

# IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS ON EDUCATION SYSTEMS AND CHILDREN

*By Quentin Wodon, District Membership Chair*

At the time of writing, more than 5 million cases of coronavirus infections have been identified globally. The actual number of people infected is likely a multiple of those estimates given lack of widespread testing in many countries and the fact that many individuals with the virus are asymptomatic. The official number of deaths from COVID-19, the illness caused by the virus, is well above 300,000. Again, actual figures are likely to be much larger due to underreporting. The impacts of the crisis on students and education systems are massive, both immediately due to school closures, but also in the short and medium term due to the economic crisis and the risk of multiple surges from the pandemic. As part of my volunteer work, I documented some of these impacts in a two-part open access article published in the Journal of Catholic Education (go to [https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce\\_covid/](https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce_covid/))

Consider first school closures. More than nine in ten students in schools globally have been affected by temporary school closures according to data from UNICEF. After initial closures in China and a few other East Asian countries, European countries and the United States were part of the second wave of closures. The closures however quickly spread to other regions later. By the end of March, most countries had implemented full (national) closures that apply to public and private K12 schools alike, and often to universities as well. Globally, at least 1.6 billion students have been affected

School closures are likely to have a wide array of negative impacts on

students. Even if school networks have the capability of implementing distance learning programs of high quality, student learning is likely to be affected. Lack of access to school meals may affect children's nutrition, in turn affecting learning negatively. Other potential consequences may include poor mental health, higher risks of violence at home, and exposure to toxic stress, as well as the risk for some students to simply drop out of school all together. Some of these impacts may be indirect but nevertheless long-lasting. For example, if a lesser emphasis is placed on young children's development at home in order to prioritize activities for children of primary and secondary school age, this may impact young children's future for years to come because of poor early childhood development. Across the board and age groups, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to suffer the most, not only because they often lack access to good distance learning options, but also because income losses for their parents due to unemployment or underemployment will affect them in other ways, including through a higher likelihood of dropping out and not returning to school when the crisis subsides. In low income households, girls may be especially at risk as the prevalence of early childbearing and child marriage often increases during crises.

Consider next economic impacts. The International Monetary Fund suggests that globally, GDP may decrease by three percent in 2020 (the decrease in the second quarter will be much larger). This would represent the deepest recession since the Great Depression. In percentage points from the base, advanced economies

will suffer from larger losses in GDP than emerging and developing economies, but the gap between both sets of countries is smaller when considering changes in GDP per capita since population growth is higher in emerging and developing economies. In addition, emerging and developing economies are less equipped in terms of fiscal space and institutional capacity to respond to the crisis. The effects of the crisis on children and households may have more severe consequences in emerging and developing economies because a larger share of the population already lives in extreme poverty. Simulations relying on IMF growth projections suggest that 84 to 132 million people might fall into poverty. Of those, half would be are children. Remittances to low and middle-income countries may decline by 20 percent. The Food Security Information Network estimates that the crisis may almost double the number of people suffering from acute hunger in low and middle-income countries from 135 million people to 265 million by the end of 2020. Some groups are especially at risk from both the health and economic consequences of the crisis. This includes refugees and internally displaced persons.

The economic crisis will also affect students in profound ways. Many children may not return to school when they reopen if in the context of the crisis, the out-of-pocket and opportunity costs of doing become too high, especially for disadvantaged groups. The crisis may affect public schools by putting pressure on state funding for schools. It is likely to affect even more the financial sustainability of private schools, including nonprofit

*(continued on page 12)*