**Human Rights Council Resolution 48/12**

**Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on human rights of young people
in the Republic of Azerbaijan**

**Responses provided by the Ministry of Education**

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented disruption to learning and education, with school closures affecting students in most countries, including Azerbaijan. With the aim of ensuring the implementation of the rights of youth to education amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and during the post-pandemic era, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan has initiated and implemented a considerable number of projects and programs:

“Lesson Time” TV lessons

On March 3, 2020, traditional classes in all educational institutions in the country were closed. In order to ensure continuous education, the Ministry of Education has launched the "Lesson time" TV lessons broadcasted on two public TV channels nationwide 5 days a week, a tradition that is carried on until today. TV lessons are recorded (8-10 minutes long per subject) video programs covering overall 10 subjects for all grade levels. The average duration of the daily broadcasting lasts approximately 5 hours with each grade level including an hour of video classes. Notwithstanding the fact that students enjoy face-to-face learning, 9548 lessons were broadcasted during the academic year of 2020/2021. TV lessons are also broadcasted on a regular basis in the academic year of 2021/2022.

Students can also use electronic resources provided in the [www.e-derslik.edu.az](http://www.e-derslik.edu.az) platform, as well as watch lessons on <https://video.edu.az> portal of the Ministry of Education.

A new educational platform – Virtual School

As a logical response to the disruptions that emerged due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the education sphere, novel tools for virtual education have been developed and systematized, alongside the long-dominant traditional education. Consequently, in 2020, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan established a new centralized and the largest educational platform “Virtual School” based on data-based education (the Microsoft Teams program), that successfully covered the teaching process during the school closures. Ensuring a safe online learning environment for students, the platform offers extensive opportunities such as watching and listening to the recorded lessons, engaging in group works, sharing information, assessing homework, scheduling virtual classes and teaching processes, organizing knowledge contests, and controlling the mechanisms that are currently used in the distance learning process on the basis of national educational content and through an interface translated into Azerbaijani language. As of today, the platform covers 1.4 million students (84.74%), more than 1.2 million active users, and 128000 teachers (92.88%) across the country.

Support to students from socially vulnerable backgrounds

The COVID-19 pandemic has most negatively affected students from vulnerable backgrounds, including those coming from low-income families. In this regard, the decision of the Government of Azerbaijan to cover the tuition fees of over 20,000 students from socially vulnerable groups affected by the COVID-19 pandemic indicates a profound significance.

Establishment of Student Loan Fund

By the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On a number of measures related to the establishment and the operation of the Student Loan Fund under the auspices of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan” dated 17 June 2021 and with the aim of broadening access to quality higher education, providing equal opportunities in education for all and specifically ensuring access to education for students from the low-income families, the Ministry of Education established the Student Loan Fund in June 2021. The Fund aims to provide long-term loans (maximum 20 years in duration) to cover tuition fees of 40% of those studying on a self-funding basis, including students from low-income families.

Professional development and capacity building training courses for educators

The rapid changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic created a necessity to ensure the constant professional development of pedagogical staff by adapting to the novel realities. In this regard, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan organizes, on a regular basis, professional development courses and capacity-building trainings for educators across the country.

Involvement and contribution of the private sector

During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, aapproximately 30,000 teachers and instructors registered in the “Virtual School” platform have been provided with a 5GB internet package. The above-mentioned project was initiated by the mobile operator company of Azerbaijani origin, “Azercell” and was provided to the teachers and instructors who are the “Azercell” subscribers.

Connectivity issues and provision of fiber optic internet

There was a sharp rise in the number of educational institutions provided with high-speed fiber-optic connection in Azerbaijan during the COVID-19 pandemic and in the post-recovery period. Based on the annual statistics provided at the end of 2021, Azerbaijan Education Network (AEN) has already expanded to the overall 4,299 educational institutions which equals to the coverage of the 92% of whole secondary educational institutions nationwide.

Accordingly, 203 educational institutions covering more than 277,000 students and 19,000 teachers across the country joined the network with high-speed fiber-optic connection in the year 2020. By the end of 2021, 726 educational institutions covering more than 861,000 students and 57,000 teachers from 64 cities and regions across the country have also switched to high-speed fiber-optic connection, indicating a steady increase in the numbers of those joined within a year.

**Response provided by the Ministry of Health**

The COVID-19 global health emergency and its social-economic impact have disrupted nearly all aspects of life for all groups of society. People of different ages are experiencing its effects in different ways. For young people, and especially for vulnerable youth, the COVID-19 crisis poses considerable risks in different fields, including physical and mental health. Moreover, young people will likely continue to face many of the negative consequences of the health crisis in the long term. To avoid exacerbating inequalities and to involve young people in building societal resilience, the Government of Azerbaijan implemented various targeted interventions to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 across different age groups, including young people.

From the start of the COVID-19, one of the defining messages has been that older persons are more affected by the pandemic. Yet health-related and social-economic impacts on young people are proving to be significant. A common understanding of these impacts and the role young people are playing in driving solutions is essential to the pandemic response.

Health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been asymmetric across various age groups. Young people are less at risk in terms of developing severe physical health symptoms linked to COVID-19 than older age groups. The disruptive nature of the COVID-19 pandemic puts the ability of the Government of Azerbaijan to act decisively and effectively under the public spotlight. The Government has implemented social distancing, confinement and social isolation measures to contain the spread of the virus.

Young people who are infected by COVID-19 are transmitting the virus to others, and in some cases are being hospitalized with serious cases. However, compared with older adults, young people and adolescents are less likely to develop serious illnesses.

The Government of Azerbaijan ensured that COVID-19 response plans are sensitive to adolescent and youth-specific healthcare needs, including sexual and reproductive health, mental health and psychosocial support.

Every effort was made to ensure the continuity of services (such as immunization schedules and essential prevention and treatment services for those who need it) for all young people, irrespective of their sex, marital status, level of education, financial status or other characteristics. It is important to ensure that young people have access to the vaccines they need across the country.

The Government of Azerbaijan ensured that healthcare facilities provide information, counseling, diagnostics, treatment and care services that fulfil the needs of adolescents and young people (such as telemedicine, mobile clinics, outpatient services). Special clinical protocols were developed and implemented for preventing the spread of COVID-19 in educational facilities and treatment of pediatric COVID-19. Schools were left open most of the time during the pandemic in 2020, with brief lockdowns in times of high viral transmission and increased burden of disease.

Ministry of Health in collaboration with UNICEF, WHO and other relevant agencies provided comprehensive training and awareness-raising activities on infection control and mitigation strategies in educational facilities among families and young people.

Various public service announcements on conventional and social media channels specifically targeted young people by recognizing their crucial role and participation in mitigating the pandemic-related impact.

Young people were the target and beneficiaries of a massive information campaign related to COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic impact aired via social and conventional media. The Mental Health Center in close partnership with the Azerbaijan Child Helpline service of Reliable Future NGO in collaboration with UNICEF developed and organized a training course for over 250 psychologists of schools and social services on mental health support and counseling for children, adolescents and young people during the pandemic. The cooperation of the Public Health and Reforms Center (PHRC) with Reliable Future NGO and support from UNFPA enabled to organize a two-week training on psychiatric and psychological support to children and adolescents from disadvantaged groups for 80 psychiatrists, psychologists and educators in collaboration with the Turkish Psychological Association.

The YouTube channel established by PHRC at the beginning of the pandemic helped to organize and deliver over 40 talk shows and interactive programs on infection control and prevention, mental health, yoga classes, physical activity and healthy nutrition specifically targeting young people and adults.

The mobile application on nutrition and physical activity developed by PHRC in 2020, and on reproductive health (2021) helped to reach out to adolescents and young people and their parents and provide them with valuable information, insights and advice on related topics.

PHRC supported local NGOs to enhance their work in the prevention of domestic violence and provision of emotional and psychological support to victims of domestic violence. During 2020-2021, the PHRC worked with Reliable Future NGO and Azerbaijan Child Helpline service to provide psychological counseling to over 170 children and adolescents and their parents/guardians and helped to provide referrals of children in need of medical evaluation and care to medical institutions in partnership with local hospitals and policlinics.

Mental Health Center of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Azerbaijan also continued to provide services for children and young people in need of the mental health support and sustained the work of mental health hotline throughout the pandemic.

As a result of the implementation of the relevant measures to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic on the social welfare of the population, including young people, by the end of 2021 the unemployment rate in the country decreased to 5.9 percent in comparison to 7.2 percent in 2020.

**Responses provided by the Ministry of Labor and Social Services of the Population**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the scope of various social support programs was expanded. The draft “Rules for financing part of the salaries of employees in social workplaces by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan” was developed and approved by the Cabinet of Ministers on July 8, 2020. The scope of the implementation of the self-employment program, began in 2017, was expanded 13.6 times in 2021 and reached 16,000 people.

Paid public jobs have also played an important role in increasing employment opportunities during pandemic. At the initiative of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, "Friend of the Unemployed" program was launched in early 2019, providing a new mechanism for organizing public jobs. In 2020 number of paid public jobs was raised to 90,000. This program specifically targeted young people.

Appropriate measures have been taken by the Government to preserve jobs and wages for 900,000 people in the public sector and 760,000 people in the private sector during pandemic.