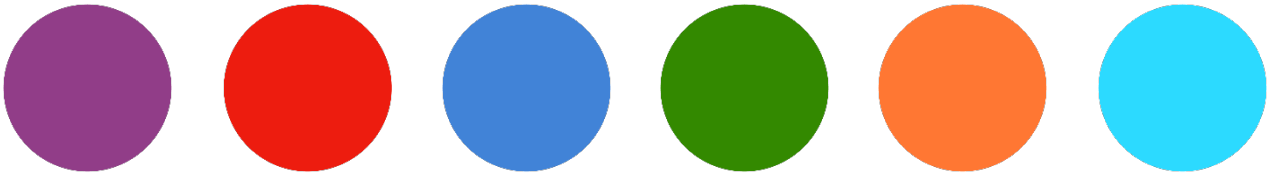
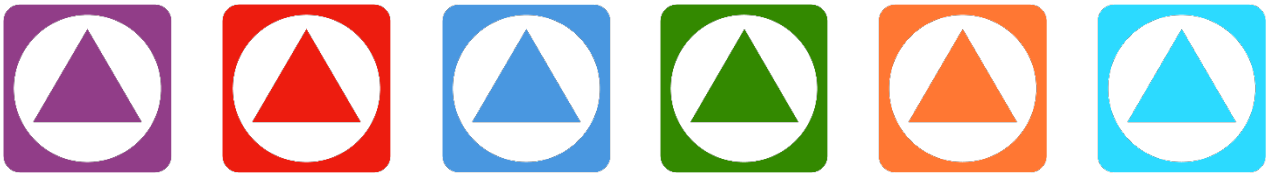
Level of Crisis



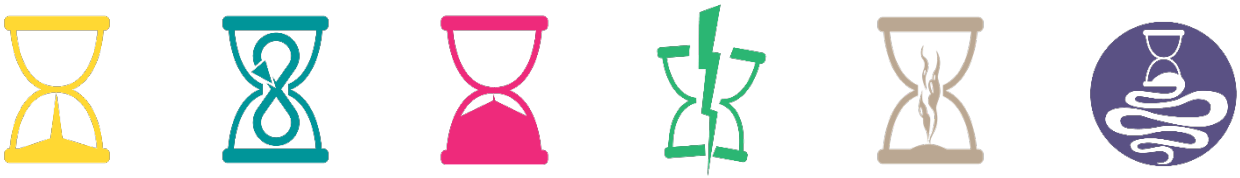
Global | National | Regional | Institutional | Departmental | Individual

Level of Responses



Global | National | Regional | Institutional | Departmental | Individual

Longevity of Crisis



Short Term | Ongoing | Long Term | Sudden | Slow-Burning | Long-Tail

Types of Crisis

Interconnected Multiple Crisis | Planetary Crisis | Legal Constraints | Political Investments | Natural Calamities | Health Crisis | Violence on Campus

Wars & Armed Conflict | Economic Crisis | Social Crisis | Technological Crisis | Cyber Security Risks | Infrastructural Crisis

Response Groups

NGOs | NPOs | Learning Communities | HEIs | Governments

International Organisations | Civil Society | Communities of Practice | Communities of Interest

Level of Crisis

Global Crisis: A large-scale, systemic disruption that significantly impairs the ability of universities and other higher education institutions to provide quality education, conduct research, and ensure equitable access to learning. Such crises often stem from global challenges—such as pandemics, economic instability, political conflict, or climate emergencies—leading to interruptions in teaching, declines in student engagement, and increased disparities in access to resources and opportunities.

National Crisis: A country-wide disruption or series of challenges that significantly impede the ability of HEIs to deliver quality education, conduct research, and ensure equitable access to learning opportunities. These crises often arise from domestic issues such as economic instability, political unrest, natural disasters, or public health emergencies, resulting in interrupted academic activities, increased inequalities, and adverse long-term effects on the higher education system.

Regional Crisis: A significant disruption or challenge that impacts the higher education institutions within a specific geographic area or region, impeding their ability to deliver effective teaching, ensure equitable access to learning, and maintain research activities. These crises often result from localized factors such as natural disasters, regional conflicts, public health outbreaks, or socio-political instability, creating disparities in educational access and outcomes across the affected region.

Institutional Crisis: A critical disruption or series of challenges that significantly affect the functioning of a single higher education institution, impeding its ability to deliver quality education, support student learning, and maintain faculty and staff operations. These crises often arise from internal or localized external factors such as financial instability, governance issues, campus security threats, or natural disasters, leading to a decline in institutional performance and outcomes.

Departmental Crisis: A situation in which a specific academic department within a higher education institution experiences significant disruptions or challenges that hinder its ability to effectively deliver teaching, support student learning, and maintain research activities. Such crises may arise from internal conflicts, resource constraints, staffing shortages, or external pressures, leading to adverse effects on academic quality, faculty performance, and student outcomes.

Individual Crisis: A personal situation or challenge faced by a student, faculty member, or staff member within a higher education context that significantly disrupts their ability to engage effectively in learning or teaching activities. These crises may stem from mental health issues, financial difficulties, personal or family emergencies, or other individual circumstances that impede academic performance, professional duties, or overall well-being.

Level of Responses

Global Response: A coordinated effort by international organizations, governments, higher education institutions, and stakeholders to mitigate the impact of a global crisis on education. This response includes strategies to maintain educational continuity, support faculty and students, ensure equitable access, and sustain higher education systems. It may involve remote learning, financial support, policy changes, and international collaboration to build resilience.

National Response: It refers to the coordinated actions, strategies, and policies implemented by a country's government, educational authorities, or relevant national bodies to address and mitigate the impact of crises—such as natural disasters, pandemics, economic downturns, or political instability—on higher education institutions and their stakeholders.

Regional Response: A collective action by local or regional authorities, educational institutions, and relevant stakeholders to address the challenges posed by a crisis in higher education. This involves modifying policies, offering support to affected institutions, ensuring educational continuity, and promoting collaboration within the region to sustain access to quality learning.

Institutional Response: The actions taken by individual higher education institutions to address the immediate and long-term impacts of a crisis on teaching and learning. This includes adapting academic policies, providing support to students and staff, implementing remote or flexible learning solutions, and ensuring the continued delivery of quality education while managing the crisis's effects on the institution's operations.

Departmental Response: The actions taken by academic departments within higher education institutions to address the specific challenges posed by a crisis on teaching and learning. This involves adjusting curricula, modifying assessment methods, supporting faculty and students, and implementing strategies to maintain the continuity and quality of education at the departmental level during the crisis.

Individual Response: The actions taken by faculty, staff, or students within higher education to adapt to and manage the challenges presented by a crisis. This includes modifying teaching methods, utilising alternative learning resources, seeking support services, and adjusting personal schedules or learning approaches to ensure continued engagement and success during the disruption.

Longevity/ Temporality of Crisis

Short Term Crisis: A temporary disruption or emergency event that impacts learning and teaching in higher education, typically lasting for a brief period. This can include events such as localized natural disasters, technical failures, or brief health emergencies, which disrupt normal educational activities but do not result in long-lasting effects. Responses to short-term crises often focus on immediate recovery and continuity of learning with minimal long-term adjustments.

Ongoing Crisis: A prolonged or recurring situation that continuously disrupts learning and teaching in higher education over an extended period. This can include prolonged economic instability, extended public health emergencies, or sustained political unrest. The effects of an ongoing crisis require sustained adaptation of policies, teaching methods, and institutional operations to maintain educational access, quality, and continuity throughout its duration.

Long Term Crisis: A persistent and enduring crisis that significantly disrupts learning and teaching in higher education over an extended period, often lasting months or years. This can include major economic downturns, systemic societal challenges, or environmental changes that permanently alter educational landscapes. Long-term crises demand comprehensive, strategic adjustments in academic policies, institutional priorities, and resource allocation to ensure the continued delivery of quality education and the long-term sustainability of higher education institutions.

Sudden Crisis: An unexpected and rapid onset event that immediately disrupts learning and teaching in higher education, requiring urgent responses. This can include events such as natural disasters, unexpected health outbreaks, or sudden political upheavals. Sudden crises often create significant, immediate challenges that demand swift adaptation in teaching methods, institutional operations, and student support to minimise disruption and restore educational continuity.

Slow-Burning Crisis: A gradual, long-term crisis that unfolds over time and steadily disrupts learning and teaching in higher education. This type of crisis may involve issues like chronic underfunding, gradual changes in demographic trends, or prolonged political or social instability. Slow-burning crises often develop unnoticed until their cumulative effects become significant, requiring ongoing adjustments in policies, resources, and strategies to address the sustained challenges they pose to educational continuity and quality.

Long-Tail Crisis: A crisis that has prolonged, cascading effects on learning and teaching in higher education, with impacts that persist long after the initial event. While the immediate disruption may be resolved quickly, the long-term consequences continue to affect institutions, students, and faculty over an extended period. These crises often require sustained efforts to address lingering challenges, such as ongoing mental health concerns, financial instability, or shifts in academic expectations, and may shape the educational landscape for years to come.

Types of Crisis

Interconnected / Multiple Crisis (Polycrisis): A complex situation in which multiple, often simultaneous crises interact and exacerbate each other, significantly affecting learning and teaching in higher education. These crises can be political, environmental, economic, and social in nature, and their interconnectedness creates compounded challenges for institutions, students, and faculty. In a polycrisis, the impacts are not isolated but interdependent, requiring multifaceted, coordinated responses to address the overlapping disruptions and ensure the continuity and quality of education.

Planetary Crisis: A global-scale crisis that affects learning and teaching in higher education, driven by widespread, environmental, social, or economic challenges that threaten the long-term sustainability of the planet. Examples include climate change, biodiversity loss, and global pandemics. A planetary crisis requires higher education institutions to adapt their curricula, research priorities, and institutional operations to address global issues, promote sustainability, and prepare students to navigate and contribute to solutions for these interconnected, long-term challenges.

Legislative Constraints: Legal or regulatory restrictions imposed by government policies or laws that limit or shape the way learning and teaching are conducted in higher education. These constraints can include mandates on curriculum content, funding limitations, accreditation requirements, or restrictions on academic freedom. Legislative constraints may also impose limits on internationalization efforts, such as barriers to student or faculty mobility, restrictions on cross-border collaborations, or limitations on foreign partnerships. These constraints can affect the flexibility of institutions to adapt to emerging challenges, influence pedagogical approaches, and restrict opportunities for global engagement and educational innovation.

Political Interventions: Actions or policies initiated by government bodies or political entities that influence or directly alter the operations of higher education institutions, affecting learning and teaching. These interventions can include changes in funding, curriculum mandates, restrictions on academic freedom, or the introduction of politically driven educational reforms. Political interventions may also impact the autonomy of institutions, limit opportunities for academic research, or shape the ideological framework within which education is delivered, thereby influencing the overall quality, accessibility, and inclusivity of higher education.

Natural Calamities: Disastrous events caused by natural forces, such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, wildfires, or tsunamis, that disrupt learning and teaching in higher education. These events can cause physical damage to campuses, displace students and staff, and disrupt infrastructure, leading to interruptions in academic schedules, access to resources, and the delivery of education. Natural calamities may require institutions to implement emergency response plans, shift to remote learning, or provide support for affected individuals to restore normal educational activities.

Health Crisis: A public health emergency, such as a pandemic, widespread disease outbreak, or mental health crisis, that disrupts learning and teaching in higher education. Health crises can lead to campus closures, shifts to online or hybrid learning models, changes in academic schedules, and significant impacts on the well-being of students, faculty, and staff. These crises often require institutions to implement health protocols, adapt teaching methods, and provide additional support services to maintain educational continuity and ensure the safety of the academic community.

Wars & Armed Conflict: Violent, often prolonged, situations of military engagement that disrupt learning and teaching in higher education. These conflicts can cause the destruction of educational infrastructure, displacement of students and faculty, and interruption of academic schedules. Wars and armed conflicts create unstable environments, making it difficult to ensure the safety and well-being of the academic community, and may lead to shifts in curriculum, restricted access to resources, and challenges in maintaining educational continuity. Institutions may also face challenges in providing support to those affected and adapting to the new socio-political realities caused by the conflict.

Financial Crisis: An economic downturn or fiscal emergency that severely impacts the financial stability of higher education institutions, affecting their ability to fund operations, programs, and student support services. A financial crisis can lead to budget cuts, staff layoffs, increased tuition fees, reduced research funding, and limitations on student financial aid. These challenges may disrupt the quality of teaching, hinder access to education, and force institutions to adopt cost-cutting measures that affect the delivery of academic programs and support services.

Social Crisis: A significant societal upheaval or disruption, such as widespread inequality, civil unrest, or systemic discrimination, that affects learning and teaching in higher education. A social crisis can lead to heightened tensions on campuses, challenges in maintaining a safe and inclusive environment, and disruptions to academic activities. It may prompt institutions to address issues related to social justice, mental health, and community well-being while adapting curricula and support services to respond to the evolving social climate. These crises can affect student engagement, faculty-student interactions, and the overall educational experience.

Technological Crisis: A disruption caused by failures or malfunctions in critical technological systems or infrastructure that impairs the delivery of learning and teaching in higher education. This can include widespread outages of online learning platforms, cybersecurity breaches, data loss, or inadequate access to essential digital tools and resources. A technological crisis can hinder academic communication, disrupt remote or hybrid learning environments, and delay academic schedules, requiring institutions to quickly implement technical solutions, restore services, and ensure continuity in education.

Cybersecurity Risks: Threats to the integrity, confidentiality, and availability of digital systems and data within higher education institutions, which can disrupt learning and teaching. These risks include cyberattacks such as hacking, phishing, ransomware, or data breaches targeting student and faculty information, learning management systems, or research databases. Cybersecurity vulnerabilities in higher education can also lead to the leakage of sensitive data into government or corporate systems, potentially creating national security risks. These incidents can result in the loss of critical information, disruption of academic activities, and damage to institutional and national security, requiring urgent measures to secure systems, protect personal data, and ensure the continuity of education.

Infrastructural Crisis: A significant breakdown or failure of essential physical or technological infrastructure that disrupts learning and teaching in higher education. This can include the collapse of campus buildings, failure of utilities such as electricity or water, or the breakdown of critical IT systems, such as internet connectivity and learning management platforms. An infrastructural crisis can impede access to classrooms, labs, or online learning resources, hinder academic operations, and create barriers to effective teaching and learning. Institutions must quickly address these challenges to restore normal operations and minimize disruption to educational activities.

Violence on Campus: Acts of physical, verbal, or psychological aggression that occur within higher education institutions, disrupting the safety and well-being of students, faculty, and staff. This can include incidents such as assaults, bullying, harassment, hate crimes, or armed conflicts, which create an unsafe environment and hinder the ability to teach and learn effectively. Violence on campus can lead to trauma, fear, and tension, affecting student engagement, faculty performance, and the overall academic atmosphere. Institutions must implement preventive measures, support services, and crisis management plans to address and mitigate the impact of violence on the learning environment.

Response Groups

Governments: The role of national, regional, or local government bodies in addressing and mitigating the impact of a crisis on learning and teaching in higher education. Governments may provide policy guidance, financial support, and resources to ensure educational continuity, protect students and staff, and stabilize institutions during a crisis. They can also enact laws, regulations, and public health measures, as well as coordinate efforts with other sectors to facilitate a coordinated response. Government action may include funding for infrastructure repair, transitioning to remote learning, offering emergency relief, and ensuring equitable access to education during times of crisis.

HEIs: The role of universities, colleges, and other academic organizations in addressing and mitigating the effects of a crisis on teaching and learning. These institutions are responsible for adapting curricula, modifying teaching methods (e.g., transitioning to online or hybrid formats), providing support services to students and staff, and ensuring the continuation of academic programs during crises. Higher education institutions also play a key role in implementing emergency plans, ensuring the safety and well-being of their community, and collaborating with governments and other stakeholders to minimize the impact of the crisis on education.

NGOs: Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a vital role in addressing crises that affect learning and teaching in higher education by providing humanitarian aid, advocacy, and support services. They may offer financial assistance, educational resources, mental health support, and capacity-building initiatives to help institutions and students recover and adapt during and after a crisis. NGOs often collaborate with governments, universities, and local communities to ensure educational continuity, promote access to education for vulnerable populations, and assist in the rebuilding of infrastructure and resources necessary for effective teaching and learning.

NPOs: Non-profit organizations (NPOs) contribute to addressing crises that affect learning and teaching in higher education by providing support services, resources, and advocacy. NPOs may offer financial aid, scholarships, educational materials, and specialised programs to help institutions and students navigate the disruptions caused by a crisis. They often focus on enhancing access to education, supporting marginalised groups, and helping institutions implement innovative solutions such as remote learning. By working in collaboration with governments, NGOs, and educational institutions, NPOs help to stabilise and strengthen the education system during times of crisis.

International Organizations: Global entities, such as the United Nations, World Bank, UNESCO, or other multinational bodies, that provide support and coordination during crises impacting learning and teaching in higher education. These organizations offer financial assistance, technical expertise, policy guidance, and advocacy to help countries and institutions navigate disruptions. International organizations facilitate cross-border collaboration, share best practices, and assist in the development of strategies for maintaining educational continuity, promoting access to education, and rebuilding educational infrastructure in the aftermath of a crisis.

Civil Society: The collective actions of non-governmental, community-based organizations, grassroots movements, advocacy groups, and individuals that support the continuity of learning and teaching in higher education during a crisis. Civil society plays a crucial role in mobilizing resources, raising awareness, providing direct support services, and advocating for policies that prioritize education during and after a crisis. By engaging with local communities, educational institutions, and governments, civil society helps ensure equitable access to education, addresses the needs of marginalized populations, and contributes to the rebuilding of educational systems impacted by crises.

Learning Communities: Groups of students, faculty, and staff within higher education institutions that collaborate and support each other in response to a crisis affecting learning and teaching. These communities leverage shared resources, knowledge, and social connections to adapt to disruptions, maintain engagement, and ensure educational continuity. Learning communities may facilitate peer-to-peer support, collective problem-solving, and the development of innovative teaching and learning practices, such as virtual study groups or collaborative projects, to overcome the challenges posed by the crisis. Their collective resilience and solidarity play a key role in maintaining academic progress during difficult times.

Communities of Practice: Groups of individuals within higher education, typically faculty, staff, and educational practitioners, who share common interests, goals, or expertise and collaborate to address challenges posed by a crisis affecting learning and teaching. These communities foster knowledge exchange, collective problem-solving, and the sharing of best practices, allowing members to adapt quickly to disruptions in educational delivery. By leveraging their collective expertise, communities of practice can innovate teaching strategies, support colleagues, and contribute to the development of solutions that maintain the quality and continuity of education during a crisis.

Communities of Interest: Groups of individuals within higher education who share a common concern, issue, or focus related to the crisis impacting learning and teaching but may not necessarily have professional or functional ties. These communities come together to exchange information, advocate for solutions, and collaborate on specific aspects of the crisis, such as student well-being, digital access, or academic continuity. By pooling resources and knowledge, communities of interest can address the unique challenges posed by the crisis, promote awareness, and support collective action to ensure that learning and teaching are not severely disrupted.

A Small Note on How to Use and Interpret Icons for Survey

The circles around each icon represent individual responses from senior leaders of participating TPG member HEIs, with each circle indicating one person selecting that option.

1 respondent

2 respondents

3 respondents

4 respondents

5 respondents