



12-14 October 2020



Context

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the most widespread disruption to education systems in history. Schools and universities in more than 190 countries were closed at the height of the pandemic impacting over 90 percent of the world's student population.

Well-intentioned government efforts to provision distant learning at unprecedented speed and scale are giving rise to staggering inequities. Formal learning effectively stopped for over one third of the world's learners because they lacked access remote learning when their schools were shuttered. The youngest students were the most likely to miss out on distance education, despite evidence that the early years of life are the most critical for learning and development. For students who were able to access technology-mediated education, learning was deeply uneven, both in terms of quantity and quality. This was true across countries as well as across communities and schools.

"No one could ever have predicted that in 2020, more than half the world's student population – 1.5 billion children and youth – would be forced to stay away from schools because of a virus."

Ms Stefania Giannini
Assistant Director-General
for Education, UNESCO

The shift to distance learning placed new strains on everyone involved in education. Teachers have been forced to move learning to digital mediums with little preparation or training. Parents have been unwittingly thrust into the role of learning coordinators and home school operators. Policy-makers must take decisions that carry enormous repercussions for a wide range of stakeholders under time pressures and often with conflicting or incomplete information.

Though the pandemic is barely six months old, it has supercharged longstanding educational inequalities that, without radical responses, will ripple through a generation. Students in developed countries and from high income households with educated parents are usually making progress studying at home and benefiting from distance education, while learning for students from developed countries and low-income households has mostly stagnated. The most optimistic projections for dropouts anticipate an unprecedented surge in out-of-school children and youth, and this is at a time when public funding for education is likely to decline due to decreased tax revenue. Students most likely to disengage and leave school are those disadvantaged by other factors, whether disability, poverty, language or geography. The pandemic appears to be far from over.

Hundreds of millions of learners are beginning the 2020-21 academic year not in a brick-and-mortar school, but rather front of a digital screen, at least for those lucky enough to have access to technology and the skills to use it productively.

The severity of risks to education are difficult to overstate. Decades of educational progress will be lost without collective action and innovative responses.

Aim

Mobile Learning Week (MLW) is the United Nations' flagship event on digital technologies in education and has been organized by UNESCO and its partners for eight consecutive years. Devoted to the theme of **Beyond Disruption: Technology Enabled Learning Futures**, the 2020 online edition of Mobile Learning Week (12-14 October 2020) will examine the medium and long-term implications of the unprecedented global educational disruption caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic. It aims to draw lessons from the range of education responses deployed in order to inform the planning of technology-enabled inclusive and resilient learning systems for the future. It also aims to explore emerging issues in order to set out an agenda for further research, policy and practice.

In this emergency context, MLW 2020 will be guided by a singular objective: surfacing ideas, practices, policies and strategies to improve the provision of distance education in line with the central policy focus of SDG4: inclusion, equity, quality and "for all".

UNESCO invites participants from around the world to reflect on lessons learned in responding to the disruption of educational processes and the quality of learning with a view to facilitating evidence-informed policy deliberation and action planning among ministers, policy makers, private partners, civil society organizations, researchers, and practitioners.

Drawing on its eight-year history of knowledge exchange on how best to leverage technology for learning, MLW 2020 will help illuminate how the education community can rise to meet the challenge of our moment and make what has become, in many contexts, the only portal to education—a computer, a mobile phone, a TV—a lifeline for learners and an ally to teachers and schools around the world.

Beyond coverage, it is also imperative to examine the effectiveness of the large-scale distance learning programmes in ensuring continuity and quality of learning, and the implications for leveraging technology as an enabler for the building of more resilient, inclusive, equitable and effective learning systems for the future.

Subthemes and Structure

The online edition of Mobile Learning Week 2020 will be structured under the following themes:

Day 1: Effective Policies – Sharing policies and evaluating effectiveness

The focus of Day 1 will be on sharing knowledge about ‘What worked?’ in the framework of distance learning policies. After months of large-scale experimentation with distance learning, panel discussions with high-level representatives of UN agencies, ministers, and experts will attempt to draw specific policy advice on the way ahead.

- What examples do we have of effective national distance learning programmes that have met the needs of all students, contained the loss of instructional time and of learning, and maintained the quality of learning?
- What examples do we have of effective national strategies to improve household access to digital devices and connectivity, in particular for students from disadvantaged and marginalized groups?
- What are effective practices in ensuring equitable access for learners from vulnerable groups, with a specific focus on female students and teachers, and learners with disabilities?
- How can teachers and parents be trained and supported to facilitate distance learning, continue social caring, and ensure effective learning engagement and progression?
- What are the best practices in evaluating the effectiveness of national or large-scale distance learning programmes? What examples do we have of leveraging big data to inform policy planning and evaluation?

Day 2: Innovative Solutions – Showcasing innovative distance learning solutions

The focus of Day 2 shifts to innovative technology solutions. Day 2 will also be a good opportunity to feature solutions from MLW sponsors and members of the Global Education Coalition¹, and exhibitions from technology providers.

- What are the main functions and roles of diverse platforms in supporting distance learning? How can existing and emerging platforms be assessed in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, and long-term financial implications?
- What are innovative solutions to the development and curation of distance learning content, including Open Educational Resources (OER), to meet the needs of learners at different ages under diverse distance learning scenarios (online, TV, or radio)?
- What are trusted technology solutions to the learning and connection needs of individual teachers, students, classes, and institutions?
- What are the uncharted risks of engaging all students into long-term online learning? How can the risks be anticipated and mitigated?

¹ <https://gloaleducationcoalition.unesco.org/>

Day 3: The Future – Setting out policy and research agendas to build back better

Day 3 is an opportunity to take stock of what still needs to be learned, and explore how education systems can emerge from the crisis stronger and more resilient to future disruptions.

- What data and evidence is missing? Where are the gaps in current research agendas? How can new technologies help fill these gaps?
- What are new potentials for research and data analysis now that so much teaching and learning has moved to online platforms? What is problematic with our current approach to evidence and attempts to understand impact?
- What paradigm shifts are needed for education after the pandemic? How can research accelerate progress to realize these changes?
- How can technologies be best leveraged to build open and flexible learning systems for all based on a network of learning spaces that better integrate formal educational institutions, homes and other community learning resources? What policy enablers, technology, and human pre-conditions need to be in place to build more resilient learning systems for sustainable futures?

Participants

Ministers of Education and ICT, policy-makers, international organizations, private sector partners, civil society organizations, researchers, teachers, education leaders and practitioners.

Format

Mobile Learning Week 2020 will be a virtual event. To maintain the sense of conferencing, UNESCO will move all programmatic activities to a single online platform. The platform will offer concurrent sessions and allow participants opportunities to visit exhibitions and network.

UNESCO has enlarged the menu of session formats in an effort to ensure maximum engagement in a digital medium. Session formats include:

EdTech Talks and Keynote Speeches inviting eminent opinion leaders to deliver short and inspiring speeches.

High-level panels convening UN representatives, ministers and senior governmental officials, as well as EduTech leaders mobilized through the Global Education Coalition. The high-level panels will examine key policy issues relative to promoting access to connectivity and to improving effectiveness of distance learning programmes in a forward-looking perspective. **Q&A opportunities** will be provided for participants to ask questions to high-level representatives.

Plenary panels and breakout sessions are composed of experts in the field. The sessions will allow participants from around the world to share experiences, demonstrate innovative technologies, and plan joint actions.

Workshops offer hands-on training on distance learning solutions or projects that have been implemented and have shown evidence in ensuring the continuity and quality of learning during the COVID-19 education disruption. The workshops are organized by MLW partners and managers of projects selected from the call for proposals.

Solutions and innovations sessions feature education solutions and new concepts for distance learning. Each solution and innovation will have a 10-minute presentation by EdTech partners from the Global Education Coalition. The audience will have opportunities to ask questions following the presentations.

Online booths provide an opportunity for MLW sponsors to stage 30-minute live demonstrations on their distance learning projects or solutions, initiate conversation with participants, and maintain the online exhibitions for at least six months. Online booths allow the exhibitions of up to three distance learning projects or solutions.

Side meetings and strategy labs may be hosted by UNESCO and partner organizations to launch joint initiatives or conceptualize and refine plans for collaboration.

Programme Structure

	Day 1 (12 October) Effective Policies	Day 2 (13 October) Innovative Solutions			Day 3 (14 October) The Future	
10:00 - 11:30	Opening Ceremony	EdTech Keynote			Sessions of UNESCO institutes or field offices or partners based on the conferencing platform of MLW	
	Plenary Session: National distance learning strategies (Ministers)	Plenary Session: Innovative distance learning solutions				
11:30 - 13:00	Breakout Sessions		Breakout Demonstrations and Workshops		Plenary Session: Technology enabled future of lifelong learning (UNESCO HQ & UIL)	
	Policy sharing (MoE and proposals)	Policy conversation	Solutions of Global Education Coalition	Workshop (Huawei)		Workshop (Partner/ Proposal)
13:00 - 14:00	Live Shows of Online Booths of Partners/Partners' Side Meetings/Online Networking					
14:00 - 15:30	High-level panel on distance learning policies (UN agencies, ministers, high-level representatives from partners)		Breakout Workshops			High-level panel: Policy recommendations and Declaration
			Workshop (NORAD/ GDL)	Workshop (Ericsson)	Workshop (Partner/ Proposal)	Closing Remarks
15:30 - 17:00	Breakout Sessions		Breakout Workshops			Online Networking or Sessions of partners based on the conferencing platform of MLW
	Data and evidence on effectiveness	Teacher training and support	Workshop (Microsoft)	Workshop (GIZ)	Workshop (Partner/ Proposal)	
17:00 -	Online Video/Poster: Highlights or key message of the day		Online Video/Poster: Highlights or key message of the day			Online Video/Poster: Highlights or key message of the events

Technical specifications

The event uses online conferencing systems to support registration, webinars, online exhibitions of partners, and networking among participants. Live streaming platforms will be used to enlarge the real-time participation.

Stay in touch

Beyond Disruption: Technology-enabled Learning Futures



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