

Education Systems' Response to COVID-19

Brief April 26th, 2021

- **The [COVID-19 Global Education Recovery Tracker](#)¹ is now live! Sourced by teams across the World Bank, Johns Hopkins, and UNICEF, it monitors recovery planning efforts in more than 200 countries and territories. Based on its data, learning modalities across regions shifted in recent weeks with many more countries shifting to hybrid or remote learning and a select few returning to in-person. Vaccine prioritization among teachers and school staff as a group has only been adopted by 30% of countries with access to the COVID-19 vaccine.**

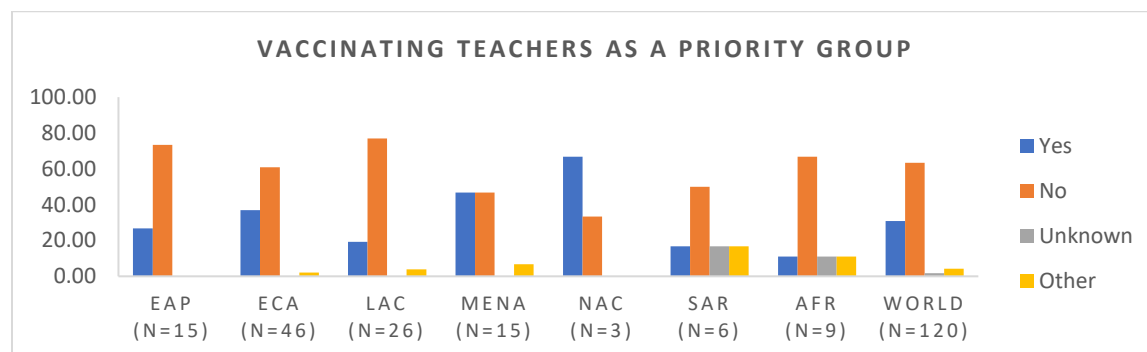
| | SAR | ECA | MENA | EAP | Africa | LAC |
|---|-----|-----|------|-----|--------|-----|
| No instruction/closed due to COVID-19: Schools are closed due to COVID-19, and no education services currently available. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 0 |
| Extended Break: Schools are closed due to a regular school calendar closure (e.g., holiday). | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 4 |
| Hybrid/remote education: Schools are open combining remote learning and in-person instruction and/or students are exclusively learning remotely. | 6 | 28 | 12 | 7 | 6 | 19 |
| Mixed/multiple: Schools are operating with a combination of the following: in-person, hybrid, remote, and closed due to COVID-19. | 1 | 15 | 3 | 5 | 8 | 7 |
| In-person education: Schools are open, and students have returned for in-person instruction. | 1 | 9 | 5 | 10 | 20 | 5 |

Source: World Bank, Johns Hopkins University & UNICEF (2021). [COVID-19 Global Education Recovery Tracker](#). Last updated as of 5 April 2021. Baltimore, Washington DC, New York: JHU, World Bank, UNICEF.



A NEW JOINT EFFORT TO TRACK EDUCATION RECOVERY

The recently launched [COVID-19 Global Education Recovery Tracker](#) aims to capture the multiple dimensions of education responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Harnessing knowledge of teams across institutions and publicly available information, the Tracker tool (covideducationrecovery.global) showcases information across four key areas: status of schooling, modalities of learning, availability of remedial educational support, and status of vaccine availability for teachers. More focus areas are coming. Information per country is [public and available to download](#).



Source: World Bank, Johns Hopkins University & UNICEF (2021). [COVID-19 Global Education Recovery Tracker](#). Last updated as of 5 April 2021. Baltimore, Washington DC, New York: JHU, World Bank, UNICEF.

¹ This is a joint effort of World Bank, UNICEF, and Johns Hopkins University E-School Initiative, the tracker collects and validates information on school reopenings and closings as well as other aspects. Because of the need to validate information collected, updates to the public site may take up to two weeks to display. <https://www.covideducationrecovery.global/>

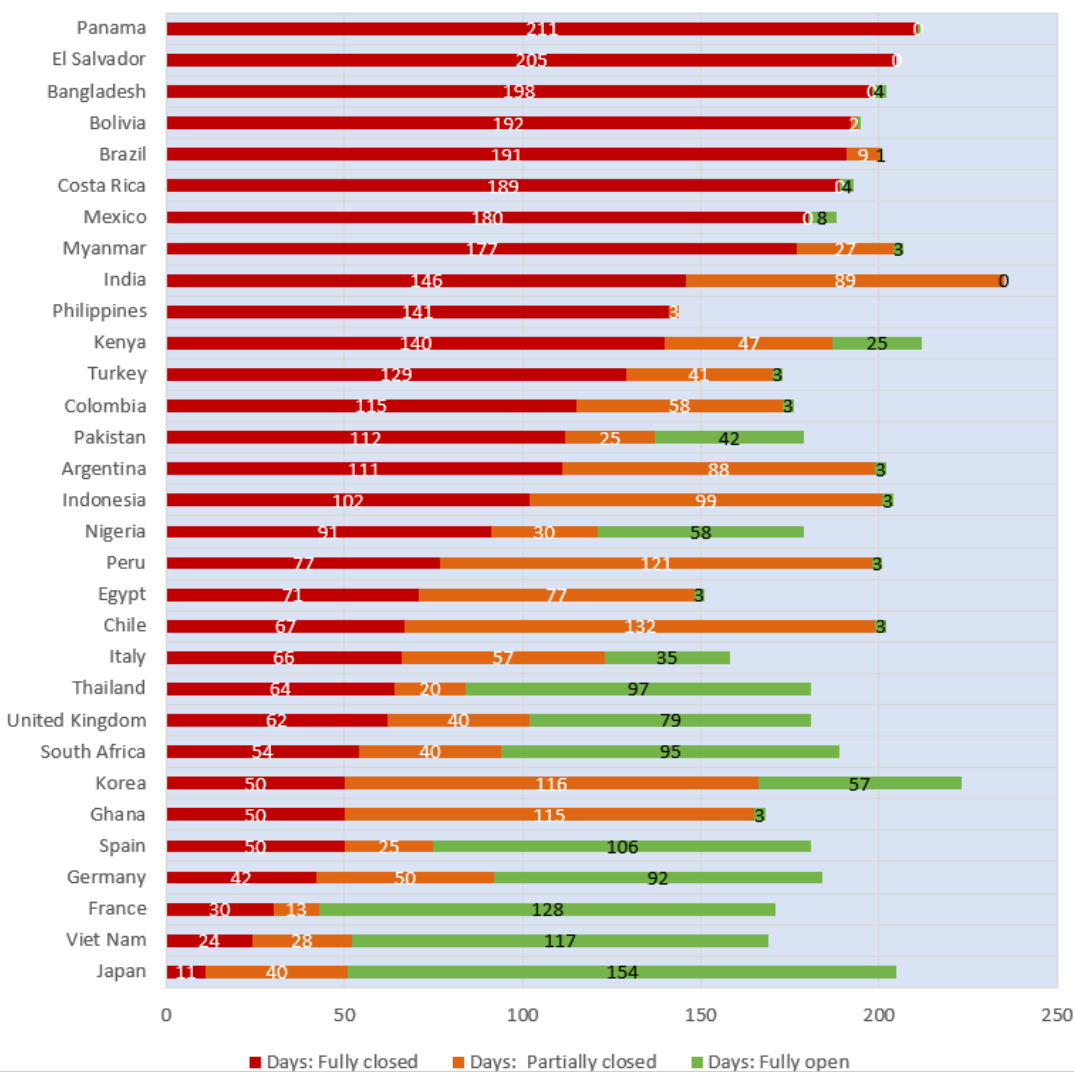


LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATION

There is yet another round of school closures around the world as the pandemic continues to surge. In France, [a three week nationwide school closure announcement](#) was made. Additionally, countries like [Belgium](#) and [Italy](#), are closing schools as cases of the new variant of coronavirus surge. Countries are hoping to alleviate increasing pressure on hospitals as the cases keep rising. Puerto Rico's health secretary announced that as of April 12th [all public and private schools](#) in the U.S. territory would close for two weeks amid a surge in COVID-19 cases.

As of the end of March, [total and partial school closures in Latin America and the Caribbean](#) currently leave about 114 million students without face-to-face schooling. According to UNICEF, on average, children in this region have lost 158 school days of face-to-face schooling followed by students in South Asia who have lost 146 days (See Figure 1 to see specific number of days per countries). A recent [World Bank Report](#) indicates that after an average of 10 months in school closures in LAC, 71 percent of students in lower secondary education may not be able to understand a text of moderate length. Before COVID-19, the figure was 55 percent. It is estimated that this percentage could rise to 77 percent if schools are closed for three more months.

Figure 1: Number of school days by opening status in selected countries



Notes: the period covered goes from March 11, 2020 to February 2, 2021. The data source and opening status definitions corresponds to those of UNICEF.

In Germany, a country that has faced several school lockdowns, the government has started vaccinating teachers. In Bavaria, starting April 12th, 2x weekly testing has become mandatory for teachers and students to participate in face-to-face instruction. Testing can be in the form of antigen, PCR, or take-home (self-) tests, but the “take-home/self-” test needs to be performed at school. In COVID-19, hotspots testing may be done more often.

In the United States, the House Foreign Affairs Committee recently advanced the [Global Learning Loss Assessment Act](#). This bipartisan, bicameral legislation shines a light on the [critical issue of learning loss](#)—and the impacts of disrupted education more broadly—as schools around the world closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. If passed, the bill would direct the US Agency for International Development (USAID) to report on the ways the pandemic is affecting basic education around the world, especially for the most marginalized children, and identify opportunities for the agency and its partners to respond.

Emerging evidence from some of the ECA region’s highest-income countries indicate that the pandemic is giving rise to learning losses and increases in inequality. [To reduce and reverse the long-term negative effects, Ukraine](#) and other lower-middle-income countries, which are likely to be even harder hit, need to implement learning recovery programs, protect educational budgets, and prepare for future shocks by “building back better.” Ukraine also implemented measures to support remote teaching and learning.

The U.S. Department of Education (Department) released the [COVID-19 Handbook, Volume 2: Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students' Needs](#), to provide additional strategies for safely reopening all of America's schools. Building off of [Volume 1: Strategies for Safely Reopening Elementary and Secondary Schools](#), which focused on health and safety measures that schools can use to successfully implement the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's \(CDC\) K-12 Operational Strategy](#), Volume 2 of the Handbook focuses on research-based strategies to address the social, emotional, mental-health, and academic impacts of the pandemic on students, educators, and staff, such as how to address any potential anxiety or depression some may face as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and nearly a year of remote learning.

One of the most severe impacts of school closures has been the impact on both student and teacher mental health. Based on a study conducted by the Reuters News Agency in the United States that surveyed school districts that serve [over 2.2 million students, 74 percent reported several signs of increased mental health issues among students](#). Nearly [90% of responding districts cited higher rates of absenteeism or disengagement](#), metrics commonly used to gauge student emotional health. The lack of in-person education was a driver of these warning signs of trouble, according to more than half of districts.

The pandemic has brought up new challenges, while also exacerbating previous barriers to education and threatening women and girls’ access to learning. On the occasion of International Women’s Day, the World Innovation Summit for Education discussed the [impact of COVID-19 on girls’ education](#) in various regions of the world, how to prevent dropouts, and highlighted best practices from around the world. [Watch a replay of that conversation here.](#)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (C.D.C.) announced that elementary school students and some middle and high school students could be spaced [three feet apart in classrooms](#). The previous guidance of keeping most students six feet apart had in many school districts become a big obstacle to welcoming students back for full-time instruction because it severely limited capacity. Many experts now say a growing body of research shows that [six feet is not much more protective than three](#), as long as other safety measures are in place, such as mask wearing.

While some educators have been able to work from home for much, if not all, of the pandemic, childcare centers have emerged as substitute schools for many thousands of American children for whom online learning is not an option. For months, [those students have been supervised by childcare, after-school, and day care employees](#) — sometimes in the very same classrooms that were closed for in-person instruction because of high virus cases and concerns among teachers’ unions about safety measures. That stark imbalance has [underscored longstanding](#)

[inequities between childcare workers and public school educators](#), and raised uncomfortable questions about which employees are considered essential.



RESEARCH AND LATEST FINDINGS

The World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF launched “[Mission: Recovering Education in 2020](#)”. With the main objective of enabling all children to return to school and to a supportive learning environment, the partners seek to support countries to take all actions possible to plan, prioritize, and ensure that all learners are back in school; that schools take all measures to reopen safely; that students receive effective remedial learning and comprehensive services to help recover learning losses and improve overall welfare; and their teachers are prepared and supported to meet their learning needs.

A [new World Bank report](#) shows that the health and economic shocks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic brought about the most significant disruption in the history of the education sector in Latin America and the Caribbean region, leading to school closures at all levels and affecting over 170 million students throughout the region. Despite the tremendous efforts made by countries to mitigate the lack of in-person education through remote learning, education is taking a serious hit and outcomes are plummeting in the region. [Learning poverty by the end of primary education could increase by more than 20 percent.](#)

A recent World Bank report discusses the impact of COVID-19 and related school closures on primary students’ access to learning in Nepal. [The note finds that overall](#), during school closures, disadvantaged parents (by wealth/caste) are significantly: (i) less likely to have accessed active remote learning; (ii) less likely to engage in the child’s learning; and (iii) less likely to receive teacher support.

By exacerbating a pre-existing “learning crisis,” the COVID-19 pandemic has undermined many developing countries’ long-term economic prospects. Even in the face of today’s fiscal constraints, immediate action to improve educational outcomes has become an urgent priority. This [piece](#) by Pinelopi Koujianou Goldberg, former World Bank Group chief economist, currently Professor of Economics at Yale University, highlights ways in which countries could possibly mitigate this learning crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused rushed digitalization of primary and secondary (K12) student education, and cyber-risks such as bullying, technology addiction, and misinformation must be addressed. There is an urgent need to coordinate global efforts for digital skills education and training, which can help students succeed in the digital age while curbing risks and inequality. This [report](#) in “Nature” aims to highlight ways in which systems can address the digital skills gap for future generations.

A recent UNICEF report highlights the impact of COVID-19 on low cost private schools (LCPS). The [economic shock of the pandemic has placed LCPS under significant financial stress](#); teachers reported losing their jobs, having their salaries cut, or not being paid at all. Thousands of LCPS have already shut down, and thousands more are on the brink of permanent closures. LCPS also struggled to provide remote learning support to their students, and the likelihood of extensive learning losses among returning students is high. Given the financial pressures they are under, LCPS will also face difficulties in providing remedial learning support to overcome this learning loss.

[World Bank Blogs, Events, and Other Resources](#)

World Bank Blogs:

- Ending Learning Poverty and Building Skills: Investing in Education - The World Bank ([brochure](#))
- Mission: Recovering Education 2021 ([English](#), [French](#), [Spanish](#))
- How to get children to Read@Home? We have a manual that can help ([English](#))

- Building back better after COVID-19: The importance of tracking learning inequality ([English](#))
- COVID-19 and the learning crisis in Latin America and the Caribbean: How can we prevent a tragedy? ([English](#), [Spanish](#), [Portuguese](#))
- How to assess students' learning? A new World Bank Primer on Large Scale Assessments helps to answer this question ([English](#), [Spanish](#))
- Raising the foundation without lowering the ceiling: How to utilize teachers' guides to facilitate high-quality instruction ([English](#))
- COVID-19 highlights urgency of TVET reforms ([English](#))
- It is time to return to learning ([English](#), [Spanish](#))
- COVID-19: Bringing girls back to school ([English](#))
- How the SDG 4.1.1 Framework and Learning Poverty Can Help Countries Focus Their Education Policy Response to COVID-19 ([English](#))
- Why investing in women and girls matter now more than ever ([English](#), [French](#))
- Back to the future: Harnessing women's capital for new growth in Turkey ([English](#), [Turkish](#))
- Building back better from the crisis: What will it take for the poorest countries ([English](#), [French](#), [Spanish](#), [Chinese](#), [Arabic](#))
- Better childcare opportunities for Sri Lankan Women ([English](#))
- Providing inclusive education for all refugees is within our reach ([English](#))
- Building back from COVID-19: Creating economic opportunities for the poorest ([English](#), [Chinese](#))
- Innovative methods to monitor development programs during COVID-19: An application to Zambia ([English](#))
- The costs of growing up during the pandemic ([English](#))