



MONGOLIA:

Addressing Learning Losses During the Pandemic

**Response to the impacts
of COVID-19 on education and
connectivity challenges in Mongolia**



Asia-Pacific
SDG Partnership

Mongolia: Addressing Learning Losses During the Pandemic

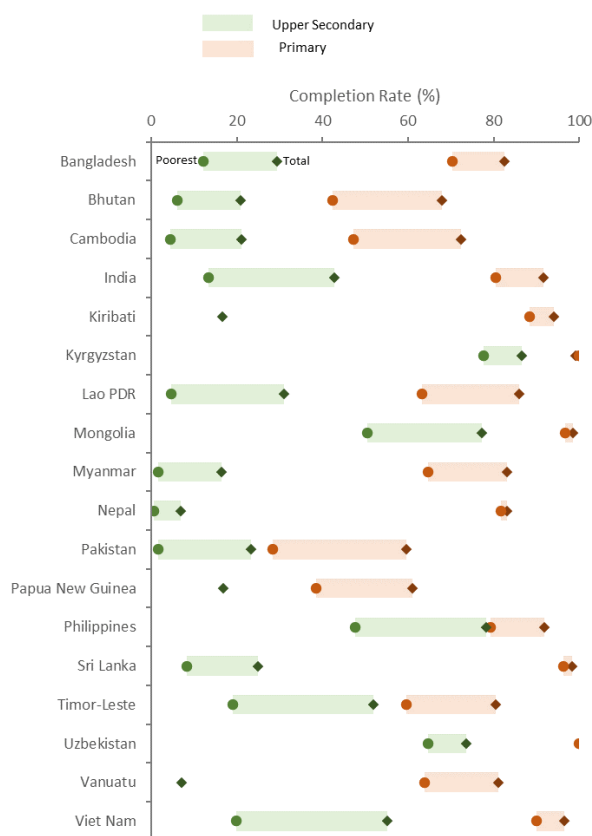
This is a data story to illustrate how the data available in the SDG data portal (<https://sdgasiapacific.net/knowledge-products/0000023>) and the SDG Partnership Report (<https://sdgasiapacific.net/sdg-data>) can be used to explore topics in depth.

One of the major effects of COVID-19 on education was widespread school closures across the region, which led to severe learning losses for students, often in countries where education systems were already poor.

Education in Mongolia Before COVID-19

Education in Mongolia was highly ranked among middle-income countries in the Asia Pacific region. It counted with high completion rates in upper secondary and primary education (Figure 1), adult literacy rates of 98 percent, and constant increases in annual budget spending that matched the world average.

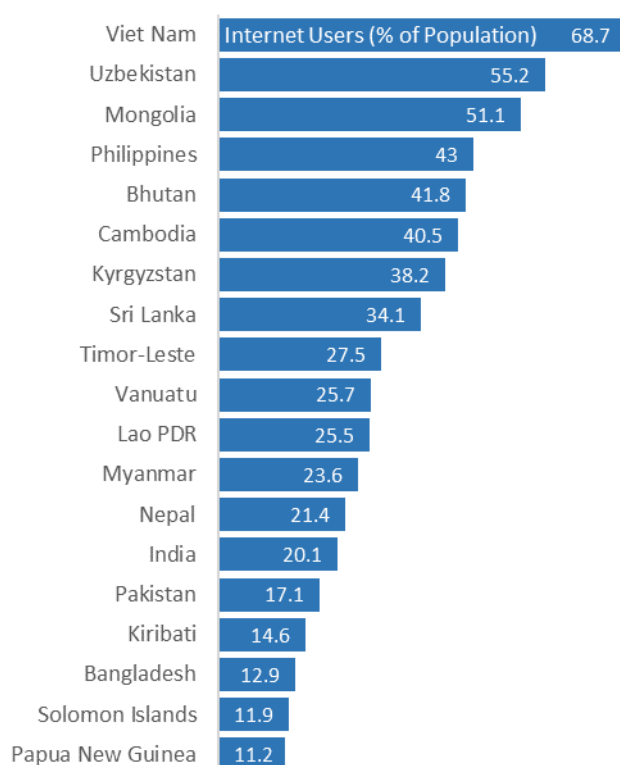
Figure 1. School Completion Rate of Lower Middle-Income Economies in Asia Pacific Pre Covid



Source: UNESCAP. SDG Gateway Data (accessed 10 June 2022).

Internet access was also above average in the region. In 2019, 51 percent of the population were recorded Internet users (Figure 2) and 317.3 per thousand people had fixed broadband subscriptions. As a reference, on average in lower-middle-income economies, only 18 percent of households have a computer and 41 percent have internet access at home¹.

Figure 2. Internet Users of Lower Middle Income Economies



Note: Latest data available

Source: UNESCAP. SDG Gateway Data (Accessed 10 June 2022).

However, Mongolia's rural population, accounting for almost one-third of the total population, is at risk of being left behind in an increasingly digitalized education system. Participation in higher education and school attendance rates reflects urban/rural education inequalities and children living in rural areas were recorded less likely to

¹ In terms of the availability of computers and an internet connection, the Asia-Pacific region shows a heterogeneous picture, varying from the Maldives with all primary schools being connected, to 73 percent being equipped with computers in Sri Lanka, and 5 percent in India.

attend educational facilities than their urban counterparts². The fact that many Mongolians live nomadic lifestyles complicates the issue of remote education as rolling out comprehensive land-based telecoms to remote districts, sometimes inhabited by just a handful of families, is not economical. According to the World Bank, in 2014, just 34 out of 360 rural villages had access to fast internet.

Learning Disruption

In January 2020, with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mongolia stopped in-person classroom training at all education levels and organized two-year distance and electronic trainings. In the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years, 47 and 62.5-68 percent of the total number of classroom days for secondary school children were held remotely and electronically, respectively. This shift to remote learning disproportionately impacted students in rural areas, who overwhelmingly lacked ICT skills compared to their urban counterparts³.

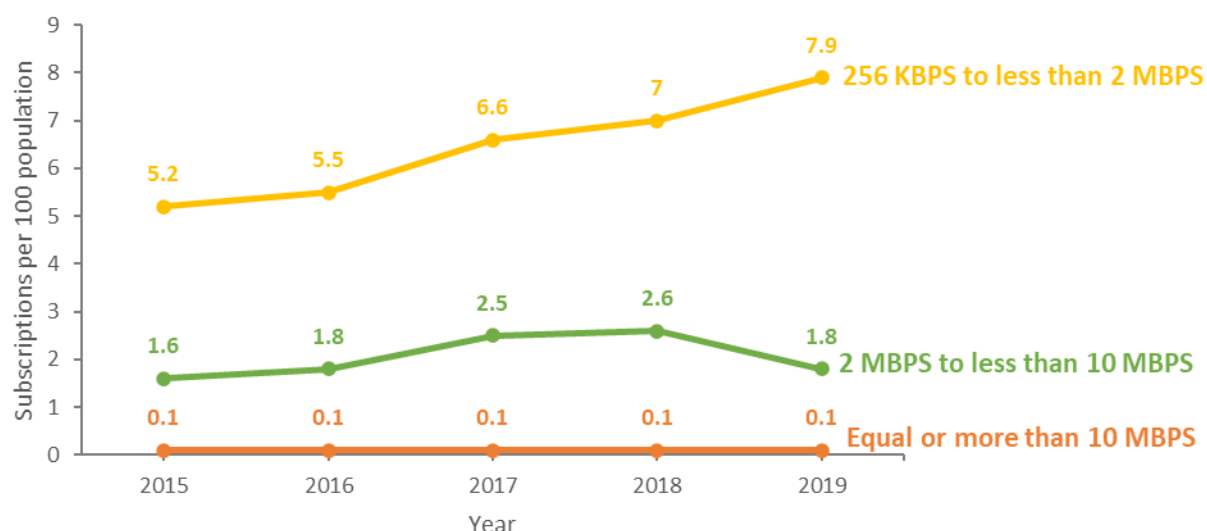
Despite large portions of the population having access to the internet, few individuals have access to fast internet (Figure 3) and the majority of Mongolians do not have the broadband speeds to optimize online classes through zoom, google meets, discord, etc⁴.

² Prior to the pandemic, 58.2% of rural children aged 36-59 months were attending early childhood education institutes compared to 81.4% of urban children. COVID-19's Effects on Educational Disparities Between Mongolia's Rural and Urban Students, WORLD MIND ISSUE 7.4, EAST ASIA

³ The ICT skills examined included but were not limited to sending an email with an attached file, transferring a file between a computer and another device, creating an electronic presentation using presentation software, connecting and installing a new device, and using a copy and paste tool within a document.

⁴ At a baseline estimate a minimum internet speed of 0.6-1.5 Mbps is needed to use Zoom. At least 0.6 Mbps is needed to participate in group calls with 480p HD quality, 3.0 Mbps is the minimum speed needed to participate in group calls at 1080p HD. *Data provided from bandwidth requirements listed on Zoom's website

Figure 3. Mongolia Fixed Broadband Subscriptions 2015-2019



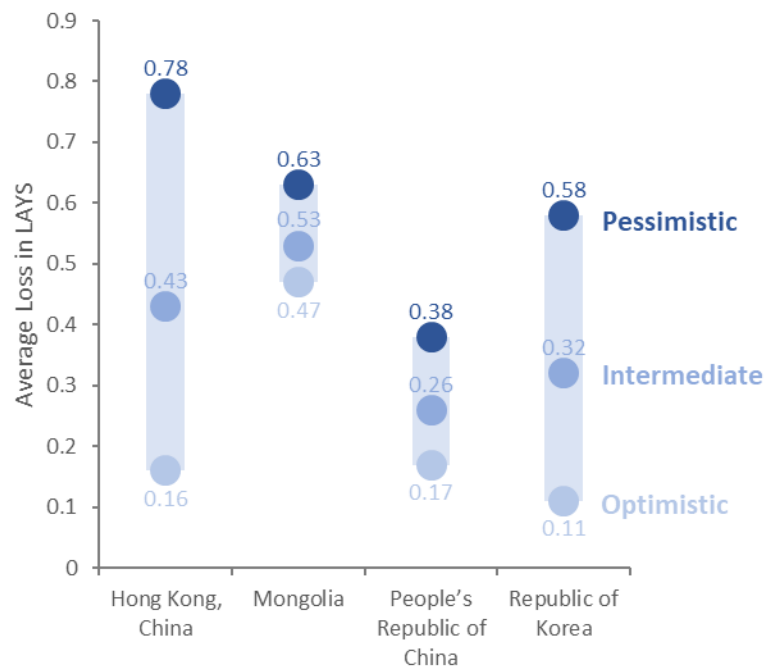
Source: UNESCAP. SDG Gateway Data (Accessed 10 June 2022).

Learning loss can be measured in terms of learning-adjusted years of schooling (LAYS)⁵. In 2020, East Asia had an average of 10.50 LAYS⁶ and because of school closures, students lost an estimated 0.23-0.59 of one learning-adjusted year. In Mongolia, the optimistic scenario of a 0.47 (equivalent to 5.85 percent reduction) year loss fell short of the intermediate scenario for China and South Korea (Figure 4).

⁵ The framework of Azevedo et al. (2021) is used to measure the losses in learning and potential earnings of students affected by COVID-19 school closures. This framework assumes that school closures affect LAYS through two components—the expected years of schooling (quantity effect) and harmonized test scores (quality effect). Both effects are mitigated by the effectiveness of remote learning. The indirect effect of income shocks also reduces the expected years of schooling. LAYS capture both the quality and quantity of education across preprimary, primary, and secondary education levels and are measured as the number of years of schooling a child can expect to obtain by age 18, adjusted by a country's average student achievement.

⁶ Based on the World Bank's Human Capital Index.

Figure 4. Average Loss in LAYS in East Asia

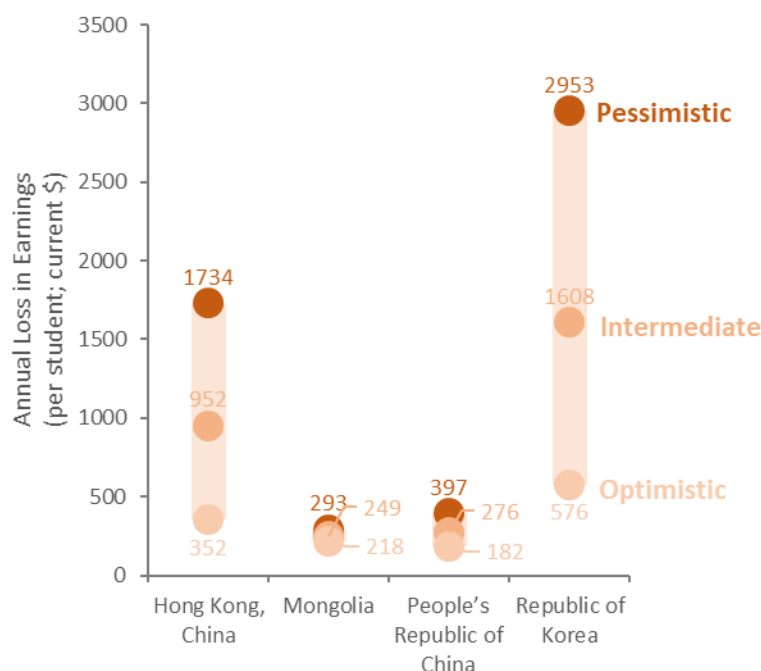


Source: R. Gayares et al. 2021. [Learning and Earning Losses from COVID-19 School Closures in Developing Asia](#). Special Topic of the Asian Development Outlook 2021. Manila.

Learning loss also impacts future earning potential⁷. In dollar terms, potential earning losses per student are highest in East Asia (\$771), where average earnings before the COVID-19 pandemic were highest.

⁷ On average, every student affected by school closures in developing Asia stands to lose an estimated \$180 every year, equivalent to a 2.4 percent drop in average annual earnings. It is important to note because LAYS are a new concept- established in 2018- no study has yet measured the average returns to every learning-adjusted year of schooling.

Figure 5. Annual Loss in Earnings in East Asia



Source: R. Gayares et al. 2021. [Learning and Earning Losses from COVID-19 School Closures in Developing Asia](#). Special Topic of the Asian Development Outlook 2021. Manila.

Initiatives

While the suspension of face-to-face teaching impacts all levels of education, Mongolia was able to execute programs that aimed to reduce education inequality and provide resources vulnerable populations.

To improve feedback on teacher-student-parent-guardian collaboration, the government developed and provided recommendations for teachers and “Family Based Development Support Recommendations” for parents and guardians of children with disabilities. Similarly, the Ministry of Education and Science, with support from UNICEF Mongolia, successfully implemented television learning programs for younger children (4-6 years old) up to 12th grade, as well as produced and broadcasted lessons in the minority languages from the Kazakh and Tuva populations, ensuring equal opportunity to learn.

The Ministry of Education and Science leveraged high rates of television and access to mobile phones (95.8 and 95.2 percent respectively⁸) by distributing educational content through portal education sites, all TV channels, and Video-on-demand services with

⁸ 2015 Data provided by The International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

telecom operators providing free access to the portal education site and discounted data services.

However, there were persistent challenges in its online education for several reasons. Lack of access to energy, equipment, and facilities left 178.5 thousand children in remote areas without access to tele- and e-learning.

Conclusion

At the 2022 Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, The Minister for Labour and Social Protection of Mongolia, Her Excellency Ms. Ariunzaya Ayush, said the following regarding the importance to crafting inclusive policy, “Those who have been most vulnerable have been, again, left behind just because of the access to the internet or digital devices.”

Despite Mongolia's relatively high access to internet and the rapid roll-out of digital education, weaknesses in the infrastructure of the region's digital connectivity, primarily regarding internet speed, caused learning losses for thousands of youths when the option of in-person schooling was removed, particularly those in rural communities. Going forward consolidated policy for integration and mainstreaming ICT across the education system is essential to addressing learning loss disparities especially in rural areas.

Acknowledgements

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