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Mirza Begovic teaches a class in an open air classroom in Kacuni, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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## Helping to ensure that education never stops in Bosnia and Herzegovina

National UN Volunteer Amila Planinčić is engaged with the UNESCO and UN assistance to Bosnia and Herzegovina in addressing the effects of the pandemic on the education sector. Her assignment as a Programme Assistant with UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe-Antenna in Sarajevo is close to its end – Amila calls her UNV year great luck and success despite all challenges.

“ I am beyond proud that as UN Volunteer I had an opportunity to contribute to UNESCO and joint UN in BiH response during the COVID-19, --Amila Planinčić, National UN Volunteer.

In 2020, Amila assisted in conducting joint UNESCO-UNICEF [Rapid Situation and Needs Assessment in Education](#), aimed at collecting and analyzing the immediate effects of the school closure on learning outcomes among students in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The pandemic has disrupted education for [1.6 billion children and youth worldwide](#), threatening to exacerbate the already existing learning crisis. At the moment [800 million students](#) still face significant disruptions to their education due to the COVID-19 crisis. Approximately 500,000 children and youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) were affected by country-wide preschool, school and university closures from mid-March 2020. In the aftermath of the pandemic outbreak, the BiH education authorities estimated that the lack of continuum of learning affected over 9,700 children in primary and secondary schools who did not have access to e-learning.

“ Together with other UN and local partners, we reached 5,300 primary and secondary students without access to e-learning and continued to work closely with education authorities in ensuring education never stops in Bosnia and Herzegovina, --  
Amila Planinčić, National UN Volunteer.



Students at a Secondary Technical School in Zenica ©UNICEF/Djemidzic.  
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Moreover, throughout UNESCO policy engagement in the education sector, Amila got an excellent opportunity to cooperate with education practitioners from all parts of BiH online in preparation of action plans for safe school re-opening. Amila highlights that teachers in Bosnia and Herzegovina have done stellar work during these challenging times.

“ Being myself teacher by profession, I would like to use this opportunity to highlight the great efforts of teachers and all education-related technical support staff in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who despite all the difficulties and challenges, worked tirelessly to ensure the learning continuum for students at all education levels, both during and post school closure phase, --Amila Planinčić, National UN Volunteer.

While the medical professionals invested tremendous efforts to curb the spread of the virus, teachers worked to prevent the generational education catastrophe. Education professionals worldwide had to adapt quickly to the unprecedented learning mode without almost any prior preparation. Despite all the challenges, technical limitations (1,5% of teachers without ICT and internet access in the country) and tight education financial resources, the country has seen great examples of teachers' creativity and innovation in building more resilient and safe schooling for all.

Amila shares an example when teachers from one elementary school in a small village in Central Bosnia [built an open-air school](#) (classrooms and amphitheater) to protect children from COVID-19. The crisis enhanced solidarity, thus in Sarajevo Canton, a group of parents started a humanitarian initiative and [collected 470 laptops](#) for vulnerable children without access to e-learning.



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Given the BiH's post-conflict context, COVID-19 could exacerbate inequalities and divisions, while creating new ones. Even before this crisis, a

fragmented education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina, faced with a range of structural issues, exacerbates divisions of children at a very early age. Twenty-five years after the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the education system is burdened by divisive rhetoric and war legacies, undermining social cohesion and intercultural dialogue in the country.

“ In some parts of the country, the existence of the so-called ‘Two Schools under One Roof’ practice, a post-conflict phenomenon of segregated schooling, is still dividing children based on their ethnic origins. During my high school education, I attended one of the school of that type in my hometown, and almost 10 years later, I worked as French language teacher in the same school, --Amila Planinčić, National UN Volunteer.

For that reason, it is essential that priority is given to strengthening social cohesion and community resilience in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, considering education as one of the main drivers in promoting peace, intercultural dialogue and social cohesion – enhancing the quality and equal education means educating future agents of positive changes, capable of understanding diversities and engaging in meaningful and peaceful intercultural dialogue.

“ Finally, I am truly proud to mention that during my assignment I took part in preparing and launching of the joint UNESCO-UNICEF-ILO-UN Volunteers project aimed at assisting the education sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina in curbing the impact of the COVID-19, titled “Re-imagining education for girls and boys during and post COVID-19 pandemic, -- Amila Planinčić, National UN Volunteer.

This joint project has for the objective to support the BiH education authorities in their efforts to respond quickly and efficiently particularly when addressing the needs of the vulnerable population. As besides the significant impact of disrupted learning on all children, children from vulnerable groups are under additional risk to be left out, with increased risk of dropping out and widening the existing equity gaps. Project activities will prioritize investing in digitalization and improvement of the quality of e-learning and blended learning practices, as well as enhancement of teachers' skills for delivery of e-learning and blended learning. Moreover, by focusing on empowering girls and women, this programme will also contribute to address specific immediate risks girls and women may face during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as an increased risk of domestic violence, an increased unpaid childcare and care for elderly, and increased domestic work. The programme will seek to equip girls with the knowledge and skills they need to stay safe across all environments and online.

“ We focus on the most *vulnerable and marginalized girls and boys to ensure* all learners have access to inclusive and equitable quality education during and beyond COVID-19 pandemic, while prioritizing the promotion of gender equality, women's empowerment and enhanced capacity building of girls and women (students as well as teachers), --  
Amila Planinčić, National UN Volunteer.

Amila Planinčić is 27-year old Bosnian national holding a Master's degree in Peace and Security Studies, a Master's degree in Internal and External Security of the European Union and a Master's degree in French language and literature. Before the UNV assignment, Amila worked at International Cooperation Sector at the Ministry of Defence of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Council of Europe in Strasbourg and in grammar school in Travnik (Bosnia and Herzegovina) as a French language and literature teacher.



Amila Planinčić at her Internship at Council of Europe in Strasbourg.  
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Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 4: Quality education](#)