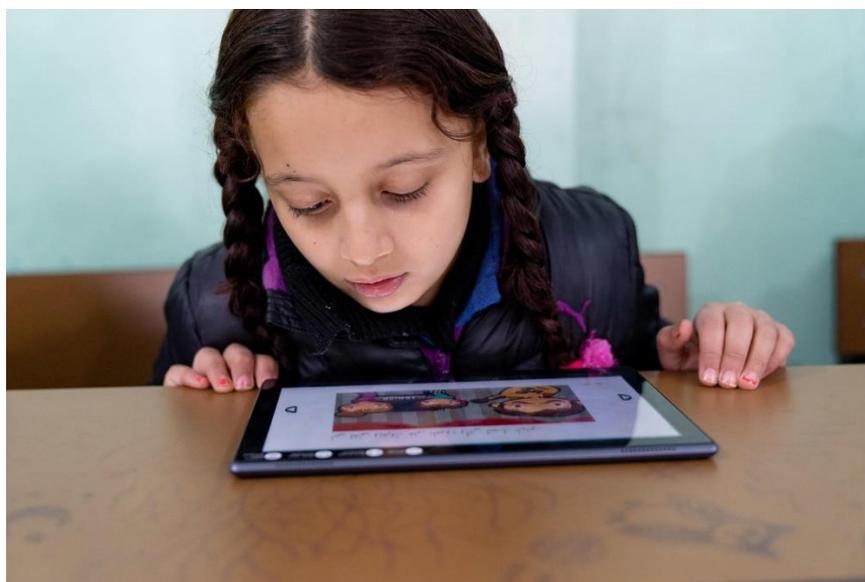# UNICEF and the COVID-19 Response for Education in Jordan

March to April 2020

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BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic is negatively impacting children's education around the world, with children in emerging and developing economies some of the worst-affected. On 15 March 2020, the Government of Jordan closed all schools, kindergartens and universities, impacting 2.37 million learners[1]. Countries affected by **ongoing conflict** are especially vulnerable to the social and economic impacts of COVID-19. In Jordan, the Syrian refugee population includes over 230,900 school-age children[2], though numbers of unregistered refugees in Jordan are much higher.[3] Until the COVID-19 crisis, **learning outcomes** had been improving, but significant **inequalities remain** by **gender** and **nationality**.[4] School closures bring the risk of increased **learning inequality** and **drop out**, particularly for the poorest children, refugees, those living in informal tented settlements, refugee camps and those with disabilities. Children in early adolescence are at greatest risk of drop out, often being forced to drop out of education due to poverty and into negative coping mechanisms such as **child labour** and **child marriage.**

The registered Syrian refugee population in Jordan includes over 230,900 school-age children out of 656,213 registered refugees[5] Numbers of unregistered refugees in Jordan are much higher.[6] While 85 per cent of Syrian refugees reside in host communities, over 120,000 (79 per cent of whom are women and

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1 UNESCO, "*Global Monitoring of School Closures Caused by Covid-19*" link
[2] ibid
3 United Nations, Department of Economics and Social Affairs, World Population Prospects 2019, Accessed March 2020 link
[4] [4] OECD, Education GPS, PISA 2018 Jordan, link
[5] ibid
6 United Nations, Department of Economics and Social Affairs, World Population Prospects 2019, Accessed March 2020 link

children) live in camps where UNICEF support 53 schools with over 32,000 students, from KG to G12 in close collaboration with MoE.[7]

The Government of Jordan is committed to ensure learning continuity for all children through **distance learning** during COVID-19, and UNICEF has supported these efforts since the onset of the crisis. **Televised lessons** are broadcast nationally, and **digital platforms** have been established to facilitate access to educational content and a learning management system. A web-landing page has been created for teachers which hosts professional development courses focused on using new technologies. These initiatives are at a nascent stage and will require significant technical and financial support to be effective in improving learning outcomes for children across the country at scale.

On 22 March 2020, MOE announced the launch of Darsak, an **online education platform** set up to host the new televised lessons for grades 1-12. In early April, 'Noorspace', linked to EMIS, was set up as a **learning management system** to provide teachers and schools the tools to track attendance, monitor engagement and set assessments online. The MOE created a website landing page to host pre-existing **teacher professional development** programmes on technology, offering 90 training hours of training in partnership with Edraak.

Internet Connectivity at Home
No 23%
Wifi Connection 15%
Unlimited Data 4%
Limited Data 58%
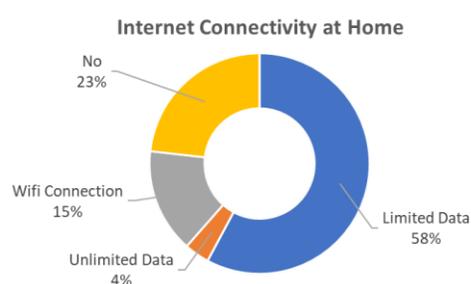
Despite these rapid advances, the **digital gap** means that not all children benefit equally. Many families lack the data, devices or connectivity for children to access online learning. An inter-agency rapid needs assessment conducted in April 2020 found that 23% of vulnerable households in Jordan did not have internet access, and the majority had limited data packages.

Lack of inclusion (for example sub-titles on televised lessons), parental support, or the skills and knowledge to use technology further disadvantage many children.

UNICEF RESPONSE
Hygiene Awareness in Schools
Although there were no COVID-19 cases reported in Jordan until 2 March, UNICEF began preparations and preventative support in conjunction with the Government of Jordan during February. This assistance included support for schools in both the host community and camps with **hygiene awareness** campaigns that included **handwashing demonstrations** and introducing **social distancing**. Additionally, UNICEF procured and distributed emergency supplies of soap bars (620,000), family kits (500), hygiene kits (3,000) and bottles of hand sanitizer (4,000) for vulnerable families in camps and the host community.

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[7] UNHCR, "*Syria Regional Refugee Response- Dec 2019,*" Accessed February 2020 link

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UNICEF, International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) and The World Health Organization (WHO) supported the MOE and Ministry of Health to develop **COVID-19 School Guidelines**. These guidelines include actionable guidance for safe operations through the prevention, early detection, control of COVID-19 and reopening of schools and other educational facilities[9]. On 31 March 2020, the Government of Jordan approved these guidelines for roll-out when schools re-open.

Distance Learning
With the closure of schools on March 15th 2020, UNICEF accelerated its COVID-19 related activities and activated emergency level planning and support. UNICEF has enabled **online distance learning** through support for the MOE to continue filming of televised lessons and provided 200 laptops to MOE to enable teachers to connect with students through Microsoft teams to create **virtual learning spaces**.

UNICEF has also considered **alternate modalities to share learning activities with children** where devices for accessing internet and connectivity are limited. Grade 1 to Grade 6 learning materials in Arabic and mathematics are being distributed to over 12,000 children in vulnerable areas including camps and children living in temporary settlements.

A donation of 140 tablets with hotspots are being provided to children in King Abdullah Park and Azraq refugee camps, including 60 children with disabilities. The tablets were pre-installed with Madrasa, which contains over 5,000 learning resources for Grades 1 to 12. UNICEF loaded additional applications, where the app developers provided free subscriptions. Pupils' progress in learning can be tracked through these applications and UNICEF's facilitators are being trained to support this process.

Learning activities developed on the principal of family learning have been prepared daily for children aged 6 to 12 years, with a focus on camps. The activities are related where possible to the lessons broadcasted on Darsak, designed to deepen children's understanding of the concept taught through applying knowledge, problem solving and being creative. The activities are also supported with short videos where appropriate. UNICEF staff also encourage pupils to photograph their work and display this

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[8] Amani, a student at Al Khader Mixed Primary school, located in a rural part of the host community, takes part in a hygiene awareness session during the first week of March as part of UNICEF's COVID-19 preparedness efforts with MOE
[9] IFRC, link

on **social media** to celebrate achievements, share their ideas and to get feedback from facilitators about their work.

Up to 6,000 children (over 1000 in camps) enrolled in the **non-formal education** (NFE) Drop-Out programme have access to teacher-student groups via WhatsApp and Facebook. These groups are monitored by MOE Supervisory Unit members to ensure quality and online safety. Online training on distance education for NFE facilitators is being conducted as well as the creation of a bank of quality assured e-learning materials. Free data access to e-learning resources is being provided to all NFE students.

Over 1,000 KG2 aged children and their families have been supported by information shared by social media includes **fun learning activities** and **parental support**. UNICEF will implement school readiness programmes over the summer for KG2 aged children whose school year was interrupted or for those who were unable to enroll in school during 2019/2020 to be prepared for the new school year.

In collaboration with MOE, UNICEF is working to also support children's **wellbeing**, **self-resiliency** and **self-efficacy** during this challenging period. UNICEF is developing e-learning **Mental Health** and **Psychosocial Support** materials along with Child Protection materials for teacher training. Psychosocial support instructional videos are also in development for children and parents that include topics like anxiety, stress, dealing with anger, problem solving, hope, self-esteem, confidence, communication and acceptance. Videos are also being localized that target both younger and older children with knowledge of COVID-19 protection. Parenting messages wil be disseminated through several MOE platforms.

Inclusive Education
To enable continued learning of **children with disabilities**, UNICEF has provided disability inclusive workbooks children from KG2 to Grade 6 in camps and host community before school closure (covering Arabic, mathematics, sensory and perceptual skills). Workbooks have been designed considering each student's individual education plan. These kits have been supported by **videos** circulated to parents (both in camp and host community settings) that support parents in undertaking **speech and occupational therapy** with their child or children during the lockdown. Parents are also supported by MOE inclusive **shadow teachers** through WhatsApp groups.

In the camps, where to date no cases have been identified, special permission was obtained by UNICEF to enable **shadow teachers** to continue to conduct **monthly home visits** to critical cases. These visits are conducted by two **shadow teachers** at a time, one that supports therapy and the other in support of learning. Nearly 700 children with disabilities are being served in Azraq and Za'atari refugee camps through this modality.

UNICEF COORDINATION
From March, the MOE began forming its **Education During Emergency Plan (EDEP) 2020-2022,** a guiding framework for the education sector. This document is presently being reviewed by donors and agencies to help the government formulate its action plans to support learning during COVID-19 and the anticipated recovery phase once schools reopen, including a costed-implementation plan for the EDEP.

UNICEF **co-chairs the Education Sector Working Group** and is a member of the Education Sector Donor Group (ESDG). Since mid-March, UNICEF has organised weekly web-based sector coordination meetings, strengthening COVID-19 response mechanisms, including a **Partner Mapping** of support from ESWG

members to government and children, and a **Learning Resources Survey**, highlighting available distance learning resources, assessment mapping and analytical data compilation. UNICEF has been actively engaged in donor coordination with MOE to ensure timely and high-quality technical assistance is provided for the Emergency Response Plan, including response and recovery.

CHALLENGES

Disparity in Access to Learning Opportunities

Although the education system is improving[10], many children in Jordan struggle to learn the basics - with 53 per cent of ten-year old's unable to read an age appropriate text[11]. **Pre-service education** has only been introduced in the last five years and only a small percentage of prospective teachers have the opportunity to take a pre-service course. There are plans to expand pre-service education, and that it will serve as a prerequisite to entering the profession to improve learning. MOE is addressing the quality of teaching by developing a career pathway and giving access to teachers to in-service professional development that will also contribute to improved learning outcomes. Developing teachers' skills and understanding to enable them to use a wider range of teaching strategies is key to increasing learning outcomes.

MOE has utilized two platforms to support distance learning during COVID-19 known as Darsak and Noor Space. While these platforms have the potential to provide students with access to continued learning at scale, **technology solutions** can only reach those that have internet connectivity, adequate data appropriate devices. Gaps in access to distance education during school closures will likely result in greater levels of learning inequality.

MOE websites are **data free** during specified times of day and electricity hours have been extended in refugee camps to ensure children can watch television when MOE lessons are aired.   In a recent rapid needs assessment, only 54% cent of vulnerable households reported in early April that they had accessed the MOE online platforms[12]. This figure drops even further for **highly vulnerable groups**, such as refugee children, and those living in temporary settlements. As a result, there exists the risk that learning continuity will be ensured for some, but denied to the most vulnerable, and that school closures may further increase gaps in **education inequality and learning poverty**.

Learning Interactions

For learning to take place, children need the opportunity to engage with the content that has been presented on Darsak. This requires student interaction with one another, teachers, parental support and the availability of interactive learning resources.

Access has been provided by MOE to Microsoft Teams for all students and teachers (with priority for Grade 8 – Grade 12).   While some teachers and students are able to use this platform, many will be excluded. Given the lack of devices and connectivity amongst more disadvantaged families, this modality will not reach the most **vulnerable children**. MOE is planning to launch a new platform, Mfhoum, which will host curriculum linked activities for pupils' grade 1 to 6 in core subjects to support their learning after the televised broadcasts. The content for this platform was derived from a previous project co-funded by

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[10] OECD, Education GPS, PISA 2018 Jordan, link
[11] World Bank Report, 2019
[12] Inter Agency Rapid Needs Assessment, April 2020

UNICEF and partner to develop blended learning in schools. However, for those children enrolled in lower grades, there remains little direction for students, teachers or families for learning across this medium. A national learning assessment conducted in mid-April will provide new data on student connectivity to the government's online learning platforms.

In early April, a **survey** of over 1,000 teachers of Grade 7 to 10 in the host community undertaken by UNICEF and partner, found that 90 per cent of schools had a Facebook page and over 80 per cent had engaged with their students since the school closures. Many teachers are sharing assignments, providing support and receiving feedback via WhatsApp. The reach, level of student participation in these group, or impact on learning outcomes, is not yet known.

Pedagogy and Distance Learning

Most countries in the world, whatever their economic circumstances, are struggling with the concept of **distance learning** for children, especially with early grades. It is not a simple case of replicating a school environment in the home and many changes are being made by teachers, schools and governments to try to be responsive to learning experiences as they are implemented.

Jordan has made great strides in providing televised broadcasts and developing a learning management system to accommodate all school children. It now needs support to set up the **technological infra-structure** necessary for creating instructional learning with social interactions going forward at school and community levels to respond to the daily needs of all children and especially the most vulnerable. The COVID-19 context and the initiatives already on-going that will provide more extensive teacher professional development and a robust career pathway may provide the stimulus to review and overhaul the current approach to teaching and learning which is currently not producing a cost effective model with the impact that Jordan needs to develop a competitive economy.To achieve this Jordan needs to look at its current approaches to education in the classroom and resist replicating this to an online version of the same.

Teachers need training on **distance learning pedagogies**, and access to a range of appropriate e-learning materials. Many are supporting children's learning via WhatsApp. Teachers are likely to find it difficult to engage students and progress individual learning outcomes without further advice and support. A professional development course on distance learning has been made available through Jo Teachers, with 30,000 teachers logging on to the platform in the first week.

Learning and E-Safety

There are worldwide concerns that as whole countries move to e-learning that the **safety of children** must be closely guarded. Countries, including Jordan, where up to this time there has not been a large number of online requirements by pupils, teachers and parents, are particularly vulnerable. Training all teachers on basic **e-safety** and **cyberbullying** awareness, while furthering **awareness** for parents and children is imperative. UNICEF is planning to revise an e-safety module developed in Jordan 18 months ago to reflect the COVID situation and make this available to teachers nationally.

LOOKING FORWARD – TO POST COVID19 RECOVERY AND SUSTAINABILITY

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UNICEF is engaging partners to enable all children to continue their **learning during school closures**, recognizing the increased risk of learning inequality and drop out.   Challenges remain in the ability of children to engage with distance education due to limitations of data, connectivity, compatible devices and IT skills. Girls and children with disabilities face challenges and need targeted support. Teachers, facilitators and parents need to be supported to ensure **retention** and **learning** of all children during this critical period.

Plans for **recovery** and to ensure **sustainability** are required for interventions implemented during the response. UNICEF is supporting the MOE to aid students in catching up in preparation for next year, psychosocial support for children and families, and preparation for back to school efforts. Investments in **blended learning** during the COVID-19 response can be of benefit to the Jordan education system longer term (i.e. the sustainability phase). As an example, UNICEF is supporting the MOE to strengthen the new Jo Teachers platform to support **online teacher professional development**.

These efforts will require **additional resources**. UNICEF Jordan is appealing for USD 4.1 million in funding to adequately support the COVID-19 response and ensure that the most vulnerable children continue to access education and make a safe transition back to learning.

In the coming months, with support of partners, UNICEF will ensure continued learning for the most vulnerable children by;

- Implementing **school readiness programmes** for 6000 children entering Grade 1 whose school year was interrupted or for those who were unable to enroll in KG2 in 2019/2020.
- Supporting Ministry of Education in **preparing schools for re-opening** through training of educators, disinfection of schools, provision of hygiene materials, and back to school awareness campaigns.
- Developing further **e-learning materials** for students including resources for **mental health, child protection** and **psychosocial support** and create a 'one stop shop' to make available to teachers, parents and students.

for every child

UNICEF

- Provide tablets pre-loaded with e-learning resources and connectivity for the most vulnerable children, including those in informal tented settlements, supporting and monitoring their continued learning
- Designing and implement a summer **catch-up programme** to enable vulnerable children to access quality learning opportunities before the start of the next academic year
- Support children's re-entry to the next academic year by training teachers to cover core learning objectives to help all children catch up on return to school.
- Developing **district and school level websites** to improve parental engagement in distance learning.

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