

FALL 2020

# Empty classrooms: the impact of COVID-19 on education

EVENT REPORT



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COVID-19 has shut down classrooms around the world, forcing a switch to digital learning that has accentuated inequalities as students without access to computers and connections are shut out of education. Action is urgently needed to correct that: the right investments could turn the pandemic into an opportunity to modernise learning around the world and foster greater intercultural learning in the Euro-Med region.

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**Madame Elisabeth Guigou**, President of the Anna Lindh Foundation and former French Minister

“We are compelled to improve the use of digital devices and to improve the use of these devices in education, primary education, civil society education and training of trainers,” (42:21) said Madame **Elisabeth Guigou**, President of the Anna Lindh Foundation and former French Minister.

Madame Guigou joined **Driss Ouauicha**, Moroccan Deputy Minister for Higher Education and Scientific Research, and contributors from the education sector and civil society in Wednesday’s Friends of Europe and the Anna Lindh Foundation online debate.

### **Investment against inequality**

Funding for equipment and training is essential to ensure more kids around the world can get online and prevent the poorest from being locked out of the education they need to build better lives.

“Equity and equal opportunity are issues that cannot be overlooked, the process should not exacerbate the digital divide (18:36),” said Ouauicha. “We absolutely need to invest in the hardware so that all students have equal access to technology (and) invest in capacity building for the teaching staff. (19:49)”

[1:04:33](#) Education may be expensive, but it’s the best investment you can make. (Ouauicha)

[10:07](#) Gender equality must top the agenda to make sure girls and young women are not disproportionately affected. (Madame Guigou)

[26:20](#) Telecoms providers have a social responsibility to make it easier for students to get connected. (Ouauicha)

[36:38](#) Poorly connected villages and rural areas need special attention. (Joseline Amutuhaire-Ondrusek, university student in Germany and head of a children's charity in Uganda)

[58:50](#) Investment shouldn't be focused only on universities, kids in primary and secondary schools must be connected too. (Naida Mousseid, Youth Work Ireland)

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**Driss Ouaouicha**, Moroccan Deputy Minister for Higher Education and Scientific Research

### The importance of internationalisation

The pandemic has hit international learning hard as border closures choke off exchange opportunities. That's curtailing the sharing of knowledge and experiences, despite the increased use of distance links.

“Physical mobility is really very important, because I would not like this period with closed borders to be indefinite ([1:02:05](#)),” said Madame Guigou. “There would be a real risk that each group or each family would close in on itself, forgetting the necessity to open their views.”

[47:55](#) Digital ties should boost ‘internationalisation at home’ because student mobility could be reduced for months or years. (Giulia Marchesini, Senior Partnership Specialist, Centre for Mediterranean Integration / The World Bank)

[23:35](#) Morocco's experience in keeping international exchanges open through a mix of face-to-face and distance learning. (Ouaouicha)

[10:50](#) ALF work on capacity building using virtual training programmes for educators. (Madame Guigou)

[26:47](#) International cooperation helps to develop distance learning and digital skills. (Ouaouicha)

### Pandemic positives

Despite the massive negative impact of the pandemic on education, the crisis does present opportunities. Accelerated development of digital techniques can have positive long-term implications if teachers and students get the opportunity to embrace the technology.

“There is a need to explore educational solutions that integrate all students and that would continue beyond COVID-19 ... this is a main objective, to fight inequalities in education,” (9:20) said Madame Guigou.

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[17:06](#) The crisis has forced universities to pull together, show solidarity, innovate and improve their digital skills. (Ouaouicha)

[30:45](#) Teachers are more motivated to adapt to new situations. (Lahcem Tighoula, inspector of secondary education, Agadir, Morocco)

[53:25](#) The crisis has allowed families to spend more time together and develop creativity. (Rolanda Sliaziene-West, teacher Youth Centre Babilonas, Lithuania)

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