

## Executive Summary

# FROM LEARNING RECOVERY TO EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION

Insights and Reflections from the 4th Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures

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Over the past three years, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented disruptions to education, deepening the pre-existing global learning crisis. As schools reopen – with nationwide school closures now lifted in all countries – children, adolescents and youth will need comprehensive, tailored support to meet their learning, health and psychosocial wellbeing needs. In response, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the United Kingdom’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), and the World Bank have introduced a RAPID Framework for Learning Recovery and Acceleration, which outlines five short-term, key policy actions:

- **Reach** every child and keep them in school
- **Assess** learning levels regularly
- **Prioritize** teaching the fundamentals
- **Increase** the efficiency of instruction, including through catch-up learning
- **Develop** psychosocial health and wellbeing

To explore how countries have progressed in learning recovery and longer-term education transformation, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), UNESCO, UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), UNICEF and the World Bank have conducted the fourth round of the Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures (‘joint survey’), with responses from Ministries of Education in 93 countries. While the first three rounds of the survey were implemented in relatively rapid succession during the periods May–June 2020, July–October 2020 and February–June 2021, respectively, the fourth round was implemented more than one year after the last data collection during the period April–July 2022, when almost all schools had reopened and policymakers were beginning to reflect on responses going forward in the ‘post-pandemic’ normalization period. Findings from the joint survey are supplemented by data from the Global Education Recovery Tracker survey (‘GERT survey’), administered with 166 World Bank and UNICEF country offices between May–July 2022. This report includes the main findings from the surveys, which are analyzed and presented along the lines of the five RAPID key policy actions. Furthermore, each of these analyses is complemented by a discourse of the policy implications and related measures required for longer-term



education transformation to address the longstanding systemic bottlenecks, ensure future system sustainability and achieve national, regional and global goals, including Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education.

### **REACHING EVERY CHILD IS THE COMMON DENOMINATOR OF EDUCATION RECOVERY.**

Ensuring that the world's children, particularly the most vulnerable, return to school is essential not only for education but also to address social challenges such as early marriage, early pregnancy, child nutrition, child labor and mental health. Countries showed their commitment to return children to school: at primary and secondary education levels, at least half of countries reported taking measures such as automatic re-enrolment and community mobilization campaigns to address disengagement from school, as well as cash transfers and subsidies to address economic hardship faced by families. To assuage parental concerns over health risks, a majority of countries implemented enhanced cleaning and disinfection and invested in improved infrastructure. A true and deep 'reach all' effort is imperative for education systems to shift from recovery to transformation. Governments can eliminate barriers to education for vulnerable and marginalized groups by targeting specific policy measures to identify and reach those who are still excluded and have been left behind. This includes ensuring the right to education for all is not only fully captured in national legal and regulatory frameworks, but also effectively enforced. Strengthening flexible models of education, including multiple modes of learning that vary in time and space, as well as teacher professional development for inclusive and personalized pedagogies, can also play an important role in retaining students. Building relationships with families by providing parents with information on benefits, costs and quality of education can also help improve school participation. Lastly, longer-term investments in resilience and preparedness for future crises, along with strengthened Education Management Information Systems to ensure real time and personalized monitoring, are also needed.

### **ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS MUST EVOLVE IN THEIR ROLE AND SCOPE TO IMPROVE BOTH LEARNING AND TEACHING.**

Emerging data from countries around the world show that learning losses due to COVID-19-related disruptions are real and disproportionately distributed. As children return to

school, understanding their current learning levels, needs and contexts allows teachers, school leaders, system managers and policymakers to make informed decisions about instructional approaches, assessment practices and other related policy measures for learning recovery and better outcomes. In the school year 2021/2022, at least 70 per cent of countries continued standardized testing programmes. However, fewer than half of countries conducted studies on the impact of school closures on learning outcomes, and only a quarter on its impact on non-cognitive skills. Looking forward to more systemic transformations and redesigning learning systems, shifting the focus of assessment from grading to monitoring and promoting learning growth, including that of social-emotional skills like agency, resilience and persistence, will be critical. New ways of assessment should not only capture student knowledge and skills, but also focus on helping students become more aware of how and what they learn. This includes promoting a regular and inclusive learning assessment culture by diversifying the types of assessment tools used, emphasizing the use of formative assessments to meet students' individual needs, and leveraging technologies such as digitalized and hybrid assessments.

### **PRIORITIZING FUNDAMENTAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS IN THE CURRICULUM HELPS CHILDREN RECOVER MORE QUICKLY FROM LEARNING LOSS.**

With the staggering loss of instructional time and its detrimental effects on students' learning levels, flexibility in curricula adherence is needed to set priorities in support of catching up on missed learning. In the school year 2021/2022, while nearly half of countries reported adjusting the curriculum for primary to upper secondary levels, only about one third reported the same for the pre-primary level. However, among countries implementing curricular adjustments, less than three quarters reported changes were based on the results of students' assessments – a crucial input for curriculum alignment. Prioritization efforts will continue to require flexibility and adaptivity to changing circumstances, putting learners at the center of the process. Moreover, teachers should increasingly be involved in co-designing and facilitating curricular adjustments. Curricular reform and transformation will entail reviewing learning objectives, content relevance and corresponding time allocations; producing the necessary educational materials; and using lessons learned during the pandemic as building blocks

for the review, design and strengthening of evolving curriculum during crisis and non-crisis contexts.

### **INCREASING THE EFFICIENCY OF INSTRUCTION REQUIRES THE USE OF PROVEN INTERVENTIONS AND EXTENSIVE TEACHER SUPPORT.**

To enable quick learning recovery, school systems must implement strategies that make instruction more effective, relevant and relational, and ensure teachers can support the recovery process in the classrooms. In the school year 2021/2022, about 80 per cent of countries implemented national programmes to provide additional support to students affected by the pandemic. However, a much smaller number of countries is implementing proven measures to catch up on missed learning, such as extending instructional time, providing tutoring programmes and using targeted instruction. To support teacher performance, more than 70 per cent of countries implemented policy measures on structured pedagogy and teacher professional development on the effective use of technologies. Ensuring education transformation requires countries to adapt new policies and financing for strengthened licensing and accreditation schemes, as well as modernize pre-service teacher education curriculum to include supervised field teaching, induction and mentoring. Teachers will also need to have better opportunities for personalized continuous professional development on targeted instruction, tutoring, and digital and other 21st century skills. Effective and efficient compensatory systems, improved working conditions in schools, and teacher engagement through social dialogue in policy development can help enhance the profession and enable teachers to better serve their role in transforming education.

### **DEVELOPING PSYCHOSOCIAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING MEANS ENHANCING ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL SCHOOL-BASED SERVICES.**

To help address the negative effects of the pandemic, it is critical that schools provide learners with comprehensive support, including services related to mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), water, health and sanitation (WASH), and nutrition. In the school year 2021/2022, less than two thirds of countries reported implementing psychosocial and mental health support to students (62 per cent) and teachers (58 per cent) at primary and secondary education levels. In addition, while 80 per cent of countries reported implementing strengthened WASH services, only 41 per cent reported the same for nutrition services. To transform education, school systems must monitor, address and prioritize learners' and educators' mental health and psychosocial wellbeing. A whole-of-society approach, involving collaboration across sectors including education, child protection, health and nutrition, will be needed to ensure

children, adolescents and youth receive comprehensive services while education systems build better going forward. To guide the development of measures on MHPSS across more countries, especially in lower-income contexts where they are lacking, governments can use assessments to understand learners' and teachers' needs in order to strengthen preparedness for potential shocks as well as longer-term planning to promote their psychosocial health and wellbeing.

### **EDUCATION FINANCING IS CRITICAL TO SUPPORTING THE RAPID FRAMEWORK AND EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION.**

To effectively implement the RAPID framework, it is essential that countries prioritize sustainable and equitable education financing. At the primary to upper secondary levels, 77 per cent of countries reported that they increased their budgetary allocations to the sector in 2021 relative to 2020. However, there are wide disparities by country income level: only 45 per cent of low- and lower-middle-income countries, compared to 91 per cent of high-income countries, increased their budgets for primary to upper secondary education. Transforming education should involve revamping how financial resources are raised and invested, prioritizing allocations of public spending to improve access to and quality in education, leveraging non-traditional sources of funding, and promoting innovations for increased efficiency in spending.

### **STRENGTHENED INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IS NEEDED TO RECOVER LEARNING AND TRANSFORM EDUCATION.**

The pandemic has shown how the international community can work together and mobilize resources to ensure continuity of learning. We need to rebuild systems so that we don't fall back to business as usual before COVID. As we near the Transforming Education Summit in September 2022, it is critical that countries, stakeholders and partners continue recovering education through the RAPID framework – as a first step towards wider education transformation. Looking to the future, bold new reforms and actions will be required to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances and create long-term sustainable transformations. These include introducing systemic changes to prevent the exclusion of vulnerable groups from education; reforming curricula and pedagogies for the inclusiveness and greening of education, improve effectiveness of instruction methods; and transforming the teaching profession by addressing teacher shortages and providing opportunities for continuous professional development. Governments and the international community must respond effectively with the necessary technical and financial resources to meet changing needs, so that all children can learn to their potential and the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals can be achieved.