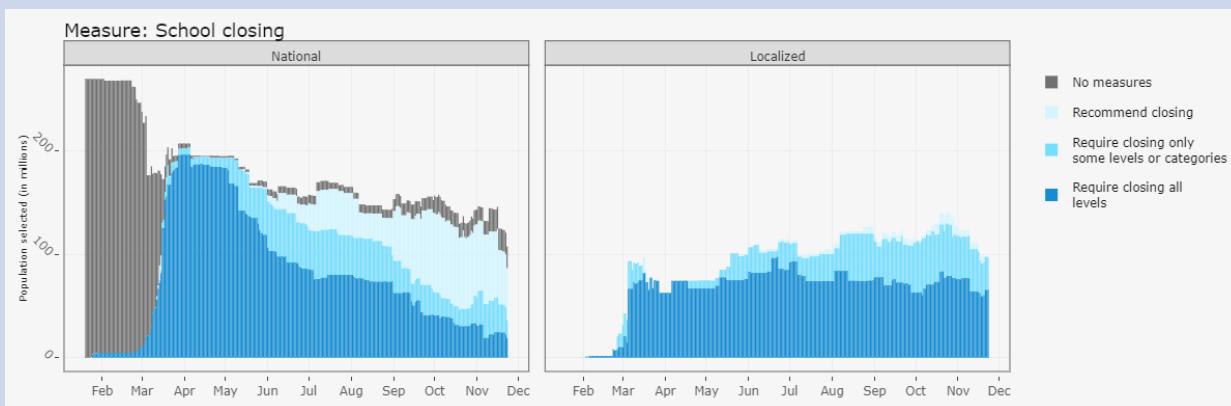
Measuring the impact of the disruption

In response to the pandemic, various cities have implemented a range of policies to meet the inclusion challenges faced by migrants in the wake of school closures. Based on preliminary evidence, efforts have met with mixed success.

⇒ A report from the OECD suggests that the negative impacts of school closures might most significantly affect smaller children in migrant families.

⇒ In answers to a survey conducted by a civil-society coalition in San Diego, respondents reiterated the challenges to assisting their students on remote-learning classwork and navigating the technology issues of online learning.

⇒ A UNHCR survey found that 48% of refugees in Turkey have struggled to access online education.

Measure: School closing

National	Localized

Legend:
- No measures
- Recommend closing
- Require closing only some levels or categories
- Require closing all levels

International migrants affected by school closures (in millions). Click here for more details. *Source: UNICEF*

Tech solutions to remote learning

With at least 100 million international migrant students facing some degree of school closure since mid-May 2020, students have had to rely on online-based educational practices to continue learning. Unfortunately, internet access and the incorporation of technology can present unique challenges for migrants and their families, both in terms of access and in terms of effectiveness. Notably, UNICEF and the International Telecommunications Union have announced GIGA, a project aiming to "connect every school to the Internet and every young person to information, opportunity and choice."