

Education Systems' Response to COVID-19¹

Brief November 5th, 2021



LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

MORE SCHOOLS ARE REOPENING: 60% of countries, mostly in Europe and Central Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and North America, have begun the new school year returning to in-person education exclusively. In most parts of South Asia and Latin America, return to school has started but is still slow. Many systems, however, have returned only partially: prioritizing by educational levels, or localities. Another 24% are using multiple modalities (e.g. parts of the country in person, other parts hybrid).

BUT IN SOME COUNTRIES, THERE IS A RETURN TO SCHOOL CLOSURES: Particularly in Europe and Central Asia. [Latvia has gone under strict lockdown](#), which will mean schools will resume distance learning. [Russia also heads into a lockdown](#) as COVID 19 cases continue to surge in the country.

There is more evidence showing students (and teachers) can be safe in schools. A [large-scale study in Scotland](#) shows that, compared with adults of working age who are otherwise similar, teachers and their household members were not found to be at increased risk of hospital admission with COVID-19 and were found to be at lower risk of severe COVID-19. Additionally, vaccine access worldwide is increasing. 58% of countries and territories are currently prioritizing teachers to receive vaccines (see Figure 2).

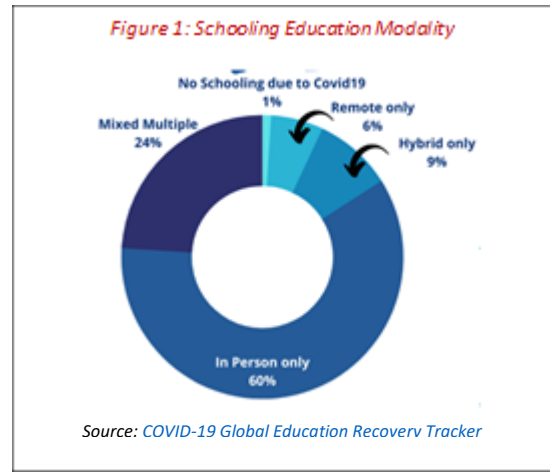
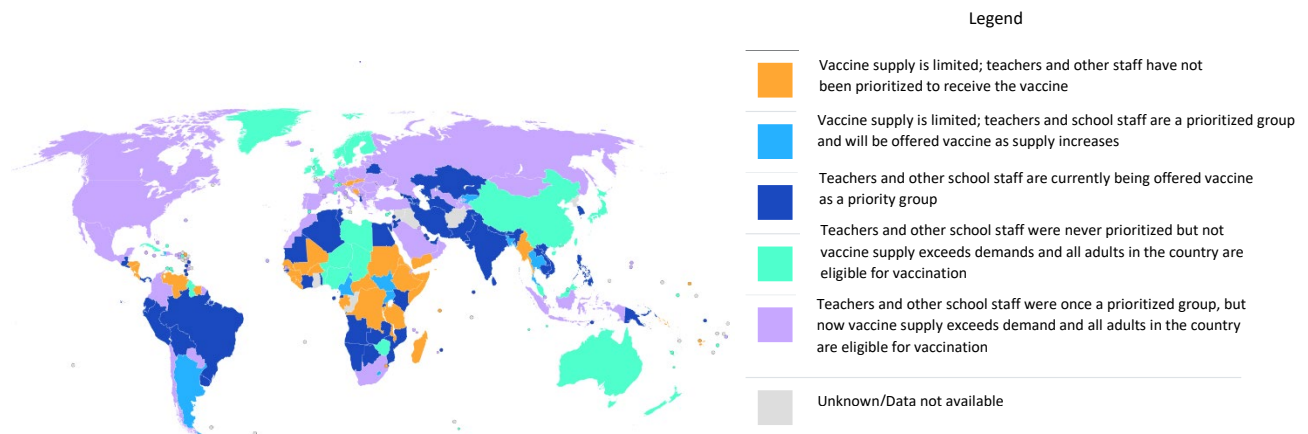


Figure 2: Vaccine Access for Teachers and other Education Staff



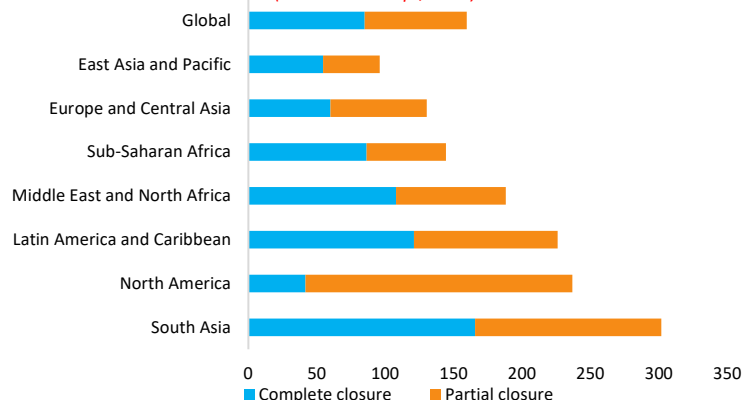
Source: COVID-19 Global Education Recovery

¹ For more information on the content of this brief or datasets of the Global Education Recovery Tracker, please contact: Kaliope Azzi-Huck, Maria Barron Rodriguez, Tigran Shmis, Aarya Shinde, Ellinore Ahlgren, and Maria Eugenia Oviedo.

MANY STUDENTS HAVE MISSED NEARLY 300 DAYS OF SCHOOL

The South Asia region has had the longest school closures, relying in many cases on remote learning. Across the globe, many schools are still closed and students are learning virtually (Annex 1 shows days of school closures per country and Figure 3 days of closures per region). Reopenings were envisioned in **Saudi Arabia** for primary school kids, but have since been delayed [indefinitely while the Government](#) undertakes further research on safety. **Peru's Ministry of Education** personnel announced that they expect a full return to in-person to begin only in March 2022.

Figure 3: Average number of school days by closure status, per region (March 2020-Sept, 2021)

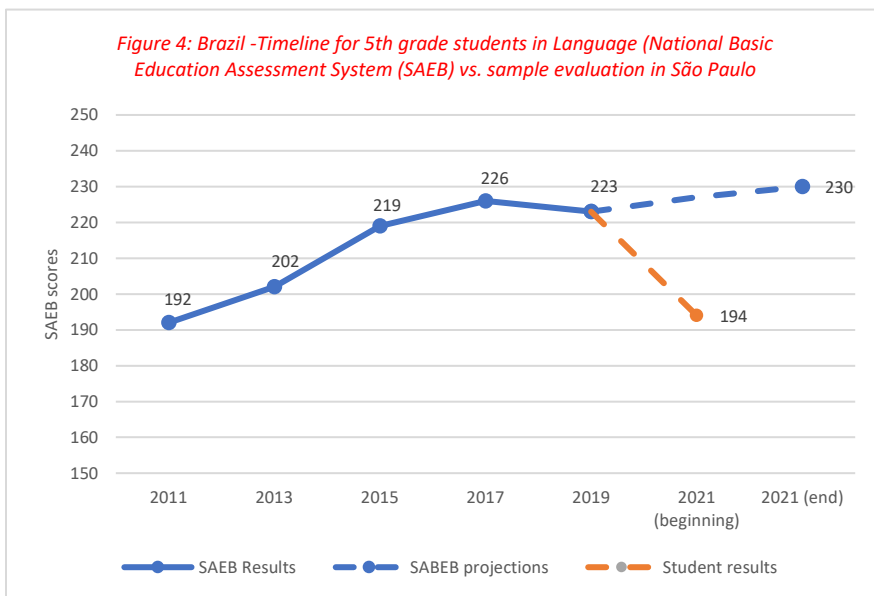


LEARNING LOSSES HAVE FURTHER INCREASED.

Simulations by the World Bank showed that Learning Poverty in low- and middle-income countries might increase from 53 to 63%. [More recent simulations however, suggest this number can increase to 70% due to the longer-than-expected schools closures.](#)

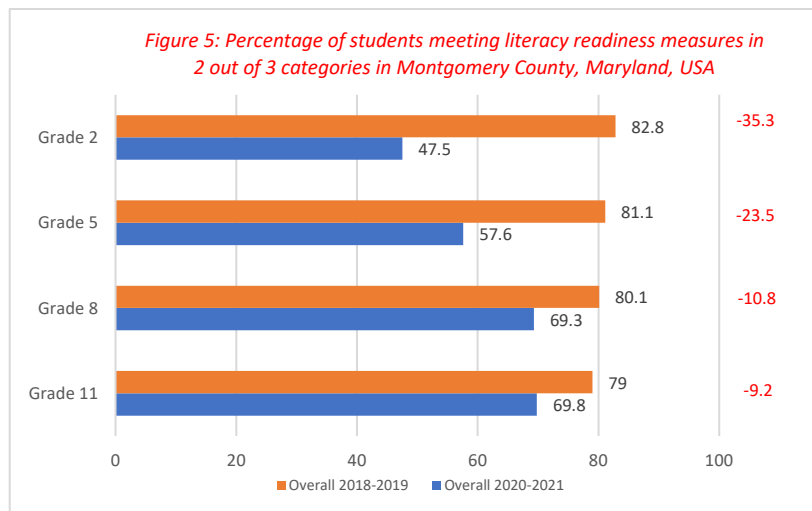
In **Brazil**, results from São Paulo's in 2019 and 2021, show a sharp reduction in learning achievement. **For instance, fifth graders' average score decreased by 13% in Portuguese and 19% in math**, where math scores are equivalent to a return to 2011 learning levels (see Figure 4). After a year of school closures, these reductions are equivalent to at least a year in learning. Also, [losses are observed across all levels, with the larger learning losses among younger students.](#)

Figure 4: Brazil -Timeline for 5th grade students in Language (National Basic Education Assessment System (SAEB) vs. sample evaluation in São Paulo)



In recent results for the state of Maryland in **the US**, there is a clear difference in the levels of proficiency reduction across grades, as can be seen in Figure 5.

In Karnataka, **India** an ASER comparator study completed in March 2021, after nearly a year of school closures, showed that the [share of grade 3 children in government schools who can perform simple subtraction dropped from 24% in 2017 to 16% in 2021](#).



South Africa tells a similar story, where second graders experienced losses between 57% and 70% of a year of learning and fourth graders experienced losses between 62% and 81% of a year of learning, according to the study published in the [International Journal of Education Development](#).



Promoting a safe return to school:

- **Togo (P174166)**: This project deployed back-to-school media campaigns ahead of school re-opening and mobilization of communities to relay important messages to families, community members, teachers, students and parents on disease prevention. It also supported radio campaigns to encourage good hygiene practices during the crisis and safety for all.
- **Lebanon**: teachers in public schools would not have gone back without our emergency teacher support of \$90 per month. Schools were closed for almost two years and inflation has eroded up to 75% of the teacher salary. We worked with FCDO to use their part of the project financing to finance the teacher top up salary. Further, through a covid emergency project purchased an additional million vaccines for which teachers have been prioritized.

Promoting learning continuity through distance learning modalities:

- **Ghana (P165557)**: The project has helped provide continuity of learning through a rollout of distance learning via TV, radio, and online channels, as well as printed materials to support home and community-based learning. The project helped launch the Edmodo Learning Management System (LMS) to enable all public and private schools, students, teachers, and parents to connect remotely to virtual learning. It has registered over 35,000 students.
- **Turkey (P173997)**: This project allocated \$160 million for supporting Turkey in expanding its digital education platform, virtual classroom, and materials to provide distance education for 18 million students during approximately 1 year of closures. For school re-opening, the project is financing improved models of hybrid learning (technological integrations into face-to-face education).

Learning assessments:

- **Bangladesh (P160943)**: The World Bank is supporting in implementing teacher-led diagnostic assessments in secondary schools for three foundational subjects: Bangla, English, and Math. This assessment will help teachers measure learning losses and heterogeneity within their classrooms post school reopening. Teachers will be provided with short assessments to implement to students to use the data to provide more targeted instructions to students. The WB DLI is linked to Grade 6, but given the importance of diagnosing learning losses, the Minister has decided to expand this initiative to all secondary grades and schools.
- **India (P166868 & P173704)**: The state of Gujarat has developed a system of *Periodic Assessment Tests (PATs)* where teachers receive and administer standardized grade and subject wise test items, collect student responses through reusable OMR sheets, and can scan the sheets using any handheld device to obtain immediate student, class, and school specific analysis. In Himachal Pradesh, a *WhatsApp Chatbot* has been developed to push quizzes/tests to students, and receive and analyze responses.

Learning recovery and remediation:

- **Colombia (P176006)**: PROMISE is part of the Government's recovery plan from the COVID-19 and has four pillars: (i) the effective use of **learning assessments** to identify students' learning and socioemotional needs (about 75% of public schools expected to implement formative and summative assessments); (ii) **improving pedagogical practices** through the *Programa Todos a Aprender (Learning for All Program)*, a large-scale teacher mentoring program in pre-school and primary education that will support teachers in designing effective responses to the impacts of the pandemic and to improve pedagogical practices adapting them to the needs of students; (iii) **improving school management practices**, by providing support to school and (iv) **improving local government management practices**, by providing technical assistance to local governments in the development of plans and program implementation
- **Togo (P174166)**: Based on results from an adapted from of PRATHAM's assessment tool, schools have planned and delivered a condensed remedial program focusing on core competencies (e.g., reading and numeracy). At the upper primary and junior secondary levels, subject-focused bridging courses have also been offered. 87,6 % of basic education schools have offered remedial programs.
- **Rwanda**: efforts to measure the status of learning through the National Learning Assessment were implemented as soon as schools reopened. Efforts to improve quality and efficiency in data collection and management through digitization and benchmarking were done in-house (under IPF support). Ongoing policy reforms under the DPO project have (a) increased time on task for students, (b) revised the timetable to include remedial sessions, (b) allocated continuous professional development hours during school week for teachers.
- **Nepal (P160748)**: in collaboration with Government, The World Bank Nepal education team is piloting Teaching at Right Level (TaRL) to support foundational education in schools to fast-track learning recovery in Nepal. The current pilot is targeting approximately 2500 primary school children (Grade 4-5) from 64 schools across three local governments.



REOPENING OF SCHOOLS

The WHO has reiterated that younger children and adolescents usually have fewer and milder symptoms of SARS-CoV-2 than adults, are less likely than adults to experience severe illness, be hospitalized with COVID-19 or die. Multiple studies confirm that children face lower risks of infection and severe symptoms from COVID-19 than adults ([WHO 2021](#)).

Reopening schools has not been a driver of community transmission. Data from the second wave in Europe indicates that [incidence among students was lower than the general population](#), secondary infections or clusters at schools were rare, and reopening schools did not lead to increased community transmission ([Gandini et al. 2021](#))

GREATER LEARNING LOSSES

Unequal access to and engagement in remote-learning activities during the ten months in 2020 in which schools were closed in Ghana led to widening learning gaps. Students of higher socioeconomic status, likely with easier access to virtual learning and remedial support, outperformed students of lower socioeconomic status by 0.2-0.3 standard deviations, approximately equal to a year of learning ([Wolf et al 2021](#))

A report by PAQ research that was based on tests in the Czech language and mathematics administered in 2020 and 2021 in the 5th grade showed that pupils [lost the equivalent of about 3 months of learning](#) during the year of the pandemic. The learning loss was significant following the reopening of schools in the spring of 2021.

In Russia, a recent regional study based on national assessments in reading and science shows that school closures had heterogenous impacts on learning across grades. There were no observed learning losses in reading among fourth graders, while sixth graders show a moderate loss equal to 3-4 months of learning. Significant losses in science were observed in for eight graders, equivalent to nearly a year and half of learning ([Zvyagintsev 2021](#)).

Significant learning losses in literacy between the 18-19 school year and the 20-21 school year in Montgomery County, Maryland. For example, the share of second graders meeting two out of three measures for overall literacy readiness fell from 83 percent to 48 percent during the period. Learning losses affected students of color disproportionately, exacerbating racial learning gaps ([Montgomery County Board of Education 2021](#)).

OTHER

[Save the Children's Building Forward Better](#) features the 5 principles included in the WB EdTech approach Paper: [Reimagining Human Connections](#) and includes a **Risks to Education Index** that ranks countries by the vulnerability of their school system to existing challenges and future crises and preparedness. The index is based six dimensions to measure risk, including data from the WB-UNICEF-JHU [Global Education Recovery Tracker](#) on prioritizing teachers for vaccines.

UNICEF's [Reopening with Resilience](#) recommends further investment in remote learning programs to build resilience into education systems and references the research conducted by the World Bank EdTech team research and the [COVID-19 Global Education Recovery Tracker](#).

A new UNESCO UIS report on School Closures and Regional Policies to Mitigate Learning Loss due to COVID 19 focused on the Asia Pacific region. The [report breaks down the effects](#) of school closures. It considers, for example, how many schools were closed, and when, across the Asia-Pacific, and the effects on different levels of education from early childhood education, through to primary and secondary school. The report analyses country efforts to implement remote learning, and strategies to mitigate learning losses as the proportion of students expected to fall below minimum proficiency levels is expected to rise.

A recent World Bank report titled Long COVID also looks at the EAP region and the effect of COVID 19. In 2020, many countries successfully contained COVID-19 and economic activity swiftly revived as other regions struggled with the pandemic and economic recession. Now the region is being hit hard by the COVID-19 Delta variant while many advanced economies are on the path to economic recovery.

The European Center for Disease Prevention and Control released a report around COVID-19 in children and the role of school settings in transmission. The [report provides](#) an update on the knowledge surrounding the role of children in the transmission of COVID 19 and the role of schools during the pandemic, focusing specifically on the experience in EU/EEA countries since the start of the pandemic.

A new **World Bank** report titled **New Skills for New Century: Informing Regional Policy** -part of the [analytical support program in Russia](#), is collecting and analyzing data in order to gather evidence to inform coherent policies and strategies for creating modern schools and for promoting 21st-century teaching and learning in Russia. As part of the activity, the team had structured interviews with teachers of science, mathematics, and other subjects to understand how COVID-19 disruptions affected teaching and learning both in the period of lockdowns and after school reopening.

The **Fast Track to New Skills: Short-Cycle Higher Education Programs in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)** report explores the labor market outcomes and returns of Short Cycle Programs (SCP's), examines their providers, and identifies the practices adopted by the best programs. The economic crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic has accentuated underlying trends, such as automation, the use of electronic platforms, and the need for lifelong learning. Addressing these demands requires the urgent upskilling and reskilling of the population—a task for which SCPs are uniquely suited.

To understand the pandemic's effects on school children, [a paper by CESifo](#) combines **a review of the emerging international literature with new evidence from German longitudinal time-use surveys**. If school closures and social-distancing experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic impeded children's skill development, they may leave a lasting legacy in human capital.

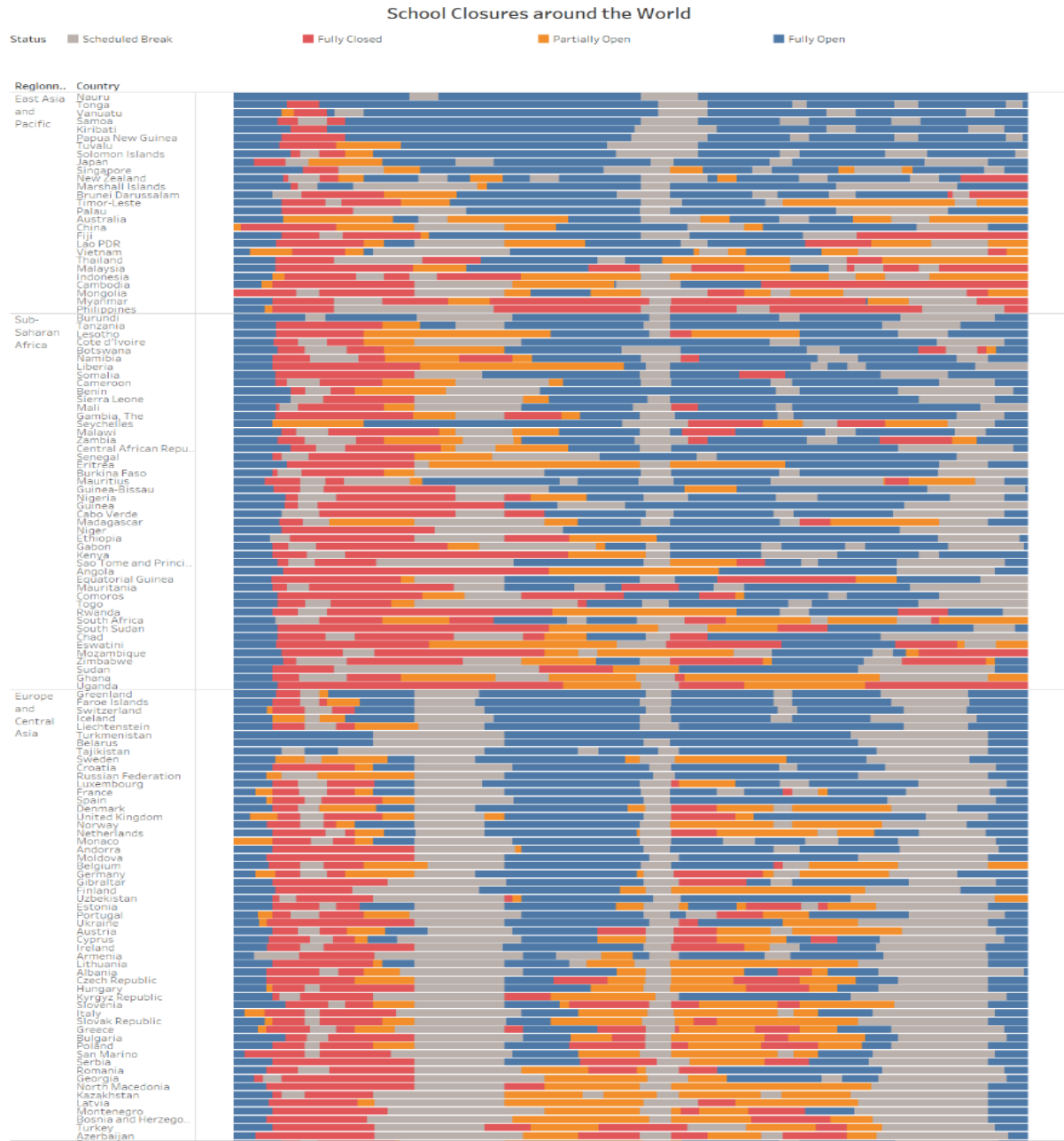
In **Bangladesh**, a randomized control trial showed that providing primary school children and their mothers mentoring services during school closures to help with learning at home, [improved the overall test scores of treated children by 35%](#).



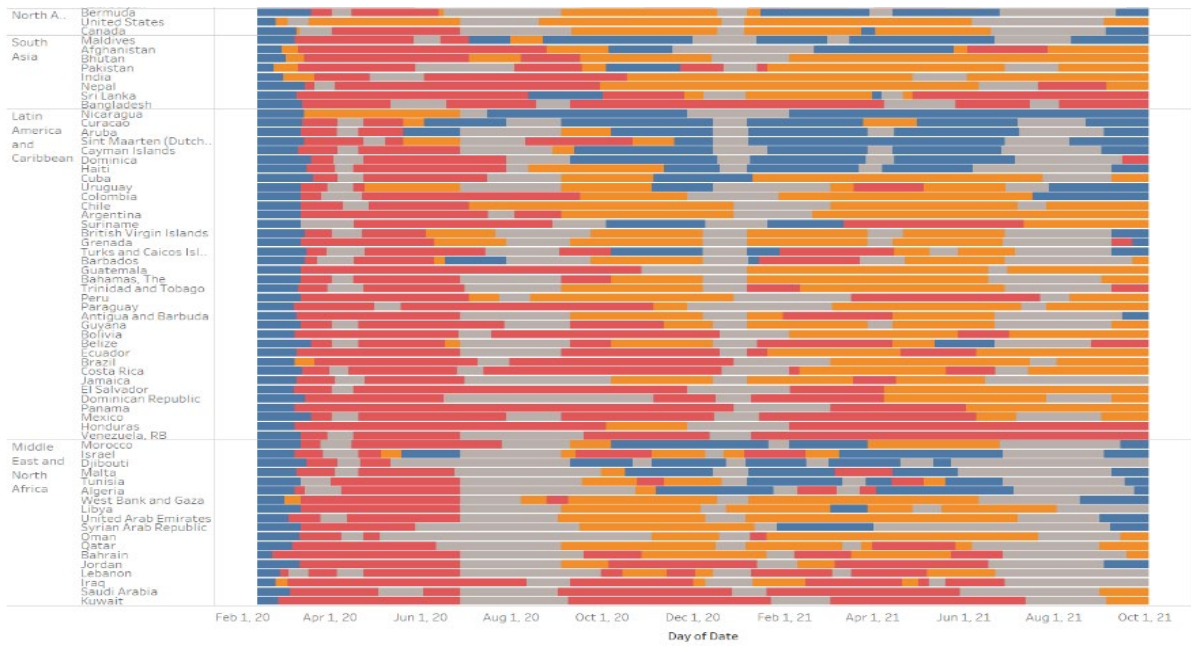
- Building forward better to enhance learning for all children in Iraq: an education reform path ([English](#))
- The juggling act: supporting young mothers complete a higher education in Kenya ([English](#))
- Uzbekistan: Economic Transformation through Smart Investments in Higher Education ([English](#))
- Education is key to sustained poverty reduction in Azerbaijan ([English](#), [Azerbaijani](#))
- Youth led healing for Africa: Amid and post COVID 19 ([English](#))
- Tertiary education is essential for opportunity, competitiveness and growth ([English](#))
- Unleashing the potential of young women and girls everywhere ([English](#))
- The kids are not alright: Three ways EdTech can support student's wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond ([English](#), [French](#), [Spanish](#))
- Recover better: Invest in skills building and infrastructural development ([English](#))
- It is back to school in Egypt: Is it back to learning? ([English](#), [Arabic](#))
- There will be no recovery without empowered, motivated and effective teachers ([English](#))
- Making up for a year of lost learning in Kyrgyz Republic ([English](#))
- How to enhance teacher professional development through technology: takeaways from innovations around the globe ([English](#))
- Where is EdTech working? Leveraging data for better EdTech policies ([English](#))
- Rewrite the future: How Indonesia can overcome the student learning losses from the pandemic and increase learning outcomes for all ([English](#), [Indonesian](#))
- COACH: Improving In-service teacher professional development ([English](#))
- Making classroom observation tools better: a new study on TEACH ([English](#), [Spanish](#))
- How can we protect education from attack? A focus on western and central Africa ([English](#))
- Three steps to get every child reading ([English](#))

ANNEX – SNAPSHOT OF SCHOOL CLOSURE DAYS PER COUNTRY

(as of September 30, 2021)



(cont..)



Source: Unesco (2021) as of September/2021, Dataviz: @jpazvd