



# Education Assessment Summary

## About the assessment

Lead UN agencies:	UNICEF and UNESCO
In partnership with:	15 education authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina
Sector:	Education
Period covered:	Mid-March 2020 – end of June 2020
Final report released:	August 2020
Geographical coverage:	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Funding sources:	UNICEF and UNESCO



## REDUCING THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH'S LEARNING IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: RAPID SITUATION AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT- EDUCATION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, PHASE II

### Background

Globally, the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has disrupted education for 1.6 billion children and youth, threatening to further exacerbate the existing learning crisis. While the evidence to measure the effect of school closures on the risk of the virus transmission is still scarce, there is significant evidence on the adverse effects of school closures on children's and youth's learning, wellbeing and safety. Children and youth attending different levels of education are at risk of receiving education of not adequate quality. School closures can further widen equity gaps, considering the increased risk of vulnerable groups of children and youth for dropping out of education. Children with disabilities, children from ethnic minorities, children living in poverty and children on the move can be disproportionately deprived of access to education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

School closures can have a disproportionate negative effect particularly on girls and women, as they are more vulnerable to multiple types of deprivation and abuse, such as domestic violence, transactional sex and early and forced marriages. A greater share of childcare for women due to school closures can contribute to higher earning gaps, and consequentially widen gender inequality<sup>1</sup>.

Approximately 500,000 children and youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) were affected by country-wide closures of all education institutions since March 2020. Considering the current epidemiological situation of COVID-19 in BiH and worldwide, significant disruptions in education can be expected in the 2021-2022 school year. Education authorities in the country will need to continue adapting to the situation while preventing impact on the quality by minimising learning loss and equity gaps. While the COVID-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented

<sup>1</sup> Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and Beyond. United Nations. August 2020

disruption of education, it is also an opportunity for all countries, including BiH, to reconsider some of the traditional education practices and to speed up digitization and innovations in the sector.

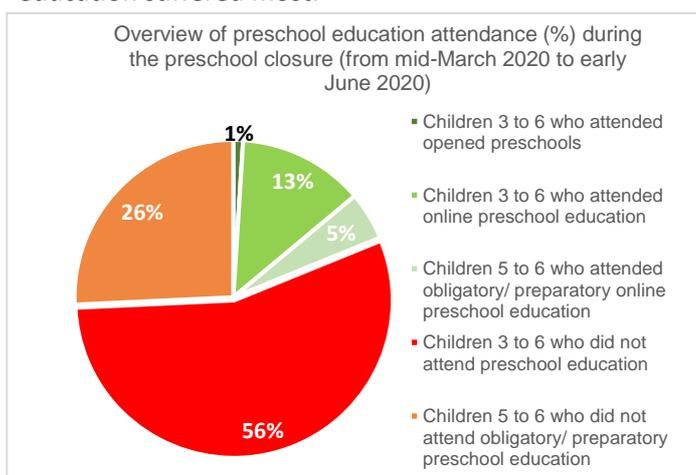
This assessment summary presents the main results of the Rapid Situation and Needs Assessment - Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Phase II), jointly conducted by

## Key Findings

### Access to Education

Following the introduction of the country-wide school closures in March 2020, education authorities in BiH initiated e-learning: 99 per cent of children and youth enrolled in primary, secondary and tertiary education had basic access to e-learning. However, children and youth out-of-school and without adequate access to information communication technology (ICT) and Internet were deprived of e-learning. **Roma children were disproportionately affected, representing at least six per cent of children without access to ICT and Internet.** Although there were no reported students in tertiary education without access to e-learning, education authorities should further assess this due to the limited data available.

**Pre-schoolers were the largest out-of-school group during the lockdown:** 82 per cent of children interrupted their preschool attendance during the preschool closure between mid-March and mid-May 2020. Considering only 25 per cent of children in BiH attended preschools prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the pre-school education suffered most.



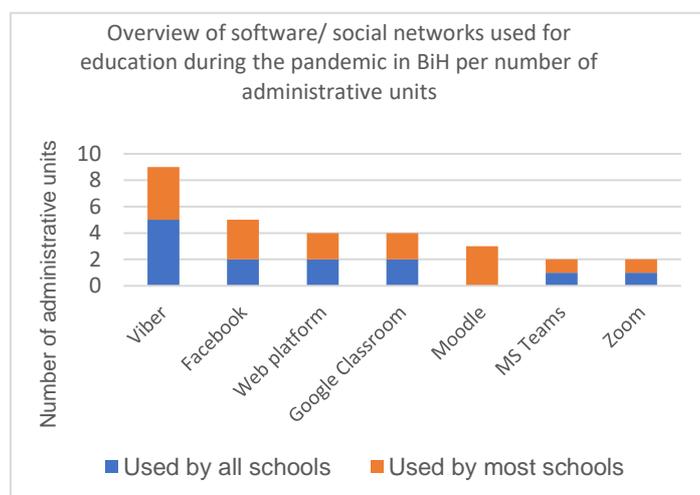
<sup>2</sup> With the exception of Sarajevo Canton which had previously introduced e-learning weeks (Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian-“online nastavna sedmica”) in a limited number of schools. Education administrative units refer to the education authority in BiH: Republika Srpska has a centralized government and one

UNICEF and UNESCO in June 2020. The aim of the assessment was to obtain an overview of the current situation and needs in the education sector, and to inform the response by BiH education authorities’ and the UN to the COVID-19 pandemic. The assessment data can be used for further analysis and to define actions based on the recommendations.

Since e-learning was a novelty for almost all education administrative units<sup>2</sup>, many education authorities in BiH were faced with **legal challenges**. Seven out of twelve education authorities reported having laws and bylaws which did not recognise the e-learning modalities or did not adjust to the e-learning context. Accordingly, the affected administrative units issued ad-hoc decisions and instructions to mitigate the challenges encountered and allow e-learning.

### Quality of Education

Considering that the education sector in BiH is highly decentralised, there has been a **broad diversity of approaches to e-learning and there is not one e-learning platform**. TV classes were conducted in seven education administrative units, mainly targeting children in lower primary grades. Schools mostly used simple communication tools such as Viber, while more complex tools such as Google Classroom and MS Office were used less frequently. This implies that many children and



ministry of education. Federation of BiH has a decentralized government and consists of ten cantons where each canton has their own ministry of education. In Brcko District education is under the authority of its Department for Education.

teachers did not exercise e-learning and e-teaching in its full scope.

E-learning challenged education authorities in BiH to adjust the existing evaluation and assessment mechanisms to the new circumstances in order to ensure required quality of the process. Education authorities in different administrative units of the country opted for local-specific quality assurance mechanisms during the COVID-19 pandemic, the most common one being to review the weekly school reports and to intervene in the case of emergence of specific issues. Furthermore, most authorities issued specific decisions/instructions for students' achievement monitoring, evaluation and assessment and/or adjusted the relevant bylaws.

The fast introduction of online education required teachers to quickly shift from physical to online classrooms. Working in an online environment requires specific skillsets for which teachers were not trained. Professional development of teachers during the school closures was organized in six education administrative units (Brcko District, Sarajevo Canton, Tuzla Canton, Una-Sana Canton, West Herzegovina Canton and Herzegovina-Neretva Canton), mostly by the Ministries of

## Conclusions and recommendations

It is of vital importance to **continue improving access to e-learning** and ensure there are no out-of-school children and youth during the next potential disruptions of learning. When improving access, the authorities should also prioritise assistive technology for children with disabilities.

Education authorities and relevant stakeholders should continue to monitor and mitigate the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the overall enrolment in preschool education and intensify efforts to improve access for all 3-6-year-old children.

The assessment also showed a notable lack of disaggregated data on access, with many education authorities not able to provide data disaggregated by gender, disability status, or specific level of education<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, authorities should invest more efforts in

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<sup>3</sup> When it comes to the level of education, major data gaps were observed for the higher education.

Education. Most administrative units were not able to estimate the number of teachers trained as they organized online training sessions and did not develop online attendance monitoring mechanisms.

### Safe Re-opening of Schools

Safe school re-opening may represent another challenge for education authorities, requiring multi-sectoral strategic planning and balancing health risks with ensuring education quality, learning continuity and adequate and tailor-made education financing based on specific needs.

### Education Sector Financing

This assessment finds that there is a **tendency to decrease education sector budgets** to redirect funds to other affected sectors. The estimated **education sector cumulative budget** cut in 2020 so far is about BAM 15 million and **represents 1.1 per cent of the overall public expenditure for formal education. It must be underlined the cuts made so far, affected already planned infrastructure projects only, and did not tackle salaries and teachers benefits, nor basic operational budgets for the schools. However, further budget cuts are possible.**

**strengthening their data management mechanisms** and adapting these to the needs in emergencies.

Education authorities used different software and networks to implement e-learning, including communication applications. This implies the need to **further develop e-learning and blended learning modalities** which use advanced software solutions and/or to scale-up the number of schools which are more capacitated to use advanced software.

**Education monitoring mechanisms need to be further strengthened** to ensure all stakeholders are included and education quality assurance is in place. Since most education authorities reported they had no insight into the implementation of tertiary education e-learning and considering that there was no data available on which e-learning platforms were used, it would be useful to further assess the quality of tertiary education e-learning.

Some education administrative units have organised trainings for teachers with strong outreach through online training modalities. Taking into consideration of possible restrictions of online professional development programmes, **blended approaches should be further strengthened because these are less costly and potentially have a wider reach than traditional approaches.** Education authorities and stakeholders should identify and support marginalized teachers to provide them with resources for improving their digital skills and the quality of e-teaching.

The estimated education sector cumulative budget cuts are expected to have a clear negative impact. Budget rebalances implemented so far aim to assist other affected sectors without considering the longer-term and strategic consequences to the education sector. There is a clear risk that authorities at different levels, focussing and addressing primarily the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to the domestic economy, will not prioritize investments in the education sector in the short and

medium term. Considering epidemiological and economic changes, it is likely that education financing at different administrative levels in BiH will be subject to periodical budget adjustments. Therefore, it is recommended to continue closely monitoring the impact on education sector budgeting. **It is necessary to mobilise resources by protecting and increasing education budgets for the safe re-opening of schools and strengthening schools' resilience to further disruptions in education.**

Finally, the COVID-19 crisis is an opportunity to re-think the pre-pandemic education practices. Authorities should use the lessons learned to **further reform the education sector and apply several innovations** and develop blended learning approaches. This momentum is also important for education authorities to strengthen the resilience of the education sector beyond the COVID-19 pandemic for the benefit of all children in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### Further reading

Op-Ed: Children and Youth Need Safer and Better Schools, Re-imagining Education while Re-opening Schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNICEF and UNESCO in BiH, August 2020, available at:

<https://www.unicef.org/bih/en/stories/children-and-youth-need-safer-and-better-schools>

Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and Beyond. United Nations. August 2020, available at:

[https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/sg\\_policy\\_brief\\_covid-19\\_and\\_education\\_august\\_2020.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/sg_policy_brief_covid-19_and_education_august_2020.pdf)

[Links to the main assessment report- English and B/H/S](#)

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