



## Initial education policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic: Denmark

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### Strengthening adaptability and resilience in the context of COVID-19

Pre-existing resources in the education system appear to have facilitated Denmark's immediate response, such as Denmark's digital learning portal and counselling services. However, students' legal right to quality education and the need to ensure access to it were critical in the decision to reopen education institutions. Denmark was among the first countries in Europe to do this, through a decision by central government through the Parliament, and plans defined by municipal councils and schools based on central guidelines. As Denmark works to balance short-term responsiveness with longer-term strategic aims and resilience, the crisis brings specific challenges and opportunities. Quickly establishing an understanding of the practical response implemented at local level can help inform guidance measures to mitigate lost learning time during the pandemic. Knowing that capacity and available resources vary by municipality and taking into consideration Denmark's wider challenge of strengthening institutional reporting and transparency to drive improvements in equity, establishing an overview of local responses becomes even more important.

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## The Danish education system's initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic. Education systems across the world have felt the force of the crisis as confinement measures triggered widespread closures of education institutions. The same day, Denmark [announced the closure](#) of all day-care facilities and educational institutions, effective as of 16 March 2020 at the latest. A phased reopening began on 15 April 2020, through [guidelines](#) prioritising ECEC, special education and school-leaving examination candidates. New laws and regulations were continuously adopted as a result of COVID-19. In light of the work of the Education Policy Outlook during 2020 in the context of this pandemic, this spotlight offers an insight into system readiness and immediate responses across five key areas:

- 1. Ensuring continued access to learning and smooth educational pathways:** To support distance learning, [EMU](#) (1999), Denmark's digital learning portal, published lists of free digital resources and advisory material about virtual and outdoor teaching in all subjects for teachers, principals, students and parents. This complemented EMU's pre-existing collection of teaching material for all sectors from ECEC to upper-secondary education. Later, Denmark announced [measures to strengthen distance education](#), including new online educational content and professional development and networking opportunities for teachers. Denmark cancelled all [national student examinations](#) for years 9 and 10; students would automatically transition to the next grade. It was decided to maintain [examinations in upper secondary education](#) for some core subjects only; other subjects would be assessed through marks awarded at the end of the school year. VET institutions were instructed to limit pathway disruptions by adjusting admissions and completion procedures, waiving practical course requirements and negotiating internship extensions. Tertiary institutions would establish alternative examination arrangements, including online assessment. Apprentices and working students received emergency financial support and student loans were extended. Financial aid for providers of after-school care, youth leisure activities and adult education aimed to compensate for lost earnings and ensure continued access following the easing of confinement measures.
- 2. Strengthening the internal world of the student:** Many municipalities maintained or extended children's counselling services, with adaptations. MoCE published [daily video greetings](#) to children via Facebook offering tips for navigating confinement. Recognising a decrease in student motivation, Denmark announced extra funding for [enhanced academic, career and personal guidance for upper secondary students](#). For tertiary students, the [Student Counselling Service](#) offered online support, including digital resources and free, online or phone counselling.
- 3. Providing targeted support and interventions for vulnerable children and families:** During closures, schools were expected to engage in daily contact with students whose home circumstances would not allow them to receive sufficient support. Exceptionally, schools could remain open for high-need children; this applied predominantly to special education. The MoCE's [Special Educational Support service](#) adapted its practices, delivering technological devices to eligible children, collating useful resources and offering some virtual diagnostic testing. For the initial period of reopening, Denmark agreed a new [parental payment scheme for ECEC](#), which enabled municipalities and private providers to waive or reduce the cost of ECEC to households experiencing financial difficulties, by providing compensation from central government for lost fees and for necessary sanitary modifications. Denmark reached an [agreement to help vulnerable groups in society](#); for vulnerable children, municipalities could seek financial support to address learning loss, and youth associations could receive extra funding for outreach work.
- 4. Harnessing wider support and engagement at local and central level:** Municipalities were expected to provide childcare for children of essential workers, or those with special educational needs or challenging home environments, between the ages of 0 and 9 years. To this end, local authorities worked with schools, day-care providers, social services and children's homes to offer care, including in the evening, night, weekends and holidays, as needed. After the first day, a [survey](#) of municipalities showed that about 2% of children were in emergency care.
- 5. Collecting, disseminating and improving the use of information about students:** MoCE established a coronavirus hotline for educational institutions and a comprehensive set of constantly updated frequently asked questions. MoCE has initiated a [national knowledge-gathering exercise](#) to help identify lessons from the crisis; the first stage invited various actors from across the education sector to discuss focus areas for reflection.



Table 1

| Selected indicators of system readiness (OECD)   |  | Denmark | Average | Min   | Max   |
|--|--|---------|---------|-------|-------|
| <i>Students' readiness (according to students' self-reports in PISA 2018)</i>                  |  |         |         |       |       |
| 1  | Index of self-efficacy   | 0.05    | 0.01    | -0.61 | 0.36  |
| 2  | Percentage of students in disadvantaged schools with access to a computer at home that they can use for school work              | 96.5%   | 81.5%   | 23.5% | 96.5% |
| <i>Teachers' readiness (according to lower secondary teachers' self-reports in TALIS 2018)</i> |  |         |         |       |       |
| 3  | Percentage of teachers with a high level of need for professional development related to ICT skills for teaching                 | 11.2%   | 17.7%   | 5.3%  | 39.0% |
| 4  | Percentage of teachers agreeing that most teachers in the school provide practical support to each other when applying new ideas | 86.5%   | 77.9%   | 64.7% | 86.5% |

Note: The information presented in this spotlight covers key measures mainly announced or introduced **before 19 June 2020**.

For more information visit: <http://www.oecd.org/education/policy-outlook/>

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