

## **Lifelong learning in times of COVID-19: education for resilience and transformation**

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A broader picture of education is needed beyond just the early years and formal institutions, but thinking about education as a lifelong process. This part of SDG 4 is a bit neglected – „providing lifelong opportunities for ALL“ and several aspects deserve our attention:

- In the context of education affected and learning by pandemic, we should keep in mind that not only schools were closed, but various types of courses were stopped too, and adult and older learners were massively affected. While schools as a stable institutions shifted to the online learning, and tend to recovery now, literacy courses and lifelong learning opportunities will not be so easily re-established. It is serious warning because of at least four reasons: 1) According to UNESCO, there are around 800 million fully illiterate adult people (not able to read or write a single sentence) around the globe. The effects of this number is huge on many areas of life! Those people are thus deprived of one of the most important human rights. 2) 2/3 of them are women, that are very much affected during pandemic and more excluded from education offer existing offers. Thus, the literacy efforts for women are additionally endangered. 3) literacy is recognized as the entrance door to achieving several other SDGs (e.g. poverty reduction, equality) and precondition for practicing other human rights. 4) adult illiteracy costs global economy more than one trillion dollars per year.

The sense of urgency that we now have around SDGs requires immediate action. This applies to climate crises, but also to many other areas. As much as schools and children education is important for securing better, sustainable future, education of adult and older people is urgent to prevent further damaging of people, peace and planet; further waiting or postponing will leave unrepairable consequences – education of broad spectrum of societal groups, from policy makers via journalists until the citizens in the communities is an emergent need.

- Online learning and virtual platforms helped us to bridge the gaps in education and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and they will play an important role in the future as well. But there is strong push to move most of the education, especially lifelong learning to the online spaces and virtual world. It is offered a silver bullet and magic solution for future education. It shouldn't be the case for several reasons: 1) half of the is not online! We will not be able in one or two years of recovery equip them with digital skills. Even if we do, it will be not enough for them to make full use of education and learning opportunities; 2) There are areas of learning and education that cannot be fully covered through the online formats, for example: education for empowerment, education for peace and tolerance; critical thinking, open-mindedness, creativity; increasing motivation for lifelong learning; social-emotional learning; education for health, sport and recreation; developing skills (especially in vocational training) that require practicing and exercising; 3) it is not suitable method of learning for some learners' groups

and for some contexts; 4) it is still more important WHAT (goal, content) we learn than how – it is a question of values and ethics. Online learning is an instrument, a powerful mean but not the goal. Currently often quoted „right to connectivity“ must not replace „right to education“

- Education during pandemic and for the recovery is very much focused on health and digital skills. But an area that requires much more attention is civic education, education for civic, human and minority rights. Researches and reports showed that during the COVID-19 pandemic in many countries, some freedoms were limited and right violated even if it was not necessary and some governments misused their power. So, the task of education which prepares people for various crises situations is: 1) to help people understand the importance of human rights and to differ the situations where human rights need to be respected by any mean from those where they can be limited to a certain extent. It is also crucial to teach citizens how to control government, to make it accountable, and to take active part in decision making processes; 2) to strengthen the values that were affected by the pandemic measures: solidarity, cooperation and exchange, mutual support. Namely, a kind of ‚new nationalism‘ is observed, communities and countries isolating, closing the boundaries, taking care only about ‚their own people‘ (which affects especially vulnerable groups), now also in the form of ‚vaccine nationalism‘ (visible especially in global North – global South context). So, education should develop solidarity, global citizenship and cooperation. The „education as usual“ will not work for the recovery; transformative learning is needed – education that tackle the deeper roots of the problems, systemic obstacles and structural inequalities.

- In the recovery process and post-COVID-19 times, there is a need to strengthen public policies, public education and increase investments in education. Adequate financing is crucial. Even before the pandemic, serious data were showing huge financial gap for achieving SDG 4 and that we are lagging behind. According to GEMR (2015), there is annual financing gap of US\$39 billion for inclusive, equitable and quality education for all, and UNESCO estimates funding gap to reach SDG4 in poorer countries to US\$ 200 billion annually after COVID-19. The recovery process which aims not only mitigation of consequences, but also development of resiliencies, requires strong public education policies, strengthened public education system and increased financing. Those who were excluded from education and lifelong learning before the pandemic, they will have even more problems after it. Different kind of vulnerable groups will need more support, otherwise the number of those left behind will be much higher after the pandemic.