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# THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN KOSOVO





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June 2021, Prishtina

**Published by the one-year program “Quality, Accountability and Inclusiveness in Education 2021”**

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**Design: *envinion*:**



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This report was prepared with the support of the one-year program “Quality, Accountability and Inclusion in Education 2021”, funded by the European Union Office in Kosovo, as part of the Framework Partnership Agreement signed between KEC and the EU Office in Kosovo in November 2019. The contents of this publication will in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.

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# Abbreviations

<b>PA</b>	Professional Departments/Assets
<b>WB</b>	World Bank
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>COVID-19</b>	CO (Corona), VI (Virus), D (Disease)
<b>MED</b>	Municipal Education Directorate
<b>GIZ</b>	German Corporation for International Cooperation
<b>EI</b>	Education Inspectorate
<b>KPI</b>	Kosovo Pedagogical Institute
<b>KEC</b>	Kosova Education Center
<b>PECF</b>	Pre-University Education Curriculum Framework
<b>MESTI</b>	Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>PISA</b>	Program for International Student Assessment
<b>KESP</b>	Kosovo Education Strategic Plan
<b>CLO</b>	Curriculum area learning outcomes
<b>SLO</b>	Learning outcomes of the subject/topic
<b>EIMS</b>	Education Information Management System
<b>AI</b>	Administrative Instruction
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund
<b>NIPHK</b>	National Institute of Public Health in Kosovo
<b>UUESC</b>	United Union of Education, Science and Culture of the Republic of Kosovo

# Executive Summary

The global pandemic known as Covid-19, which started at the beginning of 2020, has challenged societies and education systems everywhere, with effects that are not yet fully known. In its beginnings, almost all education systems took measures to close schools in order to prevent the spread of the virus and preserve the health of citizens. In response to the circumstances, the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation did the same. In cooperation with the municipal directorates of education, international partners supporting education, non-governmental organizations and the information technology industry, it managed to organize distance teaching in the pandemic conditions and conclude the 2019-2020 school year.

Lack of experience in managing education in such circumstances, lack of a digital learning platform and institutionally developed digital teaching materials, but also digital competence in the education community, were some of the challenges that influenced the management of pre-university education in Kosovo and the fulfillment of its goals.

The pandemic situation with Covid-19, present and unpredictable even in the phase of preparations for the start of the new school year 2020-2021, forced the education systems again to find different modalities of organizing learning in conditions of the pandemic. The same was done by the education authorities in Kosovo. It was decided that the organization of the learning process be realized according to three scenarios: Scenario A - school teaching; Scenario B - combined teaching (in school and online) and Scenario C – distance/online teaching. The organization of teaching in the conditions of the pandemic was followed by numerous discussions and debates, which served as a starting point for conducting this study.

The main purpose of this study is to identify the challenges currently facing pre-university education in Kosovo due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, to describe the framework of measures/policies developed during this period and opportunities for more effective responses to new circumstances created in the pre-university education.

The study was conducted through a qualitative research approach, which included a comprehensive analysis of the framework of education measures/policies for the organization of teaching under the pandemic conditions, reports for this period of teaching, and semi-structured interviews and focus groups conducted with representatives of the education community related to pre-university education. Through this research approach, the coverage of the framework of measures and actions was assessed for:

- aspects of organizing the teaching under pandemic conditions,
- returning to school and implementing the curriculum under the context of teaching during the pandemic;
- inclusion of children from vulnerable groups in pre-university education;
- professional development of teachers during the pandemic;
- the role of parents during teaching in pandemic;
- monitoring pre-university education and reporting during the pandemic;
- the challenges facing the pandemic, as well as the opportunities to be used in the best response to the circumstances created by Covid-19.

Despite the rapid response of education institutions to the first phase of the pandemic (March-June 2020), preparations for the start of the new school year 2020-2021 and return to school are described by insufficient institutional commitment for proper response and decision-making under the circumstances created, which were reflected in the postponement of the start of the new school year. However, even under these conditions, plans and guidelines were developed for the start of the new school year to continue with eLearning, and to return to school as a greater achievement supported by the community of teachers, parents and students. Upon returning to school, teaching was organized according to three scenarios approved by MESTI in cooperation with NIPHK.

Overall, the epidemiological crisis from Covid-19 highlighted many **challenges and problems** in the education system in Kosovo, which it continued to face during the pandemic. The biggest challenges faced by pre-university education during the pandemic are the level of the system and society readiness for dealing with emergency situations, such as pandemics, organization of teaching under pandemic conditions, management of the situation with staff during the pandemic, quality of teaching, work with reduced class schedule lasting 25-30 minutes, division of students into two groups, workload of teachers, quality of work of teachers with second groups of the same class, the work of teachers with students under scenarios B and C, etc.

Other challenges that pre-university education has faced during the pandemic are also the lack of a central institutional mechanism dealing with the digitalization of education, adapting learning environments to pandemic conditions in order to develop competencies, respond in a timely and proper manner, and in a timely manner to learning losses, needs and demands of marginalized groups with support measures to ensure access and active involvement in the learning process, lack of a support system for parents, insufficient psychological services in schools, lack of a monitoring framework of education institutions for the learning process in pandemic conditions and reporting through which it would be possible to report with measurement indicators, etc.

Insufficient capacities for monitoring the learning process in pandemic times, placing the main focus of all logistical and organizational support mechanisms, the shift of focus from the content of the learning process,

the approaches to teaching and the quality of teaching under pandemic conditions, were other challenges that characterized pre-university education in pandemic conditions.

On the other hand, the epidemiological crisis from Covid-19, highlighted some **opportunities**, which should be used to better respond to the circumstances created by Covid-19, as well as to establish the framework of orientations and the focus of the reform in the future, in order to increase the quality of pre-university education.

Experiences from the organization of teaching under the conditions of the pandemic, especially from the distance learning, in addition to the challenges, constitute a good opportunity to understand the importance and priority of using technology in teaching and to take concrete measures in building and incorporating online learning in the education system of Kosovo.

The lessons learned from this experience of organizing the education system in response to the created circumstances, are a good opportunity to learn more about the advantages of using technology in teaching, about the mode of distance learning, and about taking concrete measures in the construction and integration of online learning in the education system of Kosovo. The experience with the pandemic created opportunities to set the framework for the orientations and focus of the reform in the future, in order to increase the quality of pre-university education.

The study offers **recommendations** which relate to specific aspects of completing the legal framework and measures aimed at addressing the challenges and problems encountered in learning under pandemic conditions, including: reviewing and improving school counseling and support mechanisms, focusing on the development of digital competencies, identifying and addressing learning losses, taking the learning environment into account, improving funding for pre-university education, coordinating measures and actions in emergencies and development processes in education, improving and advancing the management system information, etc. The main findings and recommendations of the study show that the system needs more responsibility and accountability, as well as synergies to improve the quality of pre-university education.



The biggest challenges faced by pre-university education during the pandemic are the level of the system and society readiness for dealing with emergency situations, such as pandemics, organization of teaching under pandemic conditions, management of the situation with staff during the pandemic, quality of teaching, work with reduced class schedule lasting **25-30 minutes**, division of students into two groups, workload of teachers, quality of work of teachers with second groups of the same class, the work of teachers with students under scenarios B and C, etc.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of March 2020, in response to the circumstances imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, most of the education systems from the countries of the region, the EU and elsewhere in the world, stopped teaching in schools and other education institutions. In these circumstances, even in Kosovo, from March 12, 2020, based on decisions and instructions of the Government of the Republic of Kosovo, teaching in schools and institutions of higher education was suspended.<sup>1</sup> In addition to this interruption, the preparations for the organization of distance learning, the development of supporting documents and guidelines for the realization of distance learning in the conditions of the global pandemic began.

Thus, based on the guidelines drafted by MESTI during March 2020, in response to the situation created by the pandemic, distance learning began in pre-university education for grades 1-9, which during March-June 2020 was realized through the broadcast of lessons recorded on public television (RTK), through the MESTI channel on YouTube, and through teaching organized with various applications (Zoom, Viber, E-mail, Google Classroom, Skype) by teachers of relevant classes and subjects, where the main emphasis was placed on the tasks resulting from the lessons in public television and feedback related to the tasks. At the upper secondary school levels, distance learning was developed in a decentralized way - at school level, where teachers were the main providers of distance learning.

Referring to the circumstances created by the pandemic, in all the instructions developed by MESTI for the continuation of education and the end of the school year 2019/2020, it was emphasized that the primary purpose of distance learning and assessment was the well-being of children and the promotion of learning. This led to the acceptance of the level of student achievement by March 11, 2020 and all work with children/students to focus on their well-being and the promotion of learning for higher learning achievement. Such measures were in place by most education systems<sup>2</sup>.

In addition to the end of the 2019/2020 school year, preparations for the start of the new school year 2020-2021 began, through different scenarios, as different isolation measures were applied, depending on the level of pandemic spread. In response to pandemic prevention measures, education systems in different countries have planned several scenarios for the development of teaching in the 2020-2021 school year, with the priority of reopening schools, and depending on the spread of the virus and the specifics of schools, also distance teaching or a combination of both forms: in-school and distance learning<sup>3</sup>.

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1 Government of the Republic of Kosovo (March 11, 2020). |||UNTRANSLATED\_CONTENT\_START||| Decision to terminate the education process in public and private education institutions at all levels <https://kryeministri-ks.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Vendimet-e-Mbledhjes-s%C3%AB-7-t%C3%AB-t%C3%AB-Qeveris%C3%AB-s%C3%AB-Republik%C3%AB-s%C3%AB-Kosov%C3%ABs-2020.pdf>

2 Instituti Pedagogjik i Kosovës (2020). Distance learning/e-learning in pre-university education in Kosovo, in the circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic. PIK, Prishtina.

3 Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth (MASR) of Albania, Agency for Quality Assurance of Pre-University Education (ASCAP) (2020). Guide to help leaders, teachers, parents and students of pre-university education institutions on the start of the new school year 2020-2021. [https://www.academia.edu/43963044/Udhezuesi\\_per\\_fillimin\\_e\\_vitit\\_shkollor\\_2020\\_2021](https://www.academia.edu/43963044/Udhezuesi_per_fillimin_e_vitit_shkollor_2020_2021)



The Covid-19 pandemic is expected to have a significant short-term and medium-term impact on all areas of life and relevant sectors, including the education, with particular emphasis on pre-university education. The closure of schools has not only hindered the normal learning process, but also the support for the psycho-emotional well-being of students and has increased inequalities in learning.

Even in Kosovo, the organization of teaching for the school year 2020-2021 started according to three scenarios (A<sup>4</sup> and B<sup>5</sup> and C<sup>6</sup>) in order to help preserve the health of children/students, the health welfare of citizens and the implementation of the education process according to the Kosovo Curriculum Framework (KCF), the core curricula for the three levels of pre-university education, and curricula/subjects for each class in conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic in the Republic of Kosovo<sup>7</sup> (MASH, 2021a).

The Covid-19 pandemic is expected to have a significant short-term and medium-term impact on all areas of life and relevant sectors, including the education, with particular emphasis on pre-university education. The closure of schools has not only hindered the normal learning process, but also the support for the psycho-emotional well-being of students and has increased inequalities in learning<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, it is important to conduct comprehensive analyzes of Covid-19 impact on education, in particular on pre-university education.

This study and analytical report on the *Impact of Covid-19 on Pre-University Education in Kosovo* aims to identify and reflect the challenges currently being faced by pre-university education in Kosovo due to the Covid-19 pandemic as well as the measures/policies developed during this period in response to the circumstances created by the pandemic. Also, this report aims to contribute to the clarification of achievements and the identification of key opportunities to respond to the circumstances created and the needs for the future, in order to provide recommendations for opportunities to be used to continue learning in these circumstances, reducing teaching losses and raising the quality of teaching in pre-university education.

This report does not aim only to explore the current situation regarding the measures and policies taken to address the pandemic situation in pre-university education, but also to stimulate a debate on the opportunities raised to improve and advance the pre-university education to respond effectively to the demands of the society, beyond emergency situations.

4 Scenario A: Low level of risk. Presence teaching in preschools and schools - with preventive measures.

5 Scenario B: Medium risk level. Partial return - combined school attendance and distance learning.

6 Scenario C: High level of risk. Distance learning - TV + e-learning.

7 Ministry of Education and Science. (2020). MES general guide for organizing education in the school year 2020-2021 in the conditions of the COVID pandemic 19. <https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2020/08/udhezuesi-final-file-10-09-2020.pdf>

8 UNICEF (2020). Framework for reopening schools. [https://www.unicef.org/albania/media/2831/file/Frameëork\\_for\\_Reopening\\_Schools.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/albania/media/2831/file/Frameëork_for_Reopening_Schools.pdf)

## 2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study is to identify the challenges currently facing pre-university education in Kosovo due to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, to describe the framework of measures/policies developed during this period and opportunities for more effective response to the circumstances created and impacts from the pandemic.

### The research questions that have led this study:



- What are the main challenges faced by pre-university education in Kosovo during the pandemic?



- What are the possible solutions to address the challenges and problems in pre-university education exposed by the impacts of the pandemic?

### Some of the sub-questions that emerged from the research question are:

- What are the measures taken by MESTI in Kosovo for the organization of teaching in pre-university education in the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic? How relevant are they to student support? Do they cover all levels and specifics of pre-university education?
- What are the findings from the comparative analysis of the reports for the organization of learning according to the three scenarios set by MESTI, the differences in the possibilities of curriculum implementation from the viewpoint of the scenarios with which education institutions have worked during this school year, namely the inclusion of children with special needs and marginalized groups?
- What were the priorities and approaches applied for professional development of teachers in Kosovo during the pandemic?
- What were the approaches applied to monitoring and reporting on the work of pre-university education institutions during the pandemic?
- What are the main challenges faced by pre-university education in Kosovo during the pandemic? What are the possible solutions to address the challenges and problems in pre-university education exposed by the impacts of the pandemic?

### 3. STUDY METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a qualitative research approach. The study is based on the developmental evaluation model, which is based on the principles that evaluation is continuous and that the results are shown to all stakeholders<sup>9</sup>, so that they can be taken into account when addressing the challenges and sustainable development of Pre-University Education after the Covid-19 Pandemic.

**IN THIS STUDY, THROUGH DESK RESEARCH - A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS WAS CONDUCTED ON THE FRAMEWORK OF EDUCATION MEASURES/POLICIES UNDERTAKEN BY MESTI IN KOSOVO FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF TEACHING IN PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION, IN THE CONDITIONS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND REPORTS AND STUDIES IN THIS FIELD, INCLUDING:**

- the legal framework, documents and guidelines for organizing teaching in pre-university education in pandemic conditions, published by MESTI on the e-learning platform <https://masht.rks-gov.net/e-mesimi>;
- official reports and information related to teaching in pre-university education in Kosovo, in the conditions of pandemic, published by MESTI in the official link for publications <https://masht.rks-gov.net/publikimet>;
- decisions regarding teaching in pre-university education in Kosovo, in the conditions of the pandemic, published by MESTI in the official link for the decisions of the Minister <https://masht.rks-gov.net/vendimet-e-ministrit>; and
- reports and other documents related to distance learning, return to school under the pandemic conditions, etc.



<sup>9</sup> Manninen, J. (2014). Evaluation report: Qualitative stakeholder evaluation of the first year of implementation of new Kosovo curriculum. The Twinning Project, funded by the EU and managed by the EU Office in Kosovo.

The analysis and review of the framework of education measures/policies for the organization of learning in the conditions of the pandemic and reports in this field, has been completed with 21 written and oral semi-structured interviews conducted with representatives of the education community related to developments in pre-university education, and with the involvement of 15 teachers and school principals in two focus group discussions. Due to the circumstances created by the pandemic the interviews were mainly conducted in writing. The focus groups were held online, through the ZOOM platform, for a period of two hours. All discussions were recorded and then transcribed into two separate reports from the focus group discussions. Protocols for semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions contained questions and sub-questions related to the questions that lead this study. The questions focused on the measures taken during the pandemic, developments and processes in pre-university education, the organizational aspect of the school year and the school in support of school students, experiences in managing learning in the pandemic conditions, challenges, and Possible solutions to ensure the quality and sustainability of pre-university education, following the impact of Covid-19.

The method of content analysis was used for qualitative data. The topics were coded during the review and analysis of the measures for organizing pre-university teaching during the pandemic. Subsequently, they were reorganized within a structure of topics which characterize this research report.

This approach has helped classify all issues related to the purpose of the study, problems that arose during the cabinet analysis, interviews and focus groups, to be classified, interpreted and described in thematic categories and related to the questions that guided this study.

The authentic information collected through written interviews and focus group discussions and integrated in the study report, encoded in capital letters and in ordinal numbers known by the authors of this study.<sup>10</sup>



The analysis and review of the framework of education measures/policies for the organization of learning in the conditions of the pandemic and reports in this field, has been completed with 21 written and oral semi-structured interviews conducted with representatives of the education community related to developments in pre-university education, and with the involvement of 15 teachers and school principals in two focus group discussions. Due to the circumstances created by the pandemic the interviews were mainly conducted in writing.

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<sup>10</sup> M/1: Teacher with ordinal number 1; D/1: School principal with ordinal number 1; MED/1: Education officer from MED; A/1: Education expert, representatives from organizations that support education.

## 4. ORGANIZATION OF LESSONS IN PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In order to avoid repetitions and to better organize the main findings related to the organization of learning during the pandemic, this chapter is organized in four parts: (i) Measures taken to implement distance learning during the pandemic in March-August 2020; (ii) Planning and preparation for the development of teaching in pandemic conditions (school year 2020-2021); (iii) Budget planning for the organization of teaching in pre-university education, in pandemic conditions (school year 2020-2021); and (iv) Coordination of education institutions to organize teaching in pandemic conditions.



## 4.1. Measures taken to implement teaching in pre-university education during the pandemic in the March - August 2020 period

Based on the circumstances created by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Government of the Republic of Kosovo in March 2020, like other countries in the region, the EU and elsewhere of the world, reacted quickly in terms of obtaining measures and actions in response to the circumstances created by Covid-19. The measures taken in the March-August 2020 period are closely related to the organization of central and local institutions and education institutions/schools/ for the continuation and completion of the school year through distance learning in the situation of full quarantine of the country, whereby in all measures taken during this period, well-being and maintenance of health were primary. To start organizing online learning in various forms, education institutions, parents, teachers, students and the entire education community, showed special mobilization and commitment, an example that the citizens of this country have often known to turn into action. Kosovo faced similar challenges during the 1990s, when it organized parallel schooling, a unique example of civic mobilization to keep the education system alive in times of conflict and war.<sup>11</sup> The challenges presented now in peacetime, due to circumstances created by the pandemic, were not dissimilar.

According to the IPK study report (2020): *Distance learning/e-learning in Pre-University Education in Kosovo, in the circumstances created by the Covid-19 pandemic*, preparations for starting distance learning in times of sudden pandemic were not easy. The pre-university education system was not prepared for such teaching modality. The main challenges were lack of digital competence among teachers for online learning, lack of technology, short time, lack of relevant structures for distance learning, lack of MESTI experience, complicated procurement procedures in MESTI, lack of a standardized platform for distance learning, etc.<sup>12</sup>

According to the study report conducted by KPI(2020), the measures taken by decision-making institutions for the implementation of teaching in pre-university education during the pandemic, in the first phase of the pandemic are similar to those of the region, related to the issuance of decisions on the establishment of mechanisms for the management of distance learning, the issuance of guidelines and instructions for the division of tasks, responsibilities and modalities of the organization of learning, development of online platforms, and engagement of public televisions as official distance learning broadcasters for basic education.

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11 Bardha Qirezi (15.04.2020). Maintaining the education system: How online learning is evolving in pandemic times. <https://d4d-ks.org/editorial/mbajtja-ne-jete-e-sistemit-arsimor-si-po-zhvillohet-mesimi-online-ne-kohe-pandemie/>

12 For more details, see the study report: *Distance learning / e-learning in Pre-University Education in Kosovo, in the circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic*. Kosovo Pedagogical Institute (2020).

Referring to the documents published on the MESTI official website and the reports that reflect distance learning in the March - August 2020 period, the measures taken for the implementation of teaching in pre-university education during the pandemic, are as follows:

- Creating the first learning outline and the resources required for its accomplishment;
- Creating the outline and the first domains for the realization of distance learning;
- Establishment of a Professional Group;<sup>13</sup>
- Creating a distance learning platform <https://masht.rks-gov.net/e-mesimi><sup>14</sup>;
- Negotiating with companies with ready-made online learning platforms;
- Negotiation and decision to start broadcasting video materials on RTK;
- Production of teaching material<sup>15</sup>;
- Broadcasting of video material on RTK and the MESTI channel on 'YouTube'
- The launch of the first online platform in Kosovo "Distance Education - Care, Development and Early Childhood Education for ages 0-6."<sup>16</sup>
- Launch of the "Inclusive Education" platform<sup>17</sup>, and
- Preparation of documents (education policy and guidelines) for the implementation of distance learning in pre-university education in Kosovo.



13 Duties of the distance learning professional group: (i) develop a guide to the roles and responsibilities of distance learning factors; (ii) develop an evaluation guide; (iii) monitor the progress of online learning for quality assurance purposes; (iv) ensure that current solutions are incorporated into the digitalization of learning in Kosovo in the medium term; (v) develop policies for distance learning and digitalization of learning in Kosovo.

14 The E-learning platform contains guides, other documents drafted by MESTI and materials of video lectures. The MESTI platform does not have textbooks available. Referring to the interview by Deputy Minister Xhavit Rexhaj for the study of PIK (2020), who was responsible for the pedagogical part and communication with the MED - school: Realistically, we found nothing. We did not find any document that specifically refers to online or distance learning. We have used existing documents that regulate schooling, such as the school calendar, AI for student assessment, state curricula (NQF), curricula, and more. Were it not for the companies of new technologies (Kallxo.com, Gjirafa, Microsoft, Link Plus), we do not believe that we would dare to take even one step towards the realization of distance learning.

15 The production of teaching materials was done with the support of the Municipal Directorate of Education and teachers of schools in Prishtina. Regarding the teaching materials produced for distance learning, MESTI timely informed that it has decided that these materials be offered as open source with the following conditions: (i) These materials and contents remain the property of MESTI; (ii) These materials and contents may not be modified; and (iii) These materials and content may not be used for profit.

16 In cooperation with the UNICEF Office in Kosovo and Save the Children, as well as with technical support from the organization Open Data Kosovo, MESTI has prepared the Platform "Distance Education - Care, Development and Early Childhood Education for age 0 - 6 years old" <https://edukimihershem.rks-gov.net/>. The platform is dedicated to children aged 0 to 6 years and is in full compliance with the Standards of Development and Learning in Early Childhood 0 - 6 years, and provides support for parents/legal guardians and educators in carrying out daily activities weekly with children at home.

17 The "Inclusive Education" platform developed by MESTI, with the support of the organization "Save the Children", was launched on April 29, 2020. <http://arsimigjithetheperfshires.rks-gov.net/>

For the organization of teaching and finalization of the school year 2019/2020 in the circumstances of the pandemic, MESTI has issued documents (education policies and guidelines) which are published on the e-Learning platform. The developed documents define the duties and responsibilities of all parties and provide guidance on the aspects that cover the realization of distance learning at all levels of pre-university education. The developed documents do not provide detailed instructions for the implementation of the curriculum, the definition of the main topics to be dealt with during the distance learning, or the decision to focus only on the main competencies. This has led to distance learning continue from where regular schooling was interrupted, due to the Covid-19 pandemic (KPI, 2020). Some of the developed documents are:

- Duties and responsibilities for the realization of distance learning<sup>18</sup>;
- Guidelines for the Municipal Directorates of Education for the implementation of online learning for upper secondary schools (USS)<sup>19</sup>;
- Guidelines for MEDs for the implementation of online learning for vocational high schools (VHS) and Competence Centers<sup>20</sup>;
- Using the Zoom - Zoom-us platform<sup>21</sup>;
- Instructions for the Municipal Directorates of Education (MED) and Resource Centers for the realization of distance learning for children/students with special needs<sup>22</sup>;
- A guide to student assessment in distance learning<sup>23</sup>;
- Decision 25/01B on the procedures for the implementation of student assessment during distance learning<sup>24</sup>.
- Information, instructions and rules for candidates (Graduates) for the State Matura Exam (2020)<sup>25</sup>;

In the first phase of the pandemic, starting March 2020, distance learning in primary and lower secondary education in Kosovo was realized through e-learning - video materials on RTK and on MESTI YouTube channel, as well as online learning conducted by schools. This is due to the lack of a unified learning platform and digitized learning materials.

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- 18 Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (2020). Duties and responsibilities for the realization of distance learning [https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2020/03/detyrat-dhe-pergjegjesite-per-realizimin-e-mesimit-ne-distance-mashti\\_1.pdf](https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2020/03/detyrat-dhe-pergjegjesite-per-realizimin-e-mesimit-ne-distance-mashti_1.pdf)
- 19 Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (2020). Guidelines for the municipal directorates of education for the implementation of online learning for upper secondary schools. [https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2020/03/udhezime-per-drejtore-komunale-te-arsimit-per-realizimin-e-mesimit-online-per-shkollat-e-mesme-te-larta-shml-mashti\\_1.pdf](https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2020/03/udhezime-per-drejtore-komunale-te-arsimit-per-realizimin-e-mesimit-online-per-shkollat-e-mesme-te-larta-shml-mashti_1.pdf)
- 20 Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation. (2020). Guidelines for MEDs for conducting online learning for vocational high schools and Competence Centers. [https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2020/03/udhezime-per-drejtore-komunale-te-arsimit-per-realizimin-e-mesimit-online-per-shkollat-e-mesme-te-larta-profesionale-shml-dhe-qendrat-e-kompetences-mashti\\_1.pdf](https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2020/03/udhezime-per-drejtore-komunale-te-arsimit-per-realizimin-e-mesimit-online-per-shkollat-e-mesme-te-larta-profesionale-shml-dhe-qendrat-e-kompetences-mashti_1.pdf)
- 21 Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation. (2020). Using the Zoom - Zoom - us platform. [https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2020/03/udhezues-per-zoom-mashti\\_1.pdf](https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2020/03/udhezues-per-zoom-mashti_1.pdf)
- 22 Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation. (2020). Instructions for the municipal directorates of education (MED) and Resource Centers for the implementation of distance learning for children / students with special needs. <https://masht.rks-gov.net/e-mesimi>
- 23 Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation. (2020). Guide for assessing students during distance learning <https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2020/04/udhezues-per-vleresimin-e-nxenesve-gjate-mesimit-ne-distance.pdf>
- 24 Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (2020). Decision 25/01B on procedures for conducting student assessment during distance learning. <https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2020/04/vendim-procedurat-e-realizimit-te-vleresimit-te-nxenesve-gjate-mesimit-ne-distance-ne-te-gjitha-nivelet-e-arsimit-parauniversitar-ne-kosove-24042020.pdf>
- 25 Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (2020). Information, instructions and rules for candidates (Graduates) - for the State Matura 2020 exam [https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2020/05/informata-udhezime-dhe-rregulla-per-kandidatet-mat-urantet-provimi-i\\_1.pdf](https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2020/05/informata-udhezime-dhe-rregulla-per-kandidatet-mat-urantet-provimi-i_1.pdf)

Thus Kosovo, like countries in the Western Balkans, has tried to overcome the problems with a lack of digital platform and teaching material, by broadcasting pre-recorded lessons on national television, to which a large percentage of the population has access. However, in order to offer mass television lessons, the subjects elaborated and the teaching time were significantly shortened, which means that the right to education for students who relied on television was less effectively protected than for those who had proper digital infrastructure and information technology skills<sup>26</sup>.

In upper secondary education, namely grades 10-12, distance learning is accomplished in a decentralized way by the school itself and its teachers, with platforms and applications that differ from school to school in the way of organization, inclusion of subjects, etc. The implementation of online teaching in high schools in this period, according to the instructions of MESTI, was focused on several general subjects (Language, Mathematics, natural sciences and social subjects).

Referring to the results of the study from KPI (2020), for distance learning/e-learning in pre-university education in Kosovo, the main challenges for distance learning in the first period of the pandemic remain the quality of distance learning, including the quality of video materials and the quality of teaching approaches, then student assessment, lack of technology for teachers and students (families), lack of school conditions at home, non-participation of children from marginalized groups and families with difficult financial conditions.

According to the AIRE Center study (2020): Covid-19 and the Impact on Human Rights, when education is provided primarily through digital platforms, it is likely to have a discriminatory impact on the right of access to education for individuals from socio-economic disadvantaged groups and those living in rural or overcrowded areas. According to this study, students with socio-economic disadvantages are more likely to live in a home environment unsuitable for home learning, less likely to have access to technology such as laptops, and may only have one electronic device used by the entire family. The same situation was reported in the context of education in Kosovo.

On the other hand, distance learning under these circumstances was a good opportunity to keep children mobilized, distract their attention from the pandemic, etc. It is also a good opportunity to learn about the advantages of using technology in teaching, the modality of distance learning, and take concrete measures in building and integrating online learning into the education system, which should be at the service of all children in Kosovo and the diaspora.

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26 AIRE Center (2020). Covid-19 and the Impact on Human Rights (Overview of the relevant jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights (pp. 120 - 12). <https://www.kmd.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/covid-guide-alb.pdf>

## 4.2. Planning and preparation for the development of teaching under the pandemic conditions - school year 2020-2021

To review the situation in pre-university education and the steps to be taken, MESTI, according to the information reports published on its official website has held numerous meetings with internal mechanisms, MEDs and partners that support pre-university education. Based on the measures and preparations developed by MESTI, planning and preparations were made for the development of teaching under pandemic conditions during school year 2020-2021, at municipal and school levels.

Unlike the first phase of the education institutions' reaction to the pandemic with the planning and preparations for the development of teaching for school year 2020-2021, fewer documents and guidelines have been developed, but measures and orientations are integrated within them that cover aspects of planning, hygienic measures, orientations for organizing teaching according to scenarios and aspects of monitoring and inspecting the work of education institutions.

**The main documents that reflect the planning framework and the preparations of the Ministry of Education for the development of teaching under pandemic conditions for the school year 2020-2021 are:**

- MESTI general guide for organizing teaching in the school year 2020-2021 - under the Covid-19 pandemic conditions <https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2020/08/udhezuesi-final-file-10-09-2020.pdf> ; and
- Master plan for the development of teaching under pandemic conditions 2020-2021 in the Republic of Kosovo <https://masht.rks-gov.net/e-mesimi> (published on 18.09.2020)

Referring to the general MESTI guidelines for the organization of teaching in the school year 2020-2021, scenarios A and B and C are followed in order to help maintain the health of children/students, health welfare of citizens, as and the realization of the education process according to the curricular documents, under the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Teaching according to the scenarios set out in this guide enables the organization of learning according to the epidemiological conditions in the country, including the conditions of reopening education institutions with added measures for public health, partial closure conditions or full closure conditions due to health hazards from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The general MESTI guideline for the organization of education in the school year 2020-2021 under pandemic conditions is based on the Framework for the reopening of education institutions approved by the United Nations - UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, WFP, and UNHCR<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> United Nations (April, 2020). Framework for reopening schools. <https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Framework-for-reopening-schools-2020.pdf>

The general MESTI guide is organized in seven chapters, which address the following issues:

- Planning Framework (Policies, Safe Operation, Participant Responsibilities, Marginalized Groups, and Funding);
- General Covid-19 protection measures;
- Organizing education/learning according to scenarios for all levels and methodological guidelines;
- Curriculum Implementation and Methodological Guidelines;
- Digitalization of education/teaching;
- Training of educators/teachers for teaching in education institutions and online;
- Monitoring by the Education Inspectorate.

The guide details teaching scenarios according to risk/pandemic situation levels and measures according to teaching scenarios (A - Presence learning in preschools and schools with preventive measures; B - partial return - combined learning with presence and distance learning; C - distance learning (TV + e-learning), establishment and tasks for TASK Forces in MESTI, MED and at the level of preschool/school institutions.

The way the guide is written and the instructions are given is very flexible as it allows to act according to the instructions, epidemiological circumstances and decisions by the relevant TASK force. In support of this guide, all documents and reports from the meetings with representatives of education institutions emphasize that the decisions to continue the organization of teaching according to the defined scenarios depend on the epidemiological situation and the recommendations of the Advisory Board for Covid-19.

When the third chapter of the General Guide refers to **organization of teaching and organization of school work, according to scenarios A, B and C**, emphasis is placed on general information according to levels of education, including instructions for returning to school depending on scenarios, priorities, maximum number of students in the classroom, reduced school hours, online learning through TV, eLearning, use of e-learning platforms, regular contact with teachers, class teachers, subject teachers, etc. This chapter also reflects the proposal for curriculum planning with the reduction of contents by 25%, for the schools that work under scenario A. On the other hand, there are no guidelines or proposals for the reduction of contents for schools when working under scenario B or C, which implies that schools, regardless of the scenario they work under, must make all the commitments to achieve 75% of the curriculum, learning outcomes and learning contents.

The general guide for the organization of teaching in the school year 2020-2021 in some cases refers to the documents and instructions drafted for the schools in March-April 2020, which covered the teaching during March-June 2020 and the end of the school year 2019/2020. Thus, for example, the guide for the school year 2020-2021, despite the descriptions in the respective learning scenarios, suggests that the implementation of the curriculum in the gymnasium be limited to the main subjects (language, mathematics, natural sciences and social subjects) depending on the type of secondary school, without providing orientations or instructions on how to deal with other subjects that are not covered and how to engage the teachers of these subjects, etc.

Part of the MESTI general guide for the organization of teaching in the school year 2020-2021 under the conditions of the pandemic Covid-19 is also dedicated to **preschool education**. Return of children to preschool institutions - with education/learning activities in groups of up to 15-20 children, at a distance of at least 1.5 - 2m from each other, is described as one of the first priorities in the general guide. According to the descriptions in the platform for early childhood education, the content of the activities presented in this platform stimulates children in their development in all developmental areas, such as: physical, cognitive, emotional, mathematical and creativity, depending on their age. Referring to the statistics since the launch of the platform (analyzed on 13.05.2021), the platform was visited 2,724,122 times, 1,600 educators have been trained to use it, 1,749 digital reports were generated, and 1,075 activities were carried out.

Referring to the written interview of the Preschool Education Division head at MESTI, regarding the preparations for the development of teaching under pandemic conditions for school year 2020-2021, the updating of the online platform “Distance Education - Care, Development and Early Childhood Education for 0-6 years old” has continued along with the cooperation with partners to provide material for parents, legal guardians and education staff on how to talk to children about Covid-19 and translate the content of the platform into Serbian, Turkish and Roma languages. With the support of UNICEF, the World Bank, Save the Children and Caritas Switzerland, in response to the situation created with Covid-19 in education, during this year 8,123 children, mainly from communities and families with social assistance, were provided with didactic material. It was also achieved, as part of the protection measures against Covid-19, to ensure laser thermometers to measure children’s temperature, hygienic material and posters with instructions for protection measures for preschool institutions.

For the purposes of **inclusive education** and addressing the needs of **various marginalized groups**, the general guide for the organization of learning in the school year 2020-2021 suggests that education institutions pay special attention to children coming from marginalized groups, those in difficult socio-economic situation, those with special needs, and children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, for whom individual access is required to education so that they can be active participants in learning. The guidelines are general and lack concrete inputs and examples on how to work with marginalized groups in order to eliminate or reduce learning inequalities.

On the other hand, guidance is provided in the special guide for accessing and providing support for students with special needs for the school year 2020-2021 published on 13 August 2020 (<https://masht.rks-gov.net/e-mesimi>). The guide includes: measures, safety, protection and hygiene for students with special needs in resource centers, ways for organizing the teaching process according to 3 scenarios for students, forms of cooperation with parents, platforms to be used, materials, etc. The guide adapts to the specifics of Resource Centers with dormitories and those without dormitories. The guide also provides information to MEDs and education institutions on all services, trainings, equipment and contacts on where services for students with special needs can be obtained.

Referring to the written interview conducted with the Head of the Inclusive Education Division at MESTI, the main measures taken for inclusive education and marginalized groups for the school year 2020-2021 include (i) distance learning coordination activities with MEDs, Centers Resources and other partners working in the field; (ii) professional, education advice on daily basis for parents, support teachers, teachers and assistants for access to work with children with special needs, forms and techniques of work in carrying out individual activities-tasks, use of didactic materials, breaking down the child’s skills into concrete online pedagogical material steps, video; (iii) training of 297 teachers on the use of the Google Classroom and ZOOM platforms and three-day training of 180 members of the municipal PIA assessment teams; etc.

The large number of children in education groups during the children's attendance in Chapter four of the general guide refers to **guidelines for curriculum implementation and methodological guidelines**. In about eight pages instructions and orientations are given, which are related to the goals of pre-university education in Kosovo, along with competencies as provided by the curricular framework, curriculum principles, and didactic-methodological guidelines for teachers, developed by UNICEF. This chapter does not provide sufficient guidance on:

- Linking lesson plans with preliminary information on the level of achievement of students from the previous grade;
- The manner and the steps on how to focus on the essential contents for achieving the learning outcomes, with illustrative examples at least for certain classes;
- Ways to reduce the amount of teaching content, not to the detriment of the quality of content and learning outcomes;
- Approaches to teaching in order to ensure the attractiveness of the content being elaborated, so as to motivate students to learn, depending on the types of learning scenarios,
- Care and support of students who are reported not to have participated at all in the online learning organized in March - June 2020, namely about 10 thousand students; etc.

According to the general guide, the curriculum group at MESTI will define a more concise version of the CLO and SLO for learning under pandemic, including distance learning. Apart from the teaching plans developed by the professional groups of teachers of the Municipality of Prishtina, for grades 1-9 it has not been possible to provide any document/guide from the curriculum group in MESTI which summarizes the CLO and SLO for teaching under pandemic conditions.

**REGARDING STUDENT ASSESSMENT**, the general guide of MESTI for the organization of teaching in the school year 2020-2021 in conditions of pandemic Covid-19 provides a few instructions and orientations for the schools, as those are more detailed in the guide for the evaluation of students in the school year 2020-2021 in the conditions of the pandemic, which was published on the official website of MESTI (e-learning platform) on October 24, 2020<sup>28</sup>. The Student Assessment Guide is organized into six chapters, including guidelines for:

- Principles of student assessment in pandemic conditions;
- Assessment of students according to the requirements of the curriculum and scenarios of the organization of the school year 2020-2021 in terms of the pandemic;
- Methods of assessing students in pandemic conditions;
- Forms of student assessment in pandemic conditions;
- Assessment modalities in specific cases;
- Roles and responsibilities in assessing students in pandemic conditions.

The descriptions, instructions and guidelines given in the assessment guide are a good basis for teachers and other school stakeholders. The guide has some extended descriptions and repetitions from the general guide for organizing the lessons in the school year 2020-2021, which referring to the purpose of the guide are unnecessary. On the other hand, the guide does not focus on more concrete, concise instructions, illustrated with examples of concrete situations related to student assessment in these conditions, such as identifying learning losses through approaches to assessment methods.

Delayed publication of the student assessment guide (October 24) and the way the guides and other documents are passed on to teachers without any information or discussion organized by the developers of the guide and other documents, do not provide complete information for teachers or the school community and risk non-use or non-referral when organizing the school work and the learning process.

The general guide for the organization of learning in the school year 2020-2021 describes in a separate chapter the situation regarding **Digitalization of learning in schools - platforms, preparation and implementation of online learning**. Information and guidance are important, but they do not provide concrete instructions, with examples, on how schools across Kosovo should coordinate actions towards establishing a base platform at school level to facilitate learning during the pandemic. This platform would include the placement of digital learning materials developed by core subject groups, and it eliminates the use of different online learning applications by teachers of the same school or same class – reportedly quite a challenge for students.

According to the report on the analysis of the preliminary situation for the Strategy for Digitalization of Education in Kosovo 2021-2026<sup>29</sup>, regarding the digitalization of teaching materials for different levels of pre-uni-

28 Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (2020\_01). Guide for the assessment of students in the school year 2020-2021 in the conditions of the COVID 19 pandemic. [https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2020/10/udhezuesi-per-vleresim-2020\\_1.pdf](https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2020/10/udhezuesi-per-vleresim-2020_1.pdf)

29 Jusuf Thaçi (October, 2020): Preliminary Situation Analysis for the Digitalization Strategy of Education in Kosovo 2021-2026. ATOMI Institute, Prishtina. The document was drafted by the ATOMI Institute within the Project “Support for the drafting of a well-planned strategy for the digitalization of the education system in Kosovo”, which is funded by the British Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Development through the British Embassy in Prishtina and which is implemented by the ATOMI Institute.

versity education in Kosovo, it is said that in institutional terms nothing has been done yet, as there are still no digital teaching materials developed in Kosovo, in accordance with state curricula, with subject programs and curricula, which have passed through the relevant control filters and have been approved by the MESTI for use by pre-university education institutions in Kosovo. According to the report, the only such teaching materials are those produced during the Covid-19 pandemic period (starting from March 2020 to date), in order to provide distance learning for children/students of various levels and categories in pre-university education. The same situation was reflected on September 14, 2020, when the new school year 2020-2021 began.

In Kosovo, internet penetration is constantly increasing. According to Kantar (2019), 97% of the population have access to mobile phones, 37% have Smart TVs, 30% have tablets, 39% have computers and 48% have laptops. Kosovars access the Internet mostly through mobile phones (74%), while the main reasons for access are: communication (93%), listening to music (37%), reading (35%), listening to the news (22%), study and research (18%). The most used platforms are Viber (85%), Facebook (67%), and Instagram (51%). Consequently, it can be concluded that technology in most cases is used for communication and social media, indicating a low use for educational purposes<sup>30</sup>.

On the other hand, in terms of information and communication technology (ICT) services and tools, according to the report on the analysis of the preliminary situation for the Education Digitalization Strategy in Kosovo 2021-2026, internet access and provision of ICT tools in public schools in Kosovo turns out to be in very poor condition. 125 public schools in Kosovo do not have internet access (not because of the technical impossibility of internet access, but because of its monthly cost). Even schools with internet access in most cases do not provide internet throughout the school facilities, but only in certain staff offices and possibly in ICT cabinets.

**MONITORING AND INSPECTION IN PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION**, is described in a few lines in the general guide for the organization of teaching in the school year 2020-2021. According to the sixth chapter of this guide, the Education Inspectorate performs its tasks through general, thematic, emergency inspection, re-inspection as well as quality inspection and evaluation of teachers' performance. In accordance with the Plan for Return to School during the Pandemic or distance learning, the Inspectorate has the following priorities:

- Schools and teaching methods respect the protocol for the safety and health and well-being of children;
- Students are not left behind due to their social, economic status or special circumstances;
- The inspection method adapts to pandemic conditions and distance learning.

30 Bardha Qirezi (15.04.2020). Maintaining the education system into life: How online learning is evolving in pandemic times. <https://d4d-ks.org/editorial/mbajtja-ne-jete-e-sistemit-arsimor-si-po-zhvillohet-mesimi-online-ne-kohe-pandemie/>

Based on the above priorities, the main focus behind monitoring and inspection of pre-university education is placed on logistical and organizational aspects, not on the content of the teaching process, approaches to teaching and the quality of teaching in pandemic conditions, etc. Some of the substantive aspects of monitoring are covered in the guide for student assessment, respectively in the part of this guide for monitoring and reporting on student assessment in pandemic conditions, but they are not sufficient for comprehensive monitoring of the lesson's organization and its quality in these conditions.

In the framework of the general guide for the organization of teaching in the school year 2020-2021, also addressed are **training of teachers, school management and support staff and other actors**. According to the guide, the most urgent actions regarding the obligatory trainings for online learning are:

- Coordination of MED regarding the requirements and training needs for teachers;
- Training of teachers on the use of the learning platform by the platform provider or professional organization;
- Training of teachers for online learning methodologies as well as experimental work;
- Providing teacher training on ICT tools;
- Providing advice to MEDs, teachers and parents on the use of ICT tools;
- Trainings on online and combined teaching methods.

Referring to the general guidelines, most of the proposed trainings have yet to be confirmed by the support partners, including the timing of their implementation. However, there is no detailed plan for teacher training for this school year under the conditions of the pandemic, which is shared with MEDs and other education institutions and organizations dealing with TPD.



Based on the above priorities, the main focus behind monitoring and inspection of pre-university education is placed on logistical and organizational aspects, not on the content of the teaching process, approaches to teaching and the quality of teaching in pandemic conditions, etc.

## Budget planning for the organization of teaching in pre-university education under pandemic conditions

Regarding the budget for the organization of teaching in pre-university education under pandemic conditions, three decisions have been taken by the Government of the Republic of Kosovo:

- (i) By decision of the Government no. 01/27 of 26.08.2020<sup>31</sup>, the Master plan for the development of learning under pandemic conditions for the school year 2020-2021 drafted by MESTI was approved, with the main expenditures of the education budget being planned according to the lesson scenario that takes place in schools, as described in the following section.

### SCENARIO A: teaching takes place in schools.

Investment in school cleanliness, maintenance and disinfection required - 2,582,000 euros (evaluation based on a good practice in Prizren). Provide support to MEDs and schools to cover increased workload as a result of reorganizing classes to ensure proper distance between students. In addition, support should be provided for the preservation of the health of teachers with aggravated health conditions by replacing them whenever necessary and possible; pandemic conditions require increased maintenance mobilization (estimated at around 100 technical/maintenance worker rates); at the same time, additional psychological support is required for pedagogues and others (equal to 100 rates of school psychologists), with a total cost of extraordinary expenses due to the pandemic in the amount of € 4,444,200.

### SCENARIO B: Combined lessons (in-school and distance learning).

Investment in school cleanliness, maintenance and disinfection required - 2,582,000 euros (evaluation based on a good practice in Prizren). Supporting schools to cover the increased volume of work and to cover for teachers with aggravated health conditions (equal to 1300 norms for all municipalities), support in maintenance, psychological, pedagogical and other services (total cost € 4,444,200).

- Also required is the development of online and distance learning: € 1,003,440 (MESTI) € 337,790 (donors).
- The purchase of technological equipment in the amount of 1,100,000 euros is required. The e-learning platform is estimated to cost around € 2,600,000.

<sup>31</sup> Government of the Republic of Kosovo (August 26, 2020). Decision from the 27th meeting of the Government for the approval of the Master plan for the development of teaching in pandemic conditions for the school year 2020-2021. <https://kryeministri-ks.net/ep-content/uploads/2020/08/Vendim-nga-mbledhja-e-27-t%C3%AB-e-Qeveris%C3%AB.pdf>

## SCENARIO C: online and distance learning

- Also required is the development of online and distance learning: € 1,003,440 (MESTI) € 337,790 (donors)
- The purchase of technological equipment in the amount of 1,100,000 euros is required.
- The e-learning platform is estimated to cost around € 2,600,000.

As for **option D** (reserve option) 180,000 euros are planned. The Master Plan for teaching during the pandemic in the 2020-2021 academic year does not provide additional details about the budget for option D, the backup option.

The description of the budget according to the scenarios shows that the planned budget for Scenario A and B of teaching for two budget items is the same: (i) investment in cleanliness, maintenance and disinfection of the school - 2,582,000 euros; and (ii) School support to cover increased workload –(total cost € 4,444,200).

Likewise, the planned budget is the same for Scenarios B and C, as are the budget lines for lesson delivery, ICT equipment and the e-learning platform. There is no evidence as to the basis on which the same costs have been estimated for Scenarios B and C, bearing in mind that Scenario B refers to combined learning – classes at school and distance learning (not all the schools will have distance learning), and Scenario C refers entirely to distance learning.

The second planning (Supporting schools to cover the increased workload) differs in the description in relation to the learning scenarios. Within it, for scenario A, the budget is planned for 100 norms of technical/maintenance workers and for added psychological support 100 norms of school psychologists were calculated. As for Scenario B of teaching, instead of the norms of technical/maintenance workers, the budget is planned for the replacement of teachers with aggravated health condition. This, according to municipalities and school principals, has been almost negligible.

According to the report from the Department of Pre-University Education for the cabinet of the Minister of Education (April, 2021) which covers the period September 2020 - April 2021, the budget allocated for the central level in 2020 is € 1,864,647 and the municipal level € 2,960,000, allocated for the school year 2020. Whereas for 2021, the budget allocated for the central level (MESTI) is € 1,401,512, and for the municipal level it is € 3,700,800. The total budget allocated for two years for the central and municipal level is € 9,926,959. These amounts according to the report have been allocated from the economic recovery budget.

- (ii) Decision No. 06/58, dated 14.01.2021<sup>32</sup>, point 1.2. - measure 2 in MESTI- funds have been allocated in the amount of 5 million to support the education sector in order to enable the smooth running of learning during the school year 2020/21.
- (iii) Decision No. 08/65 dated 18.02.2021<sup>33</sup>. This decision describes the budget expenditures allocated by the preliminary decision no.06/58 dated 14.01.2021. It is worded as follows: “Additional financial resources in the amount of 3 million euros are allocated to the education sector for the additional payment, initially for teachers and technical/administrative staff in the pre-university education system for increased commitment and direct exposure to the Covid-19 pandemic.

32 Government of the Republic of Kosovo (01/2021). Decisions from the 58th meeting of the Government <https://kryeministri-ks.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Vendimet-e-Mbledhjes-se-58-t%C3%AB-Qeveris%C3%AB.pdf>

33 Government of the Republic of Kosovo (02/2021). Decisions from the 65th meeting of the Government <https://kryeministri-ks.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Vendimet-e-mbledhjes-se-65-te-Qeverise.pdf>

Decision No. 08/65 dated 18.02.2021 . This decision describes the budget expenditures allocated by the preliminary decision no.06/58 dated 14.01.2021. It is worded as follows: “Additional financial resources in the amount of 3 million euros are allocated to the education sector for the additional payment, initially for teachers and technical/administrative staff in the pre-university education system for increased commitment and direct exposure to the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the MESTI report (April, 2021), based on decision no. 08/65 dated 18.02.2021, the first additional 100 euros were paid for teachers and technical/administrative staff, with the total payment being 3 million euros. The part of 2 million euros are free unused funds. Regarding these free unused funds, the sum of € 1,665,941.00 should be allocated to cover the obligations arising from the Master Plan for the schoolyear 2020-2021. MESTI has been subject to major budget cuts both in 2020, when cuts amounted to € 10,221,643.00, and in 2021, in Goods and Services, when cuts amounted to € 2 mil out of the budget approved for 2021. This goes against the advice of international institutions such as the UN and the World Bank, to increase funding for education in order to cover the additional costs posed by the pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic, in relation to the education sector, especially to pre-university education, has had a negative impact on the family economy, due to the transport of children in two shifts, additional measures for protection against infection, as disinfectant, masks, provision of ICT equipment, etc.

On the other hand, orienting education policies to have special grants for schools in the coming years is an opportunity to directly support schools, as described by the World Bank report, in order to alleviate financial constraints that negatively affect quality of learning, whereby schools with the largest number of students from vulnerable groups could benefit.

### **4.3 Coordination of education institutions in organizing learning under pandemic conditions**

It is already known that the Kosovo education system was completely unprepared to organize distance learning in the first phase of the pandemic, both in terms of legislation, digital teaching materials and school equipment with ICT technology, but also lack of teachers’ digital competencies for a rapid shift in access to teaching, as required by the pandemic-created circumstances. However, the respondents of this report estimate that the measures taken in response to the the pandemic and the provision of conditions for the end of the school year 2019/2020 were adequate, in line with the situation and experiences of other countries. Although there were delays in some cases, such as the guidelines for assessing and providing conditions for online learning, they were sufficient for the completion of the school year.As described in the introductory part of this chapter, in order to start organizing distance learning in various forms (March 2020), education institutions, parents, teachers, students and the entire education community showed mobilization and commitment that enabled to establish a learning framework in pandemic conditions within a short time. At this stage, MESTI was forced to initially deal more with the logistical aspects of meeting the requirements of schools and teachers, and thus it was able to adapt and balance the situation.

In order to maintain and improve the quality of distance learning, in addition to the development of documents, learning platforms and guides described above, in cooperation with MEDs and with the support of partners, MESTI has held meetings, consultations, online workshops with representatives of the education community including education officials from MESTI and MEDs, heads of education institutions, teachers, parents and students. Thus, only with the support of GIZ, 10 such events were held during 2020, in the format of public debates. In each of these debates, specific topics for better education in the conditions of the pandemic have been addressed.

Efforts to support developments in pre-university education by partners such as UNICEF, GIZ, British Council<sup>34</sup>, EC, ALLED Project 2<sup>35</sup>, Save the Children, KEC, etc., have generally not been absent. Education experts, however, estimate that there has been a lack of a coordinated approach to working with support partners and MEDs. This has resulted in some sub-sectors of education being covered more with support from external partners, sometimes in the same areas or municipalities. As a result, it has not been possible to provide a minimum of support for all municipalities and schools in the Republic of Kosovo. Since the beginning of the pandemic, three central governments have changed in Kosovo. As a result, the coordination of activities from the central level was marked by delays, postponement of planned activities and often deferred measures which in certain cases provoked debates and opposition among the education community, parents, UUESC etc., as was the case of the postponement of the new school year start, the ending of the first semester of teaching and now the organization of supplementary teaching to compensate for learning losses.

The way of informing the education community, publishing policies and documents developed in response to the circumstances created by Covid-19 has also changed. While in the first phase of responding to the circumstances created by Covid-19, MESTI has published all the measures in a special link of its official website titled e-Mësimi, this has not continued after October 24, 2020, when the guide for student assessment in the school year 2020-2021 was published. All information and decisions regarding MESTI measures in response to the pandemic have been published in the official link for publications and in the official link for ministerial decisions. As of October 24, the special link of the MESTI official website, e-Mësimi, contains no supporting documents for schools and teachers regarding issues related to learning in pandemic conditions.

Despite the commitment for better preparations for the new school year under the conditions of the pandemic, according to one of the experts interviewed on education, some shortcomings emerged in the hierarchy of coordination of actions, as there was no quality coordination between MESTI, MEDs and schools regarding the identification of the most important teaching content to be covered and there was lack of guidance in terms of support for teachers who had little or no knowledge on the use of learning platforms for organizing online learning. (AU/1)

Even in terms of identifying intervention priorities in order to increase quality and inclusion, it is estimated that there was no good institutional coordination and it was not done in support of an evaluation of the distance learning process in the first phase of the pandemic. Therefore, education experts deem necessary that there should be changes in legislation, in order to establish more clearly the decision-making hierarchy in the education system, especially in exceptional circumstances such as the pandemic caused by this virus.

On the other hand, according to UUESC, the pandemic showed our reality, which this organization had emphasized many times: Political parties, and also institutions, have repeatedly stated that education is a priority,

34 Referuar intervistës me shkrim me Majlinda Mazelliu, gjatë periudhës së pandemisë COVID-19, British Council në kuadër të projektit "Shkollat e Shek. 21", ka vazhduar me ofrimin e trajnimeve për rritjen e kapaciteteve të udhëheqësve dhe mësimit në shkollave të mesme të ulëta në Kosovë në shkathhtësitë bazë të shekullit 21, që janë: Mendimi Kritik, Zgjidhja e Problemeve dhe Kodimi. Në kuadër të këtij programi secila shkollë ka fituar një numër të pajisjeve micro:bit - kompjuter xhepi me anë të të cilave nxënësit do të mund të programojnë në lëndë të ndryshme mësimore që të zgjidhin problemet e përditshme. Po ashtu, shkollat janë përkrahur të themelojnë klubet e kodimit ku nxënësit do të mësojnë kodimin në mënyrë praktike dhe do të kenë mundësinë të praktikojnë shkathhtësitë në programim kompjuterik, si dhe ato janë përkrahur me burime shtesë online për zhvillim profesional. Po ashtu kemi ri-akredituar në MASHTI katër programe trajnuese. Gjatë kësaj periudhe, programi Shkollat e Shek. 21 është angazhuar në përkrahje të MASHTI-it për menaxhimin e pandemisë duke zhvilluar programe trajnuese online për zhvillim profesional të punëtorëve arsimorë; duke ofruar një program televiziv për mësimin e gjuhës angleze dhe trajnime e webinarë online për zhvillim profesional të mësimit në shkollat dhe përmirësimin e politikave të ministrisë, si digjitalizimi i sistemit arsimor, të cilat përkrahin punën gjatë pandemisë por edhe vendosin një bazë solide për vazhdimësinë e përmirësimit të sistemit të arsimit.

35 Projekti "Harmonizimi i Arsimit dhe i Aftësisë (trajnim) me Nevojat e Tregut të Punës - ALLED Faza II" (ALLED2), mbështet 20 Shkolla Profesionale nga 17 komuna të Kosovës, në përafrimin e Arsimit dhe Aftësisë Profesionale me Nevojat e Tregut të Punës. Projekti ALLED<sup>2</sup> mbështet rritjen e sigurimit të cilësisë në AAP, zhvillimin e kurrikulës, përmirësimin e performancës së shkollës dhe pajisjen e tyre me pajisjet e nevojshme.

but the current situation in our schools shows that these were mere statements. Our schools are not equipped with the right tools and this creates difficulties in achieving greater success. The challenges are numerous and they came to the fore during the pandemic. The school lacks autonomy of action and any engagement should be expected and based on the will of the MEDs. There is a lack of tools that enable the application of information technology. Many schools have no internet access at all, while a significant number have partial access. Teachers have not been supported with work tools during the pandemic and when they switched to distance learning, they had to find themselves often borrowing laptops to conduct the lesson with their students.

On the other hand, the organizations that deal with community support, have remarked that some of the education policies have not been drafted in cooperation with all the main stakeholders. Emphasis is placed on communities, with representatives of community support organizations saying that the needs of communities and marginalized groups in the development of education policies have not been taken into account, and that the measures imposed by the local level have not been properly communicated to citizens.

Related issues were raised by another representative of the education partners:

-Policies developed for students from vulnerable groups have been relatively weak and inadequate, especially for some categories of children with special needs, since online learning requires specific conditions and specific approaches to be adopted by all vulnerable groups. For example, children with special needs have not been able to attend the entire online curriculum, not only due to lack of technology but also the format itself, which in specific cases has not been adequate. Although donors have been able to provide some iPads and computers for children with special needs, the lack of digital devices such as computers or iPads, has also brought problems for children coming from families living on social assistance or in very rural areas and lacking technology. Online language programs in the languages of the Bosnian and Turkish communities have also been lacking and this may have caused learning delays for these communities.

On the other hand, regarding the approach of education institutions to Vocational Education and Training, VET experts emphasize that efforts have been made to find better management modalities in this sub-sector of education, but the approach was inappropriate. A more coordinated, cross-sectoral and business-like approach was lacking. It is also emphasized that VET is a complicated process, requiring special commitment of all stakeholders and often, even under normal conditions, does not work properly. According to VET experts, VET teachers have good theoretical knowledge and experience, but unfortunately lack the industrial competence and experience and this cannot be achieved through online learning, as VET schools have been forced to work for most of the time. Even in conditions of a pandemic, there is no good VET without business involvement. Learning in the workplace is the best solution because it enables students to quickly learn what is lost in the theoretical part. But to achieve this, even during the pandemic, requires clear policies, a coordinated cross-sectoral approach with the involvement of businesses, detailed planning of each action, flexible approaches with opportunities for quick decisions, in response to such circumstances and context such as the pandemic.

Despite the weaknesses and uncertainties, distance learning has provided an alternative to continuing learning in pandemic conditions. From certain case studies it appears that this process has generally been well coordinated between the authorities of the Ministry of Education, Kosovo municipalities, school directorates and parent councils. A large contribution was also provided by non-governmental organizations which have technically assisted the process of distance learning<sup>36</sup>.

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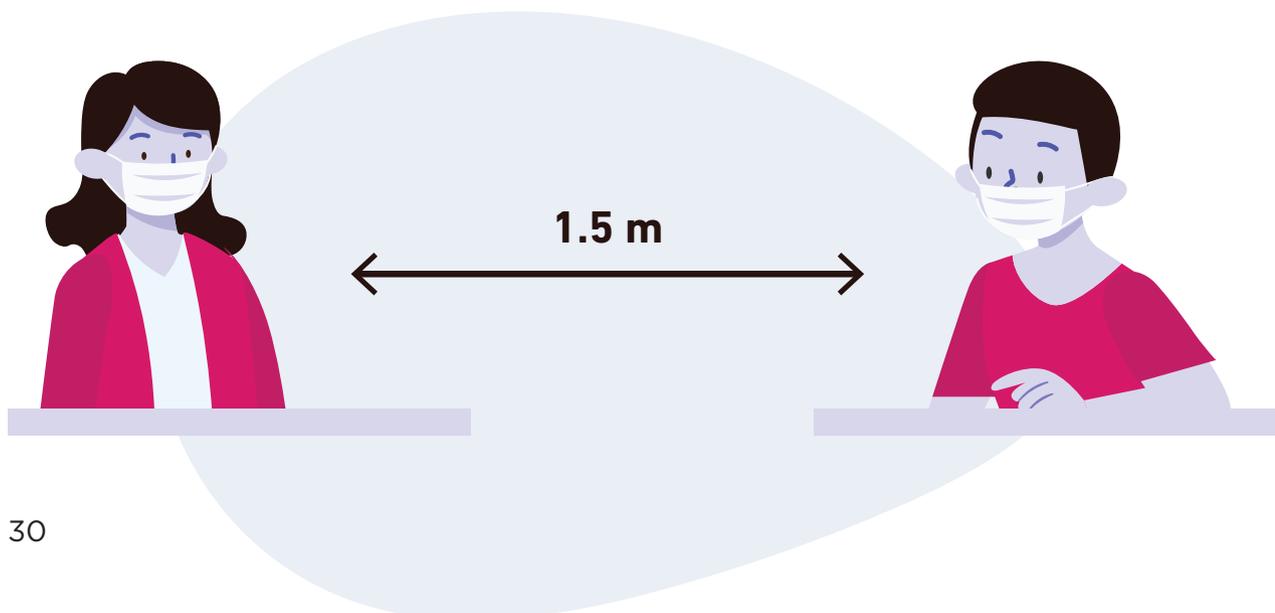
36 Vesa Ferizi. (12/02/2021). Distance learning in pandemic times: a case study in the municipalities of Prizren, Obiliq and Hani i Elezit. GAP Institute. EU-funded project "Innovation for sustainable media and civic engagement". <https://www.institutigap.org/lajme/2696>

## 5. RETURN TO SCHOOL AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CURRICULUM IN CONDITIONS OF LESSON ORGANIZATION DURING THE PANDEMIC

In order to examine the peculiarities of returning to school and the organization of teaching under pandemic, the implementation of the curriculum and other aspects related to teaching in these conditions, in addition to the analysis of documents and reports related to pre-university education in this period, opinions were collected from various actors, such as teachers, school principals, municipal education officials and those familiar with the circumstances of education. In this regard, the summary of different analyses and perspectives describes the situation and draws conclusions about the aspects addressed in this study. Their interpretation is made in accordance with the issues raised for treatment, which are reflected in the following part of this chapter.

### 5.1 Organizing and managing pandemic learning - going back to school and organizing learning according to three scenarios

The return to school of students, teaching staff, management, support staff and other actors, as in other countries, in Kosovo was done with fear and concern from the virus and the spread of infections. Facing major challenges in distance learning in the period March - June 2020, both for lack of experience for learning in pandemic situations, and for lack of technology equipment, quality internet access, digital learning platforms and



materials, digital competencies of teachers and students, etc., increased the demand for return to school from both teachers, parents and the entire education community.

The expectation was that during the summer break the necessary preparations would be made to return to school. Despite the preparations made based on the master plan for the development of teaching in pandemic conditions 2020-2021 in the Republic of Kosovo, it was not possible to start teaching on September 1, as defined by the school year calendar. According to the information published on the MESTI official website, the postponement of the school year start was done in order to ensure safe conditions for children, teachers and parents, as well as to ensure greater overall mobilization in dealing with the pandemic in Kosovo<sup>37</sup>. Despite the dangers of the pandemic, the late start of the new school year showed that the governing mechanisms in education did not make the necessary preparations for the new school year to start on time, and that there was a great lack of coordination between central and municipal actions.

The start of the new school year and the return to school was effected on 14 September 2020, after additional preparations for the beginning of the new school year, visits of the Minister of Education, Mr. Ramë Likaj in a large number of schools in about 30 municipalities, school inspections by education and sanitation inspectors, assistance provided by USAID and UNICEF in providing and distributing Covid-19 protection materials to a significant number of schools, teachers and students.

Based on the information published on the MESTI official website from meetings with institutional actors and support partners to review the start of the new school year and return to school, initially with some leading classes in the first and second level, the decision to start of the new school year has not been easy at all, but the return of students to schools is considered to be of high state interest<sup>38</sup>.

Caring for the well-being of children and school staff during the pandemic was a working principle, a preventive measure and the main measure for continuing schooling. In the meetings with the providers of education and with the mechanisms for issuing decisions for teaching in the conditions of the pandemic, the director of NIPHK, Mr. Naser Ramadani has consistently stressed the importance of adhering to three basic rules: wearing a mask, distance and hygiene. A precondition for organizing school teaching was the return of the epidemiological situation in the country under control. This was a constant request to the citizens of Kosovo in general and the education community in particular.

On the other hand, UUESC has often reacted to the shared responsibility and burden of teachers to measure students' temperature, although according to the guide the teachers are not assigned the responsibility for measuring the temperature. According to the guideline, each school should have a thermometer for measuring temperature and engage a person responsible for measuring the temperature of students and school staff.

All efforts related to the care for the welfare of children and school staff during the pandemic, have been developed in support of the guidelines for hygienic and protective measures, rules of conduct and consequences for school organization, integrated in the general guide for organizing learning in conditions of the pandemic. The benchmarks were and continue to remain certain responsibilities and measures, checklist and inspection.

37 Official information of MESTI about the postponement of the beginning of the school year: The new school year starts on September 14, 2020 <https://masht.rks-gov.net/article/viti-i-ri-shkollor-fillon-me-14-shtator-2020>

38 MES and MoH assess that education institutions are ready for the start of the new school year 2020-2021. <https://masht.rks-gov.net/article/mash-dhe-msh-vleresojne-se-institucionet-arsimore-jane-te-gatshme-per-fillimin-e-vitit-te-ri-shkollor-20202021>

The way the responsible actors have met their responsibilities reflects on the levels of observance of the measures related to the preparation of students for school, the trip to their respective education institution, the rules in the school yard, the rules inside the school, the rules in the classroom, the rules in the teachers' meeting room. In various urban schools, the rules in the school yard, at the time of the shift, from the presence of the parents at the primary level, were almost negligible.

**Returning to school and organizing teaching according to three scenarios - from the viewpoint of teachers and school principals.** As described above, the return to school and the organization of teaching according to the three scenarios was made in accordance with the Protocol on the response to Covid-19 pandemic in schools, which defines the ways of response and management of schools in case of individual or group infection of staff or children/students.

It should be noted that, based on the challenges of facing distance learning during March-June 2020, there were increased demands from both teachers and parents that the new school year begin with physical return to school, respecting the measures and rules set by the NIPH.

Returning to school and organizing teaching according to the three scenarios has not been easy at all, as reflected from the perspective of teachers and school principals. Almost all school respondents involved in the focus group discussions describe the way the scenarios proposed by the Ministry have been implemented, but also the challenges they have faced. The scenarios are the same for everyone, but depending on the circumstances with the virus it is decided by the appropriate mechanisms for the learning scenario with which the respective schools should work.

Learning Scenario A is described as having been a good opportunity towards efforts to restore normal learning, although it is described that this learning scenario has not been best used by schools that have had few students in their classrooms to increase teaching time per lesson. Lesson scenarios B and C are said to have been quite challenging, due to the difficulties with distance learning, as well as the lack of learning platforms, computer equipment/laptops among students (it is estimated that most of students conduct distance learning with smartphones/mobile phones), lack of stable internet network, as well as lack of capacity of teachers to use online applications interactively when working with students.

In the absence of teaching platforms and technological equipment for all schools, some schools and municipalities have made efforts to provide this themselves. A focus group teacher describes the situation in their school as follows: We worked with the ZOOM platform, with teachers who had better knowledge passing the knowledge on to other teachers. The school administration has provided teachers with technological equipment. In September we started the school-based training on the use of the Zoom platform. (M/1). According to the same teacher, a facilitation for the organization of distance learning was the fact that 'the municipality has developed butterfly academy - the platform for organizing online learning'.

Regarding the course of the learning process in the conditions of the pandemic, according to the learning scenarios approved by MESTI, one of the teachers participating in the focus group discussions says he has noticed many organizational irregularities of learning. According to him, although the learning process has entered the phase of adaptation of students and teachers, it feels like a normal form of work, working with a reduced schedule in the duration of the lesson/2x15 minutes per hour, we should know that work is being done without a clear plan of what awaits from day to day. Irresponsibility is being felt by all actors (M/6).

The challenge for school managers was to replace staff affected by the virus, or who also had other health problems and were in the vulnerable group. According to a school principal, the challenge remains to organize online learning - as there are teachers who have difficulty accessing it due to home conditions, unwillingness of teacher to connect, limited knowledge of teachers in the use of technology. (D/2).

In general, the views of principals and teachers show differences from school to school, from municipality to municipality, in the way of lesson organization, teaching time, adaptation to this approach to organizing teaching, but in certain cases also show grievances regarding the level of responsibility from various actors having roles in this process.

**Returning to school and organizing teaching according to three scenarios - from the viewpoint of the Municipal Directorates of Education.** Pandemic lesson management, and situation management has been one of the challenges of the state and the MEDs in particular. The latter is due to the fact that all decisions about behavior and action in pandemic times have been decided from above. A culture of waiting ‘what will come from above’ was established, namely that decision-making should come from the state level, without thinking about what the municipal level/MED can/should do.

Referring to written interviews with education officials in MEDs, they mainly dealt with logistics issues, supply of hygienic materials, but also continuous supervision of school work. It should be noted that there has been no lack of MED efforts to ensure or decide that the work of schools and teachers during teaching in pandemic conditions be conducted through platforms that have managed to develop with the support of partners with whom they have collaborated, such as the digital platform “E-School”, “Flutura academy”, etc. Also, there have been efforts by some MEDs to support schools through various forms of professional counseling and support.

According to MED/3, ‘Education officials have continuously supported schools with professional advice, in order to better manage distance learning.’ This MED, in addition to supporting municipal officials, has made agreements with the faculty psychologists to provide help and support to students in order to mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic on student well-being.

Not all MEDs have managed to have a unique learning platform at the municipal level, just as not all MEDs have managed to provide the necessary support for schools with information technology equipment, sustainable internet, staff training for raising the digital competence of teachers, which is considered extremely challenging to organize online learning, according to the guidelines for learning scenarios B and C.

According to education officials at the MED, a number of teachers have not been able to use distance learning equipment for several reasons: they did not have sufficient knowledge of technology, nor the equipment and internet access, or were elderly people. There are education officials who are critical of the local authorities themselves, and as (MED/4) puts it, ‘even the municipal government itself did not offer anything to the teachers’, so the gaps for distance learning are great.

According to MEDs, during pandemic teaching, the engagement of teachers and other school staff has been challenging, with a particular emphasis on finding replacements for infected teachers and teachers with chronic illnesses. Teacher replacements have been made mainly with existing staff within schools, due to bureaucratic recruitment procedures and the allowed number of education staff. (MED/1), even though budget funds were allocated for this.

Regarding the lesson organization, MED officials see some advantages in addition to challenges. They relate this to the mobilization of education institutions to find the best possible form of organizing learning according to the specifics of the institution and the current situation with the pandemic. It is estimated that the form of communication with the actors involved, such as MED, SIA, school bodies, parents, etc. has been positive. According to MED/5, they see the readiness of all teachers to participate in the teaching process regardless of the scenario of its organization as a very positive thing. Challenging for them was the uncertainty in terms of expectation of what and how to act in unexpected situations, and the impossibility of covering lessons in cases when there were teachers infected with Covid-19.

From MED/6 they receive information about the diversity in the organization of the lesson and the duration of the lesson. In some schools the hour lasts 30 and in some 25 minutes. Therefore, they see the accomplishment of the plan and the impossibility of providing the necessary knowledge for the students as problematic issues. Issues they present as worrying are: "Lack of support teachers for children with special needs, and the inability to develop free activities and organize knowledge competitions and other competitions" (MED/6).

Regarding the substantive issue of the learning process in terms of pandemic, work with students, their workload and that of teachers, the MED does not provide more in-depth arguments or data, but the very fact that it worked under the pressure of pandemic and fear of virus infection presents a stressful circumstance of psychological burden to students and teachers.

Lack of in-depth data on the learning process in pandemic conditions shows that MEDs are more focused on the logistical aspects of organizing learning in pandemic conditions, rather than the content of the learning process and learning environments in relation to the learning scenarios with which the schools in their municipalities have worked.

**Returning to school and organizing teaching according to three scenarios - from the viewpoint of the Municipal Directorates of Education.** Getting back to school was a challenge in itself. In addition to the need for technical, pedagogical and administrative preparation, warnings of political change also surfaced. Unnecessary competition for or against returning to school started with who was more or less right, and also questions of whether it is better to return students to school or to continue according to the scenarios drafted by the ministry (A, B, C). On one side were the ministry and health institutions who justified returning to school by increasing precautionary measures, on the other the union called for postponing returns in the name of preserving the health of teachers. This only added to the dilemma and confusion among students and parents, even though both sides demanded a return to school.

Due to the circumstances created, especially the change of governments affected the proper preparations for resumption or return to school. Especially the lack of coordination of actions between the stakeholders has affected the disorder and has spread confusion among students, parents and teachers themselves.

Inter-institutional communication gaps adversely affected, and mobilized individual initiatives of teachers and some principals, to address return to school. Each school had a Task Force formed to assess the situation and come up with a clear position on the process. But this body had more of a technical character and function than an organizational one.

According to an education expert interviewed in writing, what was missing during the whole process was direct communication and support from MESTI and MED for teachers. There was no necessary professional support

for teachers. There was no ‘center/forum for addressing questions and uncertainties’ regarding teaching and assessment while teaching was organized according to one or the other scenarios. There was self-organization by teachers through social networks, but no initiative from the center (MEST or MED). (AU/1)

According to education experts, the Master Plan for lesson organization in the conditions of the pandemic was a very ambitious and orienting document for the measures and actions to be taken during this school year. Yet, according to them, it was not implemented to the end, as foreseen in relation to the ICT equipment, the regulation of clear procedures for the replacement of teaching staff with health problems and those infected with the virus, providing opportunities for all teachers in improving their digital competencies, digital teaching materials, providing support in psychological and pedagogical services, monitoring learning in pandemic conditions, etc. This happened due to lack of good coordination, but also the political changes that followed. Certainly, the circumstances created and the attention shift to the care for the health of the students, in many cases hindered the full commitment to the realization of the curriculum contents. There is no accurate data from the schools on how much has been realized and what is the learning loss in content.

## 5.2 Learning and learning platforms used by schools

The plan for the preparation and delivery of e-Learning, distance learning for grades 1-9 for the school year 2020-2021 in the Republic of Kosovo was developed by the Atom Institute in July 2020<sup>39</sup>. The plan is prepared for e-Learning in Albanian language, but the same one, with necessary reductions and modifications according to the specifications, can be used for e-Learning in the languages of other communities living in Kosovo.

According to the description, the plan is designed based on the experience and practice of eLearning provided during March-June 2020 in Kosovo, proposing solutions to many problems and shortcomings that have accompanied this process during the first half of 2020, so that the eLearning offered for the school year 2020-2021 be better prepared, more comprehensive and of better quality.

### The eLearning Plan is organized into six chapters:

- 1 Immediate preparatory activities to be undertaken by MESTI;
- 2 Structure, duties and responsibilities of the parties involved in this process;
- 3 Curricular areas, subjects and number of classes that will be included in eLearning;
- 4 Beginning of the school year, duration, total volume and daily and weekly e-Lesson schedule;
- 5 Detailed protocol for the preparation, control, filming, confirmation and publication of video lectures and other teaching materials; and
- 6 Instructions for regular communication between teachers and students.

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<sup>39</sup> The plan was prepared in the framework of the Project “Support for the drafting of a well-planned strategy for the digitalization of the education system in Kosovo”, which is funded by the Foreign Office of the United Kingdom through the British Embassy in Prishtina.

According to the plan, in relation to the number of teaching hours, over 84% of teaching hours will be realized in grades 1-9, out of the total teaching hours per week. The following table shows a summary of this class planning.

Table 1: Number of teaching hours planned for grades 1-9

	Class									Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Total hours per week foreseen by the Curriculum	21	21	23	24	24	29	30	30	30	<b>232</b>
Total hours per week included in eLearning	16	17	19	19	19	25	27	27	26	<b>195</b>
Total hours per week not included in eLearning	5	4	4	5	5	4	3	3	4	<b>37</b>
Percentage of hours per week included in eLearning	76.19	80.95	82.61	79.17	79.17	86.20	90.00	90.00	86.67	<b>84.05</b>

Based on the e-Learning Plan, MESTI has engaged 43 teachers for primary education (grades 1-5), 62 teachers for lower secondary education (grades 6-9) for the implementation of e-Learning, according to classes and subjects/curricular areas, as well as 16 auditors and 4 lecturers.

Based on the e-Learning Plan, the protocol for the preparation, control, shooting, confirmation and transmission/publication of video lectures and other teaching materials, as well as the methodological guide for teachers and editors engaged in the implementation of e-Learning drafted by PIK, the training of 59 teachers engaged in e-Learning was held. Not all teachers were involved in the training, because it was not possible to engage all the planned teachers in time, as initially planned.

E-Learning for the school year 2020-2021 is coordinated by three coordinators, the General Coordinator of eLearning, the coordinator for grades 1-5 and the coordinator for grades 6-9. According to the written interview with the General Coordinator for eLearning, the Municipal Directorate of Education in Prishtina and the professional team of trainers according to curricular areas from MED Prishtina, have prepared plans for the implementation of e-Learning, and at the same time drafting plans at the national level for school year 2020-2021. Also, according to this interview, the teachers engaged have shown tremendous dedication, although there have been many hesitations and some have not expressed a willingness to participate. It is worth mentioning that the teachers were mainly from the municipality of Prishtina, although teachers from other municipalities were

contacted. According to the General Coordinator for eLearning, their interest has been extremely low because it was challenging to prepare and record classes on the same day when teachers were teaching in their schools at the same time.

A lot of work has been done for the realization of eLearning, with around 6,800 teaching units being realized during this period. The work process is described as quite challenging, both for the coordination of activities and for the teachers involved, due to time pressure, but also due to the technical conditions of organizing filming in the premises of the Faculty of Education. eLearning is at the disposal of any learning scenario. Unlike schools working with Scenario A (school teaching), the schools that work with Scenario B and especially those with Scenario C are obliged to develop the lessons in accordance with the eLearning offered through RTK and the MESTI YouTube channel, and through applications and learning platforms used by schools.

Although the lessons from the ‘accidental’ lesson organization (March 2020) raised the need to develop a learning platform at the state level, such a platform could not be completed even for the start of the new school year 2020-2021, so again eLearning started being offered through RTK.

In addition to eLearning, some schools and teachers have also used private learning platforms. According to the report on the analysis of the preliminary situation for the Strategy for Digitalization of Education in Kosovo 2021-2026, some of the private platforms, such as School Me<sup>40</sup>, Akademi Albania<sup>41</sup>, Education Net<sup>42</sup>, etc., have been and are being used by student schools for teaching purposes, some for a fee and some for free, depending on the policies of the platform and the agreements they have with central and local state institutions in Kosovo.

In the absence of a learning platform at the state level, a number of municipalities and schools began to take the situation into their own hands and use platforms developed with partners or on their own initiative (E-Shkollo-ri, Flutura), but in most cases, according to the teachers and school principals involved in this study, those did not function properly. To meet the needs and requirements for the organization of learning in the conditions of the pandemic (more for Scenario C), even during this school year teachers continued to work with different platforms/applications, such as Zoom, Teams, Viber, E-mail, Google Classroom, Skype.

On the other hand, according to the MESTI report on the organization of learning in the conditions of the pandemic (September 2020 - April 2021), UNICEF office in Kosovo has supported MESTI to develop a digital learning platform [shkollat.org](http://shkollat.org) through the Global Platform known as the Learning Passport, which was developed in a partnership between UNICEF, Microsoft 365 and the University of Cambridge (The Platform was launched on 1 February 2021<sup>43</sup>). According to the report, the platform [shkollat.org](http://shkollat.org) includes access to video tutorials aligned with the national school curriculum, and currently offers 14,000 videos with quality education content for all children and young people (covering all subject areas for primary and lower secondary grades - grades 1 to 9), and space for interaction of students and teachers, and is built on to the best of Microsoft 365 functions and abilities<sup>44</sup>. Furthermore, according to the report, 345,000 students in Kosovo are expected to have their unique e-mail address name.surname@shkollat.org which is underway with the help of the close cooperation with mu-

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40 <https://www.schoolme.education/landing/>

41 <https://www.akademi.al/>

42 <http://www.edukimi.net/>

43 Initially, the official launch was made on April 20, 2020 see link and from this period it has been used for supplementary and non-formal learning within the Ponder, Podium and Up Shift projects with the support of UNICEF. Then, in December 2020, the Minister of Education in cooperation with UNICEF agreed to use this platform for all pre-university education. The last official launch was made on February 1, 2020; for more info see [link](#).

44 According to Veton Alihajdari, Coordinator of the Kosovo Center for Practical Enterprises (training firm) at MESTI, Microsoft 365 Platforms for Education and Honor Passport operate within the domain [shkollat.org](http://shkollat.org) and are centralized platforms and generate various data in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation [GDPR](#) over 250 policies while protecting privacy.

municipal education directorates, school principals and students (so far about 200,000 email addresses have been created in cooperation with MESTI, MED and the schools).

### **5.3 Curriculum implementation in pandemic times and learning losses**

Covid-19 has suddenly changed the way of organizing school work, the way teachers and students work in the school, creating a new routine in an attempt to meet the learning expectations set by the curricular documents, and a new orientation to find modalities of curriculum implementation in new learning conditions and environments, both at school and at home.

The third chapter of this report reflects some data on the orientations for education institutions provided by the MESTI General Guide for the organization of teaching in the school year 2020-2021 in the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic, including those for the implementation of curricula. However, more detailed instructions and orientations for the implementation or realization of the curriculum in the conditions of the pandemic and the differences in the possibilities of the implementation of the curriculum from the perspective of learning scenarios with which education institutions have worked during this school year, will be addressed in the following part, including learning losses.

#### **Curriculum implementation in pandemic times**

The general guide instructs that the objectives of the school and pre-university education continue to be directed even in conditions of emergency towards the realization of the main competencies. Also, the General Guide provides that the achievement of competencies and learning outcomes of the field (LOF) and certain subjects (LOS) is possible even with a reduced number of teaching units (up to 80%) according to a well-organized curriculum and with integrated learning approach. However, there are no specific instructions on how to do this, which topics should be removed from the 20% reduction of program content, who should do it and when, how to take into account the developments of the previous school year in relation to the implementation of curricula in this year, etc.

On the other hand, what is provided in the General Guide does not comply with the e-Learning Plan. According to this document, the planning of the program content to be realized for the school year 2020-2021, for grades 1-9 is foreseen to be 75%. According to the e-Learning Plan, “seven curricular areas for all grades 1-9” are included, with “at least over 75% or over 3/4 of teaching hours”. This program content planning orientation refers to the plan proposed in the e-Learning guide, according to which the teaching units on RTK are prepared and displayed.

Planning and organizing teaching in all curricular areas, as provided by curricular documents, under normal school working conditions, by a connoisseur of education included in this study, is seen as a hasty and ill-considered step. According to him institutional aim to cover all curricular areas in terms of teaching restrictions is deemed unreasonable, ill-considered, and harmful to teaching. An argument for this is the stagnation identified among students and the MESTI decision itself for supplementary education for these areas only (AU/3).

It should be noted that lesson plans for subjects and curricular areas (grades 1-9), drafted by professional groups at Prishtina MED for e-Learning on RTK, are also used by schools during school teaching, regardless of the type of scenario they worked with, or the number of weekly teaching hours for the subject and class they teach. There is a possibility of revision or change based on the specifics of the respective school. However, such a thing is not reported to be happening in schools while teaching in pandemic conditions.

On the other hand, referring to the report of the Department of Pre-University Education (April 2021), regarding the developments in pre-university education in pandemic times, for the period September 2020 - April 2021, only two aspects are reflected related to the developments in curriculum implementation: the percentage of planning curricular contents and the work done for the formation of the professional commission for managing the process of textbook manuscripts for grades 3, 8 and 12, as follows:

- The planning of the program content to be realized for grades 1-9 is foreseen to be 75%, i.e. it is reduced by 25%.
- According to the e-Learning Plan, “seven curricular areas for all grades 1-9” are included, with “at least over 75% or over 3/4 of the number of classes”, where all core subjects in e-Learning should be included with a full number of classes (except for subjects that have more than 5 hours per week)” and reducing the number of classes by 30% in certain subjects, which due to specific characteristics are difficult to achieve through distance learning.
- A professional committee has been formed for the management of the manuscript process, reviewing the guidelines for the reviewers for evaluation and reporting for grades 3,8,12 and those left underestimated from 2019 for grade 7 in art and chemistry, for grade 10, subject: Geography and Physical Education, Sport and Health and for grade 11, Physical Education, Sport and Health.

Although the school year 2020-2021 has continued with the same problems regarding the new textbooks, their drafting based on the new curriculum, Dukagjini Publishing House has provided access to the electronic format for textbooks. This was done in support of teachers and all Albanians in the diaspora and around the world<sup>45</sup>. The electronic textbook format enables teachers, parents and students to use textbooks during online learning.

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45 Dukagjini Publishing House: <https://librat.net/>

According to school principals and teachers, schools related to the implementation of the curriculum in the conditions of the pandemic have received only the general guide and annual planning and for teaching periods (for subjects and curricular areas) from the professional groups of the MED of Prishtina. The implementation of curricula has been described as a very challenging process, due to non-compliance with the specifics and opportunities of their schools to implement it, but also due to the scenarios with which schools are forced to work when there have been cases of infections.

There were schools, according to the principals, that did not receive any instructions for work in pandemic circumstances regarding curriculum reduction or planning according to the created circumstances. They have largely adhered to the guidelines of health institutions regarding protection from infection.

The teachers were not very clear about what and how things had to be planned in emergency conditions. Most of them blame the management or institutions for the uncertainty. Only M/8 states' Planning was difficult at first, but then in cooperation with the school pedagogue and based on the Master plan for work, we managed to plan the lesson somewhere with 75% in the classroom, and somewhere with 50% with rotation of learning areas through the weeks. (M/8)

Other teachers have relied on some form of planning implemented by the MED of Prishtina, but there is no initiative made by the school or teachers, either professionally or individually. Teachers and principals blame others who have not come up with clear explanations regarding lesson planning in pandemic conditions.

Regarding the realization of lesson planning, curriculum implementation, teachers participating in the focus group discussion say that they have many challenges, such as lack of instructions on how to approach the reduction of curricular content and the realization of all phases of the lesson in duration of 25-30 minutes, and lack of experience to select the core of the learning units to achieve the learning outcomes. The way practical approaches to working with students in pandemic conditions are described, it appears that in pandemic conditions, the teacher is at the center, not the student. This is how it is described by a teacher:

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We teachers must be realistic, during this time of learning in the pandemic, we have been at the center, not the students. We are more focused on achieving the formal curriculum, than on monitoring student progress, providing support for students, creating a learning environment enabling the development of competencies even in these learning conditions .... (M/4)

Approximately the same situation is described in the interview with one of the PIK researchers who during the period April - May, observed 18 teaching hours/18 different teachers, while studying the *Language skills of students in the age group 9-13 and 14-18 and their impact on the overall quality of education with a focus on the results of the international PISA test 2018*. According to her:



It was widely noted that there was a rush on the part of teachers in carrying out the planned activities, but it seems that students have begun to adapt to such an approach. Discussions with students during the lesson (short questions-answers) take place especially in the introductory and final part of the lesson, while in the main part of the lesson the frontal work is combined with the individual work and the main focus is the work with textbooks, not interactivity with students. In very rare cases there is any critical thinking. Even the learning outcomes are designed at the level of knowledge, there is no argumentation and critical reflection. The evaluation part is left out. The way of formative assessment is not foreseen in the daily preparations, except for the success criteria which for the most part is not clearly defined, but are also not respected in activities with students, which in most cases differ from the requirements set to students. Working with groups of students separated from a class/classroom according to the protocol for the number of students in classes, is problematic for the second group, where according to the observed teachers, a monotony occurs in the realization of the same contents (work is done by planning the same although the structure of students is different), there is an imbalance in the acquisition of learning content in students of different groups. According to them, “working with the first group is much more effective. Even the results of the students are better.» The impossibility of a flexible schedule and the impossibility of a break for teachers between the two groups, teachers see as problematic because of the workload and fatigue they feel.

The same is confirmed by some teachers and school principals participating in focus group discussions. According to them, teaching two shifts for a class of students, with a schedule of 25-30 minutes per lesson, was a challenge in itself, because it had to be accelerated with the implementation of the program and students largely failed to get the right amount of the lessons due to the fact that the pandemic conditions brought insufficient interaction between students and teachers. It was also pointed out that the pressure of the teaching load and the fear of infection are noticed in the schools, which has challenged the implementation of the curriculum, according to the curricula for this school year.

On the other hand, from the viewpoint of MEDs, in terms of lesson planning and curriculum implementation, it is noticed that MEDs do not have sufficient knowledge of what happens in schools. The statements of the MEDs revolve around the organization of planning trainings and the obstacles that were caused by the shortening of the lesson. Some associate the implementation of the curriculum with the lack of conditions, though there is no relation between the implementation and technological equipment.

Even the part of the descriptions in the written interviews with the education officials in MED, regarding the realization of the curriculum in the conditions of the pandemic, shows that the focus and orientation of the MED was mainly in the terms of implementation of logistical requirements and rules of organization in pandemic conditions and less in the internal organization of the learning process. According to MEDs it should be acknowledged that schools and MEDs show no tendency to make decisions according to the circumstances as there is an impression that they should expect what comes from above.

Focusing only on the organizational aspects and curriculum planning for the implementation of the curriculum, both in the documents for the organization of the school year, as well as in the analyzed reports and perspectives of principals, teachers and MEDs, shows that there is no focus of supervision, mentoring and reporting on the implementation of the curriculum in terms of content, work methodology, use of teaching materials and resources, student assessment, etc.

Referring to the study of the Kosovo Pedagogical Institute for Experiences during implementation, challenges and opportunities, and the need for continuous support of teachers (2019), the implementation of the curriculum nationwide until 2018/2019 had reached a significant level of institutionalization through the development of subject curricula for the classroom, training of teachers for the implementation of the curriculum and organization of the learning process based on the plan for the new curriculum in the classes it was implemented. The study has also identified some shortcomings related to the leadership of the curriculum implementation process, from the central to the school level, the quality of training and school support in curriculum implementation, lack of textbooks, etc.

Continuation of curriculum implementation in pandemic circumstances, with uncertainties in leading the curriculum implementation process, with differences between teachers and schools in accepting competency-based curriculum philosophy, with lack of new textbooks and of systemic support for the implementation of the new curriculum is largely reflected in its implementation in pandemic conditions, as described above.

### **Student achievements and learning losses**

The Covid-19 pandemic is expected to have a significant impact on student performance, affect learning losses and create learning inequalities. The concept of “learning loss” means loss of knowledge and skills or stagnation of students in academic progress that may be as a result of interruption of teaching for various reasons including: summer vacations, temporary dropout, numerous absences as well as ineffective teaching.

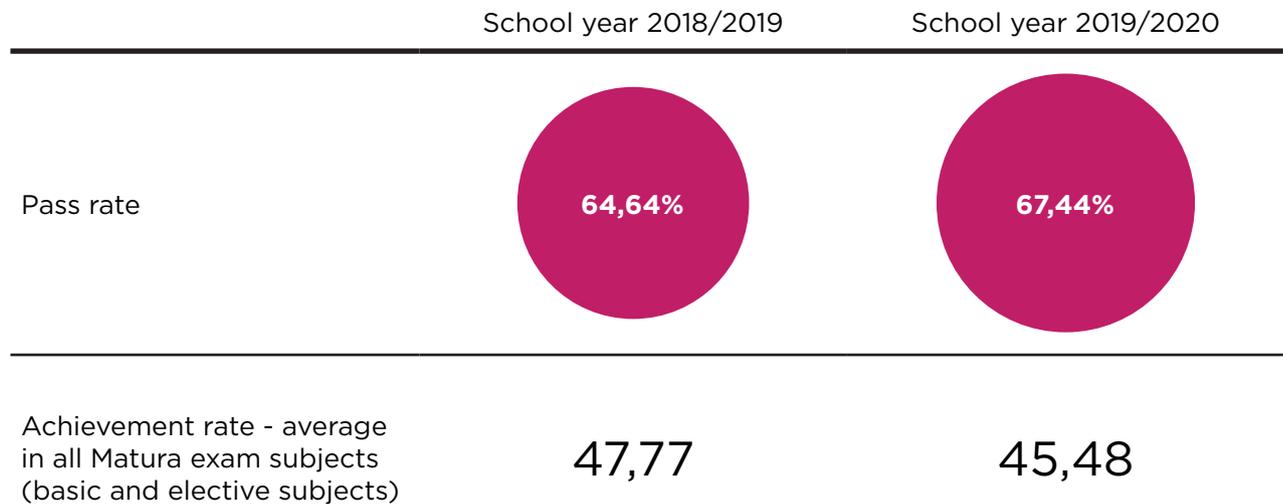
At the level of education institutions in Kosovo, debates and discussions have been raised regarding the possibilities of student achievement in learning in pandemic conditions and learning losses<sup>46</sup>. However, no specific study has been conducted, which would be a starting point to taking measures for the remedy the consequences and support students in compensating for learning losses. The Division for Standards and Assessments has continued with the preparations for the achievement test and the State Matura, as well as with the preparations for the piloting of the international tests PISA 2022 and PIRLS 2021, without any special focus on how to approach the assessments of students with the aim at identifying levels of learning losses.

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<sup>46</sup> A more comprehensive discussion was organized on the initiative of GIZ, in the framework of the sixth public debate, organized on August 6, 2020.

Referring to the Matura results for 2020 (the achievement test for grade 9, was not held in 2020), we see that in relation to the passing rate, the highest passing rate in the Matura exam is 3% higher in the first term in 2020, versus the same term in 2019. Whereas, the achievement rate in all subjects is over 2% lower in 2020, compared to 2019.

Table 2. Matura results according to school years



Referring to the purpose, the format and the way of organization of the Matura exam, the above results are an important indicator for the analysis of learning losses. The achievement rate below 50%, converted into grades of our education system, is equal to grade 2 (sufficient). However, these results cannot be taken as the main reference for the analysis of learning losses at this level of education, when the purpose of the Matura exam is considered.

International reports and studies on learning losses are a better basis for argumentatively orienting the debate and institutional focus on addressing learning losses, especially referring to reports that have high credibility and that refer to the context of Kosovo, such as the World Bank reports.

Thus, referring to the regular economic report for the Western Balkans: *Assessing the impact of Covid-19 on education and the response of countries*<sup>47</sup>, despite the rapid response of education systems, losses in the learning process will be inevitable and significant, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups, whereby a portion of students will again fall into functional illiteracy and perhaps even drop out of school.

47 Flora Kelmendi, James Gresham and Syedah Aroob Iqbal (2020). Regular Economic Report for the Western Balkans: Assessing the Impact of COVID-19 on Education and Countries' Response. World Bank. <https://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/550271590827524462/RER-Education-COVID-ALB.pdf>

According to the World Bank Assessment of Learning Loss, Learning Loss report, the estimated impact of Covid-19 on learning in the Western Balkans will be short-term and long-term. According to the report, if there is no distance learning, learning in the Western Balkans would drop by an average of 16 PISA points or 40% of the school year. But if there is involvement in distance learning, and assuming that distance learning is not as effective as face-to-face teaching, it is expected to be a reduction of about 9 PISA points or 22.5% of the school year. Also, according to the report, school closures will deepen the learning inequality, which was big even before school closures. The achievement gap between the poorest and richest students, in the case of Kosovo is expected to be approximately 2 years. Also, many students can drop back into functional illiteracy.

The results of the study by Kristof De Witte & Joana Elisa Maldonado<sup>48</sup>, conducted with sixth grade students (grade 6), in Flanders and the Brussels region, with standardized tests (validated) by the Catholic Education Flanders (IDP), to describe the change in student achievement and inequality due to the Covid-19 crisis, indicate a high rate of learning losses and high increase in learning inequality, equivalent to (compared to) six months of schooling. The inequality in test results within schools increased by 17% for mathematics and 20% for Dutch.

Even the White Paper document: *Accelerating Meaningful Learning - Project-Based Learning*, published by Defined Learning<sup>49</sup>, shows evidence related to learning losses. According to the paper, a study by global consulting firm McKinsey & Co, which analyzed assessment data from a digital learning platform for K-8 students, found that students in this class managed to learn only 67 percent of mathematics and 87 percent of reading. According to this document, McKinsey reports, on average students have lost the equivalent of three months of learning math and one and a half month of learning reading and comprehension. Learning losses are noted to be greater in schools that have students from vulnerable groups, such as minority students, where students from these schools have achieved 59 percent in math and 77 percent in reading.

On the other hand, interesting data are reflected in the study conducted by Swiss authors Martin J. Tomasik, Laura A. Helbling, Urs Moser<sup>50</sup>, regarding educational gains from distance learning in primary and secondary schools in Switzerland. In the framework of this study, the academic achievements in the 8 weeks of school closure due to Covid-19 in Switzerland were compared to the academic achievements in the 8 weeks before the closure in the subject of mathematics and German language (reading and grammar). For this study, data from the formative feedback system in electronic form (computer-based formative feedback system) were used, including statistical analysis of active users of the MINDSTEPS system<sup>51</sup> who completed at least one generated assessment. The study shows that high school students remain largely unaffected by school closure in terms of learning achievement, while for elementary school students learning slows down and at the same time inter-individual change in achievement increases. According to this study, forms of distance learning seem to be an effective tool to replace face-to-face learning in education institutions, at least in an emergency situation, but not all students benefit to the same degree.

In the context of education in Kosovo, in the absence of specific analysis and reports on the levels of learning

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48 Kristof De Witte & Joana Elisa Maldonado (September, 2020). The COVID-19 crisis and school closures, effects on student performance and inequality in education. <https://www.katholiekonderwijs.vlaanderen/engels>

49 DefinedLearning: <https://www.eschoolnews.com/resource-library/combatting-learning-loss-by-engaging-students-in-meaningful-pbl/>

50 Martin J. Tomasik, Laura A. Helbling, Urs Moser (24 November 2020). Educational gains of in-person vs. distance learning in primary and secondary schools: A natural experiment during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures in Switzerland. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ijop.12728>

51 MINDSTEPS is a computer-based formative feedback system developed at the Institute for Educational Assessment in Zurich and serving all students in the cantons of Aargau, Basel-Stadt, Basel-Landschaft and Solothurn and many students from the cantons of other German-speaking Swiss. It serves students from grades 3 to 9 and includes math subjects, German (official language), English and French (two foreign languages taught in schools), according to the school's official curriculum.

losses during the distance learning period, the indicators from the above reports should be looked at, in particular those from the World Bank report. In relation to the learning scenarios that schools in Kosovo have worked on, it is expected to reflect the levels and rates of learning losses.

On the other hand, if we look at the work of part-time schools, working with two shifts with the same classes, where classes lasted max. 25-30 minutes, it turns out that our students have lost teaching time by about 33%. This reduced teaching time may be covered in the part of individual student engagement, as class groups comprised of 15 - 20 students, and based on the learning environment created by the school/teachers and family.

With this form of work the teachers are charged with two shifts for the same classroom, while the effectiveness with the second group risks being lower, compared to the first group and there is a risk of deepening inequalities.

Schools and classes that have taught with scenarios B (partial return - combined learning with school attendance and distance learning) and C (distance learning - TV + e-learning), are assumed to have a higher loss rate than schools and classes which have worked with scenario A (school teaching).

Learning losses are also confirmed by respondents included in this study but without any measurable indicators based on the analysis at the level of schools, municipalities or nationwide. Regarding the learning losses and student achievement, teachers and school principals express themselves in different ways, agreeing that learning losses are evident and they see them in their students. Teachers and school principals express differences about classes for which they consider students have learning losses at a higher level, and always refer to their own work and what they have managed to observe during this period. They do not show there are analyses at the level of professional assets or at school level in relation to the learning losses of students during teaching in pandemic conditions, and show no orientation on how they will work with students to compensate for learning losses.

The education officials in MED also refer to learning losses, expressing the opinion that the organization of teaching in pandemic circumstances has affected the students the most. However, this is mainly related to the number of students who have not officially participated in the first phase of distance learning, and they do not provide any other data on the rate of learning losses in their municipalities, any analysis of achievements and student losses while learning in pandemic conditions.

Due to the lack of a system for reporting losses, it is still not known exactly how many learning losses there are in the entire education system. As one of the education experts interviewed observes, "we do not have a standard system for measuring losses, therefore the eventual support risks being ad-hoc and not based on the needs of students". (AU/1), and thus initiatives to make up for losses, or measures to reduce them in the future are provoking reactions.

All the interviewed experts think that the pandemic taught us a lot about the shortcomings of both the functioning of the system, including the organizational aspects and professional competence. These shortcomings must be lessons learned in order to serve us to improve the system and the performance of the schools in general.

In response to the needs for compensation of learning losses, MESTI has issued a special decision<sup>52</sup> for the organization of supplementary education for students who show stagnation in achieving learning outcomes as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the decision, the organization and holding of the supplementary lesson started on 03.05.2021 and will continue until the end of the 2020-2021. The focus of supplementary education will be on subjects such as mathematics, mother tongue and natural sciences, where students need more support.



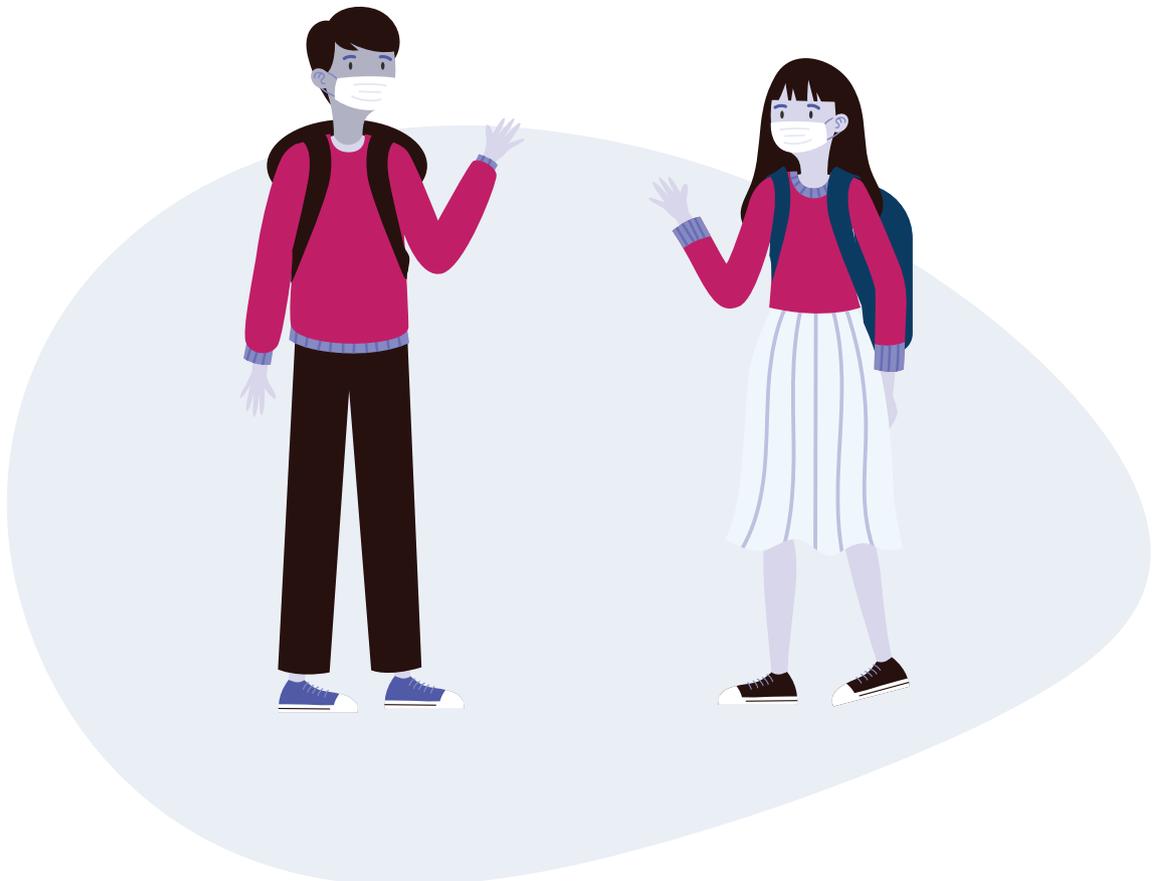
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52 Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (2021). Decision No.01B/22, dated 20.04.2021 on the organization of supplementary education for students who have stagnation in achieving learning outcomes due to the COVID pandemic 19 <https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2021/04/vendimi-me-nr-603-dka-ve.pdf>

## 6. INCLUSION IN LEARNING OF CHILDREN/STUDENTS FROM VULNERABLE GROUPS DURING THE PANDEMIC

Access to education is a fundamental right that must be provided for all children without distinction, even in the circumstances of a pandemic. All guidelines and other documents developed by MESTI with partners that rely on the continuity of learning and the well-being of students in pre-university education, support this fundamental right.



Organizing learning and involving all children in learning in the conditions of the pandemic has been and continues to be a challenge for education in Kosovo. In addition, the involvement of children/students from vulnerable groups during the pandemic is a challenge in itself. According to Insidehighered (2020), we already know that online learning does not work well for all students - especially those in marginalized groups - even under normal conditions. And now, these are not normal conditions<sup>53</sup>.

Some of the research findings of the Kosovo Pedagogical Institute for Distance Learning (PIK, May 2020), show that Children from marginalized groups are faced with anxiety and stress, mainly due to the technical impossibility of proper distance learning, resulting from lack of necessary equipment. According to the report of this study, the main difficulties are related to lack of IT equipment for students, where many families from marginalized groups have no laptop, tablet or computer, and often several children in one family possess only one smartphone available for distance learning.

Similarly, the findings from the study *Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the education of students with disabilities in pre-university education*, show that the pandemic period, associated with isolation at home, lack of socialization, change of daily routine and lack of services, have negatively affected the emotional state of children with special education needs, contributing to the burden and stress of parents. According to this study, many factors have contributed to the low level of inclusion and benefits from distance/online learning of students with special education needs during the pandemic. To improve the quality of education, inclusion and opportunities for children with special education needs, it is recommended to adapt the curriculum and teaching programs according to individual needs, equal treatment for all students, professional development of teachers, provision of services within the school and parental involvement and support in children's education<sup>54</sup>.

Efforts by education institutions in Kosovo to create conditions for inclusion in the learning of students from marginalized groups have not been lacking, despite the argument that much more needs to be done in order to ensure the inclusion of children/students from the vulnerable groups during the pandemic. Referring to the MESTI report on the organization of learning in the conditions of the pandemic (report for September 2020 - April 2021), in order to increase the inclusion of communities in the education system, in cooperation with donors MESTI has continued to provide scholarships for students of upper secondary schools. Thus, in cooperation with REF and VORAE for the school year 2020/2021, MESTI has awarded 596 scholarships for high school students for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities (MESTI has awarded 333 scholarships worth 100,000 Euros, REF 103 scholarships and VoRAE 160 scholarships).

According to one of the representatives of education support partners interviewed in writing, although the Ministry of Education and MEDs have managed to respond quickly to the provision of distance learning, measures and practices have not been comprehensive enough and some specific needs of children from vulnerable groups have not been adequately addressed.

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53 Insidehighered (2020). "Will switching to most distance learning help or hurt online learning?" - Expert panel summary. . <https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2020/03/18/most-teaching-going-remote-will-help-or-hurt-online-learning>

54 Dr. Zamira Hyseni Duraku & Mirjeta Nagavci (2020). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education of students with disabilities in pre-university education. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343323273\\_Ndikimi\\_i\\_pandemise\\_COVID-19\\_ne\\_edukimin\\_e\\_nxenesve\\_me\\_aftesi\\_te\\_kufizuar\\_ne\\_arsimin\\_parauniversitar](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343323273_Ndikimi_i_pandemise_COVID-19_ne_edukimin_e_nxenesve_me_aftesi_te_kufizuar_ne_arsimin_parauniversitar)

On the other hand, regarding the inclusion in education during the pandemic of children/students from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, it was emphasized that:

- Institutions implemented similar approaches for all children regardless of the specific needs of families from vulnerable groups (socio-economic status, internet access, equipment with technology).
- The online program (lessons offered through TV) did not provide learning opportunities for all children equally. For some children it was not understandable due to changes in teaching methodology and structure.
- Attendance at school for children from minority communities, as well as for many other low-income children, was low. Due to low participation, the performance of most of these children is expected to be low. Low participation is related to lack of internet, technology, but also lack of teaching materials.

As for vulnerable groups, even under normal conditions, they need increased support and assistance. The pandemic also highlighted other groups which under normal circumstances were not seen as such. Children from larger families had challenges with the equipment and the schedule of their use, as it was almost impossible for the teachers to adjust the lesson schedule. Their parents, in the absence of the means to equip their children with technology, ignored them and did not express interest in attending online learning. Institutions failed to reach these families to provide assistance. This is also addressed by AU/1:

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In fact, during this period, the concept of ‘vulnerable groups’ also changed because the shortcomings and needs of the system and many social groups that needed help came to the fore. It was a high percentage of students who had access to the Internet but did not have the equipment to engage in online learning, reported by the MESTI/MEDs.

AU/2, in addition to not being equipped with the necessary tools, underlined the problem that ‘...they were not supported in learning as adaptation to the methodologies of learning in these methods’. This happened since ‘The measures taken were uniform for all students’ (AU/3), excluding the Resource Centers, where the mobilization has been better in support of these students.

The Ministry drafted guidelines to assist education institutions, but according to AU/4 it is not known whether these guidelines reached all teachers and schools, or how they were implemented with children in vulnerable groups, as not all marginalized groups were included in supporting measures (those from rural areas, especially remote rural areas that do not have access to cable and/or internet, families with more than two children in school, for female students, those without parents/guardians, recent returnees, etc.).

All institutions, even schools themselves, have challenges and shortcomings in collecting, storing and reporting data on students and their families, namely the necessary data related to children's education. This fact presented additional problems in pandemic times, when many students lacked technology equipment and internet access. This was reflected more for children coming from families living on social assistance or in remote rural areas. In addition to the interest in support with hygienic equipment and space maintenance, various donors have expressed interest and provided ipads or computers for children, but it was impossible at first to provide them for all children in need.

On the other hand, the need for child support beyond technology and internet devices is growing. Obtaining assistants in distance learning conditions from home, could not even be considered in these circumstances. Even under normal school conditions, assistance is still not provided to these students when they attend regular classes.

Another education connoisseur (AU/7) addresses a range of system deficiencies to meet the needs of vulnerable groups of students. The institutional response was swift and appropriate, but in terms of helping these students, there were many shortcomings, such as health and hygiene awareness messages not being accessible or understandable to children with sensory and intellectual impairments. Good assistance was provided by external donors/organizations, such as EU-CoE (project "INCLUDE"), GIZ and Save the Children, who in addition to the equipment also provided training assistance and guidance to teachers on how to reach vulnerable groups in pandemic times.

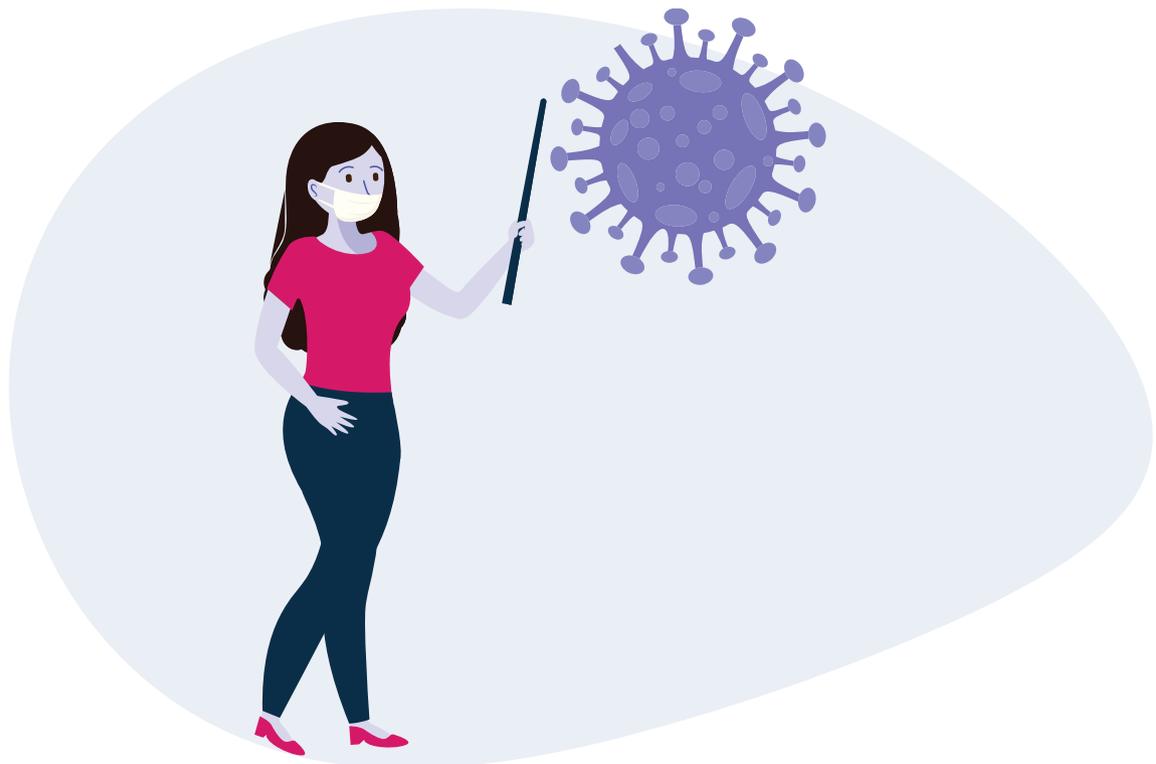
According to the representative of a partner organization in education, although there are no official data on the participation and achievements of children/students from vulnerable groups in education during the pandemic: *discontinuation of direct education in education institutions is expected to have very serious and long-term consequences for economies and societies, which could affect the growth of inequalities, lack of access to education services for vulnerable groups, and deterioration of health and social cohesion. Losses in the learning process will be inevitable and significant... significantly affecting vulnerable groups, where some students are at risk of major learning loss due to health status, disability, the conditions and circumstances in which they live, and they may even drop out of school.*

In order to better involve children/students from vulnerable groups in education and reduce learning losses, it is recommended that education institutions, in addition to supporting teachers working with students from vulnerable groups, meet the specific needs of children in these groups for access and appropriate education, and provide additional support to parents/legal guardians of children from vulnerable groups to support their children's learning from home.

## 7. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS DURING THE PANDEMIC

Teachers have faced many challenges during the pandemic. Disconnection from the almost traditional and routine system of organizing the classroom teaching, in a new situation where knowledge and use of technology was necessary, for many teachers presents an additional burden.

As described in the third chapter of this report, in the framework of the General Guide for the organization of teaching in the school year 2020-2021, guidelines are provided regarding the training of teachers, managerial staff, supporters of schools and other actors. However, there was no detailed plan published on the official website of MESTI for the training of teachers for this school year in the conditions of the pandemic.



According to the report of the Pre-University Education Department (April 2021), regarding the developments in pre-university education in pandemic times for September 2020 - April 2021, not all the trainings/modules proposed with the General Guide have been held. Referring to the MESTI report, several training programs and other forms of professional development have been implemented by MESTI, support partners and NGOs that provide trainings:

- For the practical implementation of the CF, in 2020, 2500 teachers were trained, 1700 of the primary level and 800 of the lower secondary education levels (6-9), while for 2021, another 2000 teachers are planned to be trained for CF<sup>55</sup>.
- In coordination with the British Council, 50 participants were trained online on the Basics of Micro bit-coding, while physical training on Critical Thinking, Problem Solving and Microbial Basics was offered to 243 participants. Also, for Basic Skills and Leadership Development 147 participants were physically trained.
- The Kosovo Pedagogical Institute has trained 53 teachers to introduce e-Learning.
- KEC, in the framework of the Program “After School Support for Teens - ASSET” has so far trained 237 teachers<sup>56</sup>.
- Awareness lectures were held with about 1000 teachers for mental health organized by MESTI in cooperation with NIPHK with the support of WHO, while lecturers were two school psychologists from the department of psychology. The materials are available at the official MESTI website.
- In March 2021 SCTL approved 14 training programs for information technology.

The same MESTI report (April 2021) does not include all the trainings conducted during the pandemic, with special emphasis on this school year (2020-2021), which shows that there is no reporting system based on measurement indicators, through which detailed reports could be generated on the involvement of teachers in trainings by municipalities and schools, programs attended, program providers, etc. This does not mean that there is no data, but they are unsystematized.

Referring to the data sent by the TPD Division in MESTI, within the GIZ program during this school year 659 teachers were involved in 10 different programs, with main participants being the teachers of 20 champion schools supported by the program and GIZ. Trainings by GIZ are mostly held online.

According to the written interview of the UUESC representative, 4500 education workers have been trained in four UUESC training programs, approved by MESTI, such as “Strengthening capacities for effective leadership of social dialogue”, “Leadership and strategic planning in Pre-University Education”, “Application of computer programs in teaching”, “Media education and its role in social and democratic development”, “Language teaching and Albanian literature for primary and secondary cycle”.

55 The program for the practical implementation of the curriculum is offered under the coordination of MESTI with MEDs. During 2020 MESTI has provided training for Educational Leadership, which involved 300 participants. All trainings organized by MESTI, are held with direct presence in schools or Didactic Centers.

56 Referring to the data sent by the TDP Division to MESTI, within the 5 programs offered by the ASSET project, most of these teachers have attended more than one training program, namely 705 teachers have been included in the five training programs, which are all offered through the online form of training.

The opportunity for teachers to participate in trainings organized during pandemic conditions varies from municipality to municipality, and from school to school. In general, according to the principals and teachers, there was no organization of professional development by the institutions. Some schools and municipalities have benefited more during this period, given that previously they were in some process of cooperation with training providers, such as the sample schools under the GIZ program, and other schools within the programs offered by the British Council, or by UUESC only for its membership.

There are cases when the MEDs themselves have organized trainings for teachers in the circumstances of the pandemic. This is a good example of how the municipal level can use its opportunities to support schools with training and other forms of professional development. This is confirmed by M/3, according to which the municipality has provided all teachers with technology and training (M/3). According to M/3, 'MESTI, in cooperation with UNICEF, has provided training on sex education.'

In some schools it is reported that there have been school-based trainings, in cooperation with professional assets, as well as some trainings by the union (M/1). But this did not work the same in all schools, since according to M/3 it worked 'Only with the initiative of teachers in finding trainings provided by various organizations. The cooperation between teachers within professional assets did not work either (M/3). M/7 shows almost the same concern as 'There is a lack of initiative from the school, but the school is also bypassed by the MED and MESTI. While M/7 expresses dissatisfaction with the lack of teachers' support during this period.

According to MED representatives included in this study, teacher professional development was mainly focused on the use of technology. This need has been met by voluntary training by the teachers themselves, while some schools and MEDs have expected it from MESTI or training providers. According to one of the education officials (MED/2), trainings for the use of different learning platforms and distance learning have been conducted by MESTI, GIZ, British Council, UNFPA-KOPF, UNICEF.

On the other hand, according to MEDs, there was a lack of programs and trainings for teachers regarding the approaches to teaching in pandemic conditions, the psychological aspects of the workload and stress of teachers for work under the pressures created by the pandemic. In some municipalities, training programs of this nature have been offered, such as training models provided by the NGO EDUMEN, with support from the OSCE (MED/4).

MEDs share the view that teachers do not see online training as a good opportunity, although they acknowledge that such a form of teacher training was necessary. According to MED/4, the lack of school environment, direct contact in training does not promote the motivation for successful learning, which is also reflected in working with students.

On the other hand, according to education experts, no significant actions have been identified to support teachers at a time when they were in the midst of many challenges, teaching in pandemic conditions. MEST mainly came to the rescue with instructions on how to act in emergency situations, although it is estimated that the instructions are quite general. According to (AU/3) guidance support alone proved to be insufficient. MEST in its strategic documents promotes digital learning for years, but, as it turned out, the commitment to digital learning has not been sincere.

The main need and demand of teachers at this time was to be equipped with technology, but also to be trained in terms of using technology in teaching. Support from other institutions and organizations has been fragmented, with no focus on people who really needed such training. According to (AU/4) this happens because institutions do not have accurate information on the needs of teachers, the hierarchy of institutions is fragile, schools do not have full autonomy for independent action, and usually everything is decided from above. On the other hand, MESTI does not have sufficient capacities to respond to all requests and needs.

A representative of the partners that support education in Kosovo says that in the framework of professional development of teachers and education workers there was no national approach or strategy and the partners were not consulted on this issue, despite the requirements and opportunities. While according to AU/5 efforts to support teachers for professional development were not lacking, but there was lack of experience as well as of planning and implementation capacity.

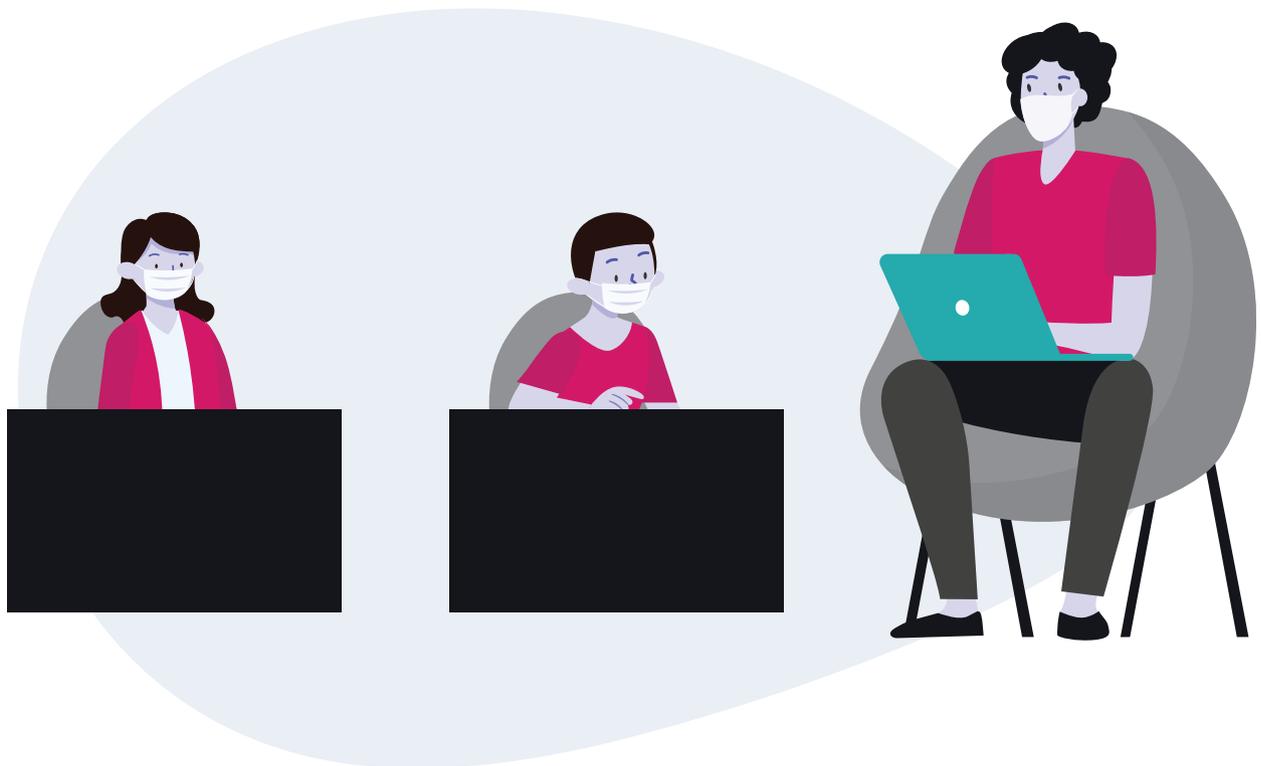
The pandemic also shed light on the fact that trainings and courses so far have been attended very formally by teachers. This has happened with ECDL training where thousands of teachers have attended but their competence has never been assessed, as happens with other trainings. Institutions now had other challenges, such as providing hygiene items, rules of conduct and protection against the virus, so teacher training was not in the forefront in pandemic times and often not relevant to teachers' needs.



The opportunity for teachers to participate in trainings organized during pandemic conditions varies from municipality to municipality, and from school to school. In general, according to the principals and teachers, there was no organization of professional development by the institutions. Some schools and municipalities have benefited more during this period, given that previously they were in some process of cooperation with training providers, such as the sample schools under the GIZ program, and other schools within the programs offered by the British Council, or by UUESC only for its membership.

## 8. LEARNING IN PANDEMIC CONDITIONS AND THE ROLE OF PARENTS

Parents as primary caregivers of their children are part of the school community, with a role and responsibility for their child and the processes that take place in the school. Parents, as well as students and teachers, faced many challenges in working with their children during Covid-19 isolation measures and distance learning from home, but even now with respecting the measures after the return to school.



Referring to the World Bank report<sup>57</sup>, even in the best of circumstances, many parents are unprepared to face distance learning and home learning, especially those who have no knowledge of technology, have limited education and resources, have many children, and have to make decisions about the distribution of an insufficient number of information technology devices. This, according to the report, is illustrated by data showing that the number of adults with basic or better digital skills ranges from 24 percent in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to 32 percent in northern Macedonia and to 46 percent in Serbia, compared to 56 percent in the EU and over 70 percent in countries like Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands.

Parents and guardians can set rules with their children about how, when and where the internet can be used. To establish a healthy balance between online time and other activities some boundaries need to be set. In the case of young children, actions like parental controls can help mitigate online risks. Parents and guardians can help children access online resources necessary for online learning, socializing and entertainment during the Covid-19 pandemic. At the same time, parents and guardians need to be vigilant about online risks to children<sup>58</sup>.

Findings from the study *Impacts of Covid-19, school closure and social isolation on the well-being and attitudes of distance (online) learning for gifted students*, show that as a result of school closures and isolation at home, the parents of gifted children have felt more burdened than usual, tension has increased in the family, while in gifted children changes in psychological well-being have been observed.<sup>59</sup>

Regarding the role of parents in organizing education in the conditions of the pandemic, at the first document for duties and responsibilities for the realization of distance learning (March 2020<sup>60</sup>), MESTI has described the importance of involving parents in the implementation of distance learning. According to this document, the parents, especially those with young children (grades 1-3), are the mainstay for the realization of online learning. Also, parents are the most important factor for the realization of learning in other levels of pre-university education. However, in the documents developed for learning in the conditions of the pandemic, there are few guidelines outlined specifically for parents and work with their children.

Within the platform “Distance Education - Care, Development and Education in early childhood for the ages 0 to 6”, tips and information for parents regarding carrying out daily activities with children at home are reflected. Part of the platform is also the content of the activities presented for which parents are told that they stimulate children in their development in all areas of development depending on their age in physical, cognitive, emotional, mathematical and creative development. The platform also brings information on how parents can talk to their children about Covid-19, monthly topics, examples of activities carried out by children, various videos and materials that talk about the development of children at an early age. Parents are instructed to work with their children during the daily activities presented on the platform.

The Student Assessment Guide for the 2020-2021 school year briefly describes the role of parents, according to which, given the situation created by the Covid-19 pandemic, parents should be more involved than ever in

57 World Bank (2020). Regular Economic Report for the Western Balkans Assessing the impact of COVID-19 on education and the countries' response <https://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/550271590827524462/RER-Education-COVID-ALB.pdf>

58 UNICEF and WHO (April 2020). COVID-19 and its impact on online child protection. [https://www.unicef.org/albania/media/2811/file/ALBANIAN\\_COVID-19\\_and\\_Its\\_Implications\\_for\\_Protecting\\_Children\\_Online\\_neë.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/albania/media/2811/file/ALBANIAN_COVID-19_and_Its_Implications_for_Protecting_Children_Online_neë.pdf)

59 Zamira Hyseni Durak & Naime Hoxha. (2020). Impacts of COVID-19, school closure and social isolation on well-being and attitudes towards distance learning (online) in gifted students. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343389659\\_Ndikimet\\_e\\_COVID-19\\_mbylljes\\_se\\_shkolles\\_dhe\\_izolimit\\_social\\_ne\\_mireqenien\\_dhe\\_qendrimet\\_per\\_mesimin\\_ne\\_distance\\_online\\_te\\_nxenesit\\_me\\_dhunti](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343389659_Ndikimet_e_COVID-19_mbylljes_se_shkolles_dhe_izolimit_social_ne_mireqenien_dhe_qendrimet_per_mesimin_ne_distance_online_te_nxenesit_me_dhunti)

60 Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (2020). Duties and responsibilities for the realization of distance learning. [https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2020/03/detyrat-dhe-pergjegjesite-per-realizimin-e-mesimit-ne-distance-mashti\\_1.pdf](https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2020/03/detyrat-dhe-pergjegjesite-per-realizimin-e-mesimit-ne-distance-mashti_1.pdf)

supporting their children in the learning process that will be organized according to the scenarios set by the school as well as in the evaluation process that will be applied according to the instructions of MESTI.

On the other hand, the general guide of MESTI for the organization of teaching in the school year 2020-2021 in the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic does not provide special instructions and support for parents, regarding the approaches they should adopt in working with their children in pandemic conditions. Also, no special instructions or video recordings have been developed for parents, and no special link created on the official website of MESTI where parents would have easy access, that would be used by schools and parents to build a more stable partnership and mutual support in pandemic conditions. This is mainly done in the schools themselves, sometimes with the support of municipalities through learning platforms in the way they were able to organize and help the parents themselves, without any special help from the system.

The technical guide Covid-19 and its impact on online child protection<sup>61</sup>, promoted by UNICEF and WHO, sets out some of the key priorities and recommendations on how to mitigate these risks and how to promote positive online experiences for children, including recommendations for parent support:

- Governments, societies, and other actors should support parents with appropriate guidance and tools, including how to respond and, if necessary, how to report harmful contacts, behavior, and content.
- Governments, societies and school administrators should familiarize parents and guardians with relevant policies, as well as with online and offline reporting mechanisms. Parents should have helpful hotline and helpline support numbers available, and contact the police if their children's concerns are related to threats, potential crimes or other illegal behavior.

The support of parents with instructions and advice for working with their children was also requested from the representative sample of parents involved in the distance learning study conducted by PIK in May 2020. This is justified by the argument that many parents cannot provide adequate support to their children in matters related to lessons, while it has been observed that continuing distance learning for a long time has begun to affect the decline in motivation of children to learn.

61 UNICEF (April, 2020). COVID-19 and its impact for protecting children online. [https://www.unicef.org/albania/media/2811/file/ALBANIAN\\_COVID-19\\_and\\_Its\\_Implications\\_for\\_Protecting\\_Children\\_Online\\_new.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/albania/media/2811/file/ALBANIAN_COVID-19_and_Its_Implications_for_Protecting_Children_Online_new.pdf)

Approximately the same requirements are described in the debate organized by GIZ regarding the Challenges of organizing the learning process in Covid-19 pandemic conditions from the perspective of parents, in which 25 people participated, mostly parents<sup>62</sup>. Referring to the minutes of this meeting, in the circumstances of distance learning, Kosovo has increased cooperation and communication of teachers and schools with parents. Certainly not at the right level content-wise. Our system has done little to involve parents in the learning processes, especially after the circumstances created by the pandemic. According to parents, the general learning challenges in pandemic conditions and parents are as follows:

- Problems with technology, lack of learning platforms that enable interactive learning, record keeping of student and teacher absences in online learning unreliable.
- Provision of information technology equipment, laptops and computers, as well as lack of capacity to support children for distance learning;
- Lack of transparency with parental councils. Lack of cooperation between the parents' councils at the school level and the municipal level. Not all schools have parental mechanisms at the classroom and school level.
- Lack of instructions and orientations for parents on how to approach work with their children (psychological, pedagogical, methodological aspects ...), home school hours, support during the lesson to provide information and teaching materials, etc. This has caused parents to be overburdened during this time.

In the pandemic learning environment, some parents took on the role of a teacher, trying to support their children, but a number of them were not very responsible. According to (AU/4), under the circumstances, the burden on parents is related to the quality of parents' sensitivity to support their children.

The situation with the pandemic is unpredictable, consequently the duration of stay in school or the duration of distance learning, therefore education institutions in Kosovo should show increased care and institutional commitment to support parents to work with their children in learning conditions in the circumstances of the pandemic. Parents, for their active involvement in the development processes of the school and education, recommend:

- to clearly define the duties and responsibilities of parents for the school and vice versa, those of the school and teachers for parents, regarding teaching in these conditions;
- to provide systematic support to parent structures from the grade, school and the central levels;
- to develop a special platform for official informing of parents from the central level, in which to publish materials and instructions for parents regarding the work with their children, have discussions and analysis such as the ones related to learning in pandemic conditions; debates to take place with parents from the school level to the central level.

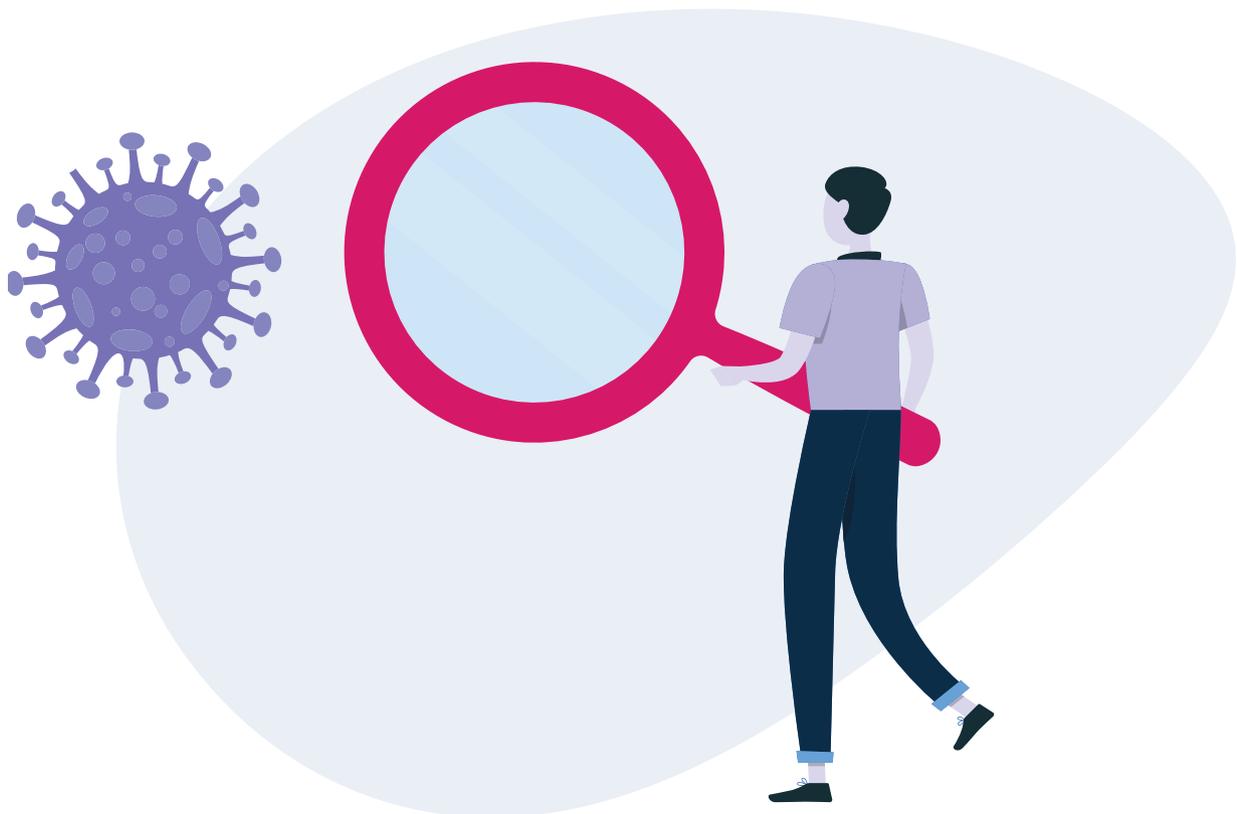
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62 The authors of this study were also part of this debate.

## 9. PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION MONITORING AND REPORTING DURING THE PANDEMIC

As described in the third chapter, the Education Inspectorate remains the main mechanism for monitoring and inspection in pre-university education even in pandemic conditions, which performs its tasks through general, thematic, emergency, quality inspection and re-inspection.

Based on the three priorities set out in the general guide for the organization of teaching in the school year 2020-2021, the main focus of monitoring and inspection in pre-university education is placed on logistical and organizational aspects, not on the content of the teaching process, teaching approaches and quality of learning in pandemic conditions, etc.



According to the written interview with the director of the Inspectorate of Education, since the beginning of the pandemic the Inspectorate of Education has been engaged in monitoring the situation in schools, where so far several hundred thematic inspections have been conducted in order to control the implementation of anti-Covid measures, and contacts with MEDs were continuously maintained, in order to harmonize activities to be as close as possible to the school in support of the learning process and provide recommendations and suggestions for prevention and protection from Covid-19.

In the report of the inspectorate for the progress of learning according to scenarios A, B and C for each municipality at the national level for 14.09.2020 to 26.03.2021, data are presented on the number of schools in each municipality that have worked with scenario A, B and C of teaching. The following table summarizes these data at the regional level.

Table 3. Number of schools according to teaching scenarios

No.	Area	Number of schools that have worked with Scenario A of teaching (in school)	Number of schools that have worked with Scenario B of teaching (in school + online)	Number of schools that have worked with Scenario C of teaching (online)	Total
1	Gjilan	74	2	2	78
2	Ferizaj	123	10	2	135
3	Mitrovica	74	5	20	99
4	Peja	47	6	41	94
5	Gjakova	114	7	0	121
6	Prishtina	143	6	10	159
7	Prizren	87	20	0	107
Total		662 or 83.5%	56 or 7%	75 or 9.5%	793

According to the report of the inspectorate, the largest number of schools that worked with Scenario C (online), at different times in the course of this year, are schools from municipalities which are also regional centers, such as Peja, Mitrovica and Prishtina.

On the other hand, regarding the narrative report provided by the Inspectorate of Education for the progress of learning according to scenarios A, B and C for 14.09.2020 to 26.03.2021, there are differences in the way the situation of learning progress is portrayed for the described municipalities. The descriptions in the narrative reports, beyond the learning scenario, refer to information on the functioning of the School TASK Force, the placement for instructions, information and decisions for compliance with protective measures, supply with disinfectants as well as masks and gloves for students, temperature measurement of students, tests done for Covid, number of cases of infections or deaths from Covid, etc.

The differences in the narrative reports of the progress of teaching by municipalities are based on the specifics and evidence provided during the inspections in schools. They are described by the lack of measurement indicators through which reports could be prepared by indicators, municipalities and nationwide. Only in two cases of descriptive reports are measurement indicators presented, such as the number of schools working according to the teaching scenarios and the number of deaths from school staff by Covid-19.

In general, the reporting system from EIMS is not connected to a monitoring and reporting framework, through which it would be possible to report with measurement indicators, which could be compared with other municipalities and country-wide reports could be prepared for certain indicators, such as:

- No. of schools that teach, according to learning scenarios;
- No. of teachers working with two groups of students of the same grade;
- Number of teachers trained for online learning;
- % of schools working with a teaching duration of 25-30 minutes;
- % of students participating in the lesson, according to the learning scenarios;
- % of teaching hours held according to classes;
- No. of teachers infected with Covid-19;
- No. of teachers who have been absent for health reasons;
- No. of teachers for whom replacement by the MED is provided
- No. of teachers for whom the schools themselves have provided replacements;
- No. of students infected with Covid-19;
- % of usage of each digital platform, based on the number of teachers who have used them (shkollat.org, E-school, Zoom, Teams, Google Classroom, etc.)
- No. of teachers monitored in the classroom.

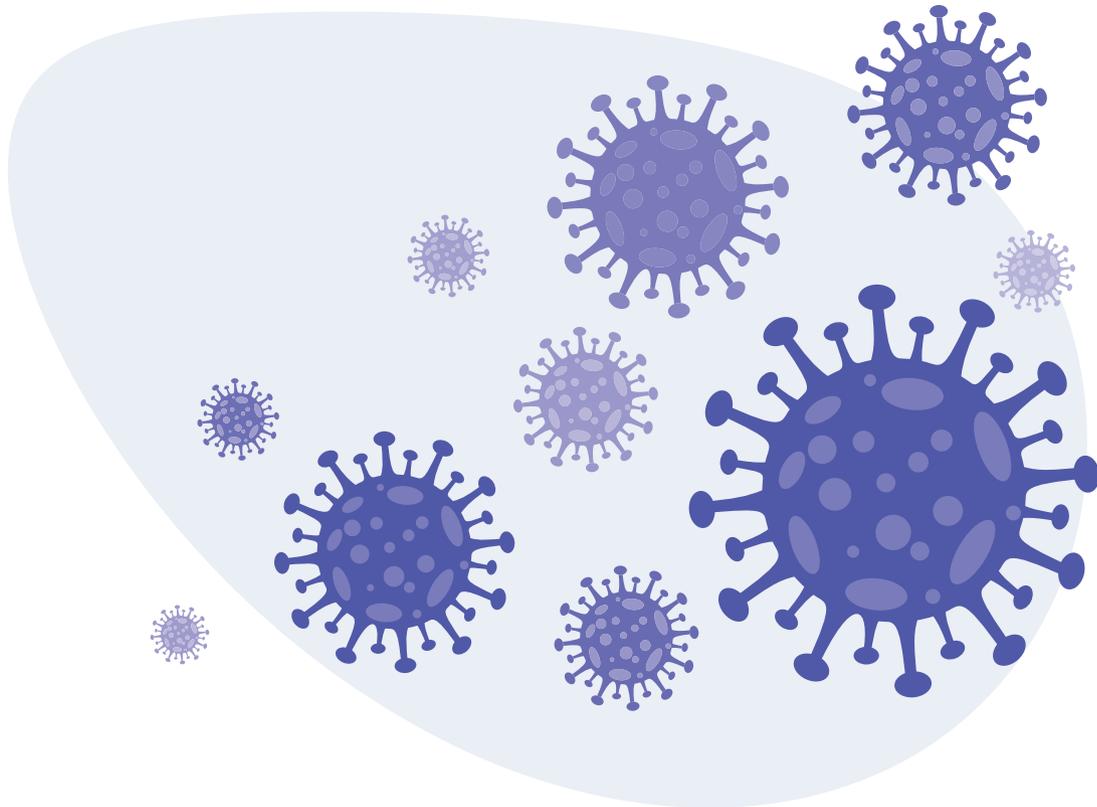
In the absence of reporting measurement indicators, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the quality of teaching in pandemic conditions. Moreover, such a reporting format is not required even with the General Guide for the organization of teaching in the school year 2020-2021, chapter six: Monitoring and inspection.

Megjithatë, bazuar në formatin e raporteve ekzistuese, IA ka identifikuar disa nga sfidat më të mëdha me të cilat është përballur sistemi arsimor si në vijim:

- situata emergjente me rrezikim të shëndetit dhe jetës;
- mungesa e plan programeve të cilat i përgjigjen situatave emergjente;
- orët mësimore me kohëzgjatje prej 25-30 minuta;
- mungesa e përvojës për t'iu përgjigjur situatave të tilla;
- mësimi online (në distancë);
- pengesa në qasje në platforma elektronike për komunikim/mësim online;
- mungesa e pajisjeve teknologjike për të përcjellë mësimin online;
- mos angazhimi i personelit plotësues nga DKA-të për shkolla për të zëvendësuar të infektuarit me Covid-19 etj.

## 10. CHALLENGES FACING THE PANDEMIC AND OPPORTUNITIES TO ADDRESS THEM

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to challenge education systems, changing the routine of organizing the learning process and organizing the work of education institutions, increasing the workload of the education community, including teachers, students and parents, and at the same time deepening inequalities in education.



In the context of Kosovo, the very ways of organizing learning in pandemic conditions, such as school education in pandemic conditions, combined learning or distance learning was accompanied by many challenges, both for teachers and parents, students and the education community in general. It is estimated that all the energy during the confrontation with the pandemic is focused on the organization of the learning process, physical participation in school, implementation of curricula, meanwhile, very little counseling and emotional support was provided to children during this period<sup>63</sup>.

The emergency closure of schools was quite challenging for the system and society at large. Changing the routine from class to home was quite challenging for students, teachers and parents. According to (AU/1) the workload of all actors in the learning process has been and remains high: online learning, having part-time teaching and in two shifts for the same class, creating pressure and stress on each category.

On the other hand, other education experts associate the burden of the education community in dealing with the pandemic, in addition to the great unknown influences, with the dysfunction of support mechanisms and lack of structured support. In the absence of support mechanisms, in most cases families and schools were left alone. This in turn has led to differences in how families and schools have understood their role in pandemic conditions and responded to specific requests related to their role.

According to another education expert, the aspect of the workload for students, teachers and parents in the learning processes during the pandemic should be viewed from the perspective of support provided, because according to him, the school community has without exception lacked structured support in the teaching and learning process during the pandemic (AU/3).

There are no accurate data regarding the quantitative load of all parties. According to (AU/6) the pressure on teachers and parents is created by the pandemic situation itself, the financial insecurity, health insecurity, balancing work from home and caring for children, but also from facing a learning system which has called into question the quality of learning and the developmental future of students. However, it is estimated that those teachers who were serious in their approach to distance learning, or even other scenarios, have been overloaded. On the other hand, in the workload was quite heavy for students throughout the learning process, given the lack of interaction with teachers and classmates or group work, which is one of the prerequisites for the development of creativity and critical thinking.

The education system has not yet been consolidated in terms of full implementation of the Curriculum and the teaching approach according to its requirements. The current Curriculum enables teachers to have extended autonomy in the selection of teaching materials/resources and the use of various tools for achieving competencies. The degree to which teachers are not familiar with the new Curriculum was made evident when they were challenged to use their autonomy in terms of the approaches addressed by the competency-based Curriculum. According to (AU/1), the lack of tradition and capacity to prepare digital teaching materials, and the low level of digital competence in our society was largely reflected during the pandemic.

A separate challenge was the 'lack of accountability and lack of professional competence of teachers' (AU/2), which has also influenced the identification of best ways to act in a pandemic.

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63 Kosova Education Center (KEC), 2021. EDITORIAL - Education in Kosovo during the COVID-19 pandemic. Within the project: QUALITY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND INCLUSIVENESS IN EDUCATION 2021. [http://www.kec-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Editorial\\_Arsimi-n%C3%AB-Kosov%C3%AB-gjat%C3%AB-pandemis%C3%AB-COVID-19-FINAL.pdf](http://www.kec-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Editorial_Arsimi-n%C3%AB-Kosov%C3%AB-gjat%C3%AB-pandemis%C3%AB-COVID-19-FINAL.pdf)

Among the biggest challenges faced by pre-university education, the representatives of MESTI address the following:

- Large number of children in education groups during the attendance in preschool institutions during the pandemic period.
- Realization of education activities with young children / inability to keep distance.
- Realization of online daily activities through the “Distance Education” platform with children in cases of isolation.
- Poor replacement of education staff infected with Covid-19 and those over 60 years of age, given the working hours of children’s educators.
- The transition from one scenario to another, which has caused problems for students with special needs because online learning has to be done through parents.
- Problems with technological equipment and their use by students and parents.
- The small number of assistants in schools and the lack of time for teachers to work individually with these students.
- Lack of digital capacities and digital teaching materials;
- Lack of an organizational unit in MESTI Department, Division dealing with digitalization of education, digital pedagogy, Planning, Monitoring and Reporting, etc.



The emergency closure of schools was quite challenging for the system and society at large. Changing the routine from class to home was quite challenging for students, teachers and parents. According to (AU/1) the workload of all actors in the learning process has been and remains high: online learning, having part-time teaching and in two shifts for the same class, creating pressure and stress on each category.

According to school principals, teachers and Municipal Education Directorates, pandemic learning is characterized by many challenges, such as:

- The very process of organizing learning in pandemic conditions,
- Lack of digital competencies of education staff and parents, lack of ICT infrastructure, lack of platforms for organizing learning, lack of equipment, lack of internet and even lack of RTK network in remote areas.
- Protection against Covid-19 infection. Organizing the entry and exit of students in the school and in the school yard,
- Short lessons time. Dividing students into groups,
- The applicability of the designed curricula, considering the reduced learning content, the working environment conditions in schools, wearing a mask, social distance with students and between students, etc.;
- Uncertainty in terms of expectations on how to act in a situation in which no school institution has been before,
- Personnel management during the pandemic. Replacement of education staff who during this time have been infected with Covid-19. Impossibility of covering classes in cases when teachers were infected with Covid-19,
- Teacher workload, especially in schools where teachers were working with two groups of students in learning scenario B,
- Interruption of various activities in schools. Impossibility of developing free activities and the organization of knowledge and other competitions.

On the other hand, education experts address the following challenges:

- Lack of systematic approach to planning and organizing learning during the pandemic. MESTI planned as much as it could - because it proved that the necessary capacities and resources for online teaching and learning had not been created.
- Lack of mobilization and inter-institutional cooperation to create the basic conditions (internet access, provision of equipment and identification of teaching materials) for the organization and progress of the learning process.
- Organizational aspects and fragmented institutional support.
- Quality assurance, which has brought many questions and opened topics for debate, especially about the opportunities for curriculum implementation, objective assessment and academic development of students according to learning outcomes and competencies.
- The flaws of the education system were carried over to be multiplied as an impact even during the pandemic. Lack of accountability, lack of professional competence of teachers, inadequate textbooks, and many other issues continue to be key problems that affect the quality of pre-university education.

All these challenges have highlighted almost all the shortcomings of the education system. The assessment of the situation should also contribute to the improvement of measures for the application of online learning and to the identification of priority measures to be taken in order to increase the quality of education. Policymakers in the future should channel budgetary and development policies towards avoiding the challenges identified so as not to be surprised by emergency situations and to anticipate the development of education.

Opportunities to be best used in response to the circumstances created by Covid-19. The 'accidental' organization of learning in pandemic conditions, the forced change of approach to teaching and learning, under the conditions of global pandemic, for many societies, including ours, was a new lesson to reflect upon, such as the organization of schooling in such circumstances. Also, organizing learning in the conditions of the pandemic was a good opportunity to learn about the advantages of using technology in teaching, about the modality of distance learning, and about concrete measures in building and integrating online learning in the education system<sup>64</sup>.

According to Dawson and Mellor (2020), it is observed that there is no single solution to all the long-term structural challenges present in education systems. The pandemic does not only mean a state of emergency, it can also present a prospect of opportunities for a national revision or reconceptualization of the education system - thus orienting it towards a new value system (cited by Gentiola Madhi and Francesco Trupia, March 2021<sup>65</sup>).

Organizing learning in pandemic conditions, especially distance learning, in addition to presenting challenges, is a good opportunity to understand the importance and advantages of using technology in teaching and taking concrete measures in building and including online learning in the Kosovo education system<sup>66</sup>. Now we can no longer say that the education system is still inexperienced, as a tradition of organization has been established along with an experience for changes and drafting of education policies from a perspective of opportunities for new approaches.

From the point of view of education experts and studies in this field, one should act from the lessons and experiences of other systems. The creation of a state plan/strategy for the digitalization of the education system and the implementation of that plan/strategy starting from the school year 2021/2022, is seen as a key alternative. The situation does not seem to be (very) different in the next school year. Any delay in this regard will only increase the rate of losses that have been created in the system. Any delay will prove the lack of seriousness of state institutions to act in this time of numerous crises in the system. (AU/1). It is necessary to promote and advance new forms and digital learning approaches. Those who were skeptical in the past about the modalities of digital teaching, now see it as a real opportunity for which to invest in the creation of digital conditions and competencies.

Also, the pandemic situation proved the importance of promoting and advancing cooperation with parents for distance learning. Many of them who were reluctant to have a closer parental cooperation with the school, are now convinced of how important such cooperation is for the benefit of their children. Schools and other

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64 Kosovo Pedagogical Institute (2020). Distance learning/e-learning in pre-university education in Kosovo, in the circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic. PIK, Prishtina.

65 Gentiola Madhi dhe Francesco Trupia (2021). Reforming or reconceptualizing post-endemic education in the Western Balkans - Analysis of Albania, Kosovo and Serbia. Kosovo Foundation for Open Society, KFOS. <https://kfos.org/storage/app/uploads/public/604/08b/814/60408b8146acd816019318.pdf>

66 Kosova Education Center (KEC), 2021. EDITORIAL - Education in Kosovo during the COVID-19 pandemic. Part of the project QUALITY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND INCLUSIVENESS IN EDUCATION 2021. [http://www.kec-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Editorial\\_Arsimi-n%C3%AB-Kosov%C3%AB-gjat%C3%AB-pandemis%C3%AB-COVID-19-FINAL.pdf](http://www.kec-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Editorial_Arsimi-n%C3%AB-Kosov%C3%AB-gjat%C3%AB-pandemis%C3%AB-COVID-19-FINAL.pdf)

institutions should therefore help to promote mutual cooperation for the benefit and well-being of the learning process.

On the other hand, in terms of addressing the learning losses, one of the experts in education (AU/1) sees the implementation of project-based teaching as an opportunity on which schools and teachers should reflect, always taking into account basic specifications of classes and levels of education, capacities of teachers for the implementation of project-based teaching, teaching topics/contents planned this school year for the learning outcomes which have not been achieved but are intended to be achieved through such teaching approaches. Ideas for the opportunities to be used to address the learning losses are a good orientation for the work of schools and teachers, largely complementing the lack of clear guidelines from MESTI for access to teaching in relation to the supplementary education that is to be provided.

Lessons learned and useful experience should be used in the future, for (and not only) (AU/5):

- providing access to education for specific groups of students (students with health problems who are in hospitals, teaching Albanian to students in the diaspora...)
- increased online communication between teachers and students (after school) to compensate for the shortcomings of limited stay at school due to the shift work
- development of digital learning in normal conditions of the teaching process as an ideal opportunity for increasing transparency and accountability in pre-university education, etc.

Lessons learned and useful experience must be turned into actions that require the integration of inter-institutional and societal synergies, for easier and more successful overcoming of the challenges of the pandemic and for the future of education.

# 11. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to the circumstances, the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation in cooperation with the Municipal Directorates of Education, international partners supporting education, non-governmental organizations and the information technology industry, managed to organize distance teaching in pandemic conditions and conclude the 2019/2020 school year.

On the other hand, to ensure the organization of teaching in the school year 2020-2021 in the conditions of the pandemic, in consultation with NIPH, MESTI developed the Guide and Master plan for organizing teaching in pandemic conditions 2020-2021 in the Republic of Kosovo. As such, these and other supplementary documents served to organize the lessons during this school year. However, the analysis of the framework of measures set in the basic documents for the organization of learning in pandemic conditions, the analysis of reports on the progress of the learning process in these conditions, as well as the views of respondents included in this study show that these documents have not sufficiently covered some of the basic needs of the school community, and some of the measures set out in these documents have not been properly and timely implemented, starting with the MESTI itself as their promoter.

The conclusions and recommendations regarding the topics addressed in this study are reflected as follows.

## 11.1 CONCLUSIONS

**Organizing lessons in pandemic conditions.** As described in the third chapter of this study report, the organization of learning in the conditions of the pandemic includes two periods, whereby the first refers to phase one of the pandemic, March - June 2020, which includes the third term of learning in the school year 2019-2020, while the second refers to the school year 2020-2021.

The education system in Kosovo was not prepared for the organization of digital learning in exceptional conditions such as the pandemic, or in normal learning circumstances for digital learning.

The main findings on the organization of learning in the first phase of the Covid-19 pandemic shows that the entire organization of learning in this phase was done through distance learning. This form of learning included broadcasting of video lectures on the Public Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK) and the MESTI channel on 'YouTube' (initially for the primary level, grades 1-5, and then also for the second level, grades 6-9), as well as

the work of teachers and students from home for additional homework and lessons. Meanwhile, for the upper secondary level, grades 10-12 (high schools and vocational schools), the organization of distance learning was left to the responsibility of the municipalities.

In this regard, in addition to the broadcast videos, teachers used various electronic platforms such as ZOOM, Skype, Viber, Google Meet, and Google Classroom, to share homework, new lessons and teaching materials.

The organization of teaching in the new school year 2020-2021 started in support of the Master Plan for the development of learning in pandemic conditions 2020-2021 in the Republic of Kosovo and the General Guide of MESTI for the organization of teaching in the school year 2020-2021 - in the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic, with restrictions, protective masks, temperature measurement, hand and environment disinfection, as well as physical distancing. The school year started with a two-week delay, while the teaching process continues to be run depending on the epidemiological situation in the country and the specific conditions of education institutions, always based on three learning scenarios: Scenario A - school learning; Scenario B - combined learning (in school and distance) and scenario C - distance learning.

The organization of teaching in pandemic conditions continues to pose many challenges for teachers, parents, students and the education community in general. For learning needs according to scenarios B and C, the organization of the learning process in pandemic conditions is still unified at the national level, whereby municipalities/schools and teachers, use different platforms and approaches for teaching and assessing students, in the absence of a nationwide platform. E-learning is an opportunity to unify teaching according to online learning scenarios, although reportedly it fails to serve sufficiently the needs for the organization of online learning by teachers.

**Return to school and implementation of the curriculum in the circumstances of the organization of learning during the pandemic.** Return to school has been marked by an increase in cases of viral infections, lack of political stability across the country, insufficient and untimely preparation, insufficient institutional commitment to respond and make appropriate decisions under these incredibly critical and sensitive circumstances.

The return to school of students, teaching staff, management, support staff and other actors, as in other countries, was accompanied by fear and concern about the virus and the spread of infections. Caring for the well-being of children and school staff during the pandemic was a working principle, a preventive measure and the main measure for continuing schooling.

Return was different from school to school, from municipality to municipality, in the way of lesson organization, teaching time, adapting to the new approach of lesson organization, level of responsibility and accountability, challenges faced in organizing the lesson etc.

Return to school is not aligned with the measures set out in the Master Plan for the development of education in pandemic conditions 2020-2021 in the Republic of Kosovo and the General Guide of MESTI for the organization of education in the school year 2020-2021 in the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic. The problems encountered with finding replacements for teachers infected during this period and cuts from the approved budget for 2021 are just some of the departures from the plans for returning to school.

**Curriculum implementation in pandemic conditions.** Covid-19 has changed the routine of organizing school work and the way teachers and students work in school and in distance learning, creating a new routine in an effort to meet the learning expectations set by curricular documents.

In terms of the implementation of the curriculum in the conditions of the pandemic, schools have received only the General Guide of MESTI for the organization of teaching in the school year 2020-2021 in the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the annual plans for the teaching periods (for subjects and curricular fields) by the professional groups of MED Prishtina. Referring to the documents and reports from MESTI, the planning of the program content to be implemented in the school year 2020-2021 for grades 1-9 is foreseen to be 75%, namely reduced by 25%.

Curricula implementation has been described as a very challenging process due to failure of compliance with the specifics of each school and their implementation abilities, but also due to the scenarios that schools had to adopt during infection cases.

Two-shift teaching for a class of students at 25-30 minutes per lesson was a challenge in itself because, as described by the representatives of the schools participating in this research, it rushed the implementation of the official program while students largely failed to receive the right number of lessons. Furthermore, because of the pandemic, there was not enough interaction between students and teachers.

The lack of systemic support in the implementation of the new curriculum is largely reflected as a problem in itself, as a result of which teachers and schools felt lonely and uncertain regarding the implementation of the curriculum in pandemic conditions. This was further complicated by the lack of textbooks and teaching materials.

**Learning losses.** The Covid-19 pandemic is expected to have a significant impact on student performance, affect learning losses and create learning inequalities. At the level of education institutions, no special study has been carried yet which would be a starting point towards understanding the scale of learning losses and identifying measures to avoid the consequences and support students in compensating for learning losses.

In relation to the learning scenarios that schools in Kosovo have worked in, it is expected to reflect the levels and rates of learning losses. In view of reduced lesson times in schools working in two shifts with the same class, where classes are held at max. 25-30 min, learning losses are about 33% relative to the teaching time according to the teaching schedule. On the other hand, this reduced teaching time may be covered by individual student involvement due to class groups of 15-20 students, and due to the learning environment created by the school/teachers and family. This requires a separate study.

Currently, no special reporting and monitoring system has been developed through which an approximate rate of learning losses could be determined, so it is not yet known exactly what they are in the entire education system. In the absence of a standard system for measuring losses, even eventual support is at risk of being provided ad-hoc rather than based on student needs. The beginning of supplementary education can be a starting point to look at learning losses.

**Involvement of children from vulnerable groups.** The Covid-19 pandemic and the challenges posed have affected all children, especially children from vulnerable groups, children of low socio-economic status, children with special education needs, and children from the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities. Key findings

show that children from marginalized groups are faced with a lack of IT equipment for students (where many families from marginalized groups have no laptop, tablet or computer, and often some children in a family have only one smartphone available for distance learning), thus facing anxiety and stress due to technical obstacles. No specific policy has been developed to avoid the deepening of inequalities in education during the pandemic.

**Teacher professional development during the pandemic.** The pandemic also shed light on the fact that trainings and courses so far have been attended very formally by teachers. This has happened with ECDL training whereby thousands of teachers have attended but their competence has never been assessed as it would in other trainings.

MESTI-managed training programs (such as curriculum implementation training and education leadership training) are offered in schools/training centers, while trainings and other forms of professional development offered by partners and NGOs are mainly held online.

Apart from the General Guide, it seems that there is no detailed teacher training plan for this school year in the conditions of the pandemic, which should be shared with MEDs and other education institutions and organizations dealing with TPD.

The data collected on TPD in pandemic times show that there is no reporting system based on measurement indicators which would be used to develop detailed reports on the involvement of teachers in training by municipalities and schools, programs attended, software providers, etc. No significant actions have been identified to support all teachers in times of many challenges, while the workload of teachers has been greatly increased during teaching in pandemic conditions.

**The role of parents during teaching in pandemic.** In general, the system does not provide specific guidance and support for parents regarding the approaches they should adopt in working with their children in pandemic conditions. Also, no special instructions or video recordings have been developed for parents and no special link created on the official website of MESTI with an easy access for parents that would be used by both schools and parents to build a more stable partnership and offer mutual support in pandemic conditions. This is mainly done in the schools, sometimes with the support of municipalities through learning platforms, and that is how they were able to organize themselves and help the parents, without any special assistance from the system.

**Monitoring pre-university education and reporting during the pandemic.** The Education Inspectorate, based on its legal responsibilities, including the teaching process, was the main mechanism for monitoring and inspection in pre-university education, performing its tasks through general, thematic, emergency, re-inspection and quality inspection.

Based on the three priorities set out in the general guide for the organization of teaching in the school year 2020-2021 and the respondents involved in this study, the main focus of monitoring and inspection in pre-university education is on logistical and organizational aspects rather than the content of the teaching process, teaching approach, quality of learning in pandemic conditions, etc.

In the absence of measurement indicators for reporting purposes, it is difficult to draw conclusions from current reports of the Education Inspectorate about the quality of teaching in pandemic conditions. Moreover, such reporting format is not required even by the General Guide for the organization of teaching in the school year 2020-2021, chapter six: Monitoring and Inspection.

**Summary of challenges while facing the Covid-19 pandemic.** The Covid-19 pandemic continues to challenge education systems, changing the routine of organizing the learning process the work of education institutions, increasing the workload of the education community, including teachers, students and parents, and at the same time deepening inequalities in education.

In the context of Kosovo, the very ways of organizing learning in pandemic conditions, such as school education in pandemic conditions, combined learning or distance learning were accompanied by numerous challenges for teachers, parents, students and the education community in general. It is estimated that all the energy during the confrontation with the pandemic was focused on organizing the learning process, physical participation in school, implementation of curricula, while very little counseling and emotional support was provided to children during this period.

Some of the biggest challenges faced by pre-university education during the pandemic are:

- The ability to deal with existing problems in the education system, such as low participation in education of children from marginalized groups, limited leadership capacities in reform implementation through a coordinated and coherent approach, lack of accountability, failure to enact school autonomy, quality of teaching, limited capacities for the implementation of the new curriculum etc.
- The readiness of the system and society to deal with emergency situations such as the pandemic, lack of competencies and digital technology, lack of a standardized platform for distance learning and digital teaching materials based on the state curriculum.
- Starting the new school year in terms of pandemic restrictions - masks, temperature measurement, disinfection and physical distancing based on the relevant protocol, the very process of organizing learning in pandemic conditions with three learning scenarios without sufficient preparation for structural reactions to any learning scenario, as well as the ongoing risk of infection.
- Personnel situation management during the pandemic, replacement of education staff who were infected with Covid-19, inability to cover for teachers infected with Covid-19.
- The quality of teaching and learning environments in relation to the scenarios of learning organization, the work with reduced teaching hours lasting 25-30 minutes, the division of students into two groups, the quality of the work of teachers with the second groups of the same classroom, teacher work with students in learning scenarios B/C.
- Lack of a central institutional mechanism dealing with the digitalization of education, focusing on preparation and system support for the digital education platform, digital learning resources and materials, development of digital competence, provision of digital services, etc.
- Adapting learning environments to pandemic conditions in order to develop competencies, finding supportive modalities for students to ensure an easy transition of learning in different learning environments from one learning scenario to another.
- Responding in a timely and appropriate manner to the needs and requirements of marginalized groups with supportive measures to ensure access and active involvement in the learning process, compensating

for learning losses and preventing inequalities in education, as a growing trend that may also affect the degree of functional illiteracy.

- Lack of a support system for parents/guardians with guidance on how to approach work with their children in the psychological, pedagogical and methodological aspects during school hours at home, support during teaching for providing information and teaching materials, protection from internet risks during online learning, etc.
- Insufficient psychological services in schools in response to the needs and demands of the pandemic, such as the workload of students, teachers, parents, etc.
- Lack of reporting system for TPD based on measurement indicators, through which detailed reports can be developed on the involvement of teachers in trainings by municipalities and schools, programs attended, program providers, involvement in training programs for online learning, or in the areas of digital competencies for teachers, etc.
- Lack of a monitoring framework for education institutions regarding the learning process and reporting during the pandemic, through which it would be possible to report with measuring indicators; the latter could be compared and compiled nationwide and would include the participation in learning of vulnerable groups, learning losses, etc.
- Insufficient capacity to monitor the learning process during the pandemic, and establish the main focus of all support mechanisms in logistical and organizational aspects, departure from the learning content, approaches to teaching and the quality of learning during the pandemic.

**Opportunities to be best used in response to the circumstances created by Covid- 19.** The organization of learning in the conditions of the pandemic, especially the organization of distance learning, in addition to the challenges, was deemed a good opportunity to understand the importance and advantages of using technology in teaching and to take concrete measures towards building and incorporating online learning in Kosovo pre-university education.

The pandemic is viewed as an opportunity to reflect, decide and act, using a different approach, on a number of changes to address long-standing problems in the Kosovo education system, including leadership, accountability in pre-university education, early childhood education and all-inclusiveness in education, teacher professional development, quality of teaching, quality management in pre-university education etc.

The development of a framework of measures for the establishment of pre-university education, based on the documents of international organizations dealing with developments in education is also an opportunity that should be used, based on the context and needs of our education system. One such possibility was the reference to reports by prestigious international institutions and organizations, such as documents developed by UNICEF and World Bank reflecting assessments of the impact of Covid-19 on education and guidance on measures taken by education systems in terms of education policies to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

The lessons learned from this experience of organizing the education system in response to the created circumstances are a good opportunity to learn more about the advantages of using technology in teaching, about the mode of distance learning, and about taking concrete measures in the construction and integration of online learning in the education system of Kosovo. The experience with the pandemic created opportunities to set the framework for the orientations and focus of the reform in the future, in order to increase the quality of pre-university education. The pandemic has accelerated the processes of integrating technology into education systems, offering new opportunities for different approaches to the learning process.

## 11.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

All identified opportunities should be turned into concrete measures and actions by education institutions to better respond to the circumstances created by Covid-19. On the other hand, some of the more specific recommendations, based on the challenges and needs, as well as the opportunities to be used, are:

- MESTI needs to review and improve school counseling and support mechanisms, and should decide an institutional mechanism at the central level dealing with the digitalization of education, digital pedagogy, planning, monitoring and reporting on progress in the digitalization of education.
- MESTI and its relevant bodies should urgently respond to deficiencies in the education system, which have been overlooked for years and surged during the pandemic. Critical changes to be addressed include the improvement of educational services in early childhood, establishing a system of accountability across all levels, strengthening school autonomy – including financial autonomy, implementing the teacher licensing system, increasing professional competence for curriculum implementation purposes, providing quality textbooks adjusted to the curriculum etc.
- Coordination between mechanisms that have a role in pre-university education needs to be strengthened, so that existing capacities can be used effectively to address the challenges, consequences caused by the pandemic and to guide improvement in pre-university education. In this framework, a reformatting of the Education Inspectorate should be a priority, in view of the role it plays in quality assurance for pre-university education.
- MESTI should galvanize institutional actions for the approval and implementation of the digital strategy in education, establishing all measures to invest in the digitalization of education in a structured and coordinated manner, with special focus on raising digital competencies in the education community.
- Professional support for teachers of all levels of education to develop digital competence should be a special priority, in order to enable the best preparation for the development of digital learning in normal conditions of the learning process.
- MESTI should prioritize work with MEDs and schools in addressing learning losses for a longer period. It is already clear that the learning losses caused by the impact of the pandemic are evident, and they may increase and deepen inequalities in education. In order to prevent further learning loss and support improvement, an effective and appropriate mechanism should be developed to assist schools in identifying levels of learning loss, taking into account the learning environment and development opportunities. This

requires concrete plans and actions, as well as institutional coordination and improved funding in pre-university education, in order to provide additional work for students in compensating for learning loss and long-term institutional support.

- MESTI should improve the information management system, including information management for teacher professional development and monitoring of pre-university education, by establishing measurement indicators, which provide opportunities for comparative analysis and data-driven decision making.
- In order to coordinate measures and actions in emergency situations and circumstances, and in order to exchange experiences and best practices in response to pandemic circumstances, institutional and regional cooperation and beyond must be increased.
- It is recommended that MEDs make an analysis of the context of organizing learning at municipal level in the conditions of the pandemic and the needs of the school community, and on that basis develop a special plan together with schools to address all the problems posed by the pandemic.. MEDs should also have a special focus on equipping schools with ICT tools, providing schools with access to sustainable internet, building the capacity of teachers in digital competencies, supporting schools in the enactment of their autonomy, including the management of their own finances, activating school bodies that involve parents and students etc.
- It is recommended that education institutions/schools analyze the work done during the pandemic, the achievements, challenges and problems faced, as well as the real opportunities they can use to restructure their work, make full and efficient use of school autonomy, take leadership of processes at the institution/school level and set clear agendas for maximizing actions for working with students and supporting them to compensate for learning losses, including building digital competencies in teaching. Education institutions/schools should pay special attention to children from vulnerable groups for whom individual access is required in order to create equal opportunities and address the differences between children in achieving the intended learning outcomes with curricula.
- The system needs more responsibility and accountability, as well as synergies to improve the quality of the education system. The development of the pandemic in the coming months is difficult to predict. Emergency situations such as the Covid-19 pandemic may occur in the future, so lessons should be learned in order to deal more easily with unexpected situations, by taking well-coordinated actions for effective response to such situations.

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## Appendix 1: List of education officials, partners and education experts interviewed

No.	First and Last Name	Institution/Organization	Place/Municipality	Post	Date
1	Fatos Osmani	MESTI	Prishtina	Political Adviser in the Cabinet of the Minister of Education	12.05.2021
2	Shqipe Bruqi	MASHTI - DAP	Prishtina	Deputy-Director of DAP	23.04.2021
3	Lulavere Behluli	MEST - Division of Inclusive Education	Prishtina	Head of Division	21.04.2021
4	Labëri Luzha	MEST - Division for preschool education/	Prishtina	Head of the pre-school education division	29.04.2021
5	Refik Azemi	Municipal Education Directory	Mitrovica	Head of Education Sector	20.04.2021
6	Suzana Gjergji	Municipal Education Directory	Klina	Education official	19.4.2021
7	Rexhep Zeka Fatime Pllana	Municipal Education Directory	Obiliq	Director of MED Education official	30.04.2020
8	Flutur Këpuska	Municipal Education Directory	Gjakova	High School and Dormitory Officer	23.04.2021
9	Ardiana Ismaili	Municipal Education Directory	Prishtina	Senior Education Officer	26.04.2021
10	Teuta Berisha	Municipal Education Directory	Lipjan	Official for pre-primary education	21.04.2021
11	Rrahman Jasharaj	UUESC	Prishtina	Chairman of UUESC	20.04.2021
12	Majlinda Mazelliu	British Council Kosovo	Prishtina	National Coordinator of the Project "Schools of the 21 Century "	7 maj 2021
13	Valid Zhubi	Save the Children	Prishtina	Education Program Coordinator	7 maj 2021
14	Muhamet Arifi	Balkan Sunflowers Kosovo	Prishtina	Executive Director	27.04.2021
15	Ismet Potera	Kosovo Pedagogical Institute	Prishtina	Researcher, head of sector	29.04.2021
16	Haxhere Zylfiu	Kosovo Pedagogical Institute	Prishtina	Research on non-formal education	23.04.2021
17	Lindita Boshtrakaj	Independent consultant	Prishtina	External Quality Assurance Consultant at VET	27-04-2021
18	Osman Buleshkaj	EU-TPD and GIZ CDBE	Prishtina	External collaborator/expert	26.04.2021
19	Rinor Qehaja	EdGuard Institute	Prishtina	Executive Director	25-04-2021
20	Zyla Osmani	SHFMU "Hilmi Rakovica"	Prishtina	Deputy Director General Coordinator for eLearning	14.05.2021
21	Besim Mustafa	Kosovo Chamber of Commerce	Prishtina	Director of the Department of Vocational Education	14.05.2021

## Annex 2: List of teachers and school principals participating in focus groups and written interviews

No.	First and Last Name	Education Level	Post	Municipality
1	Indira Huruglica	Preschool education	Director	Prishtina
2	Ilijana Mulliqi	Preschool education	Pedagogue	Peja
3	Berat Bejtullahu	Primary and lower secondary education	Director	Gjakova
4	Sedat Shkurti	Primary and lower secondary education	Director	Prizren
5	Salih Uka	Primary and lower secondary education	Director	Lipjan
6	Liridon Mulliqi	High school	Director	Podujeva
7	Vjollca Jupolli	Primary and lower secondary education	Director	Prishtina
8	Fatjona Bislimi	Elementary School	Classroom teacher	Ferizaj
9	Luljeta Rama	Elementary School	Classroom teacher	Mitrovica
10	Ibe Demolli	Lower Secondary Education	Teacher	Prishtina
11	Burim Avdiaj	Lower Secondary Education	Teacher	Deçan
12	Milazim Avdylaj	Lower Secondary Education	Teacher	Prizren
13	Syzana Bytyqi	High school	Teacher	Drenas
14	Bashkim Hoti	High school	Teacher	Klina
15	Melihate Zeqiri	Vocational education and training	Teacher	Prishtina



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