

# 13 Colombia: Colombia learns mobile

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Type of intervention: governmental

Website: <https://movil.colombiaaprende.edu.co>

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## General description

In response to the school closures and to support the continuity of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Colombian government decided to support students, teachers and parents using a multichannel approach. The Ministry of National Education provided a wide variety of free educational resources to the educational community through its platform Aprender Digital (Learning Digital). The resources are available in diverse formats, from articles and newspapers to 3D interactive games, e-books, digital libraries, video lessons, audiobooks, and videos and virtual learning objects, offering different options to continue with remote learning. The Ministry of Education also created the teacher platform “Contacto Maestro”, focused on supporting teachers and school leaders through the facilitation of webinars and asynchronous training.

However, the main objective was not only to make these resources available on line to learners, but to guarantee access to this educational content for children, adolescents and young people nationwide during the pandemic. Thus, through Decree 555 of 15 April 2020, a free mobile navigation tool was created for any mobile phone service user: [movil.colombiaaprende](https://movil.colombiaaprende.edu.co). The Ministry of Information Technology and Communications published Decree 555 determining that mobile operators should provide zero-rating conditions for the education community. “Zero-rating” initiatives are one of the most effective ways to improve cost-free access to online educational materials. Through this practice, Internet and mobile service providers do not charge for data use on specific services and websites.

The main objective of this zero-rating portal developed by the [Ministry of Information Technology and Communications](#) in co-operation with the [Ministry of National Education](#) and in co-ordination with the mobile phone operators in the country is to ensure that all inhabitants have access to educational content and guidelines, with a special focus on lower income households. The mobile operators expressed their agreement to make the necessary adjustments from their technological platforms in order to provide the service as decreed.

Colombia Aprende Móvil, therefore, facilitates connectivity access to teachers, parents and students (from early childhood education to secondary education) in rural and urban areas through free navigation (without consuming data) in the mobile version of the Colombia Aprende platform. The service is enabled for mobile phone users (voice and data) in both the prepaid modality and post-paid modality up to 71 214 Colombian pesos or approximately USD 20 (two tax value units, or *unidad de valor tributario*). This agreement between the ministries and the mobile operators ensures that data related to this specific educational website will not be charged.

## Main problems addressed

The main problem was ensuring that students could access the resources made available to them to continue learning during the closure of schools and educational centres.

According to [data about core indicators on access to and use of ICT by households and individuals](#) from the [International Telecommunication Union](#), in 2018, 44.9% of individuals used a computer in Colombia, 64.1% of individuals used the Internet and 85.2% of individuals used a mobile phone. To facilitate the population's access to educational content, a zero-rating portal was created, optimised for mobile devices. Colombia Aprende Móvil became a mirror portal of [Colombia Aprende](#), the main portal with all the educational resources aggregated by the Ministry of National Education.

The government held discussions to articulate and synchronise the work between all the stakeholders, with the objective of assuring access to quality educational content for the majority of the Colombian population in the wake of the COVID-19 emergency. Thanks to this effort, Colombians now have free access to this [portal](#). This free portal thus provides the opportunity to access educational material using a mobile phone.

This initiative ensures the citizens' right to access quality educational content during the crisis. This is especially relevant for the most vulnerable and for those living in remote areas, who will now be able to utilise the resources free of charge from their mobile phones to continue with the learning process from home (enabled by telecommunications services, which have been declared essential public services during the emergency).

It is important to note that Colombia Aprende Móvil is not an isolated government initiative to reach students with connectivity limitations. Both ministries worked closely as well to deliver more than 80 000 computers with preloaded educational content (that work with or without connectivity), distributed to teachers and students in rural areas. In parallel, the government has worked in a last-mile programme (Digital Homes for Education or Hogares Digitales para la Educación), focused on bringing low-cost Internet access to low-income households. Finally, those who want free access to 1 GB of navigation and 100 phone minutes to any operator can download the CoronApp application from the Play Store or App Store, register and wait for data validation. In less than 48 hours, they receive a text message on their cell phone with the confirmation of the data plan, which is valid for 30 days.

These strategies have been combined with the broadcasting of educational content on both radio and television. With the support of RTVC (the national Radio Television of Colombia) and several of the regional public channels, educational and pedagogical content is broadcast, such as the "[Profe en Tu Casa](#)" programme ("Teacher at Home", which strengthens academic knowledge and skills), "[3,2,1, Edu Acción](#)"

("3,2,1, Edu-Action", a programme for all ages with the aim of reinforcing educational skills in different subjects) or "[Mi señal](#)" ("My Signal", an alliance with local channels and community radio stations, with a complete programme to support the work at home of students and teachers, with a special emphasis on reaching rural areas). Additionally, through the National Radio of Colombia, the government has included pedagogical guides, seeking to strengthen basic and transversal skills through their content.

## Mobilising and developing resources

Most of the educational resources were already being collected, curated and made available to the educational community on the online portal ([Colombia Aprende](#)). However, the team from the Ministry of National Education had the challenge of quickly configuring the responsive mobile version of the site where the educational resources would be hosted and to adapt the relevant resources to the zero-rating mobile portal, Colombia Aprende Móvil. The Technology Office and the Innovation Office (both part of the Ministry of National Education) had been working on the development of a responsive version of the Aprender Digital portal. In one week, the necessary adaptations and developments for the mobile version had been implemented. The mobile operators managed to enable the zero-rating access the following week. The complete process took around ten days.

The publication of Decree 555 has also been an important and necessary step. This decree lays the foundations for the creation of the zero-rating portal, indicating that telecommunications become essential public services during the health emergency and remarking that it is imperative to guarantee the provision of those telecommunication services to all the inhabitants of the national territory during the emergency.

The available educational resources, in Spanish, range from preschool to secondary education (in addition to guidelines about the best use of digital educational resources and other materials for teachers). These resources are presented by level of education, and some of the topics are organised by grade.

It is important to note that Colombia does not have a unique national curriculum. Article 77 of the General Education Law ([Law 115 of 1994](#)) establishes that formal education institutions have the autonomy to organise the fundamental areas of knowledge defined for each level, within the guidelines established by the Ministry of National Education. In this context, the ministry has provided guidance to certified territorial entities (*entidades territoriales certificadas*) and to educational institutions (*instituciones educativas*) in order to integrate strategies that allow cross-sectional collaboration. The education secretariats have been working with the schools and the rest of the education institutions to develop plans to support remote learning at home during the pandemic, contextualising these plans to the characteristics of the territory, according to the needs identified within the framework of institutional autonomy, in close co-ordination and with support of the Ministry of National Education.

## Implementation challenges

- **Infrastructure and time:** One of the biggest challenges was to configure rapidly the responsive version of the site where the educational resources would be hosted. Additionally, it was crucial to assure the readiness of the technological infrastructure (testing, certification and production environments) to respond the potential demand.
- **Crowdsourcing and curation of content:** Another important challenge is related to content curation. The team working on the mobile site had to curate the content that the different education secretariats proposed and ensure that those resources could be adapted to the zero-rating site. It is necessary to continue reinforcing the technical team with the right knowledge and skills for the adequate selection of more content on demand, according to the needs identified in the territories.

- **Co-ordination between multiple stakeholders:** These challenges demand an intra- and inter-ministerial synchronisation exercise to generate content availability in a timely and rapid manner. Likewise, the availability of the content in the zero-rating mobile version requires articulated work with the country's education secretariats; the selection of educational resources has the purpose of enriching the planning management and design of strategies for academic work at home. This selection draws on material from the Ministry of National Education, but also from other resources received from public and private organisations that have authorised its use in the context of the pandemic. In this sense, the material constitutes an initial, purposeful and guiding list to learn at home, and complements the work of the Ministry of National Education with the secretariats of education to support the work carried out by teachers and school leaders as well as families at home.

## Monitoring success

Since it was launched, both the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Information Technology and Communications have been monitoring the mobile zero-rating site. The monitored metrics include the number of visits, the location of the visitors, the most visited pages and resources, and the types of devices used for accessing the site, among others.

From 21 April to 14 May, the site "[movil.colombiaaprende](https://movil.colombiaaprende.gov.co/)" received almost 283 000 visits from around 66 000 users. Most of these users are located in Colombia, but Colombia Aprende Móvil also received visits also from Argentina, Mexico, Peru, the United States and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (this tool is an online public site that can be accessed from anywhere in the world and with different devices, but not in zero-rating conditions).

As part of this joint inter-ministerial work, and based on the usage data of the site, both ministries are planning how they can refine and improve the strategy by including more content and defining other strategies that may complement the access to the content.

## Adaptability to new contexts

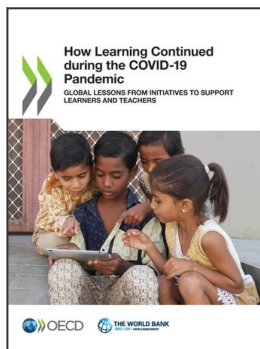
- The educational resources made available on the mobile zero-rating site can be expanded relatively easily, following the same process of content curation and adaptation from the main educational portal.
- Depending on the increase in demand, modifications to technology infrastructure capacities may be required. This is being monitored. Cloud technology can be used, if necessary.
- The large amount of resources in Spanish made accessible to the educational community can serve other Spanish-speaking countries in the region.
- In addition, this initiative could serve as a good example, at different levels, for other countries that are exploring the use of zero-rating initiatives as an alternative to facilitate free access to specific educational websites:
  - the lessons learnt from the process of co-ordination between multiple stakeholders: the Ministry of Information Technology and Communication, the Ministry of National Education, and mobile operators
  - the example of [Decree 555 of April 15, 2020](#), created to make the mobile site available to users through free navigation.

### Box 13.1. Key points to keep in mind for a successful adaptation

1. Close collaboration between the Ministry of Information Technology and Communication, the Ministry of National Education, and the education secretariats is critical. The ministries have worked closely with the telecommunication operators and with the EdTech ecosystem as a result of the articulation promoted by the High Council for Economic Affairs and Digital Transformation.
2. It is essential to curate relevant content to make educational content available for all educational levels, as well as guidelines for teachers and for parents. It is important to ensure that these resources are adaptable to the mobile version of the portal to speed up the process and make the content available quickly.
3. The zero-rating portal is not a stand-alone initiative. To reach the largest number of students across the country, including those with limited access to connectivity or with no connectivity at all, it is crucial to combine different tools and technologies that are available. Hence, the government created a portal to share educational resources on line, the parallel zero-rating portal to facilitate access to the resources using mobile phones at no cost, but also included other initiatives, such as the distribution of devices with preloaded materials or the broadcast of educational programmes on TV and radio.

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