

An international review of plans and actions for school reopening

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Continuity
of learning
during the
period of
school
closure

The status
of school
reopening
plans

Plans for
learning
recovery
and student
support

The state
of support
for learning
recovery in
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Pointers
for
policymakers

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Introduction and key findings

Scope of the study

This report is based on a rapid survey of recently published materials, guidance documents and media commentary. It summarises what we know and understand about the impacts of the prolonged school closures that followed the spread of Covid-19 and the context of school reopening and plans for learning recovery.

In March 2020, schools around the world began closing their doors and governments, jurisdictions, educators and a range of connected stakeholders moved rapidly to support educational continuity through remote models of provision. Education Development Trust has been following these developments from the beginning, mapping the response, the challenges that have arisen and the concerns expressed by many educators across the globe. The educational responses, challenges and solutions have continued to change, adapt, and proliferate. The picture around the world today is complex and increasingly chaotic as systems, still grappling with the virus, begin to reopen.

From April to June 2020, Education Development Trust wrote eight reports in partnership with the EdTech Hub. These reports, among others, marked the start of our tracking of the impact of Covid-19 on education. Those reports focused on a set of questions set by policymakers and covered topics including:

- Good practice in pedagogy for remote learning¹
- Policy to support the provision of continuity of learning²
- What we could learn from prior responses to education provision in emergencies and conflict-affected settings³
- What the evidence tells us about how to support disadvantaged students and students with disabilities and, more generally, about ensuring that continuity plans are inclusive⁴
- How to support girls' education⁵
- What we could learn from systems which have made provision for remote education for some time (not related to a crisis)⁶
- A specific focus on China – the first system to lockdown schools⁷
- An assessment of plans for reopening schools.⁸

Written a few months into the period of near universal global school closures, the last of the reports listed above identified key risks at the forefront of debate and discussion on school closure and reopening.⁹ These risks included:

- those posed to the mental and physical health of students
- the risk of extensive school dropouts and increases in child labour and early marriage
- significant learning loss and a deepening of the achievement gap for disadvantaged students
- teacher attrition
- a potential decrease in education funding, which would further exacerbate the existing learning crisis.

¹ McAleavy and Gorgen (2020) ² Jones et al. (2020) ³ Hallgarten, Gorgen and Sims (2020) ⁴ McAleavy et al. (2020) ⁵ Naylor and Gorgen (2020) ⁶ Ndaruhutse, Gibbs and Fitzpatrick (2020) ⁷ Hallgarten and Fitzpatrick (2020) ⁸ Gorgen and McAleavy (2020) ⁹ Ibid.

The first chapter of this report updates what we know about student and teacher wellbeing, the time spent on learning for pupils during the period of school closure and the experience of lockdown for teachers.

In the second chapter, we consider the status of school reopening planning around the world, alongside the measures being taken to ensure that students and teachers can return to school safely. We also look at emerging plans to tackle learning loss and to structure and support recovery.

Finally, the report assesses the conditions for long-term educational recovery with a focus on funding and financial support for governments in low-income contexts, where fragile and unequal learning environments had already persisted prior to Covid-19 school closures.

Throughout the report, the key findings are illustrated with country examples of both challenges and promising solutions.

Key findings

- **Student (and teacher) wellbeing continues to be a concern for the international education community.** This focus is welcome. Policymakers should continue to prioritise issues of wellbeing and mental health in their reopening and recovery planning and ensure this covers both students and teachers.
- **There are widespread concerns about insufficient time spent on learning.** Where remote learning persists as a result of continued school closure or partial school reopening, policymakers must give urgent attention to the barriers that prevent learning and find ways to work around these. Particular attention must be given to the most marginalised and disadvantaged students who will be most deeply affected.
- **In plans for reopening, consideration should be given to mobilising communities, families and caregivers in supporting schools, teachers and learning.** There is compelling evidence that the right forms of partnership, with local stakeholders, if effectively structured and supported, hold promise – not just in the immediate phase of learning recovery, but as part of improved education provision for the long term.
- **Teachers who have faced great adversity and insecurity will require coordinated and coherent support to return to work effectively.** Among policymakers' prime concerns in planning reopening should be ensuring that teachers are able to return to work safely, and are provided with professional development to support them to respond to learners needs effectively. Policymakers will also need to address issues of teacher shortages where this is a problem.
- **The state of school reopening across the globe is chaotic, varied and deeply political.** The preconditions for opening schools are still driven by having the virus under control but issues around economic activity and concern for pupil wellbeing have driven some systems to open when the prevalence of the virus remains high. The situation is fluid and highly volatile in many places. With increasing concern for learning loss and wellbeing, governments are under pressure to act. Policymakers should continue to consult stakeholders and make good use of media to communicate plans. They should consider blended, flexible opening approaches that allow room for educational quality improvement and they should continue to develop remote education provision in readiness for both future closures (if needed) and to maximise the potential for quality improvements.
- **The evidence suggests that governments in many countries are preoccupied with getting health and hygiene measures in place for school reopening and are placing much less focus on the conditions for learning.** The effective reopening of school systems depends on the existence of a clear plan for assessment for this academic year as the basis for catch-up action. Targeted interventions for vulnerable children need to be a priority. Plans are required to mitigate learning loss, including accelerated learning and/or remedial approaches.
- **Good data and system intelligence will be required if governments are to act responsively and strategically.** As systems reopen, levels of enrolment and drop out – particularly among vulnerable groups, including girls – must be carefully and accurately monitored. This must be followed by careful tracking of learning for these groups.
- **The extent of the financing gap in education post-Covid-19 is as yet unknown, but there is a clear need to protect education budgets worldwide.** The economic crisis resulting from Covid-19 will create a need for governments and donors to prioritise expenditure on education. In the short term, donors are providing funding to support countries to plan and implement their responses to the pandemic.

The continuity of learning during the period of school closure

This chapter updates what we know about student and teacher wellbeing, the time spent on learning for pupils during the period of school closure, and the experience of lockdown for teachers.

Student and teacher wellbeing

Student and teacher wellbeing continues to be a concern worldwide. There is insufficient evidence at present to fully understand the extent of the issues associated with wellbeing during school closure and reopening, the impact they have on learning, and the longer-term impacts on learning recovery that should be anticipated.

Student wellbeing has been noted as a key concern in many countries, although the available hard data is not sufficient to assess the extent to which wellbeing has dropped as a result of school closures.

In many systems, there have been attempts to act to protect students' wellbeing during the period of school closure. Recent findings from Young Lives phone surveys reported 72% of teachers surveyed in Ethiopia provided wellbeing support while schools were closed, with 84% of teachers in India reporting providing such support^{10,11}

In Thailand, a UNICEF survey found that 70% of young people felt frustrated, anxious and stressed as a result of lockdown. Similarly, a Human Rights Watch report quoted many young people were feeling more anxious because of school closures. Many students shared feelings of stress, anxiety, isolation, and depression, which they linked to the lack of contact with their school community. One 17-year-old student in Kenya noted: 'It's stressful when I have to study all alone'. Another 15-year-old from Kenya commented: 'It makes me sad. I know my school has a counsellor, but we were never given contacts after we closed and before this, I had never gone to him'.¹²

There is also a growing concern for teacher wellbeing and a recognition that teachers are likewise subject to increased stresses as a result of school closures. In a survey in Vietnam, for example, 62% of teachers stated that the shift to online learning has increased their workload.¹³ Significantly, more than a quarter of teachers reported that they are stressed as a result of the changed ways of working. Data from the UK also indicates a decline in teacher wellbeing due to Covid-19. According to a survey conducted by YouGov on behalf of Education Support, 52% of teachers in the UK felt their mental health and wellbeing had declined during the Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁴ A total of 58% of teachers stated that the most challenging aspect of Covid-19 was working from home whilst ensuring pupils/students completed their work.¹⁵

Bright spot 1: BRAC's approach to coping strategies

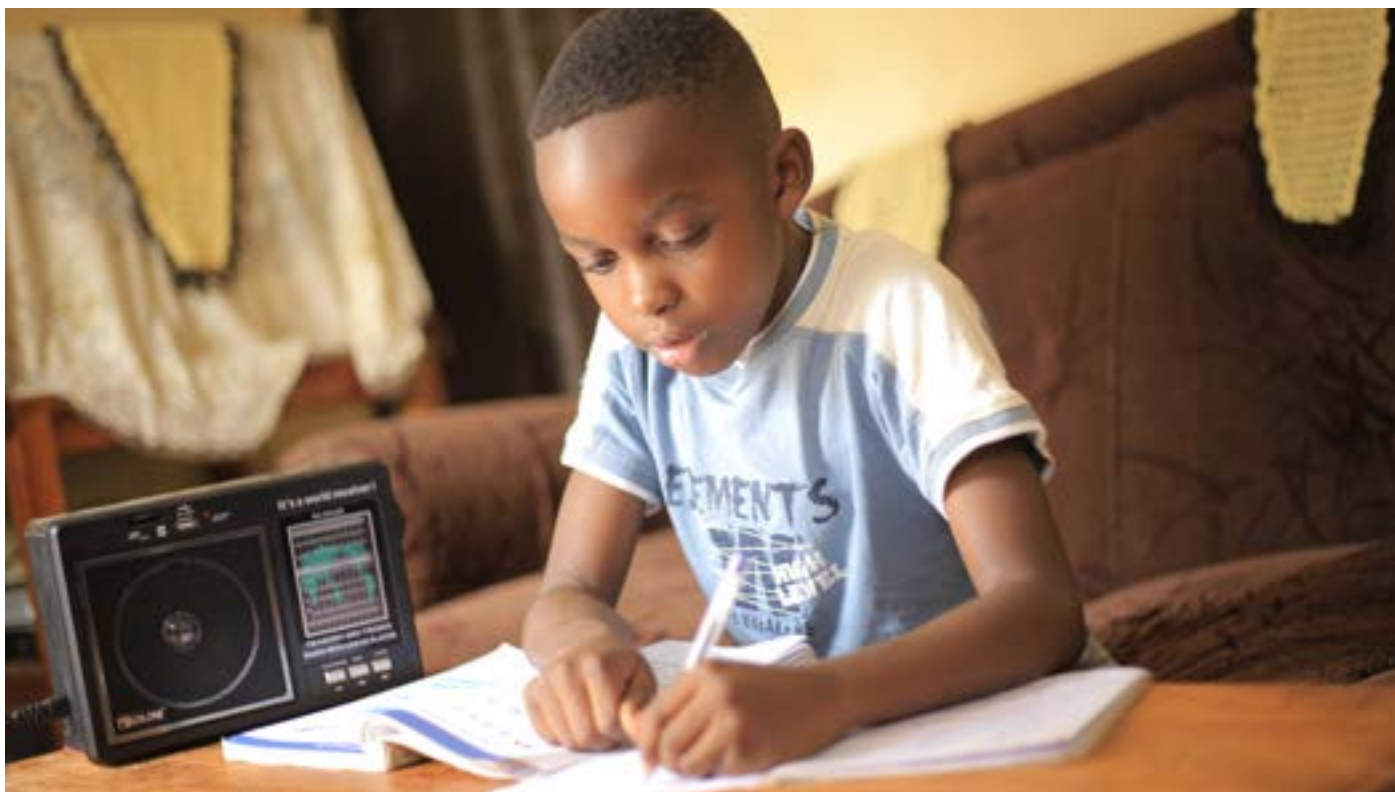
BRAC Education programme is working closely with the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education and the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education in Bangladesh to support broadcasting of primary and secondary school classes on TV. Teachers in BRAC community schools have been conducting classes in group calls of three-to-four children with their parents twice per week since March. All discussions start with students talking about how they and their family are coping. Teachers use psychosocial counselling activities designed to help children cope with anxiety¹⁶.

Time spent learning

There is a growing recognition of the importance of understanding variations in the amount of time that students spent learning during the period of school closure. These variations appear to be influenced by the way learning materials are supplied and access to technology (where this was a part of the mode of delivery). In many systems, factors associated with disadvantage also influence time spent learning.

¹⁰ Outhred et al. (2020a; 2) ¹¹ Outhred et al. (2020b; 2) ¹² Human Rights Watch (2020) ¹³ Hoang et al. (2020) ¹⁴ Education Support (2020: 5) ¹⁵ Education Support (2020: 6)

¹⁶ Chowdhury et al (2020)



A key question posed by researchers and policymakers has centred on time spent on learning activities since school closures. Concerns have been raised by NGOs, governments and other multinational organisations that children are at risk of dramatically falling behind if they are not engaged in learning activities during closures, with the most disadvantaged households potentially the worst hit. This concern has not been limited to low-income contexts, but has also been noted in countries such as the UK. At the peak of school closures, research by NFER found that only six in ten students in England were in contact with their teachers during school closures, with the most disadvantaged students the least likely to be engaged in schoolwork.¹⁷ Another study by UCL estimated that one in five children (over two million students) in the UK had either done no schoolwork or managed less than one hour of work per day.¹⁸ In a recent Young Lives survey in Ethiopia, researchers found that parental education levels played a role in influencing the likelihood of young people learning remotely.¹⁹ In addition, there were differences between urban and rural settings. In urban areas, 38% of children were engaged with remote learning, while this was only the case for 12% of rural children.

There is a picture emerging of how school closures have impacted learners, although major gaps in understanding persist. Several large-scale surveys are currently seeking to address these gaps. For example, ASER in India are currently conducting the first wave

of their 2020 survey, which has been adapted for the Covid-19 context.²⁰ The RISE programme country teams are also currently undertaking, or have recently undertaken, a series of surveys intended to understand the impact of school closures on a variety of stakeholders including headteachers, teachers and children.

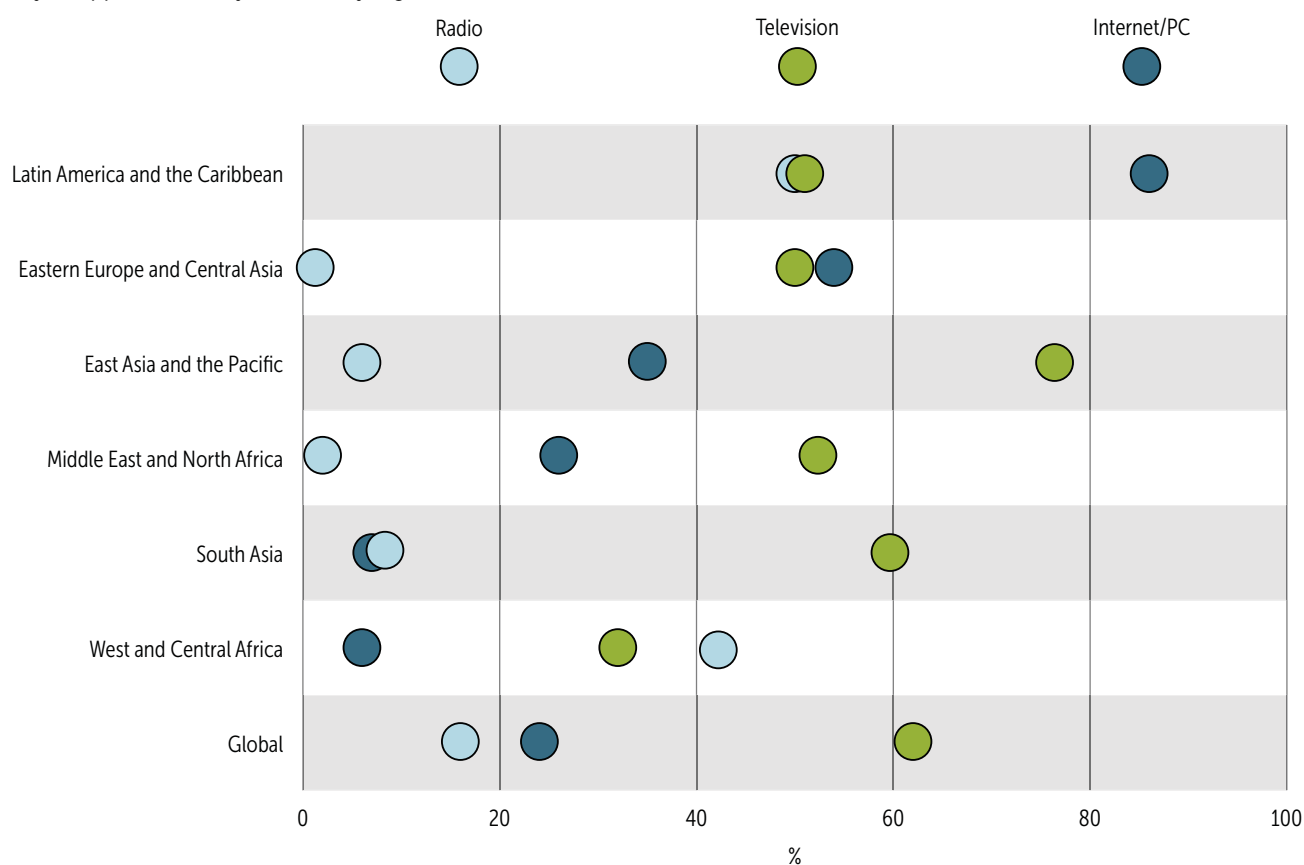
Access to technology for learning continues to pose challenges to remote learner engagement. Even where learners have access to the appropriate technology, they may still not be engaged with learning.

Education technology has received substantial focus over the past six months. Research shows that access to technology for remote provision varies within and between countries. In Bangladesh, the World Bank reported that only 39% of students were able to access the Sangsad educational television channel.²¹ The World Bank's LSMS survey in Ethiopia found discrepancies in access between rural and urban households, with 17.9% urban households reporting learners using mobile learning apps, compared to 4.6% of rural households.²² A study in Senegal found that only 10% of students were using radio or television for learning purposes whilst schools were closed.²³

The figure below, based on UNICEF data, demonstrates differences in the reach of different technologies for learning purposes across regions globally.²⁴

¹⁷ Lucas et al (2020; 3) ¹⁸ Green (2020; 2) ¹⁹ Outhred et al (2020a) ²⁰ ASER (2020) ²¹ Biswas et al (2020) ²² World Bank (2020a) ²³ Nestour et al (2020) ²⁴ UNICEF factsheet (2020)

FIGURE 1: Share of students potentially reached by different types of remote learning policies
Pre-primary to upper secondary students by region²⁴



Source: Unicef

Even when children and young people have access to technology or learning resources, this does not always translate into students interacting with those resources. A study in Senegal found that fewer than 1% of learners accessed online content during school closures, despite more students having access.²⁶ Similar results were found in Bangladesh, where only 1.5% of those students with internet access had used online learning materials in the week before the study.²⁷ In Ecuador, a World Bank survey found that 74% of students have internet access at home and that 59% of students have a computer or a tablet. However, only 8% of students in grades 10, 11 and 12 used the Ministry of Education's learning platform in the week prior to the survey.²⁸

As remote education provision persists, either in full or as part of flexible plans to support school reopening, a 'no-tech safety net' is necessary as an integral part of remote learning provision.

A recent Education Development Trust report highlighted the importance of a 'no-tech safety net'. While technology has great

potential to assist home learning, there is a need for realism about the access gap and the possibility that technology solutions will exclude disadvantaged students.

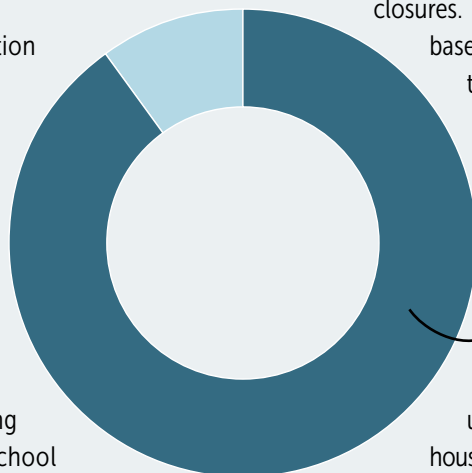
*'Many households lack even the most basic technology. If home learning relies heavily on technology, we automatically exclude the most underprivileged students from learning. We need to make imaginative use of technology, but we also need a 'no-tech safety net' with accessible hard-copy learning resources available to all students who cannot access digital materials. We call for a 'low threshold/high ceiling' approach that recognises the exciting potential of technology where it exists (the high ceiling), but assumes the worst levels of access (the low threshold) when planning to best ensure universal engagement.'*²⁹

Recent evidence suggests that careful consideration of the time expectations – how long and when students are expected to study remotely each day – can support or hinder students' participation.

²⁵ UNICEF (2020a) ²⁶ Nestour et al (2020) ²⁷ Biswas et al (2020) ²⁸ Asanov et al, (2020) ²⁹ McAleavy (2020)

Bright Spot 2: Community Health Volunteers supporting learning continuity for disadvantaged girls in Kenya

During school closures in Kenya, Education Development Trust worked with an extended learning team of community health volunteers (CHVs), parents, teachers, and instructional coaches as part of distance learning support for marginalised girls. This work was carried out in the context of a UKAID-funded project, Wasichana Wetu Wafaulu (Let Our Girls Succeed), which supports improvements in learning outcomes and transition to secondary school for 70,000 disadvantaged girls.



Less than half of households surveyed had access to television or radio for girls to engage in learning activities during school closures. The project team therefore developed paper-based learning resources that were delivered to households by CHVs. Girls completed exercises, which were then collected by CHVs, delivered to teachers and coaches for marking, then returned to students.

Survey data showed that **90%** of households who received paper-based resources were using them for learning. In contrast 44% of households had access to radio, but only 39% of girls reporting using the radio for learning.

Where lessons are broadcast via radio or TV, there is a need to be aware of the constraints on students. A recent World Bank survey in Ecuador found that during school closure, most children dedicated time to their studies in the morning. While some learners may study later in the day, students from low-income families often need to spend their afternoons completing household chores.³⁰ A study by BRAC in Uganda found that 71% of students were required to complete housework during the day.³¹ Similarly, BRAC also found that 59% of students in Sierra Leone were responsible for chores since schools closed. In Bangladesh, students are now spending twice as much time performing chores and paid labour than they were when schools were open.³² This suggests that the time radio, television and other lessons are scheduled are all important factors in ensuring that young people with household responsibilities can spend time on learning alongside their other duties.

Children from the poorest households are among those with the lowest levels of learning activity during school closures.

This equity gap is apparent across the globe in all contexts. In Ecuador, survey findings suggest that learners from the lowest wealth quartile are more than twice as likely to have completed no schoolwork than learners from the highest wealth quartile.³³ In Senegal, a survey reported that 20% of children from 'poor' households have pursued no learning activities, compared to 15% of children from 'non-poor' households.³⁴ An Uwezo survey in Kenya indicated that only 16% of learners in public primary schools have access to digital learning resources, compared to

48% in private primary schools.³⁵ In Uganda, the World Bank LSMS survey found that during school closures, the share of households with any child attending any remote learning activity stood at 59% and was distributed unequally. It ranged from 44% among the poorest quintile to 74% among the richest quintile. There is also a statistically significant gap between engagement levels in rural and urban areas.³⁶

There has been limited research relating to how far the crisis has particularly impacted on girls and the most marginalised, although the risks to these groups have been identified. A study by AMREF revealed a disturbing trend, with about 850 girls getting pregnant each day in Kenya.³⁷ Human Rights Watch reported that prior to Covid-19 school closures, 65% of internally displaced girls in Pakistan were not enrolled in school. During school closures, only 6% of displaced girls living in hard-to-reach rural areas have continued to engage with learning during school closures.³⁸ Widespread school closures may also increase risks of child marriage. Research by Human Rights Watch in Malawi, South Sudan, and Tanzania shows a strong connection between girls leaving or being out of school and being forced into marriage. Child marriage—and pregnancy and parenthood—are also factors keeping girls out of school, with some schools discouraging or banning married, pregnant and parenting girls from attending.³⁹ Plan International point to the impact of previous crises as an indication for how girls may have been impacted by Covid-19, noting that the most frequent cause of death for girls aged 15-19 globally is complications related to pregnancy.⁴⁰ Projections from the United Nations Population Fund back in April predicted

³⁰ Asanov et al, (2020) ³¹ BRAC (2020) ³² Asadullah (2020) ³³ Asanov et al, (2020) ³⁴ Le Nestour et al, (2020) ³⁵ Uwezo Kenya (2020) ³⁶ Atamanov, A. and Kilic, T., (2020).

³⁷ AMREF (2020) ³⁸ Human Rights Watch (2020b) ³⁹ Human Rights Watch (2020a) ⁴⁰ Plan International (2020)

that during lockdown there would be seven million unintended pregnancies, risking the lives of thousands of girls.⁴¹ Research conducted on the impact of the Ebola crisis between 2014 and 2016 found a 75% increase in maternal mortality.⁴²

The role of caregivers in supporting learning is one of the key factors that contribute towards students engaging with learning during school closures.

In Mongolia, a World Bank survey revealed that three-quarters of households with school-enrolled children pursued distance learning in the week prior to the study.⁴³ Significantly, 74% of these households reported that children required a caregiver to support educational activities. A greater number of children in Kenya have accessed educational resources from their parents than via the radio, WhatsApp or the national online learning repository.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, low levels of literacy – and digital literacy – among caregivers have limited their capacity to support children with technology-based learning. The same study in Kenya also reported that 20% of parents did not know that their children should continue to study whilst schools were closed. This figure rose to 80% in the remote county of Mandera. Parents highlighted the importance of raising awareness about distance learning. The Kenyan government has responded to these challenges with initiatives such as the Keep Kenya Learning campaign, which aims to work with families and identify suitable approaches to supporting education in the home.

In Ghana, a lack of supervision from adults in the household was cited as the most common reason why children were not spending more time on education.⁴⁵ Qualitative research in Ghana has found that parents and teachers do not always agree on their roles and teachers often feel frustrated in their attempts to communicate with parents. The IPA RECOVER survey in Ghana found that only 32% of all households had been contacted by their school in the period since schools had closed. Households with

higher levels of education were more likely to be contacted.

There is, however, some promising practice. In Botswana, Young Love sends caregivers a basic numeracy problem via text message to share with their children at the start of each week.⁴⁶ Afterwards, facilitators discuss the problem with both caregivers and students on speakerphone. After four weeks, the intervention had already resulted in statistically significant learning gains in numeracy.

Teachers

Throughout the Covid-19 crisis, teachers have faced unprecedented levels of uncertainty. There have been substantial variations in what they have been expected to do, the ways in which they have acted, and the support they have received in providing education continuity. Policy regarding the role of teachers has been hugely inconsistent around the world.

When schools closed, many teachers faced a great level of insecurity. Their ability to continue to support learning during closures has been strongly impacted by contextual factors. The impact of Covid-19 on teachers is becoming a more commonly voiced concern in the emerging literature but it is still not well understood. Key barriers preventing teachers from supporting learning effectively include:

- not being given clear instruction on how to support learners during school closures
- lack of access to technology
- inability to contact school leaders or colleagues during closures
- teachers migrating or relocating to other locations, away from the schools in which they teach
- teachers not being financially compensated for their time during school closures, particularly private school teachers and contract teachers.

Bright Spot 3: Rising Academies

Rising Academies was founded in 2014 in Sierra Leone as a low-cost private school chain, and now serves over 50,000 students across more than 160 schools in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ghana. In response to Covid-19, they adapted their curriculum content into a 20-week radio programme called 'Rising On Air', which includes standardised scripts focusing on literacy and numeracy for early childhood, primary and

secondary education and SMS content to support learners. Content can be edited and tailored to local needs and contexts and aligned to national standards. The programme has now reached over 10 million children across 25 countries in Africa and Asia.

The content targets parents, focusing on the role they play in supporting children as radio listeners and learners. Parents' feedback is then used to inform subsequent messaging.⁴⁷

⁴¹ UNFPA (2020) ⁴² The Lancet (2020) ⁴³ World Bank & National Statistics Office of Mongolia (2020). ⁴⁴ Uwezo Kenya, (2020) ⁴⁵ IPA, (2020) ⁴⁶ Angrist et al (2020)

⁴⁷ BBC (2020a)

Bright Spot 4: 'Seguimos Educando' platform provides resources for teachers and learners during school closures

In response to Covid-19, the Ministry of Education in Argentina developed the 'Seguimos Educando' (Continue to Educate) platform that is accessible to all teachers through its Educ.ar portal. On the platform, educational content is organised by subject area and grade and includes a variety of resources, such as "self-learning resources, suggestions for families and

teachers, films, interviews, educational and communication proposals through social networks and videoconferencing tools, agendas for online events, as well as proposals for free time of students." Telecommunication companies have made it possible for users to browse the website at no cost (zero-rated services).⁴⁸

In Kenya 'about 95% of the more than 300,000 private-school staff members have been sent on unpaid leave'.⁴⁹ Private school teachers have gone without pay since March and some have turned to alternate professions. One news article shows how some schools have been converted to chicken farms or the land has been used for vegetable growing instead. Ndoro stated that 1400 teachers have lost their jobs because of school closures, with the remainder on unpaid leave. In Togo, at the end of May 2020, one in six contract teachers had not received any financial state support during closures.⁵⁰

In Ethiopia, teachers in urban areas were more likely to be supporting students than rural teachers (57% urban, compared to 45% rural). Teachers who had received support and guidance from principals were more likely to support student learning.⁵¹ Two thirds of school principals indicated that they had received guidance on how their school could keep education going during the school closures, mainly from the local 'Woreda' education office. A slightly lower proportion of school principals indicated that they were supporting teachers during school closures.⁵² However, less than half of teachers reported having received guidance on how to support students' learning during school closures. The report findings also showed that school principals were more likely to have had contact with the parents of students than teachers, and that this was more likely to be face-to-face and include information about handwashing, physical distancing, staying at home and wearing facemasks.

A Human Rights Watch report identified multiple anecdotal stories from students on the lack of communication they had with teachers during school closures, and how this caused difficulties in completing work. One student in Zambia noted 'most topics are difficult to understand without the help of a teacher'. Another student interviewed in Morocco noted that: 'Sometimes we don't hear from a teacher for the whole day, then he'd show up at 6 saying he didn't have enough internet

credit'. They also interviewed teachers. One teacher in Bangui, Central African Republic, said that he had not been in touch with any of his students since schools closed on 27 March 2020.⁵³

In some contexts, support and training was provided to teachers to help them transition to remote teaching. In a Hunan Province city in China, courses were developed to train teachers in online teaching practices during school closures. A total of 17,000 teachers reportedly participated in the training, with feedback overall positive around its usefulness.⁵⁴ At national level in China, the Department of Teacher Education collaborated with key teacher training institutions to provide a resource pack to support online teaching strategies and technology applications.⁵⁵ The resource packs were developed in collaboration with national and regional universities and teacher training providers, museums and businesses.

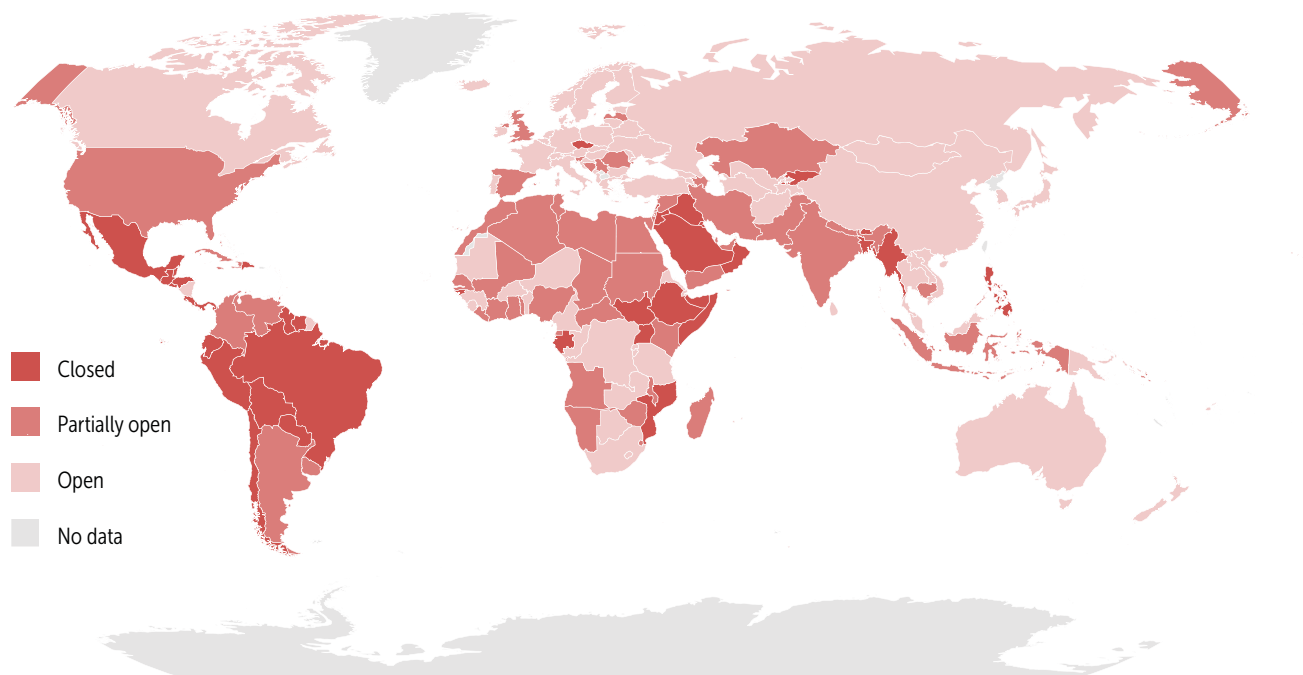
Bright Spot 5: StiR Uganda

StiR Education has been working with the Ministry of Education in Uganda to support teachers in meeting the needs of learners returning to school, leveraging public sector networks they were already working with before the crisis (at school and district level). StiR has delivered radio broadcast sessions for teachers across 15 different radio stations, covering 31 districts, on topics such as health and safety, checking for understanding, breaking down learning, teacher beliefs and intrinsic motivation. They are working with District Education Leaders and School Education Leaders, providing 1:1 coaching, facilitating group conversations and supporting them with professional development planning to ensure continuous, ongoing support for teaching and learning across the system.⁵⁶

⁴⁸ Education International (2020) ⁴⁹ BBC (2020a) ⁵⁰ Teacher Taskforce (2020) ⁵¹ Yorke et al (2020) ⁵² Yorke et al (2020) ⁵³ Human Rights Watch (2020) ⁵⁴ The Chinese Education Information Website. (2020) ⁵⁵ Zhang et al (2020) ⁵⁶ StiR (2020)

The status of school reopening plans

FIGURE 2: School closure status: mid-October snapshot



Sources: Insights for Education (2020), CGD (2020), government web pages and official government social media sites

This chapter considers school reopening planning around the world and the measures being taken to ensure that students and teachers can return to school safely. We discuss how far these plans seek to tackle learning loss and to structure and support recovery.

Back in June 2020, Gorgen and McAleavy noted that most governments supervising school reopening plans were focused on the immediate challenges of implementing hygiene protocols, rather than on preparations for teaching and learning.⁵⁷ The key findings of that report suggested that:

- the urgent need to focus on the health and hygiene challenge meant that plans for access and equity were being neglected
- policy and plans for reopening were rarely addressing quality of provision

- reopening schools in low-income contexts was going to require new solutions, not simply a modification of approaches being adopted in higher-income countries.⁵⁸

Policy towards school reopening is extremely varied and remains governed by the degree to which the spread of the virus is under control. However, increasing economic concerns and worries about the potential harm to students caused by long-term absences from school are leading some school systems to reopen even where the virus is not well controlled.

Throughout September and October 2020, governments in many countries took steps towards school reopening. The situation has proven to be confusing and plans can change at very short notice. Figure 2 illustrates the extent of global school closures and reopening as of mid-October. To highlight the extent of fluidity around reopening planning, in a two-week period between 12 and 23 October, whilst writing this report, 27 countries globally changed their school reopening status. Some countries

⁵⁷ Gorgen and McAleavy (2020) ⁵⁸ Ibid.

unexpectedly opened schools (e.g. Kenya began reopening schools in October, despite initial intentions to open in January 2020)⁵⁹, whilst others closed them in response to rising Covid-19 cases (e.g. Czech Republic⁶⁰).

The state of school reopening and the measures in place to keep students and staff safe vary.

Most European countries fully reopened schools at the start of the academic year 2020-2021 (i.e. in August/September 2020). In the UK, primary schools were encouraged to start bringing pupils back to school in small 'bubbles' from 1 June, with years 10 and 11 brought back from 15 June onwards.⁶¹ With the new school year in September, all students were welcomed back, maintaining the approach of 'bubbles', in which students interact with a limited number of other individuals. Germany also reopened schools in September, dividing students in 'cohorts' of students who are prohibited from mixing with individuals from other cohorts, including teachers.⁶² This model means that if there is an outbreak in one cohort, the entire school population does not need to go into quarantine. Students and teachers are required to wear face masks in corridors and when entering classrooms, but are permitted to remove them when seated in class. In Norway, the government reopened schools back in April, but opted for a traffic light system. A school with a green light can operate in normal hours, an amber signal means schools must take measures to reduce social contact and increase hygiene practices, and a red light indicates schools must reduce class sizes and alter school hours.⁶³

In Cambodia, a phased reopening across different provinces took place, taking into consideration the rate of local cases.⁶⁴ Schools initially only opened their doors to grades 9 to 12, though four provinces were granted permission to open their doors to all year groups. Measures include a maximum of 20 students per class, all seated 2m apart. Students are also required to have their temperature checked, wash their hands and to wear face masks before entering the classroom. In areas where there are large class sizes, students are divided into two shifts, with blended online and in-person learning taking place for each student each week.

Zimbabwe is another country in which there has been a phased approach to returning to school, but has been complicated by teacher unions.⁶⁵ The government planned for a gradual return to school with all students to return by early November. However, many teachers did not report to work as their union demanded the government should first pay them a Covid-19 allowance

and improve their salaries and working conditions. Raymond Majongwe, secretary-general of the Progressive Teachers Union, said: 'Teachers cannot afford the bus fare to report for duty. They cannot even afford to pay school fees for their children from the pathetic salaries that they get, yet they are expected to teach other people's children.'

Ghana is an example of a country with partial school reopening measures.⁶⁶ They have also put in place a maximum number of students permitted per class, though they differ depending on level of school. A total of 30 students are permitted per class in Junior High, compared to 25 students per class in Secondary. All teachers and students are required to wear face masks. Schools were also to be provided with buckets, soap, tissues, thermometers and sanitisers, though it is unclear whether all schools that opened were able to do so with these measures fully in place. All assemblies and sporting events have been banned.

In India, the national government issued minimum standards, although the decisions regarding reopening and safety measures are issued at state level. National level measures include:⁶⁷

- distance learning preferred/ encouraged
- students can opt for online instead of in-person classes
- states to adopt their own Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) health and safety measures
- schools can open if they follow state SOPs
- students must have written consent from parents to attend school.

In Delhi, India, schools remain closed and the government has adopted an approach of keeping in contact with parents via WhatsApp and SMS.⁶⁸ The Department of School Education & Literacy Ministry of Human Resource Development Government of India developed an in-depth set of guidelines to support digital remote learning during school closures.⁶⁹ The guidelines set out the expectations for teacher communication with parents and setting work in this period. Teachers are to send parents worksheets on a daily syllabus via WhatsApp for all students in kindergarten to grade 8. For grades 9 and 10, worksheets should be subject-specific. For classes 11 and 12, live online classes are conducted for up to two hours each day in twelve subjects. Teachers are also required to maintain up-to-date telephone numbers for all parents who do not have access to a smartphone, to arrange for parents to collect paper-based worksheets for the week ahead. School principals from government schools are required to report completion of weekly tasks for different classes.

⁵⁹ Vao (2020) ⁶⁰ Reuters (2020a) ⁶¹ DfE (2020) ⁶² Godin (2020) ⁶³ Ibid ⁶⁴ Kanika (2020) ⁶⁵ Mutsaka (2020) ⁶⁶ BBC (2020b) ⁶⁷ India Ministry of Education (2020) ⁶⁸ Pushkarna (2020) ⁶⁹ Department of School Education & Literacy Ministry of Human Resource Development Government of India (2020)

There have been a broad range of different measures put into place to keep students and teachers safe once schools are open.

There are often different measures within countries and even on

a school by school basis, though minimum school reopening standards have typically been set by national governments. To ensure the safety of students and staff the following in-school measures are being adopted to stem the spread of the virus where school systems are partially or fully reopening.

TABLE 1: Safety measures in operation where schools are reopening (planned and actual measures)

Temperature checks	Vietnam ⁷⁰ , Bermuda ⁷¹ , Botswana ⁷² , Armenia ⁷³ , China ⁷⁴ , Singapore ⁷⁵
Hand sanitising	Argentina ⁷⁶ , Bermuda, Barbados ⁷⁷ , Cuba ⁷⁸ , Guyana ⁷⁹ , Botswana, Cote d'Ivoire ⁸⁰ , Equatorial Guinea ⁸¹ , Austria ⁸² , Belgium ⁸³ , China, Japan ⁸⁴ , Papua New Guinea ⁸⁵ , Singapore
Regular cleaning	Botswana, Armenia, China, Cambodia ⁸⁶ , Cameroon ⁸⁷ , Indonesia ⁸⁸ , Madagascar ⁸⁹ , Tanzania ⁹⁰
Students and/or staff wearing masks	Botswana, Equatorial Guinea, Zambia ⁹¹ , Guyana, Vietnam, Belgium, Spain ⁹² , China, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Tajikistan ⁹³ , Germany ⁹⁴
Social distancing in classrooms	Equatorial Guinea, Zambia, Greece ⁹⁵ , Spain, Vietnam
Blended learning and/or shifts	Cambodia, Afghanistan ⁹⁶ , China, Madagascar, Papua New Guinea, Vietnam, Jordan ⁹⁷
Staggered return by grade level	Namibia ⁹⁸ , Kenya, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Indonesia
Regional measures based on local case numbers initially before full reopening	Cambodia, China, Uruguay ⁹⁹
Promote remote learning over school attendance	India ¹⁰⁰
Limit to class size or 'bubbles'/cohorts	Cambodia, Zambia, Estonia ¹⁰¹ , Singapore, UK, Canada ¹⁰² , Germany ¹⁰³ , Denmark ¹⁰⁴
Outdoor lessons	Armenia, Denmark
Opened schools for examinations/ students studying towards examinations	Tunisia ¹⁰⁵ , Sierra Leone ¹⁰⁶ , Malawi ¹⁰⁷ , Egypt ¹⁰⁸
Building more classrooms	Rwanda ¹⁰⁹
Condensed curricula	Mozambique, the Philippines
Shortening school calendar	Zambia

⁷⁰ MOET (2020) ⁷¹ Government of Bermuda (2020) ⁷² Ministry of Basic Education, Botswana (2020) ⁷³ Elliott (2020) ⁷⁴ Ministry of Education, China (2020) ⁷⁵ Ministry of Education, Singapore (2020) ⁷⁶ Argentina Ministry of Education (2020) ⁷⁷ Barbados Government Information Service (2020) ⁷⁸ President of Cuba Twitter (2020) ⁷⁹ Ministry of Education, Guyana (2020) ⁸⁰ Reuters (2020b) ⁸¹ Africa News (2020) ⁸² Frassl (2020) ⁸³ Moens (2020) ⁸⁴ MEXT (2020) ⁸⁵ Department of Education, Papua New Guinea (2020) ⁸⁶ Khmer Times (2020) ⁸⁷ Kindzeka (2020) ⁸⁸ Loasana (2020) ⁸⁹ UNICEF (2020b) ⁹⁰ Omondi (2020) ⁹¹ Xinhua (2020) ⁹² Hidalgo (2020) ⁹³ Asia Plus (2020) ⁹⁴ Godin (2020) ⁹⁵ Stoyanov (2020) ⁹⁶ Bali (2020) ⁹⁷ UNICEF (2020c) ⁹⁸ Ngutjinazo (2020) ⁹⁹ Infobae (2020) ¹⁰⁰ Ministry of Education, India (2020) ¹⁰¹ ERR (2020) ¹⁰² Bogart (2020) ¹⁰³ Time (2020) ¹⁰⁴ Vegas (2020) ¹⁰⁵ WFP (2020) ¹⁰⁶ Gberie (2020) ¹⁰⁷ Michael-Piri (2020) ¹⁰⁸ Reuters (2020c) ¹⁰⁹ Ntirenganya (2020)

Plans for learning recovery and student support

The development of 'system intelligence' remains weak

There is still a need to develop and implement strong data-driven approaches to support school reopening and recovery efforts.

To be effective, plans for reopening and recovery need to be implemented in a data-driven, adaptive manner. At the time of the last review of country-level responses, we could find only limited evidence of system-level emphasis, for example, in gathering disaggregated data on absenteeism or participation levels among students from different backgrounds. Without fine grained data about the engagement of students from different backgrounds geographical localities, it will be impossible for policymakers to measure the success of reopening policy, or to adapt implementation in response to emerging evidence.

We will revisit this topic in subsequent updates.

Thinking in new ways about the types of data that can support data-driven approaches to reopening and recovery will be important.

The notion of *system intelligence* is gaining ground. To understand and respond strategically at either local or national level, a fundamental requirement is 'intelligence' about which students are at school (and which are not), where they are with their learning, how they are responding to interventions to support learning recovery, what access they have to technology or no-tech provision, and what support they have from family, carers or community etc. Education systems will also benefit from data about the efficacy of measures intended to support

teachers and school leaders. There is an urgent need for the development of sophisticated, agile and cost-effective approaches that support the generation of system intelligence – providing answers to important questions that can direct policy and action.

Assessment and mitigation of learning loss during school re-opening

Kaffenberger estimated that the impact of school closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic could equate to more than a year of learning loss when considering the period of school closure and during the phase of reopening.¹¹⁰ Wagner and Warren estimated that between 7 and 9.7 million children will drop out of school due to indirect effects of the economic crisis resulting from the pandemic.¹¹¹ A recent UNICEF publication found children aged between 9 and 11 who were out of school at the time of being surveyed were "between 11 and 43 percentage points less likely to acquire foundational reading skills than children staying in school".¹¹² Vulnerable children are likely to be most affected.

Lessons from school closures in the past provide insights into effective remediation policies and interventions that have helped reverse learning loss, including targeted interventions for vulnerable groups (such as pregnant girls and young mothers), condensing the curriculum, extending the school year/hours of instruction, drop-out initiatives, etc.¹¹³

There is widespread concern and commentary about the challenges ahead. Global actors, such as UNESCO and UNICEF, have published guidelines and frameworks based on available evidence on what works. The online media space is overflowing with articles and think pieces advising practitioners and policymakers on what to do as they plan for and implement school reopening.

Within plans for school reopening, there appears to be consensus on the importance of formative assessment to determine strategies and interventions to help learners catch up. Gewertz¹¹⁴ provides clear guidance urging practitioners to focus on formative, informal, testing-by-teaching assessment for instruction and avoid the misuse of standardised testing (which is more effective in informing policy in the medium- and long-term).¹¹⁵

Experts are divided on the issue of where to re-start teaching and what to focus on first as schools reopen.

¹¹⁰ Kaffenberger (2020) ¹¹¹ Wagner and Warren (2020) ¹¹² Conto et al (2020; 5) ¹¹³ Hallgarten (2020) ¹¹⁴ Gewertz (2020) ¹¹⁵ Education Week article based on a review of 17 guidance documents and articles and interviews with over a dozen experts in the field.

Bright Spot 6: Build Back Equal – Guidelines for a gender responsive approach to girls returning to school

This set of guidelines was developed to support girls' return to school and to help ensure continued support for girls during closures. The guidelines recommend the following measures to support girls' learning once they have returned to school:

- “Establish more robust gender-responsive risk analysis, standard operating procedures and contingency plans for future shocks, drawing on feedback and lessons learned.
- Ensure robust gender-responsive data collection capacity and mechanisms through Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) and other measures to identify and monitor the enrolment and participation status of all learners, with associated protocols to ensure learning for all.
- Build long-term institutional capacity within Ministries of Education to support curriculum reform that promotes gender equality across all subjects and levels of education.
- Establish broader and sustained approaches to narrow the gender digital skills divide through role models and mentors, gender-responsive ICT-infused curricula, and efforts to increase girls' understanding of, and exposure to, technology-linked careers.
- Ensure that remedial programs and adapted curricula to address learning loss are delivered in safe and accessible environments. Engage with parents and communities to ensure girls' participation in these programs, and their transition to different levels of education, and to training / employment.
- Provide special accommodations, including flexible learning, particularly for pregnant girls and young mothers, and other measures to build knowledge and skills, and ensure all girls' right to education.
- Maintain and continue to scale up gender-responsive and inclusive distance learning measures to reach the most marginalised girls and support continuity of learning.
- Increase the representation of women in school management, and leadership positions, recognizing their key role in girls' continuity of learning and return to school.
- Establish / strengthen linkages between schools and communities, through parent teacher organizations, school-community partnerships, cooperation with community and youth centres, and other means to ensure sustained support to equal rights and opportunities for girls and boys through education.”¹¹⁵

Examples include:

- Focus on remediation interventions and/or 're-teaching' content from the previous year.
- Focus on foundational skills.
- Tailor instruction to the level of each child.
- Focus on grade-level curriculum for all students (with differentiated in- and out- of class support).

The most comprehensive global account of country responses to school closures and plans for reopening (including addressing learning loss) is provided by UNICEF, through the education tracker data. A briefing from the Office of Research – Innocenti¹¹⁷, summarises data from two surveys distributed to national Ministries of Education in April/May (134 countries) and May/June (84 countries) to describe the strategies that countries are using

or planning to use to mitigate the impact of lost learning during school closures.

There is very little other evidence available online that condenses and combines information across countries to give a global picture. This section draws on the UNICEF data and a few illustrative countries where information is available in the public domain.

Where available, school reopening guidelines have largely focused on health and safety measures with only cursory reference to strategies for assessing and addressing the anticipated learning loss.¹¹⁸

The UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank¹¹⁹ framework for reopening schools calls for schools to 'equip teachers to deal with both

¹¹⁶ (UNESCO, UNICEF, Plan International, UNGEI and Malala Fund) ¹¹⁷ Conto et al (2020) ¹¹⁸ UNICEF (2020d) ¹¹⁹ UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank (2020)

learning recovery and students' mental health and psychosocial (MHPSS) needs' as part of the reopening process, but does not go into details on how to do so. At the time of writing, these guidelines had not been updated.

An emphasis on safety rather than educational issues has appeared in a variety of countries and contexts.

The Presidential Task Force on Covid-19 in Nigeria released Public Health Guidance for Safe School Re-opening in early October, providing clear guidance on health and safety requirements, but making no provision for addressing issues of learning loss.¹²⁰

The Canadian school reopening plan focuses on health and safety, but also provides high-level guidance on priority areas of focus in relation to mental health and wellbeing, provision for vulnerable groups, and additional and/or accelerated learning interventions.¹²¹ The Canadian press and parent groups have been highly critical of what they perceive as a lack of focus on the pedagogical aspects of schools reopening.

The first iterations of the guidance for school reopening in England focused heavily on health and safety and logistical aspects of premises management. Later iterations have included dedicated sections on teaching and learning as well as social and emotional wellbeing of staff and children. This is also supported by the Education Endowment Foundation COVID Guidance for schools.¹²²

Assessing students' learning is a priority for school reopening in many countries,¹²³ but information on what plans for assessment entail is limited.

A total of 40% of governments responding to the UNICEF survey intended to assess children's learning levels when schools reopened and included learning assessment in their school reopening plans. For example, students in Afghanistan will be assessed when schools re-open and the results will be used to identify priority areas for remediation interventions. Antigua and Barbuda, Honduras, the Cayman Islands, Kenya, and Benin are also planning assessments to diagnose student learning needs, but information on how they intend to do so is limited.

In the UK, the UK Data Evaluation and Learning for Viral Epidemics (DELVE) group, established to advise government

scientists, recommended the need for an anonymous assessment of learning loss and mental health across all age ranges in a sample of schools in mid-September (two weeks into the new school year) and at the end of the 2020-21 academic year, in the same sample of schools, to determine achievements in catching up.¹²⁴

Also in the UK, Renaissance Learning,¹²⁵ an organisation known for its STAR Reading and Mathematics Assessments, will carry out research across a large sample of pupils from years 1 to 11. A previous study comparing scores on Star Reading before and after lockdown suggested primary pupils have been worst hit¹²⁶. However, whilst Renaissance Learning will be sharing findings iteratively with the Department for Education over the course of the year, the final report will not be available publicly until October 2021.

The Department for Education in England advises schools to plan on the basis of an assessment of pupils' starting points identified through formative assessments such as quizzes, observing and talking to pupils in class, scrutinising their work and avoiding unnecessary tracking systems.¹²⁷

Some countries are relying predominantly on schools themselves to identify which students have fallen behind and decide on the best approaches to supporting children to catch-up.

Governments in many countries have or are planning to suspend testing and formal assessments this academic year and are prioritising formative assessment. Australia cancelled the NAPLAN (National Assessment Programme – Literacy and Numeracy), while Brunei, Indonesia and India cancelled end of year exams, and most countries, including China, delayed college entrance exams. On 14 April, UNESCO published a repository of news articles and guidance notes on countries' plans for organising and conducting exams and assessments in the context of the pandemic, but this has not been updated.¹²⁸

With support from the Indian non-state organisation, Pratham, Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) is promoting and supporting the use of simple, fast, cheap, low-stakes learning assessments, such as one-on-one oral assessments for reading and numeracy and/ or ASER, ICAN or Uwezo methods to understand each child's learning needs when they return to school. In addition to Pratham, several non-state actors including YoungLove and global

¹²⁰ Government of Nigeria (2020) ¹²¹ Ministère de l'éducation (2020) ¹²² EEF (2020) ¹²³ UNICEF (2020d) ¹²⁴ The Delve Initiative (2020) ¹²⁵ <http://www.renlearn.co.uk/> ¹²⁶ The study was carried out across 2,000 pupils in the year 3, 3,900 pupils in year 5, over 24,000 in year 7 and 8,600 in year 9. For year 3 pupils, the gap between the score of the pupil at the 25th percentile and the pupil at the 75th percentile rose from 190 points to 290 points (52 per cent). At year 5, the rise was 39 per cent. The impact for secondary pupils wasn't as drastic, but the achievement gap among pupils in both year 7 and 9 still grew by 13 per cent. See Dickens (2020). ¹²⁷ Department for Education (2020) ¹²⁸ UNESCO (2020a)

donor agencies, such as the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO), are using and promoting these techniques in their guidance and programming.

England's catch-up funding scheme (described in more detail under the section on remedial programmes) is an example of this. Schools have the freedom to 'spend their additional funding in the best way for their cohort and circumstances'.¹²⁹ Government advice is to continue to teach an 'ambitious and broad curriculum in all subjects from the start of the autumn term but make use of existing flexibilities to create time to cover the most important missed content [... and] aim to return to the school's normal curriculum in all subjects by summer term 2021'.¹³⁰ Prioritisation within subjects and ways of using all subjects to fill gaps in core skills, such as reading and maths, are likely to be more effective in the long term than removing subjects.

The Education Endowment Foundation, an independent UK charity supporting teachers and school leaders to be evidence-led, has published a Covid-19 Support Guide for Schools, covering three categories of interventions: (1) teaching and whole school strategies; (2) targeted approaches; (3) wider strategies.¹³¹

Recovering lost learning time is a top priority in many low- and middle-income countries

A total of 70 of 134 countries surveyed report focusing their policy response on recovering lost learning time. Tajikistan cancelled the summer break. In the Seychelles, mid-term breaks will be cancelled, and mid-year holidays will be shortened by two weeks. In Gambia, the Ministry of Education outlines the following list of measures to recover learning time:

- a) Extension of the school day or week, paying attention to double-shifting school where it is applicable.
- b) Intensive and extensive classes for exam year groups to recover lost time with the option of rescheduling of examinations.¹³²

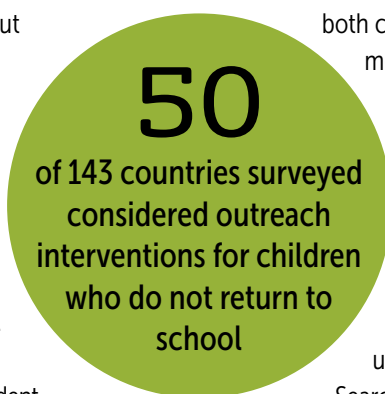
Many countries are condensing the curriculum, identifying priority learning outcomes, ensuring content is mutually reinforcing, integrating subjects and reducing repetition.

UNICEF report that 62% of countries surveyed plan to adjust the scope of the content that will be covered.¹³³

Monitoring re-enrolment and attendance,¹³⁴ with a view to addressing drop-out, is key for many countries.

In total, 50 of 143 countries surveyed reported considering outreach interventions for children who do not return to school. 18% of countries used school-based mechanisms to track the number of girls not returning to school¹³⁵. Djibouti plans to 'strengthen the monitoring of enrolments, school drop-out and absenteeism, as well as providing psychological support for

both children and teachers.¹³⁶ Venezuela also plans to monitor enrolment and attendance. In Brazil, the School Active Search system brings together local government agencies in education, health, social assistance and planning, to identify, register and monitor out-of-school children and those at risk of dropping out.¹³⁷ The system is managed online but data can be accessed in paper form where necessary. Discussions are underway to determine the role School Active Search can be used during and after the pandemic.



The degree to which countries are planning/implementing differentiated strategies to support vulnerable groups varies widely across countries and localities.

UNICEF found that national outreach activities have tended to focus on mass back-to-school campaigns (55%), rather than targeted strategies to reach children who are at greatest risk of dropping out (45% specifically encourage vulnerable groups to return to school).¹³⁸ Only 32% of countries employed targeted campaigns to encourage communities to support girls to return to school.¹³⁹ School Leaders in Ethiopia reported that only 60% of school principals and 41% of teachers were preparing to support those who are likely to drop out.¹⁴⁰ However, at the local level, there are also reports of practitioners going door-to-door to reach children who had not returned to school, for example, in Guatemala. Only 6% of countries reviewed/revised access policies to allow pregnant girls and young mothers to attend school. A total of 48% of countries reported ensuring that learning materials/platform services are accessible to people with disabilities.¹⁴¹ In Turkey, the Ministry of National Education released a mobile application designed for special education learners. The app was designed to ensure continuity of learning for children with hearing or visual impairments, intellectual disabilities, or autism spectrum disorders.¹⁴² The additional funding made available for special, alternative provision and hospital schools in England is £250 per pupil, compared to £80 per pupil in mainstream schools.

¹²⁹ United Kingdom, Department for Education (2020) ¹³⁰ United Kingdom, Department for Education (2020) ¹³¹ EEF (2020) ¹³² Republic of the Gambia, Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (2020, page 2) ¹³³ UNICEF (2020d) ¹³⁴ Ibid. ¹³⁵ Nugroho et al (2020; 3) ¹³⁶ Nugroho et al. (2020: 3); UNICEF (2020d) ¹³⁷ UNICEF (2020d) ¹³⁸ Ibid. ¹³⁹ Ibid. ¹⁴⁰ Yorke et al. (2020) ¹⁴¹ UNICEF (2020) ¹⁴² Lennox and Taolo (2020)

Remedial programmes feature as a prominent vehicle for catch-up.

The UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank framework¹⁴³ for reopening schools calls for 'large scale remedial programmes to mitigate learning loss and prevent exacerbation of learning inequality after school closures, with a focus on literacy and numeracy for primary-age children and accessibility accommodations for children with disabilities [...] implemented in parallel to integrate previously out-of-school or over-age children.'¹⁴⁴ Remedial interventions can be integrated in any programme including formal, non-formal education or accelerated education programmes (featured in more detail below).

Two-thirds of countries surveyed by UNICEF reported intending to use remedial programmes. Jordan was planning to use part of the school summer holidays for remedial education,¹⁴⁵ but has since closed schools for the second time. UNICEF is in the early stages of planning to assess Syrian refugee children in Arabic proficiency against global standards for Arabic in order to develop a tailored remedial reading programme. The State of Palestine reported to have planned a remedial programme in August, combining in-school and virtual delivery.¹⁴⁶ Further information on the programme and its impact was not available at the time of writing.

The government in Luxembourg rolled out a 'Summer School' catch-up programme from 31 August to 11 September, benefitting 6,000 students in primary and secondary education. Since the 24th August, 48 new thematic learning units have been made available on the existing online learning platform to support children in preparing for their return to school in September. Materials include scaffolded exercises and an assessment function that helps students understand and correct their mistakes. They also established a helpline offering advice and pedagogical guidance to students and parents.¹⁴⁷

Many countries, including the United Arab Emirates and Anguilla, are seeking to scale remedial programmes already in place before the crisis. In Uganda, UNICEF is looking at further scaling the Teaching at the Right Level approach, pioneered by Indian NGO Pratham, which assesses children's reading and arithmetic skills, groups them by ability level (rather than age or grade), and dedicates part of the learning time to foundational reading and mathematics to help students catch up. The Douglas B. Marshall, Jr. Foundation, Innovations for Poverty Action, J-PAL, Pratham, Teaching at the Right Level Africa, and Young1ove

are all calling for 'simple, fast, cheap and low-stakes learning assessments'¹⁴⁸ to inform instruction at the right level and a focus on foundational skills, based on their shared belief that this approach is appropriate no matter the circumstances or reasons for learning gaps.

Bright Spot 7: Building Tomorrow, Uganda

Building Tomorrow is an international social-profit organisation which recruits and trains Ugandan university graduates and embeds them in underserved schools for two years, with the aim of turning them into 'Thriving Schools.' When schools reopen in Uganda, Building Tomorrow will launch a pilot fellowship model focussing on enrolling (or re-enrolling) every child, ensuring all children are caught up to grade-level in literacy and numeracy (deploying the TaRL tools and techniques), and supporting local government capacity building and community engagement.¹⁴⁹

England has announced a £650 million catch-up premium fund made available to all state-funded, mainstream, special and alternative provision schools. Each school will receive £80 per pupil in reception to year 11 and £250 per pupil in special, alternative provision and hospital schools to add to their budgets for academic year 2020-21.¹⁵⁰ The funding is expected to be used as a single total and schools are expected to prioritise spending and support for pupils according to their need.

Accelerated programmes/interventions feature somewhat less prominently as a strategy to mitigate learning loss, despite considerable evidence of their effectiveness.

Accelerated education is defined by the Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG) as:

'A flexible, age-appropriate programme, run in an accelerated timeframe, which aims to provide access to education for disadvantaged, over-age, out-of-school children and youth.'¹⁵¹

The AEWG has published a resource, COVID-19: Pathways for the Return to Learning, including a decision tree to support governments, planners and practitioners in determining their approaches to getting all 'learners back on track', based on evidence of what works in accelerated learning globally.¹⁵²

¹⁴³ UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank (2020) ¹⁴⁴ Ibid. ¹⁴⁵ UNICEF (2020d) ¹⁴⁶ Ibid. ¹⁴⁷ Gouvernement du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg (2020) ¹⁴⁸ Douglas et al.(2020)

¹⁴⁹ Building Tomorrow (2020) ¹⁵⁰ Department of Education (2020) ¹⁵¹ Shah and Choo (2020:9) ¹⁵² AEWG (2020)

Less than a third of countries reported planning to/having introduced accelerated learning programmes as a strategy to mitigate learning loss following Covid-19 school closures.

Vietnam is planning accelerated learning programmes for remote, hard-to-reach ethnic minority areas.¹⁵³ In Montenegro, the government is planning targeted catch-up classes and workshop for Roma parents and children, made possible by a sophisticated EMIS which is able to identify students at risk of dropping out.¹⁵⁴

England has launched a parallel £350 million National Tutoring Programme (NTP)¹⁵⁵ (in addition to the £650 million catch up programme for schools) to offer catch-up support for pupils who missed out on learning during school closures. The programme will target the most disadvantaged young people, providing direct 1:1 tutoring from a list of approved tuition partners and embedding coaches (trained graduates) within schools in the most disadvantaged areas of the country.

The TNTP issued its Learning Acceleration Guide – Planning for Acceleration in the 2020-2021 School Year, a toolkit for school and district stakeholders in the United States, to support planning for accelerating student learning.¹⁵⁶ This states that every student needs to be put on a fast track back to grade level, with a renewed focus on proven strategies to accelerate student learning. It cautions against returning to 'business as usual' or remediation strategies, which they believe are inappropriate for the most vulnerable: students of colour, low-income families and students with special needs. They make five recommendations for accelerating student learning:

1. Prioritize the most critical prerequisite skills and knowledge for each subject area and grade level now.
2. Plan your approach to diagnosing students' unfinished learning in that prerequisite content knowledge and those prerequisite skills.
3. Adapt your scope and sequence/pacing guidance for each subject area and grade level to reflect where teachers might need to provide acceleration support.
4. Train your teachers and leaders to diagnose students' unfinished learning and provide acceleration support.
5. Monitor your students' progress on grade-appropriate assignments and adjust your supports for teachers and leaders based on student results.¹⁵⁷

Bright Spot 8: Second Chance Programme (Liberia and Lebanon)

The Luminos Fund's accelerated learning programme, Second Chance, has been delivering education in emergencies for over five years. They have adapted their approach to offer remote learning using blended approaches adapted to the needs and capabilities of each context. In Liberia, they operate a no-tech solution, delivering workbooks and working face-to-face with small groups of children at social distance. In Lebanon, where there has been significant investment in high quality learning apps to meet the needs of the Syrian refugee population, they have been able to leverage the existing tech to deliver tablet-based solutions. In addition, Luminos facilitators have continued to stay in touch with students and their families to maximise the likelihood that they will return when schools reopen.¹⁵⁸

Some countries are investing in remote learning to prepare for future closures.

More than two-thirds of UNICEF country offices reported that they were increasing investment in remote learning.¹⁵⁹

All schools in England are expected to plan to ensure any pupils can be educated and given the support that they need to master the curriculum at home for some or all of the time to ensure equity in access and achievement.¹⁶⁰

Recovery, wellbeing and mental health

In some jurisdictions, schools are putting support mechanisms in place to protect children's mental health when returning to school.

Support for wellbeing in school reopening has often been tailored to the local context and linked to what measures for school reopening have been put in place. The Education Bureau of Yuexiu District, China organised online mental health education and training for primary and secondary school students ahead of schools reopening, to help them prepare.¹⁶¹

UNICEF have created a set of general guidelines for parents to support learner mental health when returning to school, responding to the following questions:

¹⁵³ UNICEF (2020d) ¹⁵⁴ Ibid. ¹⁵⁵ NTP (2020) ¹⁵⁶ TNTP (2020) ¹⁵⁷ Ibid. p8 ¹⁵⁸ Luminos Fund (2020) ¹⁵⁹ UNICEF (2020d) ¹⁶⁰ Department for Education (2020) ¹⁶¹ Soho News (2020)

- My child is scared to go back to school. How can I help him feel at ease?
- How can I encourage my child to follow precautions (such as frequent handwashing, physical distancing etc.) at school without alarming her?
- My child is not part of the same group as his close friends returning to school and is feeling even more isolated. How can he feel more connected to the classroom and his friends?¹⁶²

The latter question is particularly important for children in countries where children are returning to school in shifts, or 'bubbles', as children might not be connected with their usual friendship group and support network at school.

The Center for Global Development (CGD) developed guidelines for safe return to school. The guidelines draw on learning from previous crises, such as school closures as a result of Ebola, to suggest important considerations for student wellbeing. They note that psychosocial and emotional support are frequently needed following crisis-related school closures. The CGD noted that differentiated support might be needed or girls in particular: "Following the Ebola epidemic, evidence suggests that adolescent girls faced disproportionate risks and abuse while the schools were closed. Interventions focused on the empowerment and well-being of girls may be needed as schools reopen."¹⁶³ The report also indicates that schools should prepare for an increase in child malnutrition upon returning to school. This concern is supported by Education Development Trust's forthcoming research on Community Health Volunteers in Kenya, where one of the most consistent concerns raised by households was a shortage of food.¹⁶⁴

Bright Spot 9: The Citizen's Foundation (TCF), Pakistan

TCF has created a televised show focusing on student wellbeing covering physical movement and joy over and beyond basic literacy and numeracy. Students send in their artwork following the broadcasts. The organisation is also piloting a magazine format with self-study materials for learners who do not have access to television. Going forward,

their focus will be on supporting teachers with Teacher Guides and other professional development activities, with an emphasis on post-lockdown/post-pandemic teaching and learning. This is based on the trauma-informed approach to education developed based on evidence of what works in education in emergencies.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² UNICEF (2020d) ¹⁶³ CGD (2020; 10-11) ¹⁶⁴ Education Development Trust (2020) ¹⁶⁵ TFC (2020)

The state of support for learning recovery in lower-income contexts

In this final chapter, we reflect on long-term educational recovery in different contexts, with a focus on funding and financial support for governments in low-income contexts in which fragile and unequal learning environments existed prior to Covid-19 school closures.

The extent of the financing gap in education post-Covid-19 is yet unknown, but global players are making the case to sustain investment and moving quickly to mitigate the risk of detrimental shocks to education budgets worldwide. The World Bank¹⁶⁶ used forecasts of GDP growth and public spending and estimated that the crisis will lead to a drop of up to 10% in education financing (including government spend, household expenditure and donor funding). Some countries are already cutting their education budgets. The Ukraine has cut spending by 4%. Nigeria is expected to cut the budget for the Universal Basic Education Commission by approximately 45%, and Kenya will be cutting back on tertiary education expenditure and plans for basic education curriculum reform. Canada and the US have announced cuts to education budgets through layoffs, cutting back on new recruits and making reductions in salary increases. On the other hand, some high- middle- and low- income countries have introduced fiscal stimulus packages and allocated a significant amount of funding to education. According to the IMF policy tracker, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Panama, Sweden and Tonga have included additional spending in their fiscal stimulus packages. Other countries, such as Algeria, are focusing on protecting social



spending, including education, in their long-term budgets.¹⁶⁷

The economic crisis resulting from Covid-19 will increase the number of people living in poverty and significantly constrain their ability to prioritise expenditure on education. Updated estimates from the World Bank indicate that the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to push between 88 and 115 million people into extreme poverty.¹⁶⁸ The World Bank estimates that the poverty rate will increase by 25% in the Ukraine and 35% in Tajikistan, whilst Rahman and Matin's rapid assessment of livelihoods in Bangladesh indicated a likely decline of two-thirds in average incomes in rural areas, leading to widespread food insecurity.¹⁶⁹ Lakner, et al. estimate that an additional 23 million people will be pushed into poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa because of the pandemic.¹⁷⁰ Remittance payments, often used to fund better education, are expected to drop by approximately 20% (equivalent to US\$142 billion) worldwide.¹⁷¹

Total donor spend is likely to decline sharply as the global economy contracts. The UK government, one of the largest bilateral donors to basic education, is likely to see a fall in total aid commitments of US\$1.4 billion as a result of the forecast 6.5% decline in GDP.¹⁷² However, in the short term, donors are

¹⁶⁶ World Bank (2020) ¹⁶⁷ IMF (2020) ¹⁶⁸ Lakner, et al. (2020) ¹⁶⁹ Rahman and Matin (2020) ¹⁷⁰ Lakner, et al. (2020) ¹⁷¹ World Bank, (2020b) ¹⁷² Ibid

providing emergency funding to support countries to plan and implement their responses to the pandemic. The World Bank will deploy US\$160 billion over the next 15 months to help tackle health, economic, social and poverty shocks in the hardest hit areas. The Global Partnership for Education has established an emergency fund of more than US\$500 million. At the time of

writing, 57 grants have been approved, nine proposals are under review, and a further investment of US\$25 million has been approved to support UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank to pool and share their knowledge and maximise efficiency gains in investments going forward. Figure 3 details the grants awarded by the GPE emergency fund by the time of writing.

FIGURE 3: Breakdown of the US\$454m Global Partnership for Education grants awarded so far in 2020
Grouped by donor agency (US\$m)



*Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines
Source: donor agencies

Recommendations for policymakers

1. Promote student and teacher wellbeing

There is a welcome focus on student wellbeing in much of the current international discourse. Although this is often identified as a priority in the available literature, relatively little is known about the effectiveness of support relating to wellbeing. With many education systems opening schools or planning to do so in coming months, this is a critical time to focus on how student and teacher wellbeing can be measured and supported.

Again, we need a deeper understanding of the depth of the issues and how teacher wellbeing can be promoted once schools reopen.

Policymakers should continue to prioritise issues of wellbeing and mental health in their reopening and recovery planning and ensure this covers both students and teachers.

2. Maximise time spent on learning, particularly for disadvantaged students

The picture that is emerging from the period of school closure is one of significant learning discontinuity, particularly for disadvantaged students. Time spent on learning has been the focus of much discussion over recent months. Substantial research has been undertaken concerning what exactly students have been doing and how much learning they have managed to achieve while schools have been closed. Our understanding of this will continue to develop as more evidence becomes available. The current picture suggests that many pupils have struggled to access learning at all or for much time. There are various factors at play, including access to technology and the absence of good 'no-tech safety nets', disadvantage, household chores and other non-school work-related commitments.

Where remote learning persists as a result of continued full or partial school closure, policymakers must give urgent attention to the barriers that prevent learning and find ways to work around these. Where possible, data and evidence should be gathered to support reopening plans. Teachers and schools armed with

knowledge about the reality of their pupils' learning contexts will be better prepared to respond. Particular attention must be given to the most marginalised and disadvantaged students who will be most deeply affected.

In reopening plans, consideration should be given to mobilising communities, families, and caregivers in supporting schools, teachers and learning. There is compelling evidence that this may hold promise if effectively structured and supported – not just in the immediate phase of learning recovery – but as part of improved education provision for the long term.

3. Make teacher professional development a priority

School reopening will require teachers to operate in a stressful and unfamiliar environment. Many students will have suffered greatly during recent months, and teachers themselves have often faced great adversity and insecurity.

For policymakers, a prime concern when planning reopening should be ensuring that teachers are able to return to work safely, and are provided with professional development to support them to respond to learners needs effectively. Areas of likely focus for teacher professional development include the mental health and wellbeing of students and the need to measure and remediate learning loss.

4. Make learning recovery – as well as health – a priority when planning school reopening

The current state of school reopening across the globe is chaotic, varied and deeply politicised. Ideally, no schools would reopen until the virus was under control, but economic issues and concern for pupil wellbeing have driven some systems to open when the prevalence of the virus remains high.

Understandably and quite correctly, health and safety issues are a huge priority for governments. There is, however, also a need

to focus on action that will restore learning – and this will require thoughtful policy. Governments should consult stakeholders and make good use of different media to communicate plans to parents and families. Agility and an ability to respond to different scenarios will be required. Governments should consider blended, flexible opening approaches and they should continue to develop remote education provision in readiness for both future closures (if needed) and to maximise the potential for quality improvements. Learning recovery at school should be supplemented by supported learning opportunities at home and in the community.

Countries reopening school systems need a clear plan for summative and formative assessment for this academic year. In addition, targeted interventions for vulnerable children need to be a priority. Plans to mitigate learning loss, including accelerated learning and/or remedial approaches, are required. Governments must be clear on the strategy they are promoting – whether this is remediation interventions and re-teaching content, a focus on foundational skills, a tailored approach for each child, and or a grade-level curriculum for all students. As

school systems reopen, enrolment and drop out – particularly among vulnerable groups, including girls – must be carefully and accurately monitored, alongside tracking learning for these groups.

5. Secure short-term and long-term funding for school education

There is a real risk that funding for education will be cut because of the health emergency. The economic crisis resulting from Covid-19 will increase the number of people living in poverty globally, and may significantly constrain their ability to prioritise expenditure on education. Donors may have reduced funds and may not see spending on education as a top priority. The extent of the financing gap in education post-Covid-19 is yet unknown, but several global players are rightly making the case for education budgets to be protected. There is also, of course, a need to ensure that the money is spent wisely – ensuring that the right resources are in place so that all children, regardless of background, have access to good quality school education.

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