



# Education

## Impact of COVID-19 on education

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## Impact of COVID-19 on education

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on education in Africa. The restrictions and protocols associated with the pandemic caused many schools to shut down and learning temporarily suspended. At the peak of the pandemic, more than 90% of African students had their studies interrupted as a result of [school](#) closures. Even in South Africa, where the education sector is relatively well-resourced and information and communication technologies (ICT) infrastructure is better developed than in many other countries, UNICEF estimates that the average student lost between three-quarters and a full year of schooling, and up to half a million children dropped out of school entirely since the beginning of the [pandemic](#).

Countries with larger rural and extremely poor populations seem to have suffered the most. In many countries, children received no education at all during the COVID-19 pandemic, either because schools without facilities to teach remotely closed entirely or because of inadequate ICT infrastructure to allow students and teachers to log in to classes. Economic inequalities have again become decisive, with wealthy students who have access to well-resourced schools and homes equipped with high-speed Internet having experienced minimal disruption to their programmes, while many rural and poor students without such resources [lost access to school](#) entirely.

Even when they were able to access lessons, the sudden shift undermined learning as students struggled to focus in a home setting or received inadequate personal attention through online classes, with resulting mental health consequences of lockdowns that, in some instances, lasted up to two years. Outside school, children were also more susceptible to exploitation of child labour, particularly girls with respect to unpaid domestic work, further distracting them from their [studies](#) and undermining their fundamental rights.

Although students around the world have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the higher levels of poverty as well as the significant digital divide in Africa have rendered Africans particularly vulnerable. Internet access rates are very low in Africa compared to the rest of the world, with studies estimating that 60% to 85% of African university students did not have the necessary devices or Internet access to continue [online education](#). This highlights the need for a greatly expanded roll-out of quality and affordable ICT infrastructure (see the theme on leapfrogging) and integrating these technologies into education, including reskilling teachers.

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## About the authors

Mr Enoch Randy Aikins joined the AFI in May 2021 as a Researcher. Before that, Enoch was a research and programmes officer at the Institute for Democratic Governance in Accra in charge of local governance reforms, poverty and inequality and public sector reforms. He also worked as a research assistant (economic division) with the Institute for Statistical Social and Economic Research at the University of Ghana. Enoch's interests include African politics and governance, economic development, public sector reform, poverty and inequality. Enoch is a Young African Fellow at the School of Transnational Governance, European University Institute in Florence and has an MPhil in economics from the University of Ghana, Legon.

Dr Jakkie Cilliers is the ISS's founder and former executive director. He currently serves as chair of the ISS Board of Trustees, head of the African Futures and Innovation (AFI) programme at the Pretoria office of the Institute, and is an extraordinary professor at the University of Pretoria. His 2017 best-seller *Fate of the Nation* addresses South Africa's futures from political, economic and social perspectives. His three most recent books, *Africa First! Igniting a Growth Revolution* (March 2020), *The Future of Africa: Challenges and Opportunities* (April 2021), and *Africa Tomorrow: Pathways to Prosperity* (June 2022) take a rigorous look at the continent as a whole.

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