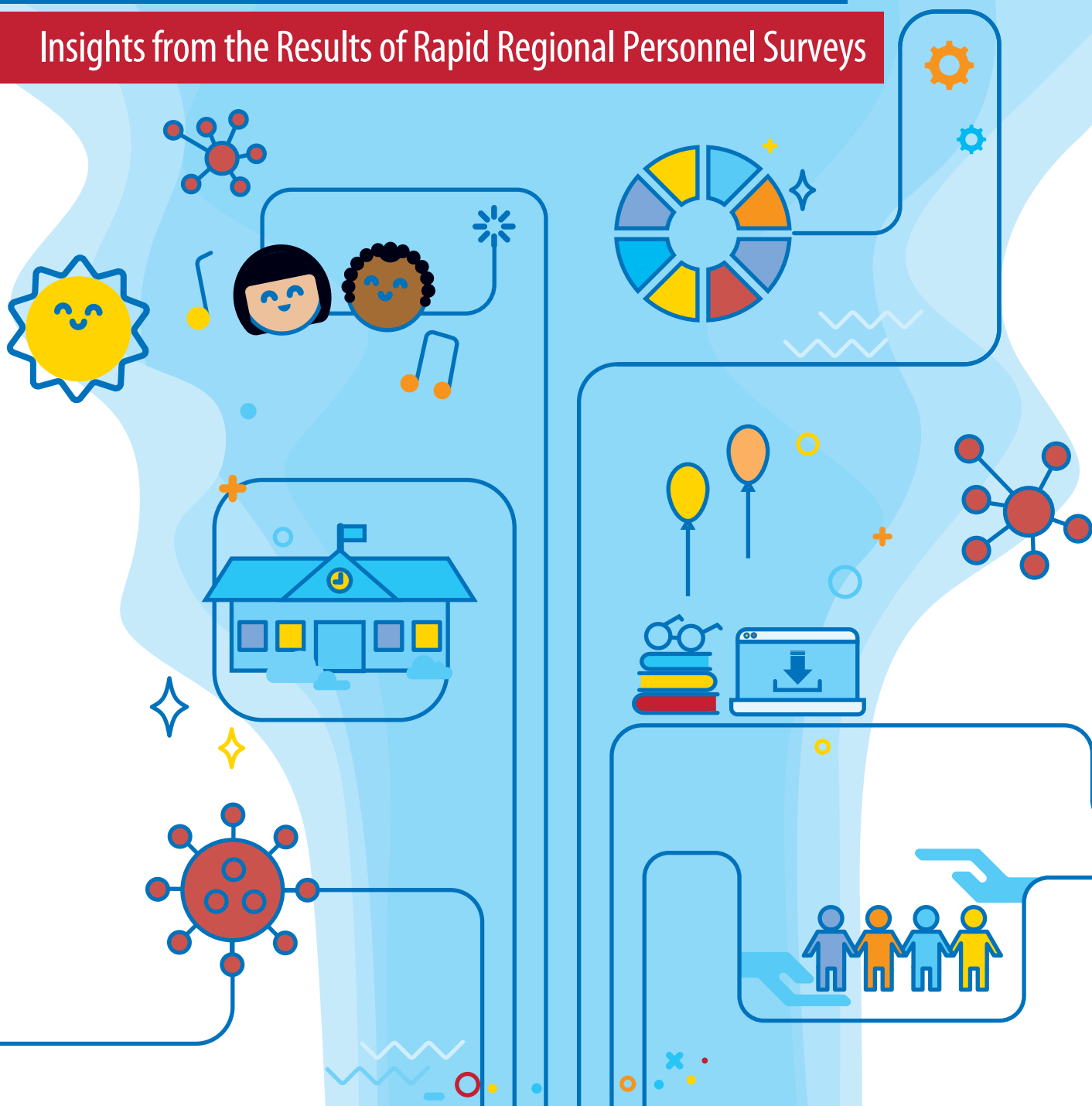


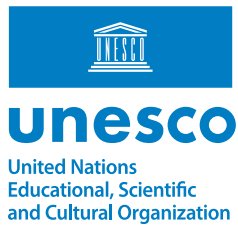
The Impact of COVID-19 on Early Childhood Education in the Asia-Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa

Insights from the Results of Rapid Regional Personnel Surveys



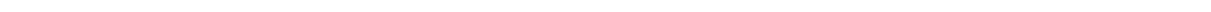
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The Impact of COVID-19 on Early Childhood Education in the Asia-Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa

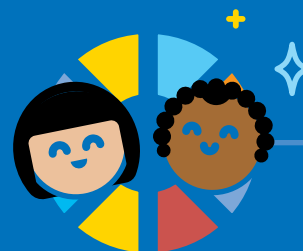
Insights from the Results of Rapid Regional Personnel Surveys

Short summary

Declared a global pandemic on 11 March 2020 by the World Health Organization (WHO), COVID-19 has had far-reaching impacts on every facet of life around the world, exacerbating pre-existing inequalities and negatively impacting on vulnerable and disadvantaged populations the most. Learning continuity has been disrupted by school closures, generating an unprecedented situation worldwide. According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) data collated in July 2020, over 18.6 million children in pre-primary education in forty-eight Sub-Saharan African countries and 4.4 million pre-primary teachers – eighty-five per cent of whom were women – in twenty-four countries in the Asia-Pacific region were affected by school or centre closures. Recognizing the possible severe and detrimental impact that COVID-19 might have on ECE personnel and their practices, UNESCO Bangkok and Dakar teamed up with several partners to undertake regional surveys in the Asia-Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa from April to July 2020. Based on the regional surveys, this report features eight key findings and three key messages to better understand ECE personnel's needs and to identify possible responses to support them.



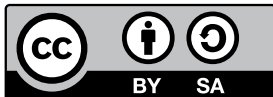
'Since wars begin in the minds of men and women it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed'



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• Acknowledgements

This report highlights key findings and messages drawn from two rapid regional Early Childhood Education (ECE) personnel surveys conducted in the Asia-Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa regions from April to July 2020.

These assessments enabled a better understanding of the immediate situation, the challenges and responses of ECE personnel in both regions as the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) broke out. The knowledge gained provides guidelines for building the foundations of more resilient education systems.

The surveys undertaken in the Asia-Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa regions were led by UNESCO Bangkok and UNESCO Dakar under the coordination of Kyungah Bang and Yoshie Kaga, respectively. The studies benefited from close cooperation, valuable advice and generous support from a number of individuals and partners. Those who collaborated on the development and dissemination of the two surveys include:

- **Asia-Pacific survey:** The Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC), the Early Childhood Workforce Initiative (ECWI), the International Step by Step Association (ISSA), the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization – Regional Centre For Early Childhood Care Education and Parenting (SEAMEO CECCEP), the Thematic Working Group on Education 2030, and UNICEF.
- **Sub-Saharan Africa survey:** The ADEA Inter-Country Quality Node for Early Childhood Development (ICQN-ECD), UNICEF, the Africa Early Childhood Network (AfECN), the SDG4/ECD Regional Task Team, BUPL, Education International (EI), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 (TTF), Saber Education, the UNESCO Co-Chair in Early Childhood Education, Care and Development, VVOB and the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP). Special appreciation is extended to ICQN-ECD and the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) Secretariat for their close collaboration in the organization of the survey's dissemination through AEDA focal points.

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¹ As a federally owned enterprise, GIZ supports the German Government in achieving its objectives in the field of international cooperation for sustainable development.

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Background

Declared a global pandemic on 11 March 2020 by the World Health Organization (WHO), COVID-19 has had far-reaching impacts on every facet of life around the world, exacerbating pre-existing inequalities and negatively impacting on vulnerable and disadvantaged populations the most. Learning continuity has been disrupted by school closures, generating an unprecedented situation worldwide. Over ninety per cent of the world's learners were estimated to be affected at the peak of school closures in early April 2020.² Schools have progressively reopened,³ yet close to half of the world's learners were still affected by partial or full school closures at the time of the release of this report and over 100 million additional children will fall below minimum reading proficiency as a result of the pandemic.⁴

While education at all levels has been significantly affected by the pandemic, ECE⁵ has not been given as much attention in education-related discussions and responses compared to other schooling levels.⁶ This is evident in the recent UNICEF review of data from 100 countries (2020). An assessment of ministries of education revealed that sixty per cent of countries with data provided remote policies for pre-primary education and seventy per cent of pre-primary students attending pre-primary programming prior to school closures lacked access to remote learning opportunities.⁷

According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) data collated in July 2020, over 18.6 million children in pre-primary education in forty-eight Sub-Saharan African countries and 4.4 million pre-primary teachers – eighty-five per cent of whom were women – in twenty-four countries in the Asia-Pacific region were affected by school or centre closures. ECE personnel, especially women, may be facing more difficulties in addressing COVID-19-induced challenges, compared to those working at other education levels,

2 UNESCO, 2021, *One year into COVID, UNESCO convenes global meeting of education ministers to ensure learning continuity*, See: <https://en.unesco.org/news/one-year-covid-unesco-convenes-global-meeting-education-ministers-ensure-learning-continuity>

3 The number of countries with country-wide school closures evolved from 16 (10 March 2020), reaching a peak of 173 (2 April 2020). It then gradually decreased to 103 (10 June 2020), 41 (10 September 2020), 39 (10 January 2021), to 28 at present (10 April 2021), UIS data.

4 UNESCO, 2021, *One year into COVID, UNESCO convenes global meeting of education ministers to ensure learning continuity*, See: <https://en.unesco.org/news/one-year-covid-unesco-convenes-global-meeting-education-ministers-ensure-learning-continuity>

5 This document focuses on ECE settings, including pre-schools, kindergartens and other early childhood development and education centres, which are designed to include educational content for children aged three years up to the start of primary education, often around the age of six.

6 UNESCO, 2020, *Agenda for the COVID-19 Education Response Webinar: Ensuring quality of learning and well-being for young children in the context of the COVID-19*, See: https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unesco-covid-19_ed-webinar-14-concept-note-en.pdf; UNESCO, 2020, *The Impact of COVID-19 on ECCE Sector: Lesson learned and promising practices from the Asia-Pacific*, See: https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unesco-covid-19_ed-webinar-14-unesco-bangkok.pdf

7 UNICEF, 2020, *Covid-19: Are children able to continue learning during school closures? A global analysis of the potential reach of remote learning policies using data from 100 countries*, See: <https://data.unicef.org/resources/remote-learning-reachability-factsheet/>

due to low pay⁸ and precarious working conditions linked to private sector employment.⁹ Also, the extent of learning disruption may be more pressing in ECE due to inequitable access to digital connectivity and the general lack of experience, pedagogical guidance and resources in distance learning.

Recognizing the possible severe and detrimental impact that COVID-19 might have on ECE personnel and their practices, UNESCO teamed up with several partners to undertake regional surveys in the Asia-Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa from April to July 2020 to better understand their needs and to identify possible responses to support them.



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8 M.J. Neuman, K. Josephson and P.G. Chua, 2015, *A review of the literature: Early childhood care and education (ECCE) personnel in low- and middle-income countries*. Results for Development Institute and UNESCO, See: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000234988?posInSet=1&queryId=277829c9-af5f-40c7-8db0-9c75fa56258d>

9 In 2018, 33.8 per cent and 55.1 per cent of total pre-primary enrolment occurs in the private sector in Sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia and Pacific respectively, compared to 14.3 per cent and 10.3 per cent in primary and 20.8 per cent and 19.2 per cent in secondary in the respective regions, UIS data.

Contexts

Regional landscapes in the Asia-Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa are very different. Inner diversity is also highly significant in the case of both of these regions. Reference to the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) 2020 Human Development Index (HDI) ranking of 189 countries¹⁰ reveals that many Sub-Saharan Africa countries show low figures – those ranked from 156th to 189th are all from this region, with the exception of Haiti. Of the 689.1 million people living in extreme poverty in 2017, about 430.8 million were in Sub-Saharan Africa, 167.6 million in South Asia and 29.3 million in East Asia and the Pacific.¹¹

Regarding pre-primary enrolment, the Asia-Pacific region has a higher rate than Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2019, the Sub-Saharan Africa gross enrolment rate in pre-primary education was thirty-two per cent. This is compared to fifty per cent in Central Asia, eighty-two per cent in East Asia and the Pacific and sixty-two per cent in West and South Asia. Within Sub-Saharan Africa, the gross enrolment rate in pre-primary education in 2018 ranged from one per cent and four per cent in Chad and Burkina Faso respectively, to ninety-eight per cent and 115 per cent in Mauritius and Ghana respectively. As for the Asia-Pacific region at the same time, it ranged from nine per cent in Myanmar, twenty-three per cent in Timor-Leste, and twenty-four per cent in Cambodia to sixty-one per cent in India, eighty-eight per cent in China, ninety-four per cent in the Republic of Korea and 100 per cent in Viet Nam.¹²

UIS data has determined that ECE personnel are predominantly female. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion of female teachers in pre-primary was eighty per cent compared to forty-five per cent in primary and thirty per cent in secondary education.¹³ In the Asia-Pacific, the share of female teachers was highest in pre-primary, which accounted for more than ninety per cent.¹⁴ Compared to primary school teachers, pre-primary teachers often have lower status, lower pay, poor working conditions, fewer chances for continuous professional development and advancement and weak administrative support. It was found that these negative factors lead to high rates of absenteeism and attrition among pre-primary teachers in the Asia-Pacific.¹⁵

¹⁰ UNDP Human Development Report Office, 2020, *Human Development Index (HDI) Ranking*, See: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/latest-human-development-index-ranking>

¹¹ *Our World in Data*, 2020, The number of people living in extreme poverty, by world region, See: <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/total-population-living-in-extreme-poverty-by-world-region>, (reported from the World Bank and PovcalNet, 2020), See: <http://iresearch.worldbank.org/PovcalNet/povDuplicateWB.aspx>

¹² UIS data.

¹³ UIS data.

¹⁴ UIS data.

¹⁵ SEAMEO and UNESCO, 2016, *Southeast Asian guidelines for early childhood teacher development and management*, See: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000244370>

The two regions show a contrasting picture regarding Internet connectivity. This emerged as a critical condition for learning continuity during the COVID-19 crisis. In 2019, the proportion of individuals accessing the Internet at this time was identified at 28.6 per cent in Africa and 44.5 per cent in the Asia-Pacific. The percentages of households with Internet access at home was identified at 14.3 per cent in Africa and 43.4 per cent in the Asia-Pacific.¹⁶

It was determined that sixty per cent in East Asia and the Pacific, thirty-three per cent in South Asia and twenty-six per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa had a mobile Internet connection in 2019. Sub-Saharan Africa is home to almost half of the world's population not covered by mobile Internet connectivity. Despite this shortfall, the expansion of mobile Internet coverage in 2019 mostly occurred in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. East Asia and the Pacific were the regions that saw the highest increase in mobile Internet adoption in the same year, with China and South-East Asian countries showing particular broad-based improvements. However, the urban-rural gap remains substantial worldwide, with Sub-Saharan Africa showing the largest divide at sixty per cent. Significantly, Sub-Saharan Africa is the region with the highest monthly cost of one gigabyte (GB) as a proportion of income.¹⁷ Noting that countries which quickly offered online learning opportunities for young children have built on existing remote learning systems, it is crucial to connect ECE centres with information communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and materials.¹⁸



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¹⁶ ITU, 2021, *Number of internet users*, See: <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>

¹⁷ K. Bahia and A. Delaporte, 2020, *Connected Society: The state of mobile internet connectivity 2020*, GSMA Intelligence, See: <https://www.gsma.com/r/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/GSMA-State-of-Mobile-Internet-Connectivity-Report-2020.pdf>

¹⁸ UNICEF, 2020, *COVID-19: Trends, Promising Practices and Gaps in Remote Learning for Pre-Primary Education. Working Paper 2020-15*, See: <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/1166-covid-19-trends-promising-practices-and-gaps-in-remote-learning-for-pre-primary-education.html>

Methodology

The regional surveys¹⁹ were designed to target two categories of ECE personnel in public and private settings in urban, peri-rural and rural areas as respondents. These are ECE centre managers and heads of pre-primary schools and ECE teachers and practitioners. Respondents were invited to provide information about the impact of COVID-19 on ECE provision, education for children and communication with parents during closures and their preparation for reopening and training needs.

The Asia-Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa surveys were led by UNESCO Bangkok and Dakar, respectively. Given the urgency of the pandemic and the need to roll out the surveys rapidly, the questionnaires were reviewed by partners and in the case of the Sub-Saharan Africa survey, some ECE professionals. The surveys did not undergo pilot-testing and verification processes before their launch.

Conducted online between 20 April and 18 May 2020, the Asia-Pacific survey was administered in English and nine regional languages and received 2,040 responses from thirty-four countries. The Sub-Saharan Africa survey was administered online between 27 May and 3 July 2020 in the English, French and Portuguese languages and received 1,480 responses from thirty-one countries.²⁰ The latter survey was an adaptation of the former, with some questions in common across both surveys.

Participation was voluntary. As the surveys were only conducted online, respondents were limited to individuals connected to wider systems or organizations through which the survey was launched and personnel with access to digital and communication resources, such as phones and phone credit, for example. In terms of data analysis, a series of frequency tables that summarized responses was prepared by ACER and this report has also benefited from draft analysis completed by this educational research organization. The findings of the surveys are not regionally generalizable and are not comparable across regions and therefore should be understood as a snapshot of the situation and the needs of ECE personnel.

¹⁹ The survey questionnaires can be obtained from: k.bang@unesco.org (Asia-Pacific survey) and: y.kaga@unesco.org (Sub-Saharan Africa survey).

²⁰ As the results are from the early stage of the pandemic (April to July 2020), the situations have evolved.

• Respondents

As highlighted, the Asia-Pacific survey received 2,040 responses from thirty-four countries, while the Sub-Saharan Africa survey received 1,480 responses from thirty-one countries. The top six countries with the largest number of responses were Indonesia, Bhutan, Pakistan, Philippines Japan and Thailand for the Asia-Pacific and Benin, South Africa, Madagascar, Nigeria, Comoros and Mauritius for Sub-Saharan Africa. Overall, seventy-eight per cent of respondents in Sub-Saharan Africa were female, as were ninety-one per cent in the Asia-Pacific. These figures are fairly representative of the pre-primary education subsector as recorded in UIS data. Respondents to both surveys were most commonly aged between thirty and forty-nine years-old.

More than one-half of respondents to the Asia-Pacific survey were ECE teachers and practitioners, including teaching assistants, community and health mediators and specialist staff working in ECE centres, whereas sixty-eight per cent of respondents to the Sub-Saharan Africa survey were ECE teachers and practitioners. Respondents to the Asia-Pacific survey were evenly split across urban and rural areas, while over sixty per cent of respondents to the Sub-Saharan Africa survey were located in urban areas. A majority (seventy-two per cent) of respondents to the Asia-Pacific survey were employed in publicly financed institutions. As for the Sub-Saharan Africa survey, fifty-two per cent of respondents worked at public centres, followed by twenty per cent in for-profit centres, twelve per cent in non-profit centres and seven per cent in community-owned centres.



• Summary of eight key findings

1. Few ECE personnel had received training on crisis management and distance teaching and learning prior to the COVID-19 outbreak in both regions.
2. A discontinuation of ECE personnel remuneration and changes to employment status was reported, post COVID-19 outbreak, in both regions.
3. The level of respective government's technical and financial support received by ECE centres and staff in response to the COVID-19 crisis varied between regions.
4. The majority of ECE centres in the Asia-Pacific continued education and communication with parents. It was found that half of ECE centres did so in Sub-Saharan Africa. The most frequently reported means of communication and education was through mobile messaging platforms in both regions.
5. A lack of affordable Internet access and equipment was reported as the greatest challenge to remote teaching and learning in both regions, followed by a lack of training and support on remote teaching and learning.
6. Maintaining regular contact through messaging, social media and other platforms and following up on learning and play activities provided for children in the domestic environment were identified as the most effective strategies.
7. Ensuring the provision of COVID-19 preventive measures in ECE centres was the most frequently cited requirement for reopening schools, followed by parents' support for children's personal hygiene practices.
8. The COVID-19 crisis has shown that ECE centres serve as important providers of early learning opportunities, as well as health and nutrition provision, especially for disadvantaged children.



Key findings

Key finding 1: Few ECE personnel had received training on crisis management and distance teaching and learning prior to the COVID-19 outbreak in both regions.

The majority of respondents to both regional surveys indicated that centres or schools were closed because of the COVID-19 outbreak at the time of the surveys. This closure rate was reported as seventy per cent in the Asia-Pacific and ninety-six per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa. Approximately nine per cent of teacher respondents in the Asia-Pacific survey and twenty-two per cent in the Sub-Saharan Africa survey reported they had received training on distance teaching for young children prior to the pandemic. About three per cent and eighteen per cent of centre head respondents in the respective Asia-Pacific and Sub-Saharan surveys reported that they received training on crisis management prior to the pandemic (Table 1).

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Table 1:

Percentage of teachers who had received training on remote learning or crisis management prior to COVID-19, by region, position and type of training

Topic of training	Asia-Pacific		Sub-Saharan Africa	
	Centre Head Per cent	Teacher Per cent	Centre Head Per cent	Teacher Per cent
Distance teaching for young children	17.8	21.7	4.4	8.6
Crisis/disaster preparedness/management	17.8	6.7	2.7	3.6

Sources: COVID-19 Early Childhood Education Workforce Survey; COVID-19 Early Childhood Education Personnel Survey in Sub-Saharan Africa.

When asked about the kind of training teachers would like to undertake in the future, frequent responses from the Asia-Pacific survey were related to conducting remote teaching and learning, including online content development, approaches to engaging with young children through virtual screens and supporting home-based learning curriculum development and practice. Teachers also favoured the introduction of hygiene and sanitation measures, the provision of psycho-social support for children and their families, education and care interventions for children with disabilities, leadership in ECE management and regular child development assessments.

Key finding 2: Discontinuation of remuneration and changes to employment status have been reported since the COVID-19 outbreak in both regions.

In the Sub-Saharan Africa survey, forty-two per cent of centre head respondents indicated staff members were fully remunerated, twenty-three per cent responded that staff members were partially remunerated and thirty-three per cent cited that staff members were not remunerated. Among those who indicated that staff were fully remunerated – sixty-five per cent worked in public centres, sixteen per cent in non-profit private centres, fourteen per cent in for-profit private centres and nine per cent in community-owned centres.

Asked whether their employers had suggested or made changes to their contractual terms, including potential redundancies or lay-offs, seventy-three per cent of teacher respondents in the Sub-Saharan Africa survey reported not having experienced any change as a result of the pandemic, while eighteen per cent indicated that they had been approached by their employers to consider changes. In the latter case, the most common outcome (thirty-six per cent) was that they were forced to stop working, followed by stopping to work voluntarily (ten per cent).

In the Asia-Pacific survey, participants were asked what proportion of their staff remained employed after COVID-19 induced closures. Over fifty per cent responded that all staff remained in work, twenty-nine per cent reported that some staff had been laid off²¹ and fourteen per cent were unsure. Asked if their salaries were secured under social security measures during closures, just over half (fifty-one per cent) of teacher respondents in the region reported having access to this provision.

Of those who had access to social security, sixty per cent of teacher respondents indicated that they had access to the full amount of their salary, thirty per cent reported having access to a level that was fifty per cent and over and nine per cent reported having access to less than fifty per cent.

For personnel that lost full or partial employment, social security provision enables them to sustain their livelihoods. This benefit is also a way to ensure workforce retention as personnel are not forced to seek others forms of employment to sustain a living.

²¹ Looking at 29 per cent of respondents, the ECE workforce under publicly-financed and privately-provided ECE service providers faced the hardest hit during the pandemic, regardless of where they were located (both rural and urban areas), compare to privately-financed and privately-provided services. Among 29 per cent of respondents, 25.7 per cent of publically-financed and privately-provided service providers in rural areas and 17 per cent of publically-financed and privately-provided ECE service providers in urban areas had to lay off some staff.

Key finding 3: The levels of government support in response to the COVID-19 crisis experienced by ECE centres varied between regions.

Government support to ECE centres

Centre head participants in both surveys were asked to indicate what levels of support they received from their respective governments in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. More than two-thirds of respondents in the Sub-Saharan Africa region indicated their centres had not received government support, whereas one-tenth of survey participants²² in the Asia-Pacific region reported the same findings (Table 2).

The most commonly reported government support measures included guidance on centre or school management during the crisis. Fifty-six per cent of Asia-Pacific respondents and twenty-four per cent of Sub-Saharan Africa respondents cited this activity.

Regarding regular government communication with centres to disseminate operational instructions during the crisis, fifty-three per cent of Asia-Pacific respondents mentioned this. In relation to monitoring the crisis and suggesting possible responses, forty-three per cent of Asia-Pacific respondents mentioned this.

Few centre heads reported receiving any financial assistance from their respective governments. Twenty-four per cent in the Asia-Pacific survey and four per cent in the Sub-Saharan Africa survey indicated they received some form of financial aid (Table 2).

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Table 2:

Government support received by centres, by region

Type of government support received by centres	Asia-Pacific (per cent)	Sub-Saharan Africa (per cent)
Regular/clear guidance on centre/school management in a crisis situation	55.7%	23.9%
Provide sanitary supplies and/or personal protective equipment	28.6%	10.4%
Financial assistance	24.5%	3.8%
Regular outreach to your centre/school to monitor the current situation	--	5.0%
Communicate regular instructions/guidelines on centre/school operation during crisis	52.9%	--
Monitor and report on the current situation, including possible centre/school responses	42.8%	--
Provide ICT equipment and facilities	17.6%	0.9%
Receives no support	10.2%	68.9%
<i>Total respondents (n)</i>	<i>1,132</i>	<i>704</i>

Note: Percentages will not total to 100 as the question allowed for multiple responses.

Sources: COVID-19 Early Childhood Education Workforce Survey; COVID-19 Early Childhood Education Personnel Survey in Sub-Saharan Africa.

²² The respondents were from urban (5.3 per cent), peri-rural (0.8 per cent) and rural (4.1 per cent) areas.

Despite the fact that over half (fifty-two per cent) of Sub-Saharan Africa survey participants specified that they worked in public ECE centres, a high proportion of them (sixty-nine per cent) indicated they received no government support in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regarding responses about the availability and provision of stakeholder support, only six per cent of centre head participants in the Sub-Saharan Africa survey indicated they received this backing. This finding and the previously mentioned lack of government support to ECE centres suggests ECE centres in this region were under substantial pressure during the time of the survey.

Government support to ECE staff

Centre head participants in both surveys were asked to identify what government support was available to help staff continue teaching during the closure periods. In the Asia-Pacific region, forty-five per cent of participants specified that their staff received in-service training to prepare for remote teaching, thirty-one per cent reported that practical guidelines for ICT-based teaching were provided and twenty-seven per cent indicated they received ready-made teaching and learning materials.

Regarding the Sub-Saharan Africa region, responses from centre heads implied they were provided with little in the way of government support for their endeavour to deliver remote teaching and learning activities. In this region, five per cent of centre heads indicated their governments had provided their staff with training on how to conduct remote teaching, three per cent said their staff received practical guidelines on how to conduct remote teaching and less than two per cent reported that ready-made teaching and learning materials were provided to staff.

Overall, a very high percentage, seventy-four per cent, of centre head respondents in the Sub-Saharan Africa survey indicated their staff received no government support, while twenty-one per cent of respondents in the Asia-Pacific survey reported the same situation. These regional differences in government support may be linked to differing levels of ICT access and infrastructure, as well as the availability of remote teaching, learning resources and personnel experience.

Key finding 4: The majority of ECE centres in the Asia-Pacific continued education and communication with parents and half of ECE centres did so in Sub-Saharan Africa. The most frequently reported means of communication and education was through mobile messaging platforms in both regions.

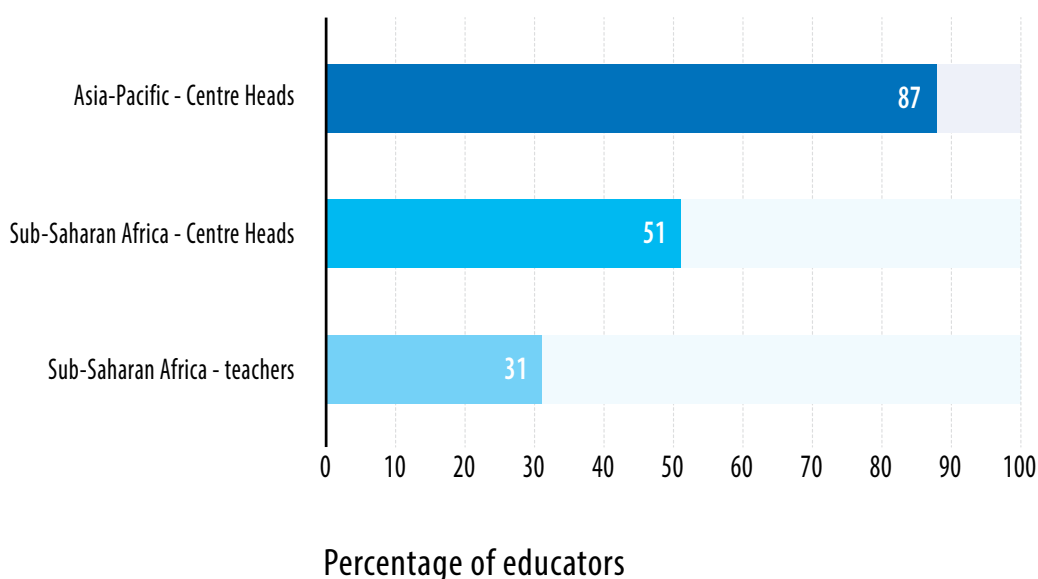
Responses to questions about whether centres were able to continue to provide education and communicate with children and parents since closures show different experiences in the two surveyed regions. Over eighty per cent of centre heads in the Asia-Pacific region

indicated they had been able to continue providing education and/or communication with children and families since the COVID-19 outbreak.

The situation was very different in Sub-Saharan Africa, with just over half of centre heads and less than one-third of teachers reporting they could continue teaching or communicating with families during closures (Figure 1). This may be linked to the different levels of access ECE personnel had to ICT connectivity and equipment, as mentioned previously.

Figure 1:

Percentage of educators (centre heads and teachers) who said they were able to continue education or communication since closures, by region



Sources: COVID-19 Early Childhood Education Workforce Survey; COVID-19 Early Childhood Education Personnel Survey in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Regarding the choice of media formats to facilitate education and communication with parents; mobile messaging platforms were the most frequently used in the Asia-Pacific (sixty-five per cent), followed by online formats (fifty-eight per cent).

In the Sub-Saharan Africa region, mobile technologies (messaging platforms and text messages) were used more frequently than fixed technologies, such as radio or television, with over fifty per cent of respondents reporting the use of mobile messaging platforms for teaching and over seventy per cent of respondents for communicating.

At the same time, over forty per cent of respondents reported physically distributing learning activities and twelve per cent conducted regular home visits to maintain communications with parents in Sub-Saharan Africa (Table 3).

Table 3:

Methods used by centres for teaching and communication with families, by region

Medium	Asia-Pacific	Sub-Saharan Africa	
	Teaching and Communicating	Teaching	Communicating
	Per cent	Per cent	Per cent
Online	57.9	24.5	19.6
Radio	8.6	6.9	--
TV	22.0	8.5	--
Mobile Text messages (SMS)	21.2	25.1	32.5
Mobile Messengers (e.g. Whatsapp)	65.1	50.7	73.3
Social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram)	22.4	14.3	20.4
Distribution of learning activities	--	41.9	--
Home visits	--	--	12.4
<i>Total respondents (n)</i>	1030	363	

Note: Percentages will not total to 100 as the question allowed for multiple responses.

Sources: COVID-19 Early Childhood Education Workforce Survey; COVID-19 Early Childhood Education Personnel Survey in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Key finding 5: A lack of affordable Internet access and equipment was reported as the greatest challenge to remote teaching and learning in both regions, followed by a lack of training and support on remote teaching and learning.

The sudden shift to remote teaching and learning for ECE centres was unexpected and brought unprecedented challenges in both regions. While countries in the Asia-Pacific generally have more extensive ICT access than Sub-Saharan Africa, both regions have areas, such as rural and remote expanses, where ICT access is limited or non-existent, as stated earlier.

In response to a question about the main challenges faced by ECE centres in their provision of remote teaching and learning, centre head participants indicated a lack of equipment, reliable Internet connections and affordable data plans as the greatest obstacles in both regions.

The surveys indicated that sixty-six per cent of centre head respondents in Sub-Saharan Africa and forty-three per cent of their counterparts in the Asia-Pacific indicated a lack of training, guidance and support on remote teaching and learning as another major barrier.

Insufficient support given to parents and caregivers in promoting their children's remote learning – a question only asked in the Sub-Saharan Africa survey – was also highlighted as an issue by sixty-eight per cent of centre head participants (Table 4).

Table 4:

Challenges of remote learning faced by ECE centres, by region

Challenges	Asia-Pacific	Sub-Saharan Africa
	Per cent	Per cent
Lack of equipment		70.8
No access to a reliable Internet connection	65.2	50.4
No affordable data plan/Internet connectivity options		47.6
Lack of training and guidance/support on distance teaching and learning	43.1	65.7
Lack of opportunity to learn how to manage lessons online	29.9	--
Lack of teaching and learning materials in official language	25.7	23.0
Lack of teaching and learning materials in local language		20.4
The learning gap between those who are capable and those who are less so will increase	35.3	--
The learning gap will increase	--	19.7
Unequal participation among children in home-based learning	--	39.9
Difficult to monitor children's progress in learning	58.4	46.2
Parents/caregivers do not have adequate support to promote young children's distance learning	--	68.0
Maintaining learners' motivation	35.5	--
Communication with parents	26.5	--
Other	--	2.9
<i>Total respondents (n)</i>	1128	712

Sources: COVID-19 Early Childhood Education Workforce Survey; COVID-19 Early Childhood Education Personnel Survey in Sub-Saharan Africa.

See: <https://www.unicef.org/eap/reports/education-every-ability>

Key finding 6: Maintaining regular contact through messaging, social media, or other platforms and following up on home learning and play activities were frequently reported as the most effective remote teaching strategies.

Centres that were already engaged in remote teaching and learning in both regions were asked, through an open-ended question, to identify the approaches they found the most effective in supporting children's learning (Table 5). The most frequently cited strategies in the Asia-Pacific region were related to regular contact, either through messaging apps and social media (thirty-nine per cent) and home learning with follow-up monitoring (nineteen per cent).

In the Sub-Saharan Africa region, fifteen per cent of teacher respondents found home work with a follow-up as an effective strategy, followed by regular contact through messaging, social media or other apps (eleven per cent). It should be noted that in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, where few centres had stated that they were using remote teaching and learning, over sixty per cent of teacher respondents indicated that no strategy was found to be effective, while in the Asia-Pacific, thirty-six per cent said that no particular strategy was especially effective.

Table 5:

Effective strategies for remote learning reported by centres, by region

Strategy	Asia-Pacific	Sub-Saharan Africa
	Per cent	Per cent
Nothing/None/Nil/No	36.3	61.3
Regular contact through messaging, social media or other apps	38.6	11.1
Work sent home with follow-up	18.8	15.1
Clustering educators to share equipment	--	1.0
Online competitions	--	0.5
Using radio or television to broadcast lessons	3.4	6.0
Using small groups or individual lessons	1.1	--
Other	4.3	5.0
<i>Total respondents (n)</i>	749	199

Note: Percentages will not total to 100 as the question allowed for multiple responses.

Sources: COVID-19 Early Childhood Education Workforce Survey; COVID-19 Early Childhood Education Personnel Survey in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Key finding 7: Ensuring provision of COVID-19 preventive measures in ECE centres was the most frequently cited requirement for reopening, followed by parents' support for children's personal hygiene practices.

Participants in both surveys were asked to indicate what they require so they could reopen ECE centres and resume in-person learning (Table 6). The responses were similar across the regions. The majority of responses relate to COVID-19 preventive measures, such as ensuring social distancing, cleaning and access to personal protective equipment (PPE).

About twenty per cent of respondents stated that parents' support was necessary to enable ECE centres to reopen. This 'support' included parents' willingness to send their children to centres once reopened, their backing for enhanced hygiene provision for children and an approach that would keep children at home if they displayed signs of illness. Some centres

said their ability to maintain personal hygiene and reduce the spread of COVID-19 was dependent on the availability of running water and the construction of new lavatory/hand washing stations at key entry points.

A wide range of responses were received from centre heads, grouped under the 'other' category (sixty-four per cent) of Asia-Pacific respondents and (thirty-nine per cent) of Sub-Saharan Africa respondents. Many of these responses were not directly related to the pandemic. These responses may relate to concerns that already existed, prior to closures caused by COVID-19.

The most frequent response from centre heads suggested that 'better teachers' as well as a 'better ECE curriculum' were needed. They also cited a need for 'more teachers', which may relate to the need for smaller groups to facilitate social distancing, or to a general need for more teachers due to a high number of children enrolled in the centres.

Table 6:

Centre heads' perceived requirements for centres to re-open, by region

Centres' requirements to re-open	Asia-Pacific	Sub-Saharan Africa
	Per cent	Per cent
Hand sanitizer/masks/gloves	47.1	55.0
Increased distance between seats	30.3	34.6
Regular cleaning	12.6	22.0
Increased health care (physical health, mental health)	11.8	4.3
Smaller/reorganized class groups	10.9	--
Temperature checks or other screening	7.6	12.1
Groups in shifts or reduced hours or later opening	5.0	3.6
Need running water	1.7	3.3
Children only – no parents	1.7	11.1
Increased space	0.8	3.3
Phased return (grades in school)	--	2.4
Need parent support	22.7	19.9
Reduced fees	--	3.8
Nothing/None/Nil/No/Just open	10.9	2.4
Other	63.9	38.6
<i>Total respondents (n)</i>	119	422

Note: Percentages will not total to 100 as the question allowed for multiple responses.

Sources: COVID-19 Early Childhood Education Workforce Survey; COVID-19 Early Childhood Education Personnel Survey in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Teacher participants in the Sub-Saharan Africa region were asked about their professional learning needs before returning to their centres. Their most frequent responses were related to the pandemic: How to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and how to ensure the correct application of sanitary measures, including PPE with children. About one fifth (eighteen per cent) responded that they would need training on remote teaching and five per cent indicated that they would need training on how to deal with children's fears and trauma.

Key finding 8: The COVID-19 crisis has shown that ECE centres serve as important providers of early learning opportunities as well as health and nutrition, especially for disadvantaged children.

A review of the free-text responses to a number of issues revealed that some participants were keenly aware of the impacts of COVID-19 on their children, other than education during closures. Some noted that, during normal pre-COVID-19 times, there were children who did not always eat over the weekends and relied on food provided to them while they were at an ECE centre or at school on weekdays.

With the closures caused by COVID-19, some children may not have regular access to food. Others indicated that provision of in-kind support, such as food baskets for distribution during closures or supplies of extra food upon reopening, would be integral to their plans for supporting their communities in the coming months.



Conclusions

While the regional surveys are not meant to provide generalizable regional pictures, nor are they intended to be comparative, they have given some ECE personnel an opportunity to share information about their status, as well as their concerns in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis.

They also offer a snapshot of the situations and challenges faced by some ECE personnel with regard to key issues such as working conditions, practices and challenges related to continuing education for children and communication with parents during the crisis, plus professional training needs.

As shown throughout this report, the extent of their ability to respond to the crisis, as well as the activities and support provided to children and their families, seems to have been dependent on the level of resources available to them. This includes ICT and Internet access, infrastructure and equipment, the availability of other resources and support made available to them, plus prior knowledge and skills about crisis management and remote teaching and learning.

The challenges ECE personnel faced have most likely been compounded by the pre-existing vulnerability of ECE linked to lower government investment level²³ and a greater presence of private sector employment compared to other levels of education.²⁴

As 63.9 per cent of respondents in the Asia-Pacific region and 38.6 per cent of respondents in the Sub-Saharan Africa region pointed out (Table 6), in order to build better and more resilient ECE systems, governments need to address pre-COVID 19 challenges, such as the lack of a trained and qualified ECE workforce and developmentally appropriate ECE curricula.

The following key messages emanated from the survey data.

²³ Early childhood education tends to receive the least government education expenditure as a percentage of GDP compared to primary and secondary education. For example, in 2015, pre-primary, primary and secondary education respectively were allocated the following percentages of GDP: 0.17 per cent, 1.69 per cent and 1.02 per cent in Australia; 0.06 per cent, 2.08 per cent and 1.29 per cent in Cabo Verde; 0.18 per cent, 1.39 per cent and 0.48 per cent in Comoros; 0.1 per cent, 1.45 per cent and 0.66 per cent in Cote d'Ivoire; 1.07 per cent, 1.1 per cent and 1.41 per cent in Mongolia; 0.34 per cent, 2.06 per cent and 1.07 per cent in Niger; 0.05 per cent, 1.19 per cent and 0.74 per cent in Rwanda, and 0.22 per cent, 1.86 per cent and 1.13 per cent in Senegal (UIS data).

²⁴ In 2018, 33.8 per cent and 55.1 per cent of total pre-primary enrolment occurs in the private sector in Sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia and Pacific respectively, compared to 14.3 per cent and 10.3 per cent in primary and 20.8 per cent and 19.2 per cent in secondary in the respective regions (UIS data).

Key message 1: Provide timely financial and in-kind assistance in crisis situations and in support of safe reopenings conditions for ECE centres

The survey findings revealed financial difficulties experienced by ECE personnel, such as a reduction and non-payment of staff salaries and forced or voluntary departure from work since the outbreak of COVID-19 in the two regions, as well as limited or no access to social security during closures in the Asia-Pacific. More than one-third of Sub-Saharan Africa respondents and one-tenth of Asia-Pacific respondents reported their centres had not received any government support to face COVID-19-induced challenges.

The main operational concerns reported by centre head participants in Sub-Saharan Africa include parents not willing, or able to pay fees and ECE centres not being able to cover operational costs and staff salaries, followed by concerns over not being able to provide for educational continuity and psychosocial support for families and children.

Some respondents concern that centre closures are negatively affecting children's nutritional status as their access to daily meals, available at centres, was cut. They suggested the distribution of food to families in need as an appropriate intervention.

To support the wellbeing of ECE personnel and their continued engagement with children and families in distance learning, as well as to encourage them to stay on in the profession, the provision of timely financial and in-kind assistance was identified. The survey data identified four broad areas, as reported by survey respondents, as requiring assistance:

- **Assistance in overcoming the hardships of ECE centres and the families they serve, including food security and psychosocial wellbeing, in crisis situations**, such as child allowances (e.g. Thailand, Japan and the Republic of Korea²⁵), ECCE worker wage subsidies (e.g. New Zealand²⁶), cash programmes including cash transfers and cash-for-work (over 27 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa²⁷) and emergency food relief (e.g. Australia²⁸, Kenya²⁹).
- **Assistance in remote teaching and learning for young children**, including training and guidance on remote teaching and learning,³⁰ play-based and context-sensitive materials for remote teaching and learning, ICT equipment and subsidized or free data packages to access the Internet.

25 E. Park, H. Logan, L. Zhang, N. Kamigaichi and U. Kulapichitr, 2020, *Responses to coronavirus pandemic in early childhood services across five countries in the Asia-Pacific region*: OMEP Policy Forum, International Journal of Early Childhood, Vol. 52, pp. 249–266., See: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13158-020-00278-0>

26 Ministry of Social Development, 2021, *The latest guidance and information for all social services*, See: <https://msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/newsroom/2020/covid-19/the-latest-guidance-and-information-for-all-social-services.html>

27 M. Cummins, 2020, *COVID-19: A Catastrophe for children in Sub-Saharan Africa: Cash transfers and a Marshall Plan can help*, UNICEF, See: <https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/7626/file/COVID-19-A%20Catastrophe-for-Children-in-SSA.pdf>

28 Department of Health and Human Services, 2021, *Community inclusion and food relief – coronavirus (COVID-19)*, See: <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/community-inclusion-and-food-relief-coronavirus-covid-19>

29 V. Nechifor, M.P. Ramos, E. Ferrari, J. Laichena, E. Kihiu, D. Omanyo, R. Musamali and B. Kiriga, 2021. *Food security and welfare changes under COVID-19 in Sub-Saharan Africa: Impacts and responses in Kenya*, *Global Food Security*, Vol. 28, Article 100514, See: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2211912421000249>

30 This includes how ECE personnel can guide parents on supporting their children's remote learning and development at home.

- **Assistance in facilitating safe reopening of ECE centres**, including the provision of PPE, availability of accessible, gender-segregated water and hygiene, guidance on COVID-19 measures for centres and parents and planning for the resumption of face-to-face teaching and learning.

Key message 2: Improve ECE personnel's capacity with regard to remote teaching and learning and crisis management and invest in providing them with decent working conditions

The survey data has clearly shown that ECE personnel lacked prior training on crisis management and remote teaching, including access to technology and the use of digital platforms. Provision of the latter would have helped them to better respond to challenges brought about by the COVID-19 crisis in both regions. It was also indicated that one of the main challenges reported by centre heads in providing for remote teaching and learning was a lack of training and guidance and support (forty-three per cent in the Asia-Pacific) and (sixty-six per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa). The fact that the majority of Sub-Saharan Africa teacher participants and more than one-third of Asia-Pacific participants reported not having any particular effective remote teaching strategies to share may be indications they felt unsure of their own practices and were in need of guidance and training on how to use ICT in pedagogy.

These findings could also be indicative of the need for systemic workforce development initiatives, generally, that promote ECE teachers and service providers to use age-appropriate teaching pedagogies and strategies during in-person learning situations.

ECE teachers and service providers may not feel confident in articulating early learning and development strategies in general given often cited limitations in their professional qualifications, the amount and frequency of pre-service professional development received and opportunities for in-service professional development.³¹

The lack of ECE personnel qualifications and professional development, pre-crisis, may be compounded when asking personnel how ECE teaching strategies may be translated to remote learning situations during a crisis situation.

Since the time the surveys were conducted, ECE centres and schools have reopened in many countries. However, some countries are relying on a hybrid approach that combines in-person classroom and remote learning to prevent a worsening of the COVID-19 learning situation. This approach has also been adopted as a preventive measure in case schools and educational establishments close again in certain localities.³²

³¹ M. J. Neuman, K. Josephson and P.G. Chua, 2015, *A review of the literature: Early childhood care and education (ECCE) personnel in low- and middle-income countries*. Results for Development Institute and UNESCO, See: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000234988?posInSet=1&queryId=277829c9-af5f-40c7-8db0-9c75fa56258d>

³² United Nations, 2020, *The virus that shut down the world: Education in crisis*, UN News, 28 December 2020, See: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/12/1080732>

In the context of uncertainties about the subsequent evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic and in support of building a resilient ECE system that can address a similar crisis in the future, the provision of training on crisis management and remote teaching and learning to ECE centre heads and teachers is critical and should be integrated into education plans and reflected in related budgets across levels of the education system, in both surveyed regions.

It is strongly recommended that training opportunities on remote teaching and learning and crisis management, including how to support children's and families' psychosocial wellbeing at distance, should be provided during a time of crisis. These activities can be delivered online, via TV or radio broadcasts – if the current sanitary measures in place do not allow the organization of face-to-face training. Furthermore, formal units or modules on remote learning and crisis management should be included in pre-service and in-service training and professional development programmes for all teachers and centre heads.

Furthermore, the surveys have shown the hardships experienced by centres during the COVID-19 pandemic, in terms of maintaining the salaries of ECE staff, keeping them in employment and sustaining adequate operations. As the majority of respondents were female in both regions, this highlights that women are disproportionately affected by crises and they face further implications for gender equitable access to employment and the workforce.

Demotivation toward work and departure from centres triggered by the COVID-19 crisis are likely to exacerbate the shortage of qualified teachers in the future. While these experiences will differ from centre-to-centre and will more likely hit private and community-based provisions than public provisions, the responses do point to vulnerable and discouraging situations in which many ECE personnel find themselves.

As decent working conditions are essential for promoting staff motivation, wellbeing and quality work, as well as for building the ECE profession,³³ more investment in strengthening the overall working conditions of ECE personnel is needed.

Key message 3: Strengthen efforts to develop remote teaching and learning that is adapted to the early years and to local contexts

The survey data has shown that a lack of access to remote teaching and learning materials was an obstacle to ECE staff in being able to ensure learning continuity for young children in both regions. Close to thirty per cent of centre head respondents in the Asia-Pacific and less than two per cent of centre head respondents in Sub-Saharan Africa reported that their staff benefited from the provision of ready-made teaching and learning materials from the government.

³³ ILO, 2013, *ILO Policy Guidelines on the promotion of decent work for early childhood education personnel*, See: https://www.ilo.org/sector/Resources/codes-of-practice-and-guidelines/WCMS_236528/lang-en/index.htm

Around one-fourth of centre head respondents, in both surveys, indicated that a lack of remote teaching and learning materials was a challenge faced by staff during the crisis. These findings may suggest that ECE has not been a target for ICT-based provision in both regions and especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, a global region that is home to a number of countries with modest levels of formal ECE provision and where access to ICT infrastructure and equipment is relatively low.

Some respondents in the Sub-Saharan Africa survey indicated that remote teaching and learning was 'not appropriate' for their children, at least in the way they interpreted it. This may reflect their understanding of this delivery mode as requiring learners to engage in independent learning through remotely provided instructions, which may not be possible in the early years unless accompanied with intensive service provider training on age-appropriate ways to engage young children virtually.

Alternatively, this may reflect the fact that they have not been exposed to developmentally appropriate remote ECE programmes that promote holistic learning and play. A few participants in the Asia-Pacific survey indicated that young children are not able to stay focused in front of a screen for a long time, suggesting that age-appropriate recommendations for the amounts of screen time should be balanced with remote learning needs, or that alternative options for home-based learning and play-based curriculum should be developed and implemented.

The above findings highlight the need for reinforced efforts to provide remote teaching and learning that is adopted to the early years and to local contexts and to make it available to ECE personnel. In developing remote teaching and learning, the following are some suggested directions:

- *Ensure that remote teaching and learning strategies in ECE promote a child's holistic development, learning and play.* Such an effort should be in alignment with the national curriculum, early learning and development standards, and/or existing parenting programmes.
- *Emphasize the importance of play and learning through play.* Play is an effective way not only to promote young children's development and learning, it also reduces pressure and negative emotions and nurtures resilience. A central aim should be to support children's play and playful interactions with caregivers and peers in the context of the home environment. This approach can bring rich opportunities for social and emotional learning, cognitive, language and communication development. Physical activity, self-help and helping with housework are equally important for children's physical growth and psychological health and these are essential components of the learning process.

- *Include a parenting education and support component in the programmes.* During ECCE centre and school closures due to COVID-19, the critical role of parents and family members as their children's educators has never been so elevated.³⁴ It will therefore be important to undertake ECE needs assessment efforts, or integrate ECE into wider education in emergencies or education sector-specific crisis assessments to understand the needs of both young children and their parents/caregivers in the context of COVID-19 and wider crises more generally. Programmes should subsequently be designed to address their needs and also include the promotion of playful parent-child interactions and activities as an integral part of remote learning programmes and resources for early childhood. Guidance for parents should acknowledge their multiple roles and responsibilities and it is important not to put further pressure on caregivers as they are likely to be experiencing more anxiety and stress than under normal circumstances.
- *Develop programmes that use suitable delivery modes depending on the contexts.* In the Asia-Pacific survey, the most frequently reported method of remote teaching and communication with parents was through mobile messages (sixty-five per cent), followed by online methods (fifty-eight per cent). In the Sub-Saharan Africa survey, mobile messages was the most frequently used method (fifty per cent) for remote teaching, followed by the physical distribution of learning materials (forty-two per cent), mobile texts and online methods (both twenty-five per cent). Mobile messaging platforms appear as a method to be actively explored in developing effective programmes and practices, although the extent to which these platforms are age-appropriate and accessible to parents/caregivers with varying literacy levels needs to be further explored. In addition, the impact of the use of mobile messaging platforms on privacy, intellectual property rights and personnel working conditions also requires further study.
- *Pursue parallel efforts to improve access to ICT infrastructure and equipment in order to close the digital divide and contribute to the creation of a more resilient ECE system.* The top challenges in providing for continuity of learning and communication, reported by survey participants in both regions, were related to the lack of ICT equipment and access to the Internet and affordable data plans. Providing financial and material support to ECE centres and families for making technology and devices more readily available, especially for disadvantaged locations and offering free data plans for educational purposes in partnerships with telecommunication providers can be considered in both pre- and during crisis situations as an option for expanding ECE systems' reach to the most vulnerable ECE service providers, young children and their families.

³⁴ UNESCO, 2021, *One year into COVID: Prioritizing education recovery to avoid a generational catastrophe*, UNESCO online conference report, See: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000376984>

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