



European Expert Network
on Economics of Education

The impact of COVID-19 on the education of disadvantaged children and the socio-economic consequences thereof

NESET Analytical Report, 2022
Summary

This report responds to the need among EU and national-level stakeholders to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the learning progress of disadvantaged children, and how the educational inequality that has increased during the pandemic can be reduced and mitigated over the coming years. The report looks at both the current widening gap in learning progress between disadvantaged children and their peers, as well as the impact this may have on their social and economic opportunities in the future. As a result, the report provides both short- and medium-term recommendations to address these disruptions to the learning progress, as well as long-term recommendations to reduce social and economic inequality in the future.

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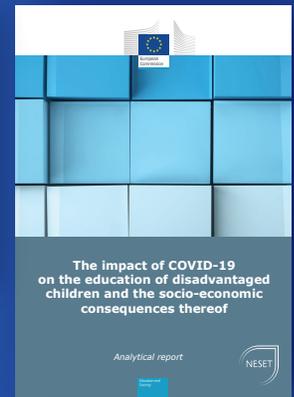
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ABOUT NESET

NESET is an advisory network of experts working on the social dimension of education and training, set up at the initiative of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture (DG EAC).

The Network is one of the seven key knowledge providers that contribute evidence-based advice to DG EAC. NESET provides reliable, independent and rigorous scientific support, country-specific expertise and advice to the European Commission in relation to equity and social aspects at all levels of education and training. NESET acts as a knowledge broker, bridging the gap between EU policy coordination and the academic world.

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If you are a researcher into the social dimension of education and training and would like to be included in the NESET database of experts, simply complete a short online form and **open yourself to new research opportunities!**

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ABOUT EENEE

EENEE is an advisory network of experts working on economics of education and training. The establishment of the network was initiated by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture and is funded by the Erasmus+ Programme.

EENEE has a mission to become a leading knowledge broker, advisor and knowledge disseminator in the economics of education and training. The Network works with high-profile experts in the field, covering a variety of topics on economics of education, and aims to contribute to lasting positive policy changes that ensure high-quality education and training for all.

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NESET AND EENEE COORDINATION

NESET and EENEE networks are both coordinated by PPMI, a leading European research and policy analysis centre. PPMI began coordinating NESET in January 2015, and took over the coordination of EENEE in 2021.

The impact of COVID-19 on the education of disadvantaged children and the socio-economic consequences thereof



Context

Full and partial school closures, and the introduction of full-time distance learning during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, have been an unforeseen and unexpected phenomenon in Europe. Despite existing transformations towards digitalisation and digital tools in education, the pandemic has demonstrated that curricula, pedagogies and the capacities of actors in education were insufficiently prepared for an abrupt, unplanned and total switch to remote education.

Key findings

Three groups of disadvantaged children stand out in the study, in terms of the disproportionate disruption to their learning progress during the first year of COVID-19.



The technological features and tools of existing education platforms can render them inaccessible for **children with disabilities and SEN in mainstream education**. Insufficient personal support was given by teachers to children with special needs, mostly due to teachers' increased workload during the pandemic.



The vulnerability of **children at risk, from poorer socio-economic backgrounds**, relates to insufficient support at home (in terms of direct support for their learning, as well as insufficient learning resources and learning environment, and relates to their parents' personal and academic backgrounds).



Children with migrant backgrounds often faced difficulties in accessing online learning structures, due to limited linguistic and technological skills as well as a lack of access to technological devices and the internet. Refugees in reception centres and refugees on the move were severely affected by these barriers, as were Roma learners. Available virtual teaching tools are not fully suited to the needs of non-native speakers and their parents.

In the longer term, gaps in learning progress can affect how children progress in their adult lives. Economically, disruptions in learning will affect salaries, job opportunities and their general position in the labour market. Experiences during school closures also caused other challenges that have impacted their **quality of life** and affected **societal cohesion**. Namely, connections have been found between education achievement and levels of health, civic participation and social mobility.

To mitigate disruptions and learning loss, and alleviate the long-term socio-economic consequences of the pandemic, governments and education stakeholders should implement a combination of short-term and long-term measures.

Short and medium-term

Use assessments to determine the widening of inequalities in achievement.

Consult with teachers, school staff and relevant stakeholder groups regarding the most suitable approaches to enable specific groups of children to catch up on their learning.

Design support mechanisms for teachers, parents and other stakeholders to enable them to provide individualised support for disadvantaged children.

Create extensive 'lessons learned' sessions including policy makers and stakeholders, for the purpose of developing education risk plans and strategies.

Implement digital skills training for educators, learners and parents on an ongoing basis, to ensure they remain up to date and prepared for digital learning.

Target non-school factors of vulnerability, revealed in this report, that negatively impact education, such as the living conditions of migrants, refugees, minorities and disadvantaged learners, and enhance collaboration with parents and caregivers.

Long term

Review current lifelong learning and adult learning strategies, which need to take account of current lower education achievement.

Strengthen lifelong learning and adult learning offers to address these gaps over the coming decades.

Develop joint strategies with educators, companies and vocational training providers to facilitate the transition to tertiary education.

Analyse in further detail the advantages, good practices and resilience factors such as the development of independent learning strategies, intensified family time, different approaches to online learning, and other strategies.

Educators, as well as governments, should enhance their focus on skills training and the recognition of skills and short-term learning opportunities. The talents of children and young adults must be recognised beyond school-level achievement.

Foster collaboration at all levels – local, regional, national, and international – with regard to good practices in, and preparedness for, responses to changed conditions, as well as long-term strategies for inclusive learning and teaching.