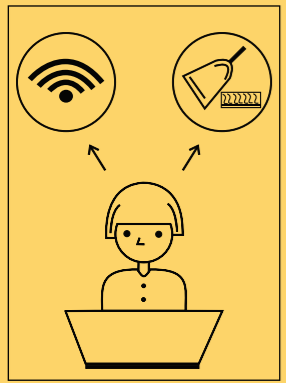


This research aimed to capture the impact of the pandemic on: (i) school education - students, teachers, parents; (ii) higher education - students, research scholars, faculty members; (iii) livelihoods and the everyday life of informal workers.

School Education



Students

With the sudden shift towards online classes, children from vulnerable sections of society were left out of the learning process due to lack of access to digital devices and internet facilities.

Time constraints, dilution of curriculum and limitations posed by online modes of interaction impacted children's learning through online classes.

Girl children struggled to attend online classes as they were constantly kept busy with household work. Due to financial distress caused by the pandemic-induced economic downturn, families pressurized girls to get married.

Teachers

Teachers were under constant pressure to ensure the efficacy of online classes with a focus only on access and participation numbers rather than ensuring meaningful learning.

The pandemic exacerbated the problem of undermining teachers' epistemic identities and professional judgement. Teachers were coerced into disseminating teaching-learning materials that were outsourced.

The bulk of government primary school teachers were assigned Covid-19 related duties, leading to health risks and fatalities. Many teachers working on contracts were laid off during the pandemic.

Women teachers struggled to fulfil their professional duties and domestic responsibilities, including meeting the demands of online education for their children.



Parents

Due to loss of livelihood, parents struggled to provide resources such as smart mobile phones and internet facilities required for online education.

The continued pressure on parents to pay fees in private schools even when schools were shut down added to their financial and mental stress.

Systemic impact

Several low fee-paying schools closed as they proved to be economically unviable, leading to a significant increase in enrolment in state schools.

Non-state actors, especially in the IT sector viewed the pandemic as a profit-making opportunity to introduce e-learning products at scale for the underserved.



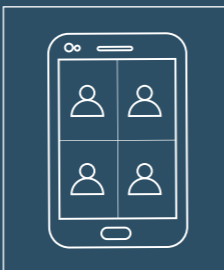
Strengthening the public school education system

The pandemic has revealed a deeply fractured school education system - one that reopened questions of access as the state pushes for digital learning platforms, creating new forms of exclusion.

The 'learning crisis' must not be seen as mere 'learning loss'. It needs to be problematized as the push for digital learning has revealed deep intersections of inequality across class, caste, gender, language, and region.

The mass closure of low fee-paying private schools and increased enrolment in state schools need to be seen as an opportunity to revive the state school system.

Higher Education



Access

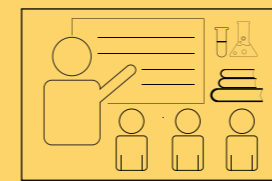
The burden of ensuring access to online classes fell squarely on individual students, pushing up the cost for higher education; making it unattainable for disadvantaged sections of society, marginalised communities and those residing in remote areas.

Well-endowed private institutions used different digital platforms to smoothen the transition to online classes, while public institutions fell short of such efforts, leaving many out of the learning process.

Teaching and Learning

The digital space reduced in-class participation and impacted the motivation levels of faculty and students.

Closure of laboratories and libraries, and the suspension of fieldwork impacted research and practice-based learning.



Well-being

Prolonged stay-at-home orders and the impediments to access online classes increased stress levels, impacting the mental health of students.

The burden of household chores and care work fell on women, impacting their productivity. Several women students were pressured into marriage, forcing them to discontinue their studies.

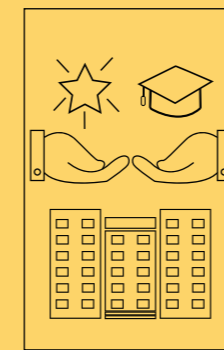


Social exclusion and commodification of higher education

The challenge of exclusion in higher education is not merely that of physical and digital access; the structure and arrangements of higher education favour the privileged.

There is need to increase public spending in higher education to make it accessible to the socially and economically disadvantaged; and to reduce the financial burden of digital learning on students.

It is critical to address the emotional hardships that emerged as a result of long periods of isolation during the pandemic. Interventions must extend beyond making technical provisions for digital learning.



Livelihoods



Livelihoods and lives of informal workers

The pandemic exposed the precarious nature of livelihoods of informal workers - characterised by low wages, intense physical labour in the absence of safety measures.

The different dimensions of vulnerability- economic (no income and livelihood), physical (lack of affordable housing), and social (discrimination based on caste, work) were exposed and exacerbated during the pandemic.

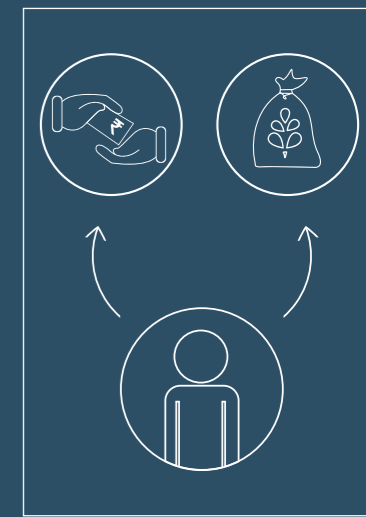
Coping strategies and relief measures

Self-help mechanisms such as borrowing money, pledging valuables, finding alternative livelihoods and community support measures in terms of provisioning of food, monetary compensation and Covid-19 health initiatives worked well as short-term measures for some.

However, these short-term measures proved to be insufficient as they subsequently amplified economic and physical vulnerabilities.

State relief measures that distributed food ration and monetary compensation through the Public Distribution System (PDS) were standardized and proved to be exclusionary due to structural issues and eligibility criteria.

Non-state measures lacked the necessary resources to carry out wide-scale implementation of relief work.

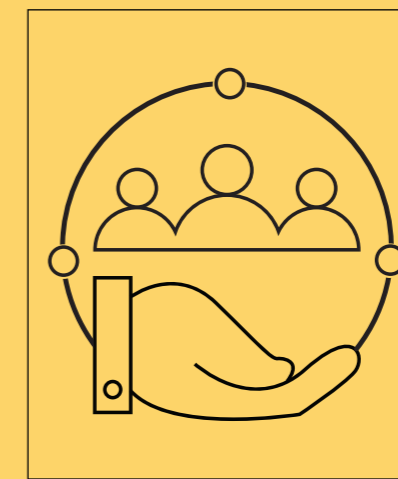


Reimagining social protection measures

To reduce widespread suffering in emergency situations such as the pandemic, policy should focus on providing adequate food access, cash support for basic expenses and livelihood reconstruction for the affected.

It is critical to develop records of vulnerable individuals and their locations and to identify suitable mechanisms to reach them. This can be achieved by leveraging existing and new social registries.

Social protection measures need to be re-conceptualised along the multi-faceted nature of vulnerabilities that are complex, interlinked, and dynamic.



<https://www.tesfindia.iihs.co.in/resources/>

¹Batra, P., Bazaz, A., Shanmugam, A., Ranjit, N., Kaur, H. and Das, R. (2021). Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Education, Livelihoods and Health. Bengaluru: TESF India, IIHS DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24943/ICPELHI08.2021>