



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Education  
Sector

# Education and training: Not yet prioritized in national fiscal responses

Information note



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## Key Highlights

- The current paper is a brief information note that provides some preliminary findings of UNESCO's recent survey conducted between 19 February and 15 March 2021, which will be followed by a more in-depth, comprehensive report by July 2021.
- Despite the significant disruption in education and training caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the education and training sector has had relatively little support through governments' fiscal responses, having received a mere 2 per cent of overall stimulus packages.
- High-income countries have been able to allocate much more per-capita and higher proportion of financial resources to education from stimulus packages than lower-income countries, which runs the risk of exacerbating the educational inequalities that existed between countries prior to COVID-19.
- In investing in the education and training sector, countries focused their attention on the introduction or expansion of remote learning and prioritized lower levels of education.
- Governments should prioritize financial allocation in support of the education and training sector, as it will be responsible for providing relevant human capital for an economic transformation and transition in the changing post-COVID labour market.
- UNESCO will continue to monitor the weight of education and skills development in national fiscal stimulus packages and advocate for increased allocations to education.

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## Acknowledgements

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The research team included Gwang-Chol Chang, Satoko Yano, Sara Bin Mahfooz, Charles Antoine Linne, and Danni Xu, together with the regional focal points: Rokhaya Diawara, Rolla Moumne, Megumi Watanabe and Pierre Chapelet. The research also benefited from the input of the following UNESCO staff members, consultants and interns: Paula Razquin, Samaher Al-Hadheri, as well as Eliza Bennett and Juliette Norrmen-Smith for copy-editing and Julia Han Janicki for data visualization.

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This is a living document; therefore, results may still contain some factual errors given the urgency of the research and rapid changes in governments' responses. UNESCO will continue to monitor the situation and update the document in accordance with the evolving situation.

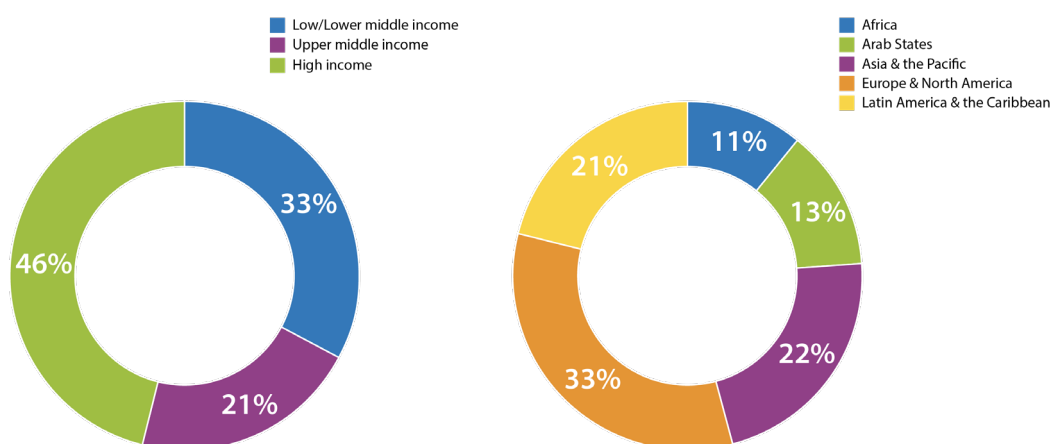
## Background and survey methodology

According to UNESCO estimates, approximately US\$ 11.9 trillion was spent in COVID-19 stimulus packages worldwide by October 2020. Of that amount, the share of education was practically negligible.<sup>1</sup>

To continue this monitoring, UNESCO launched a rapid survey in February 2021 to collect more data and evidence from governments on the allocation of stimulus package resources to education and training. This rapid survey aimed to capture only the additional pandemic response resources that were channeled into education and training through education and labour ministries. In some cases, the information collected is related only to central/federal level funding and, to a limited extent, specific states/provinces in the case of decentralized education systems.

The survey was conducted by UNESCO between 19 February and 15 March 2021, and it was available in English, French, Spanish, Russian, and Arabic. During this period, responses were received from 54 countries and territories (hereinafter referred to as “countries”), most of which were high-income (46 per cent) and European (33 per cent). Information from the survey, together with the additional information collected from public sources, were used to estimate the amount allocated to education for 193 countries (see Annex 2 for the details).

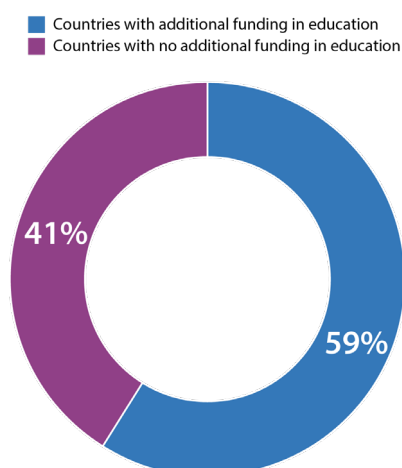
**Figure 1: Country Participation by Income Level and Region**



Analysis based on the responses received suggests that 59 per cent of countries worldwide issued stimulus packages over the course of 2020 that included funding in education and training. Given the discrepancies between the information provided to UNESCO by government respondents and the IMF database that categorizes different types of additional spending and forgone revenue in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (for example, above-the-line and below-the line measures, and contingent liabilities), our analysis used IMF datasets for stimulus package totals to ensure comparability. This might have resulted in subsequent underestimation of the proportion of governments' allocation of fiscal support to education.

<sup>1</sup> UNESCO. Fiscal responses to education and training in the context of COVID-19. No. 10, Working Papers on Education Policy (October 2020).

**Figure 2: Countries with Additional Education Funding**



Only the stimulus packages announced by December 2020 were included in the preliminary analyses. UNESCO will continue monitoring and analysis of national fiscal response to education and include 2021 information in the full report, which will be released in July 2021.

## Estimated allocation to education in stimulus packages

**Education represents merely 2 per cent of the total global stimulus package amount, and of that, 93 per cent was invested by high-income countries.**<sup>2</sup> A total amount of US\$ 14 trillion was released under stimulus packages in 193 countries by December 2020, of which 86 per cent occurred in high-income countries. UNESCO estimates that approximately US\$ 281 billion may have been allocated to education globally; however, of that spending, US\$ 264 billion occurred in high-income countries. At 2 per cent globally, the share of education in total stimulus packages remains small. Europe and North America allocated the largest amount to education (US\$ 258 billion) followed by Asia and the Pacific (US\$ 19.7 billion), as shown in Table 1. As measured against the “above the line” fiscal measures only (e.g., additional spending, foregone revenues, accelerated spending and deferred revenue), 3.6 per cent has been allocated to education, which is considerably lower than the health sector (17 per cent).<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1: Estimated Allocation to Education by Region and by Income Level, 2020**

| Data               | Total estimated funding in education (US\$) | % of education in total stimulus package (IMF) | % of education in “above-the-line” measures <sup>1</sup> (IMF) |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Global</b>      | <b>281 billion</b>                          | <b>2.02%</b>                                   | <b>3.59%</b>                                                   |
| Africa             | 565 million                                 | 0.97%                                          | 1.42%                                                          |
| Arab States        | 314 million                                 | 0.57%                                          | 0.79%                                                          |
| Asia & the Pacific | 19.7 billion                                | 0.47%                                          | 0.92%                                                          |

<sup>2</sup> Only 59 of the 193 countries had readily available information on the amount allocated to education, the median shares of education in stimulus packages of three income groups were taken (high-income, upper-middle income and low-/lower-middle income) in order to minimize the effect caused by extreme values. Those countries that lack education allocations in stimulus packages were then estimated by applying the median share of education to the total economic stimulus amount. The data for total amount of stimulus packages were extracted from the [IMF Fiscal Monitor \(January 2021 update\)](#) and the [IMF Policy Tracker](#).

<sup>3</sup> IMF Fiscal Monitor

|                               |             |       |       |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------|-------|
| Europe & North America        | 258 billion | 2.77% | 4.76% |
| Latin America & the Caribbean | 2.5 billion | 0.71% | 1.28% |
| High income                   | 264 billion | 2.19% | 4.00% |
| Upper middle-income           | 13 billion  | 0.85% | 1.25% |
| Lower-/Lower middle-income    | 3.7 billion | 1.07% | 2.08% |

**The difference between allocation in high-income and low-income countries is even larger when considering per capita spending on education (population aged 0 to 24 years), which may deepen global learning inequalities further in the future.** Table 2 indicates that low- and lower-middle countries allocate much smaller amounts of their education fiscal response to each person, compared to higher-income groups that appear to dedicate a much higher per capita amount on education. These differing responses are likely to exacerbate the inequality of learning and education services between countries, especially in African countries and Arab states, while per capita spending on education has been much higher in Europe and North America.

**Table 2: Estimated Additional Funding on Education by Region and by Income Level (US\$ per capita)**

| Data                              | Estimated additional spending on education (per capita) |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Global</b>                     | <b>84.16</b>                                            |
| Africa                            | 0.16                                                    |
| Arab States                       | 0.05                                                    |
| Asia & the Pacific                | 4.01                                                    |
| Europe & North America            | 715.71                                                  |
| Latin America & the Caribbean     | 8.91                                                    |
| <b>High income</b>                | <b>786.67</b>                                           |
| <b>Upper middle-income</b>        | <b>3.16</b>                                             |
| <b>Lower-/Lower middle-income</b> | <b>0.17</b>                                             |

## Patterns of education spending in stimulus packages

Developing remote learning and supporting basic education are among the top priorities worldwide. To ensure continuity of learning amid school closures, 46 per cent of surveyed countries allocated their additional funding to the introduction or expansion of remote learning. Other areas that attracted governments' fiscal response are: addressing marginalization and inequalities (37%), skills upgrading (35%) and sanitation and health measures (33%) as shown in Figure 3. According to education levels, almost half of the countries (48 per cent) prioritized education spending at the primary and lower secondary levels, while post-basic and early childhood education appear to have been given relatively smaller attention in additional funding.

**Figure 3: Uses of Education Stimulus and Allocation to Education Levels (%)**

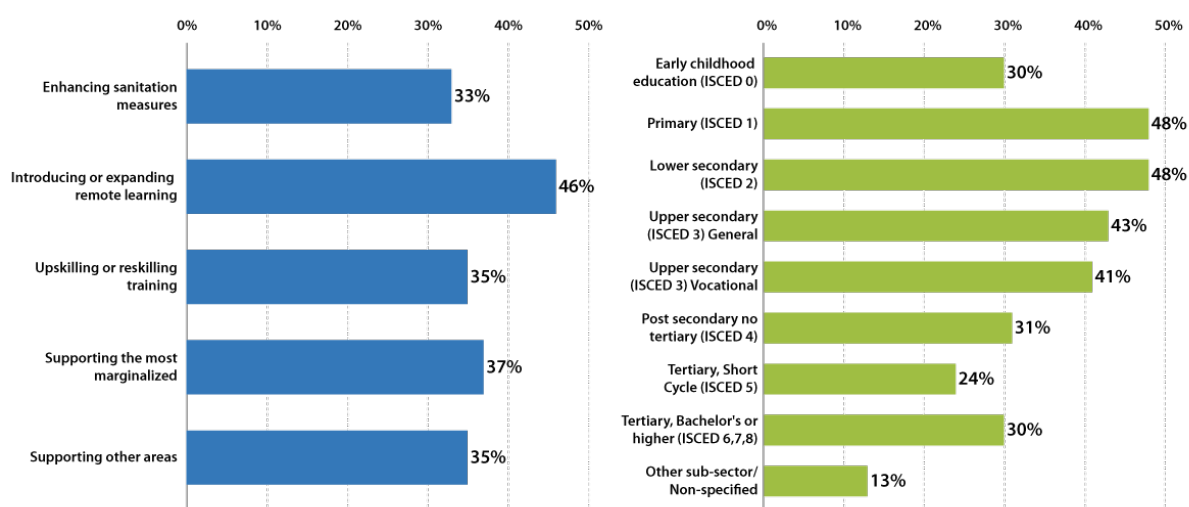


Figure 4 shows diverging funding patterns according to education levels across countries of different income groups, such as:

- High-income countries appear to have often supported all education levels rather evenly, though relatively more for compulsory education levels (60%)
- Low- and lower middle-income countries have less supported education across all levels of education, while relatively prioritizing pre-primary to secondary education (22–36 per cent) and seldom allocating additional funding in post-secondary education (6–11 per cent)
- Upper middle-income countries seem to have prioritized higher education in their funding allocation more than any other income countries (45%).

**Figure 4: Allocation of Stimulus Package to Education by Income Level**

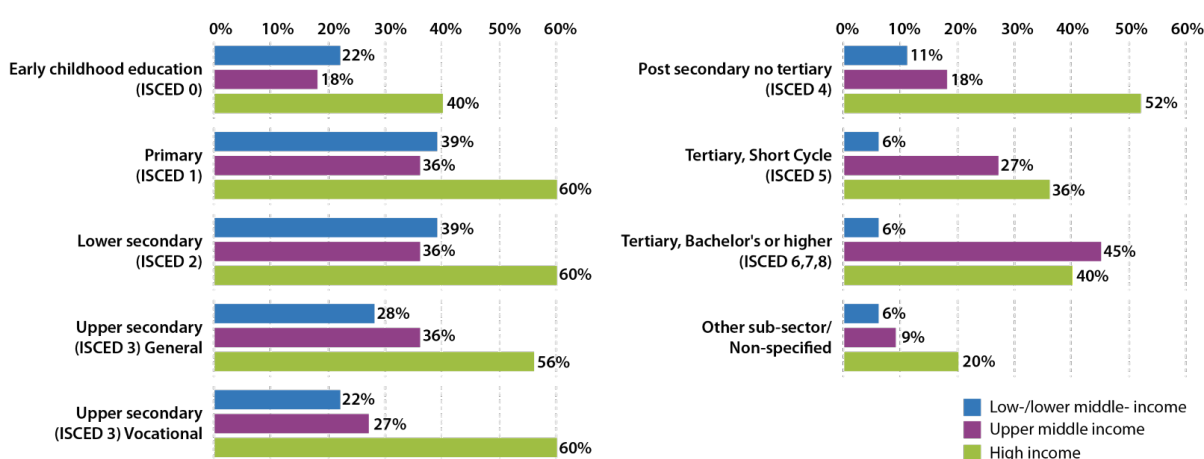
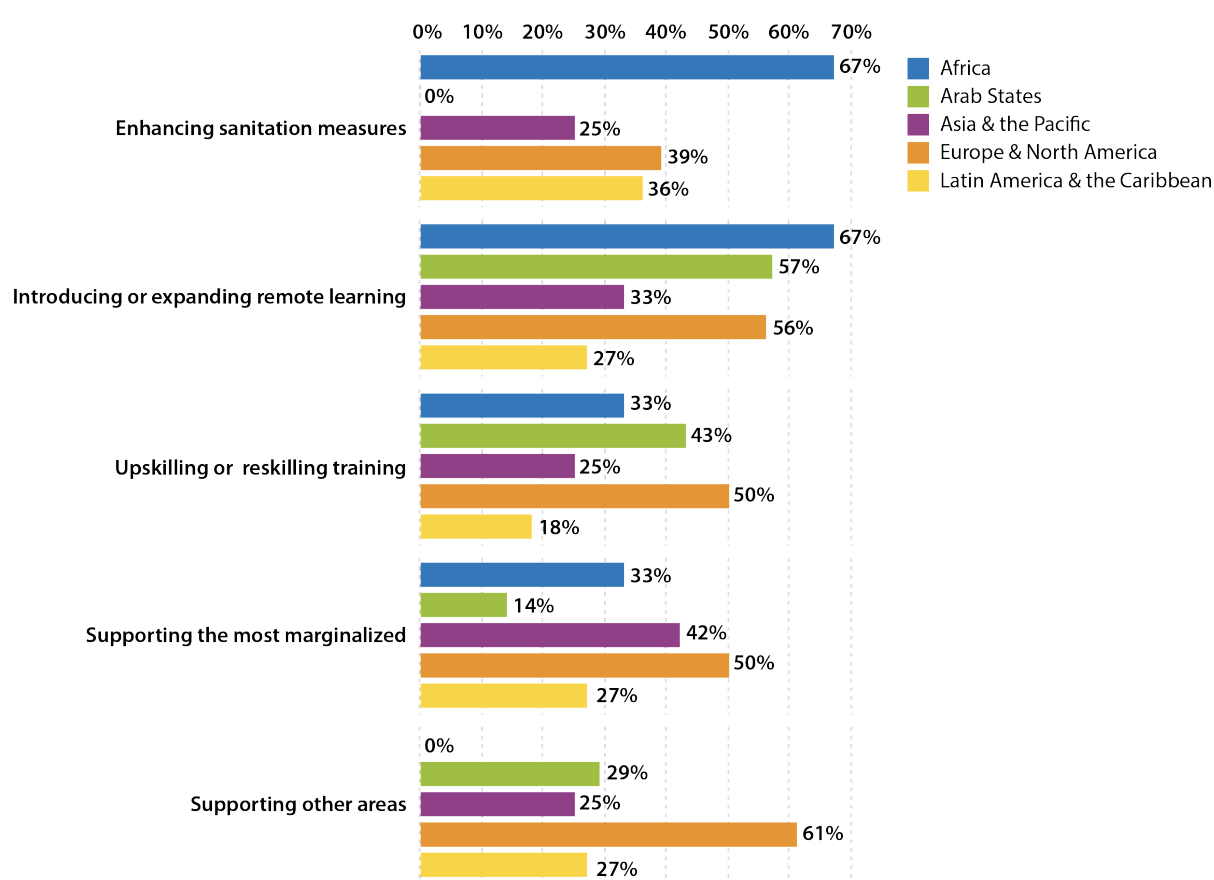


Figure 5 shows funding patterns according to thematic areas by region, with the following emerging trends:

- African countries allocated their additional funding to improving school sanitation and deploying remote learning as two priority thematic areas (67%)
- Arab countries prioritized deployment of digital learning and skills upgrading more than other areas
- Countries in Asia and the Pacific region appear to allocate more to address marginalization than other areas
- Countries in Europe and North America, as well as those in Latin America and Caribbean allocated their funding relatively evenly across different thematic areas (around 50% and 25% respectively)

**Figure 5: Use of the Additional Education Funding by Region**



## Findings for policy consideration

- **Prioritize education in stimulus/recovery packages.** Education plays a key role in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and building a stronger, more resilient society. It is therefore critically important that governments financially support the education and training sector in order to ensure learning continuity and prepare future generations for the demands of the post-COVID economy.
- **Increase financial support to developing countries to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing recovery.** The pandemic has likely exacerbated inequalities both within and between

countries. UNESCO estimates show that very little additional funding was made available to education in lower-income countries, while high-income countries were able to respond financially to the challenges. In order to avoid the deepening of global inequalities in educational access and quality, the international community should maintain, if not increase aid to education, rather than reduce it.

- **Ensure innovation is integrated into the recovery plan.** Many countries are now moving from pandemic response to pandemic recovery. It is critical to invest in remote learning solutions that foster resilience, and quality and equity of education and training. Investment in relevant skilling and reskilling will prepare the workforce for the post-pandemic “new normal.”

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## Annex 1: Country Examples

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### Republic of Korea

The Republic of Korea has disbursed three stimulus packages with additional education funding that amounted to 1.8 trillion won (approximately US\$ 16 billion). Of that, a significant proportion was allocated to the development of online education. This includes: building digital infrastructure for primary and secondary education (wireless internet, replacement of old computers, etc. — 270.8 billion won); strengthening teachers' capacity to deliver online education (3.3 billion won); supporting online education in universities (renewal of computer networks, support for online education support centers, etc. — 149.8 billion won); recruiting support personnel for online classes in universities (65.8 billion won); developing online content for KMOOC (a Korean open online course platform — 3.9 billion won); and providing distance learning subsidies for 1.38 million lower secondary students (aged 13 to 16) — 150,000 won/child, for a total of 207.4 billion won. Other spending covers support for the purchase of masks and disinfectant products (8.5 billion won); support for kindergartens (32 billion won); tuition fee subsidies for working undergraduates (5 billion won) and special childcare subsidies for 5.32 million preschool children and primary school students (200,000 won/child, for a total of 1.06 trillion won).

### Côte d'Ivoire

Côte d'Ivoire has disbursed 4.5 billion CFA (approximately US\$ 8.2 million) allocated to support for distance learning through television for examination classes (CM2, 3ème and Terminale). This is part of a package of social measures including the payment of electricity and water bills of underprivileged persons for the months of April and May 2020. A response plan has been drawn up to address the specific problems and focuses on access to distance learning services for students during school closure; safe environment when students return to school; activities that benefit the most vulnerable children; support to the most vulnerable households through the distribution of hygiene kits to girls; and the establishment of a sustainable distance learning system.

### Russia

Russia reported three stimulus packages including additional funding mainly allocated to higher education. This includes the allocation of 15.8 billion RUB (approximately US\$ 2.1 billion) to the main administrators of federal budget funds for the provision of state-supported subsidies of federal budgetary and autonomous institutions carrying out educational, scientific and medical activities. It also included the provision of state social support to students enrolled in secondary professional medical education and higher medical education during the period of practical training in the context of the COVID-19.

### Finland

Finland reported four stimulus packages with additional education funding that amounted to 364.2 million EUR. This funding provides support for various education activities, which include: arranging national matriculation examinations in general upper-secondary education; compensating for the loss of revenue in basic education in arts and sports; integrating cost-free extracurricular activities into schools and compensating for the loss of revenue in before- and after-school activities for children; increasing study possibilities and admissions in higher education and eliminating fees in open higher education; developing a digital early childhood education operating culture and expanding the general availability of digital materials for children and young people in libraries with the aim of reducing inequalities caused by the pandemic; providing guidance counselling to prevent and mitigate the risk of cessation of studies and administering study guidance for students close to graduation; enabling the

demonstration of competencies in vocational education; and compensating the losses of revenue caused by the pandemic in non-formal and liberal adult education institutions and deploying quick-acting measures to develop the skills and knowledge base of working-age people.

## Annex 2: Estimating Allocation to Education in Stimulus Packages

To measure global education funding in the fiscal response to COVID-19, this study analyzed the stimulus packages launched by 193 countries as of December 2020. The analysis included two steps.

First, the share of education funding was identified in each country's total stimulus package(s) extracted from the IMF Fiscal Monitor (January 2021 update) and the IMF Policy Tracker, including both "above-the-line" measures (e.g., additional funding and foregone revenue) and "below-the-line" measures (e.g., equity injections, asset purchases, guarantees).

Second, the amount allocated to education was obtained from the UNESCO survey results as well as publicly available sources. In total, UNESCO was able to collect the information from 59 countries, which is substantially more than the 2020 exercise (43 countries). The median shares of education in stimulus packages of three income groups were taken (high-income, upper middle-income and low-/lower middle-income) in order to minimize the effect caused by extreme values. For those countries where information on education allocations in stimulus packages was lacking, the allocations were then estimated by applying the median share of education to the total economic stimulus amount. The median values of share of education by income group are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Median Share of Education by Region and by Income Level (%)**

| Income level               | Country and territory | Median |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|--------|
| High income                | 61                    | 0.70%  |
| Upper middle-income        | 58                    | 0.91%  |
| Lower-/Lower middle-income | 74                    | 1.10%  |

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