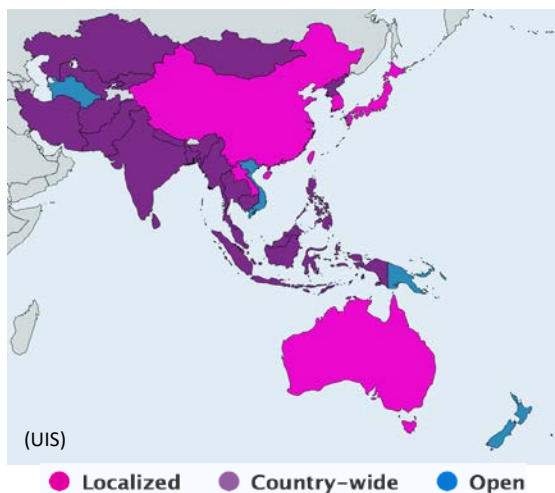


The impact of COVID-19 on ECCE sector: Lesson learned and promising practices from the Asia-Pacific

Background

School Closures caused by COVID-19 in the Asia-Pacific (June 1)



The COVID-19 pandemic affects everyone and everywhere. It has been exacerbating pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems which are in turn amplifying the lifelong impacts of the pandemic. Based on the latest available data, over 93 million pre-primary students in 34 countries and 4.4 million pre-primary teachers (85 percent of whom are women) in 24 countries in the Asia-Pacific region are affected by COVID-19¹. We don't know yet the magnitude of long-term damage of COVID-19 on the early childhood care and education (ECCE) sector. However, it is expected to be most damaging for children in the poorest countries, and in the poorest communities, and for those in already disadvantaged or vulnerable situation.

While all levels and types of education are facing serious challenges, ECCE sector is one of the most vulnerable sectors

and prone to have bigger impact given that the large percentage of ECCE sectors are privately funded and operated. Moreover, as many countries in Asia and the Pacific are yet to introduce one year of free and compulsory pre-primary education, decrease in household income due to COVID-19 is likely to have direct impact on students' enrolment. With unstable income and job security of many ECCE workforce in the region, they are under more pressure than ever to handle unprecedented challenges, stress and disruptions.

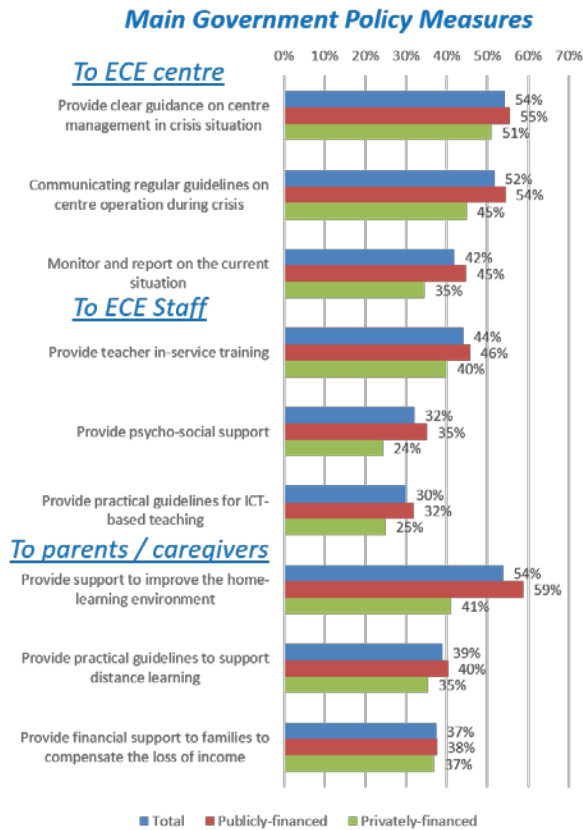
Taking into account the pre-existing vulnerability of ECCE sector, UNESCO Bangkok conducted a desk review and launched a joint survey with UNICEF, Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC), the Early Childhood Workforce Initiative (ECWI) and International Step by Step Association (ISSA) to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the early childhood education (ECE)² workforce in the region. The survey was conducted between 20 April and 22 May 2020 and received a total of 2040 responses from 34 countries. As the survey was based on voluntary participation, it does not lend itself to draw any country comparison or assessment nor should the findings be generalized for all countries in the Asia-Pacific region. However, the survey has given the ECE workforce in the region to amplify their voices and share their current status and concerns amidst COVID-19.

¹ UNESCO-UIS

² In this document, early childhood education (ECE), early childhood care and education (ECCE) and early childhood development (ECD) are used interchangeably in a holistic way to refer to services and programmes that support children's survival, growth, development and learning – including health, nutrition and hygiene, and cognitive, social, emotional and physical development – from birth to entry into primary school.

The below key messages and promising cases have been derived from above mentioned desk review and the ECE workforce survey.

Key messages and promising practices



1. Governments’ support on ECCE service providers, teachers and families are essential to overcome this challenging period

The unprecedented school closure and economic downturn perpetuated the vicious cycle of learning poverty. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, many governments in Asia and the Pacific region are actively providing both financial and technical supports for ECE centre/ preschool, ECE staff and parents /caregivers in order to ensure the continuity of children’s learning. However the survey revealed that privately-financed ECE institutions are less likely to receive support through government measures compared to publicly-financed ECE institutions. Australia³, Republic of Korea⁴, Singapore⁵ and New Zealand⁶ provided management guidelines and financial support/relief package for families and early childhood education and care services to help them keep their doors open and employees in their jobs.

2. Provide job security and timely, adequate compensation to ensure teacher motivation and retention during times of crisis

As expected, the survey revealed that the school closure has affected the working condition of ECE staff. 6.7 percent of respondents were approached by their employer to consider leaving or terminating their contracts. Even if they can continue their work without any changes in their contract, 49.3 percent of respondents indicated that their salaries were not secured under social security schemes and had to rely on other income sources to sustain their living. Therefore, it is critical to ensure measures to provide job security, and adequate and timely compensation so that teacher motivation can be maintained and retain the teachers during times of crisis. For example, New Zealand⁷ is providing the COVID-19 wage subsidy to early learning services a flat rate of NZ\$585.80 per week for every full time employee, and NZ\$350 per week for every part time worker (before tax), paid upfront in one lump sum to cover twelve weeks.

³ <https://www.dese.gov.au/covid-19/childcare>

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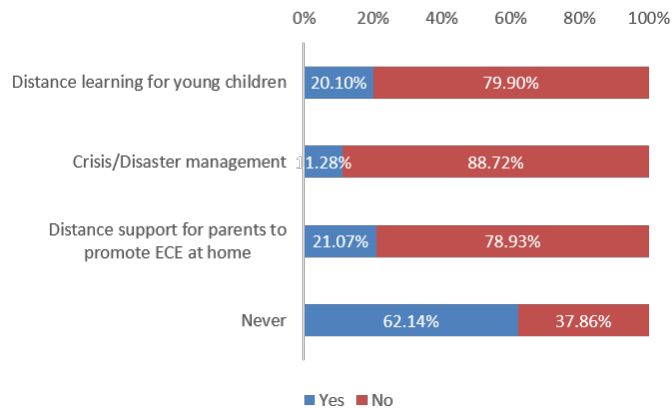
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⁵ <https://www.moe.gov.sg/news/press-releases/schools-and-kindergartens-to-re-open-with-enhanced-precautionary-measures>

⁶ <https://www.education.govt.nz/news/covid-19-update-for/>

⁷ Ibid.

Training prior to COVID 19



3. Invest in pre- and in-service teacher training on adapting to new technologies, social-emotional skills as well as preventing, preparing for and responding to crises

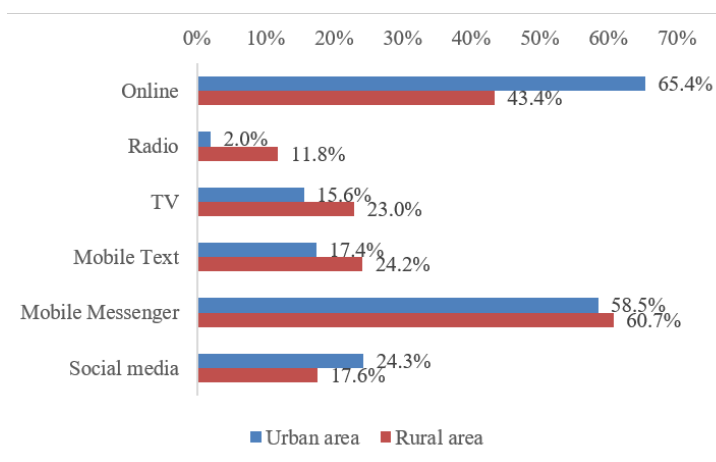
As many countries are adopting remote learning practices to reduce the learning disruption, many ECCE teachers have to deliver distance learning without any prior training or clear guidance. Only 20 percentage of respondents have prior training on delivering distance learning and 1.28 percent on crisis and disaster management. Invest in the training and professional development of ECCE teachers should be the priority among

governments and learning institutions to equip ECCE teachers with relevant information and increase their resilience. Hebi City in China launched an online training for the city's 500 kindergarten staff on epidemic prevention and control, distance learning strategy, how to give the epidemic prevention education to the children after the school re-opening, etc⁸.

4. Support teachers' health and social-emotional wellbeing and resilience before, during and after the crisis

Many ECE teachers experienced pandemic-induced stress like everyone: frustrated with the unpredictable situation, worried about their income and job security and anxious and overwhelmed about delivering distance learning. Teachers are key agents in providing social and emotional support to students and their families, but before that, they themselves require support and it is important that they receive this support from peers or specialized professionals to continue teaching and learning amid the crisis. However, the survey revealed that only 35.2 percent of respondents reported to receive psycho-social support such as stress management advices from the government. Early Childhood Australia provides tips and guidelines to ensure mental health and wellbeing of ECE workforce⁹.

The modality of work in urban and rural area during the crisis



5. Ensure inclusion, equity and fairness in providing distance learning

It was evident that urban/rural disparity in accessing IT infrastructure and internet for distance learning. While the respondents from urban area identified the difficulty of monitoring children's learning progress (60.1 percent) as the major challenge, the respondents from rural area identified the lack of access to distance learning equipment as the major challenge. In addition, ECE institutions in urban area tend to use web-based online platforms, while that in rural areas are more likely to use traditional media for learning, including TV and radio. It is important to

explore innovative ways to ensure inclusion, equity and fairness in providing distance learning. Cambodia¹⁰, Fiji¹¹ and Nepal¹² launched Radio programmes on learning activities on health, hygiene, nutrition, child protection, play-based learning, education and holistic development of young children at home.

6. Provide clear guidance for and maintain regular communication with parents/caretakers

Parents and caregivers play critical roles for home-based learning and providing physical, emotional, social, and cognitive developmental needs of children. It is important to have a continuous communication with parents and caregivers to track/monitor children's development/progress. In the case of New Zealand¹³, the Philippines¹⁴ and Samoa¹⁵, the Ministry of Education set up a special web-page to provide practical guidance for parents and caregivers on helping children's learning at home.

7. Support the continuity of quality ECCE through inter-sectoral approaches

The impact of COVID-19 on young children goes beyond education sector. Millions of children in the region rely on school for daily nutrition, security and safety. In order to provide comprehensive quality ECCE services, it is essential to have an integrated approach that works across government agencies and community organizations to ensure holistic development of children. In case of Thailand, to curb nutrition and learning loss impacts, the Ministry of Interior ordered ECD centres to continue to provide milk and food to children by arranging for parents to pick up food packages from the centres or through teachers delivering to households. ECD centres and the Ministry of Public Health have provided online training for parents and mobile applications to assist parents on how to interact with children while at home, and there is a dedicated television programme for pre-primary learners¹⁶.

¹⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/ECCDCambodia.gov.kh/>

¹¹ <http://www.education.gov.fj/2020/04/06/ministry-initiates-supplementary-radio-programmes/>

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/SikdaiSikaundai/>

¹³ <https://www.education.govt.nz/school/health-safety-and-wellbeing/pastoral-care-and-wellbeing/talking-to-children-about-covid-19-coronavirus/>

¹⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/pg/ECCDCouncil/photos/>

¹⁵ <http://mesc.gov.ws/aoaoga-mo-fanau/early-childhood-education/>

¹⁶ www.dla.go.th/upload/document/type2/2020/5/23525_1_1588301956532.pdf