



PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN
ASSEMBLÉE PARLEMENTAIRE DE LA MEDITERRANÉE
الجمعية البرلمانية للبحر الأبيض المتوسط

/MEDIA INFORMATION/INFORMATION MEDIA: No. 19/2020

/ISSUED ON/DIFFUSEE LE: 28.04.2020 تاريخ النشر

/RELEASE/DIFFUSION: حالا لكافة الاعلام: للنشر /immediate all media/immédiate tous media

COVID 19 - PAM calls for urgent attention to the adaptations required by educational system

As part of the effort to contain the spread of the coronavirus, many schools and universities were closed down so that students could stay at home and prevent further spread. According to [UNESCO](#), as of 27 April 2020, approximately 1.292 billion “learners” have been affected due to school closures in response to the pandemic, representing 73.8% of total enrolled students in 186 countries.

Many schools and universities have opted to continue their normal classes on online platforms. This includes the use of online tools, such as group video learning programs, or through distance education, which uses online programs, which replace instructors with tutorial material that students can use on their own.

The school closures have shed light on numerous issues affecting access to education, as well as various social and economic fundamental issues, such as access to digital learning, food insecurity, and homelessness, as well as access to childcare, health care, housing, internet, and disability services.

The impact is more severe for disadvantaged children and their families. Moving the world’s students online has starkly exposed deep inequities in the education system. [The World Food Programme](#) warned that more than 320 million children rely on school for food and a safe environment. Moreover, the digital divide is cutting off completely from learning those kids without devices or reliable internet connections, or whose parents have not the time to spend neither the level of digital literacy necessary to help.

School closures have also consequent economic cost, as parents struggle to balance work commitments with childcare, negatively affecting productivity. These divides will likely worsen, as staggering job losses and a recession is devastating the most marginalized in every society, including all their kids.

This emergency is also a stark reminder of the critical importance of school, not just as a place of learning, but of socialization, food security, care and coaching, of community and shared space.

[UNESCO](#) is working with ministries of education in affected and concerned countries to ensure continued learning for all children and youth through alternative channels, offering global and regional responses.

Now that countries are starting planning for school reopening, they are faced with the dilemma of balance between right to education and right to health, as a too early resumption of classes would put the public health in danger, and a period longer than necessary could continue to aggravate the learning loss, especially for the most vulnerable. As of today, according to UNESCO, 71 countries have announced their timeline for reopening schools, whereas 128 countries have not yet done so. Out of

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those which announced it, reopening has already begun in 12 countries, 52 countries set future date for reopening this academic year, and 7 for next academic year.

During the “*Sixth Covid-19 Education Response [webinar](#) around effective strategies to anticipate and prepare for this critical transition*”, organized by UNESCO on 24 April, at least three conditions for reopening schools were identified: physical protection, including safe hygiene conditions; the availability of school personnel, especially teachers; and the capacity of local administrations and institutions to implement changes such as remedial actions, accelerated learning strategies and double shift schooling in some cases. It was also underscored the importance of consultation, communication and coordination within the school community, as well as with parents, to build trust, reassure parents of the safety of schools and coordinate among various stakeholders.

When the storm of the pandemic will pass, schools may be revolutionized by this experience. Or, they may revert back to what they were before. But the world in which they will exist—one marked by rising unemployment and likely recession—will demand more. Education may be slow to change, but the post-coronavirus economy will demand it.

Therefore, several challenges have to be considered by PAM Member States in the present transition phase, such as an urgent adaptation in the educational system and a commitment to improve training opportunities for ensuring growth in job creation in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, within its Panel on External Trade and Investments in the Mediterranean and its Academic Platform, is indeed ready to assist in sharing options, guidelines and expert advice, by providing the forum needed for MPs to meet international experts in such a reflection.

In the meanwhile, the PAM Secretariat is “virtually” hosting a considerable number of junior researchers, from both the North and the South shores of the Mediterranean. This is in line with the commitment of the Assembly to facilitate mobility for students in the Euro-Mediterranean region and promote further interaction within and among young researchers and universities.

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