

**Abstract of Contribution 149****ID: 149****Crisis Response in Education Network  
Individual Paper***Orientation of proposal:* This contribution is mainly an academic research contribution.*Crisis Response in Education Network Sub-themes: Reimagining learning in response to the pandemic:* What has the short, medium and longer-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on learners and their families?, How have education systems around the world responded to the COVID-19 pandemic?, What new ways of working have emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic? How have these supported or hindered the quality of education provided by educational systems?**Surviving COVID-19 and Ensuring Digital Access to Education in Extreme Poverty Contexts****Cecilia Azorín<sup>1</sup>, Cristóbal Ruiz-Román<sup>2</sup>, Jesús Juárez<sup>2</sup>, Lorena Molina<sup>3</sup>**<sup>1</sup>University of Murcia, Spain; <sup>2</sup>University of Malaga, Spain; <sup>3</sup>Association Chavorrillos; [cmaria.azorin@um.es](mailto:cmaria.azorin@um.es)

The pandemic has highlighted disparities in access to technology. There is no doubt that many children and young people without physical contact to schools and no technological devices at home have fallen into the digital gap, and into social inequality. According to Harris (2020, 3):

These current circumstances demand that all students have Internet connectivity so that they can access resources and continue progressing. Those leading education systems, therefore, have a moral duty to invest in connectivity for all learners, as a priority, if learning is to be genuinely inclusive and equity is to be realised.

Hence, accepting educational responsibility is essential for survival in the Era of COVID-19.

The paper focuses on the digital divide in "Los Asperones" (Alcalde, Ruiz-Román and Molina, 2017), a disadvantaged area of Malaga (southern Spain), where there are 1000 people located there, of which 90% are in extreme poverty. A Roma community is living in a shanty town in dire conditions, without adequate housing or access to public services for 32 years (Alston, 2020). The main problems are overcrowding, illiteracy, school absenteeism, unemployment, exclusion and children who live together in crowded spaces, with no guarantee of being able to eat three times a day (Juárez, de Oña and Molina, 2020; Ruiz-Román, Juárez, Molina, de Oña and Herrera, 2020).

According to Ruiz-Román, Molina and Alcaide (2018) in recent years there has been a huge effort on the part of educational institutions and NGOs to get children and young people to advance in their studies. Azorín (2020) and Herrera-Pastor, Juárez and Ruiz-Román (2020) note that Los Asperones survives thanks to a social network that revolves around this neighborhood, but COVID-19 has undoubtedly made the social and exclusion gap even wider.

A patronage project led by the University of Malaga (UMA) and the Association "Chavorrillos" is currently under way in response to the crisis. The project aims to generate synergies between volunteers from the UMA and the neighborhood, thus empowering the people who live Los Asperones, and seeks to combat inequality and the digital divide by providing tools that truly allow "connect to learn: learn to connect" (Harris and Jones, 2012). This initiative revolves around the following axes:

1. Creation of a Wi-Fi community with long range repeaters to provide access to all students in the neighborhood.
2. Campaign from the UMA for the donation of laptops that will be recycled in a joint workshop among computer students from the university and young people from the neighborhood.
3. Training in digital competences to different agents (families, students and teachers in the neighborhood), including the use, reuse and repair of devices and deployment of Wi-Fi.

In summary, the priority is to minimize the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic is having in this particular context by supporting learners and their families in the short, medium and long-term.

The different stakeholders involved are part of a social movement led by and for people which is based on the power of collective capacity and collaborative networking in challenging circumstances.

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