



United Nations  
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Cultural Organization

**Santiago Office**  
Regional Bureau for Education in  
Latin America and the Caribbean

## UNESCO COVID-19 Education Response



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# National education responses to COVID-19: The situation of Latin America and the Caribbean

## About this document

The COVID-19 pandemic caused the greatest global, simultaneous interruption of education services in recent history. It has impacted over 90% of the worldwide student population from preschool to higher education.

Latin American and Caribbean countries have engaged in enormous efforts to promote continuity of teaching and learning in this context. In spite of this, profound inequities persist in school systems that limit the capacity to reach the entire population.

It is imperative to have information that contributes to guiding the actions that may mitigate or reverse the pandemic's negative impacts on learning and educational inequities.

This report presents a regional overview based on the results of the "Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19," which was implemented by UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank between May and October 2020.

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# Acknowledgments

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# Introduction

The rapid spread of coronavirus in the world in 2020 and its manifestation in the COVID-19 pandemic led most national governments to suspend in-person classes on a massive scale.

This is the greatest global and simultaneous interruption of education services in recent history. It has impacted over 90% of the global student population from preschool to higher education<sup>1</sup>.

In this context, Latin American and Caribbean countries have undertaken enormous efforts to promote continuity of teaching and learning. However, profound inequities persist in school systems that limit the capacity to reach the entire population.

The unequal conditions in school infrastructure, access to computer equipment and connectivity in schools and homes, combined with deficits in the development of teachers' and students' ICT skills in the region's countries, have been significant factors that have led to expand previously existing gaps in access and learning.

The suspension of in-person classes has jeopardized both the progress made towards fulfillment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 and fulfillment of the targets set for 2030. The pandemic has brought consequences and costs with it, particularly for the most marginalized and at-risk populations.

In that context, through the Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19, UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank have undertaken a joint initiative to monitor countries' education responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ministries of Education were surveyed to

explore the measures adopted and the planning of the return to in-person classes<sup>2</sup>.

This survey was planned in several rounds of data collection to record the changes that took place in the countries. As of the drafting of this report, two rounds have been completed. The first was conducted between May and June 2020 and the second between July and October of the same year. A third round was implemented between February and March 2021, in which the OECD also participated.

Based on the information collected in the first two rounds, the goal of this document is to present an overview of the educational situation of Latin America and the Caribbean in 2020. Issues covered include the suspension of in-person classes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the countries' efforts to ensure pedagogical continuity and support the education community, and the status of reopening plans when the survey was applied.

This information is expected to contribute to expanding knowledge on the situation of the region's education systems during the period analyzed, while also recognizing the main achievements and difficulties that the countries have faced and identifying the challenges that exist in 2021 with respect to organizing the return to in-person classes and to mitigate or reverse the pandemic's negative impacts on learning and educational inequalities.

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO (2020). Global Education Monitoring Report, 2020, Latin America and the Caribbean: Inclusion and Education: All Means All <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374614>.

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on the survey, see UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank (2020). What have we learnt? Overview of findings from a survey of ministries of education on national responses to COVID-19. Paris, New York, Washington D.C.: UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank. [online] [http://tcg.uis.unesco.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2020/10/National-Education-Responses-to-COVID-19-WEB-final\\_EN.pdf](http://tcg.uis.unesco.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2020/10/National-Education-Responses-to-COVID-19-WEB-final_EN.pdf). Complementary material can be found online at: <http://tcg.uis.unesco.org/survey-education-covid-school-closures/>.

The document is organized into three sections. The first analyzes the impact of the pandemic on the suspension of in-person classes. The second describes the strategies and policies implemented by the countries in 2020 in response to this context through four areas: the continuity of learning, monitoring strategies, family support and support for teachers. The third presents the measures taken to plan the return to in-person classes

as of the date of the second round's completion. The report also offers conclusions of the study.

The information contained here describes the situation of the region during the second and third quarters of 2020, which can be updated, complemented and enriched with the results of the third round of the study.

## Survey Technical Sheet\*

**Characteristics.** The questionnaire, designed to be answered by officials from the ministries of education, was submitted simultaneously to countries' ministries of education and statistics units. Two officials were asked to serve as the focal point for gathering and submitting the information. The survey refers to all educational levels except for higher education and technical and vocational education and training.

**Rounds.** The first round was implemented globally between April 15 and June 12, 2020. Thirty countries from Latin America and the Caribbean participated. The second round was conducted between July 15 and October 15. Twenty-five countries from the region responded, 19 of which had participated in the first round. As such, data from 36 countries is available. The third round was applied between February 1 and March 31, 2021 and the general results will be released mid-year. \*\*

**Dimensions.** The survey addresses various aspects of the countries' responses and reopening plans as well as the distance learning modes implemented; support measures for teachers, students and families; the assessment and monitoring of learning; school reopening plans and changes to the academic calendar. The two rounds covered the same dimensions but most of the questions changed between the first and second.

**Processing criteria.** Given the document goals, data obtained during the second round was prioritized as more time had passed since the outbreak of the pandemic and the countries had more of an opportunity to develop their responses. In some cases, data from the two rounds are combined to describe a broader set of countries.

\* For more information, see the technical notes from the first round of the survey, which were published here in June 2020, and the second, which were published here in October 2020.

\*\* Participating countries: (round one only) Anguilla, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Bolivia, Curacao, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Turks and Caicos, Nicaragua and Puerto Rico; (round two only) Chile, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Aruba, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Brazil, Peru, Honduras, Uruguay, Guatemala and the Cayman Islands; (both rounds) Montserrat, Belize, Cuba, Colombia, El Salvador, the British Virgin Islands, Jamaica, Mexico, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Suriname, Antigua and Barbuda, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela and Santa Lucia.

# How did the pandemic impact the suspension of in-person classes?

The region responded quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic, suspending in-person classes in some or all schools on a massive level for several months in 2020<sup>3</sup>.

This suspension began during the second week of March 2020 in the majority of Latin American and Caribbean countries. The impact of the suspension of in-person classes has varied widely among countries and over time. **Figure 1** presents a summary of the situation of school openings for in-person classes between April and December 2020<sup>4</sup>.

From the beginning of the pandemic, only 15 countries of the 42 analyzed managed to fully resume in-person classes for at least two months in 2020. This group of countries is home to 4.7 million preschool, elementary and high school students.

Many have managed to partially reopen for in-person learning, with varying capacity to begin and sustain it over time, although these situations should not be considered as equivalent<sup>5</sup>. Of the 37.9 million students

in these countries, only some have been able to restore the in-person connection to school.

Ten countries in the region were unable to implement any format of returning to in-person classes. Given that this group includes the most populous countries, the data suggest that over 100 million students in the region have not had any in-person connection to their school during the period in question.

The suspension of in-person classes has been the context in which governments have deployed a broad set of strategies aimed at favoring distance learning in synchronous and asynchronous formats, as described in the next section.

In summary, **Figure 1** presents the challenges that countries faced in 2020 and the progress and setbacks experienced in some cases due to the spread of the disease, which reflects the heterogeneity present in the region.

The majority of the countries could not fully return to in-person classes at any point in 2020, which has impacted the educational situation of the schools' stakeholders. For example, during the 275 days between April 1 and December 15, Latin American and Caribbean countries have kept schools completely open for in-person classes for only 33 days on average.

**Figure 2** shows that, compared to other regions, during the period between April 1 and December 31, Latin America and the Caribbean presents a very high number of days in which schools remained closed for in-person

<sup>3</sup> For the description of the impact of the pandemic on the suspension of in-person classes, this section draws on data published by UNESCO on the global monitoring of school closures, which includes 42 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. For more information, see <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>.

<sup>4</sup> The methodological decisions regarding each of the categories are described in the following document: [https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/en\\_methodological\\_note\\_-\\_unesco\\_map\\_on\\_covid-19\\_caused\\_school\\_closures\\_reopening\\_final.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/en_methodological_note_-_unesco_map_on_covid-19_caused_school_closures_reopening_final.pdf). It is worth noting that the expression 'school closures,' which is included in the original categories, has been replaced here by 'schools closed for in-person classes' in order to avoid suggesting that this category implies having halted teaching activities.

<sup>5</sup> According to the methodological definition, the category "Some schools open for in-person classes" includes situations in which some schools are open in certain regions and/or only for some grade/age levels and/or with reduced in-person learning times combined with distance learning (hybrid approach). In order to expand our

knowledge of the partial in-person learning experience that each country developed, see the Reports on the COVID-19 Education Response for LAC, which UNICEF publishes regularly. They are available online at <https://www.unicef.org/lac/en/update-reports-covid-19-education-response>.

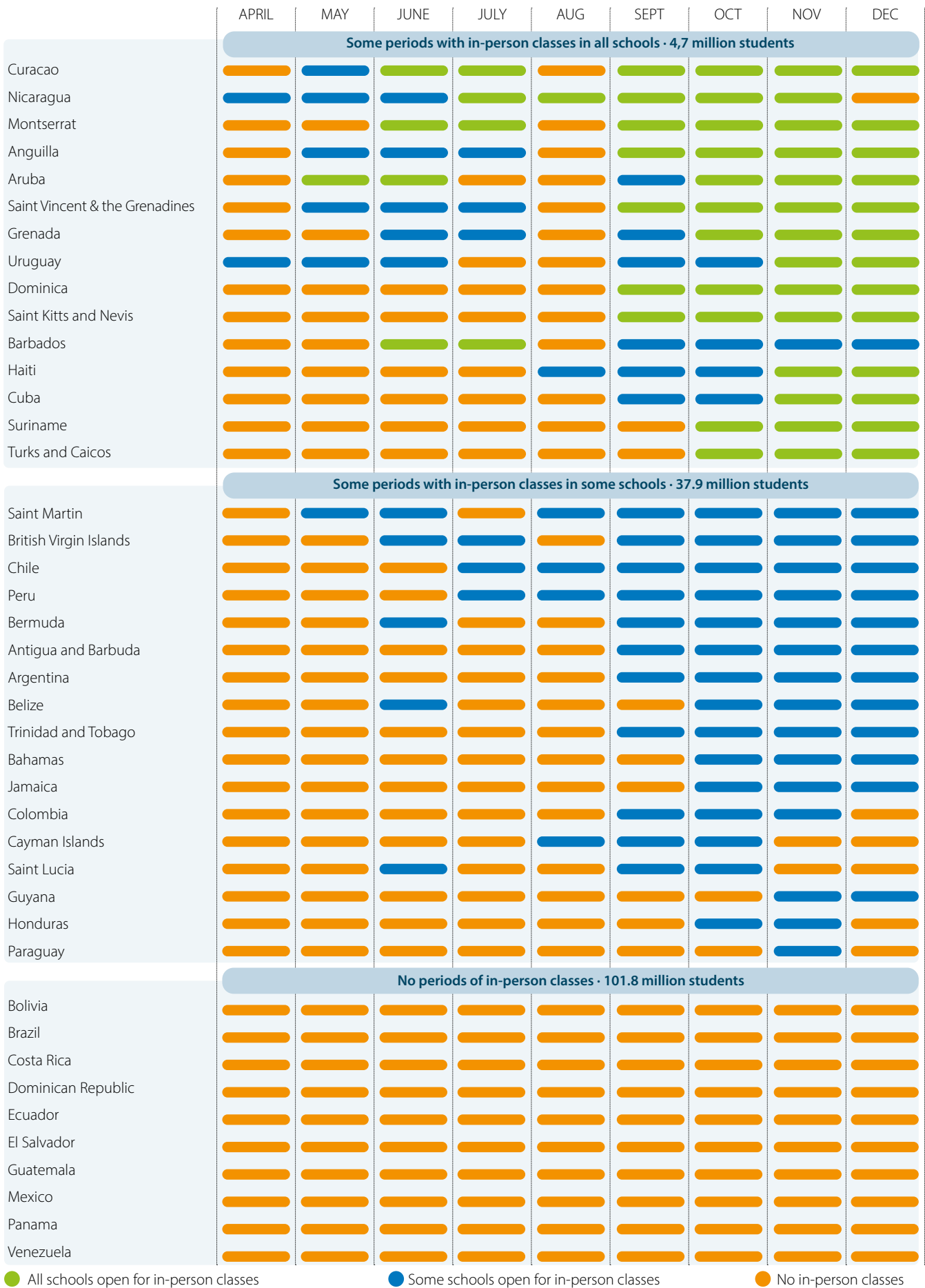
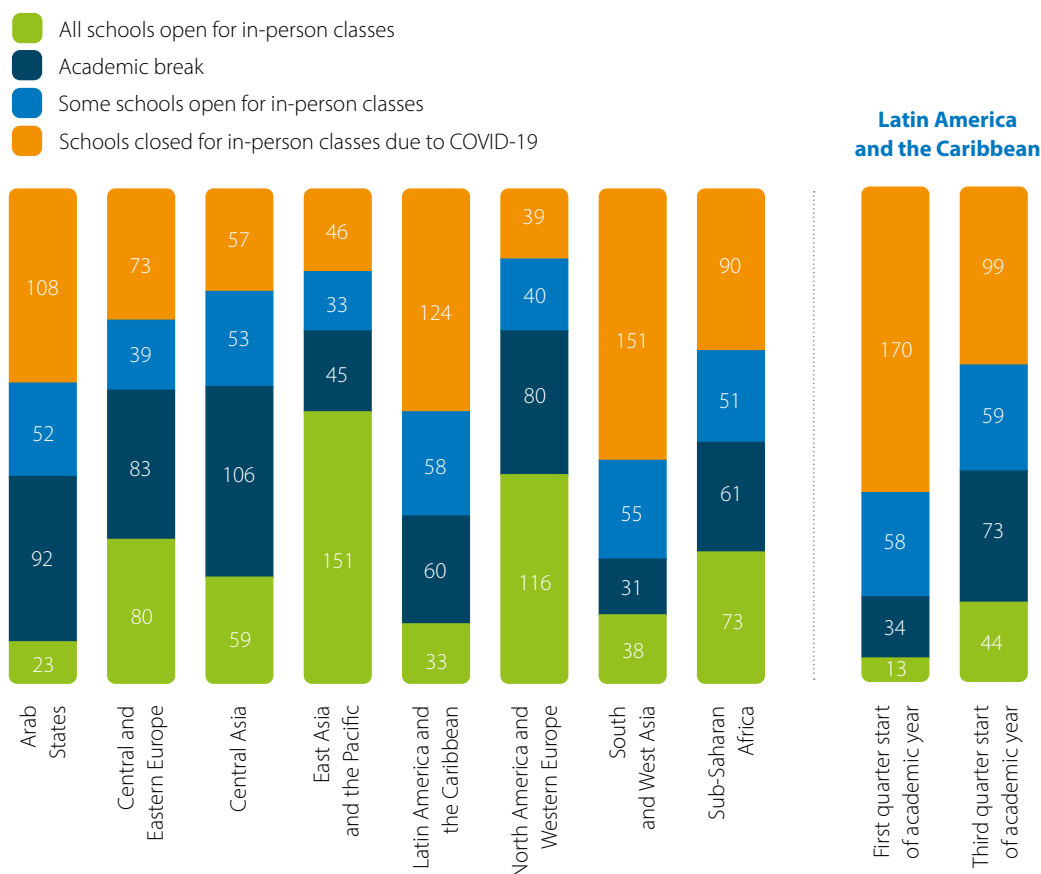


Figure 1. Monthly situation of in-person classes (April-December 2020) by country and type of reopening.

Data source: UNESCO global monitoring of school closures.





**Figure 2. Average number of consecutive days accumulated by school opening status by region April 1-December 31, 2020.**

Data source: UNESCO global monitoring of school closures.

classes. During that period of 275 consecutive days, schools were closed for in-person classes an average of 124 days. This number increases to 184 if school vacation periods are included.

The only regions with similar numbers were South and West Asia, which had schools closed an average of 182 days due to COVID-19 or school vacation, and the Arab States which, though it had fewer days without in-person classes due to COVID-19, reaches 200 days when the three months of school vacation are included<sup>6</sup>.

During the period analyzed, the relationship between the start of the academic year and the suspension of in-person classes is also worthy of note. The countries in the

region that normally start classes during the first quarter of the year suspended all in-person classes for 170 consecutive days on average<sup>7</sup>. In contrast, this number drops to 99 in countries where the academic year begins in the third quarter. This happened because the first group of countries had summer vacation prior to the pandemic, while the second had it in the midst of it<sup>8</sup>.

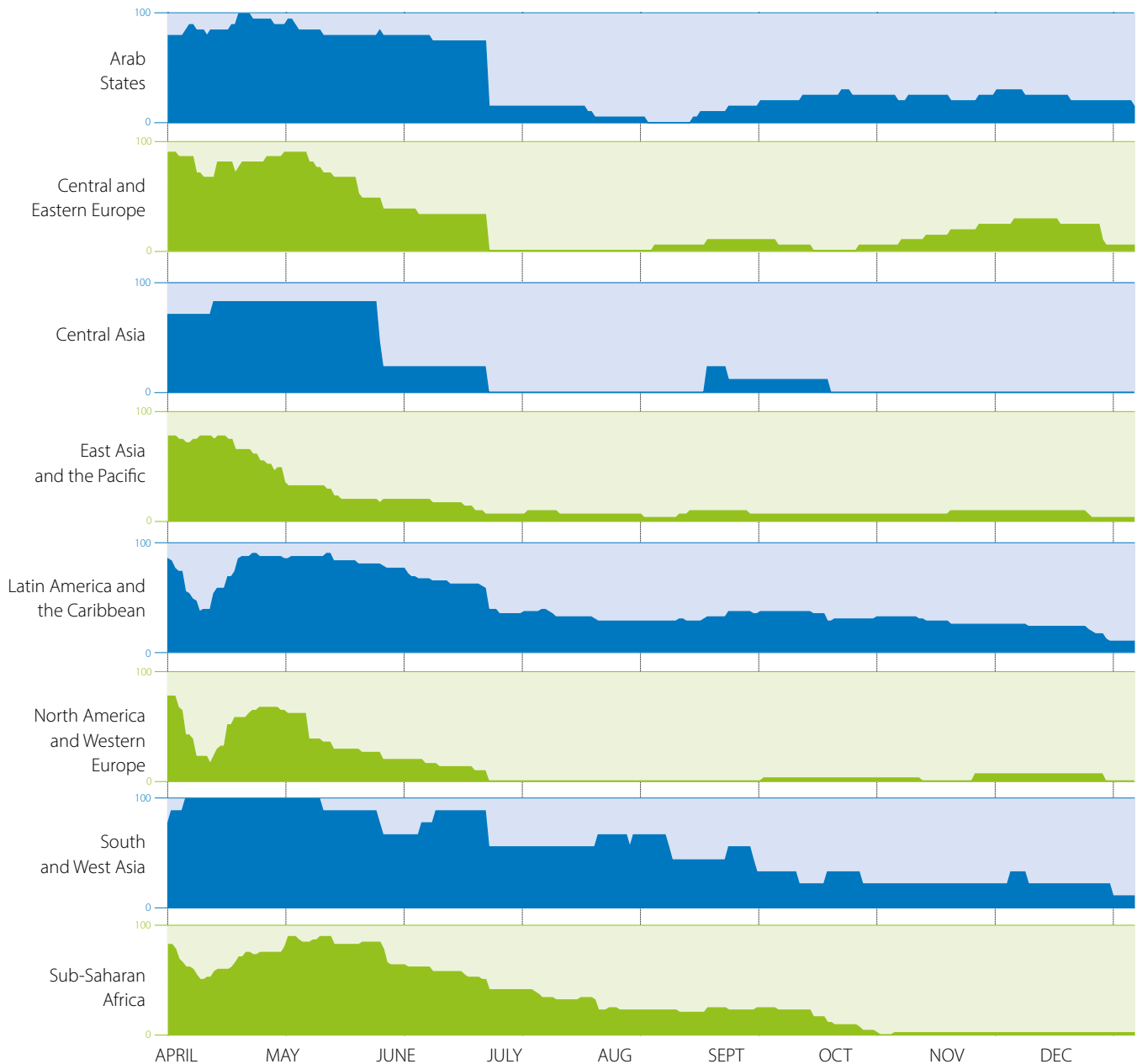
In comparison, **Figure 3** shows that some other regions have managed to quickly respond to the situation caused by COVID-19, returning to in-person classes prior to mid-2020.

When the regions' responses are displayed over time, we see that some quickly implemented strategies

<sup>6</sup> According to recent estimates from UNICEF, Latin America and the Caribbean continues to be the most impacted region in terms of suspension of in-person classes through February 2021, presenting an average of 158 working days without schools opened. It also has the highest percentage of countries in this situation through the end of the period analyzed (22% of the total). See UNICEF (2021), COVID-19 and school closures. One year of education disruption [online] <https://data.unicef.org/resources/one-year-of-covid-19-and-school-closures/>.

<sup>7</sup> Twenty-four countries in the region begin the school year in the third quarter. They are Caribbean nations, plus Mexico, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic. Those that begin the year in the first quarter are located in South America, with the exception of Venezuela.

<sup>8</sup> The information available for the first quarter of 2021 indicates that these differences remain. Even after the January-February southern hemisphere summer school vacation, the countries that began the academic year in early 2021 accumulated more days without in-person classes due to COVID-19.



**Figure 3. Percentage of countries without in-person classes due to COVID-19 by region (April 1-December 31, 2020).**

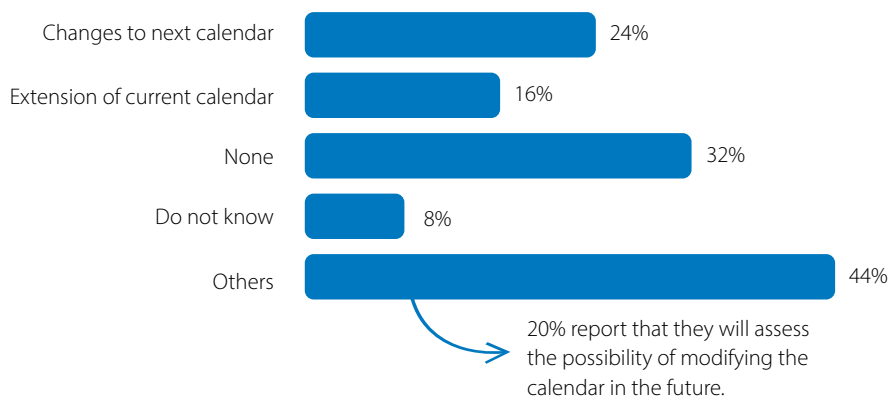
Data source: UNESCO global monitoring of school closures.

designed to allow schools to remain fully or partially open, as occurred in North America, Western Europe and Central Asia. In other cases, such as Latin America and the Caribbean, Southern and Western Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, the number of countries that have not returned to in-person classes has decreased much more gradually.

Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the few regions that maintained a high and stable percentage of countries without in-person classes during the second

half of 2020. That percentage was between 25 and 30% between July and the first half of December. Then it decreases due to the beginning of the academic break in some countries. The situation is similar in Southern and Western Asia, though the percentage has remained below 25% since October.

This accumulation of days without in-person classes could be expected to lead to the need to revisit the organization of the academic calendar in many cases. **Figure 4** presents the results of the survey on national



**Figure 4. Percentage of countries that modified the school calendar due to the pandemic by type of change in Latin America and the Caribbean.**

Data source: Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19, July-October round.

responses in education to COVID-19, specifically those related to the question of whether countries have modified their academic calendars due to the pandemic.

The responses of the region's countries highlight two key issues. First, only 32% stated that they did not make changes and do not plan to make changes to the academic calendar. Adjusting the organization of the start and end of the academic year has been the focus of assessments in most education systems. Some countries

(16%) considered extending the academic year that was in progress when the survey was applied while others (24%) considered extending the next academic year.

Another group of countries had not decided to change the academic calendar when the survey was applied. This percentage could be extrapolated at 28%, based on those who responded "I don't know" or "Other," and whose response leaves the possibility open for this type of change in the future.

# How did the countries respond to the suspension of in-person classes?

In response to the widespread suspension of in-person classes in March and April 2020, the countries deployed different strategies to favor distance learning.

These answers centered on the implementation of alternative mechanisms for sustaining the connection between students and teachers, using different combinations of strategies and platforms to respond to the specific challenges of each context.

The main strategy of the majority of countries was distance learning, which posed enormous challenges, especially in those countries that lacked digital inclusion policies. On the other hand, both homes and schools in the region present marked digital gaps in access to technological devices, connectivity and technical skills<sup>9</sup>.

For these reasons, countries also implemented strategies to make educational content available to the entire child and adolescent population (see below), though in numerous cases this was carried out without teacher monitoring of learning.

Countries also focused on supporting teachers during this transition to facilitate the exercise of the new teaching role and provide support and accompaniment. Families were also the focus of national education policies, which included financial and socio-emotional support strategies and initiatives focused on educational work with students at home.

This section describes the diversity of strategies executed in response to the suspension of in-person classes based on the answers provided by countries between May and October of 2020. This information covers aspects that have frequently been addressed,

those that have not been addressed and the diversity of responses.

## Strategies for learning continuity

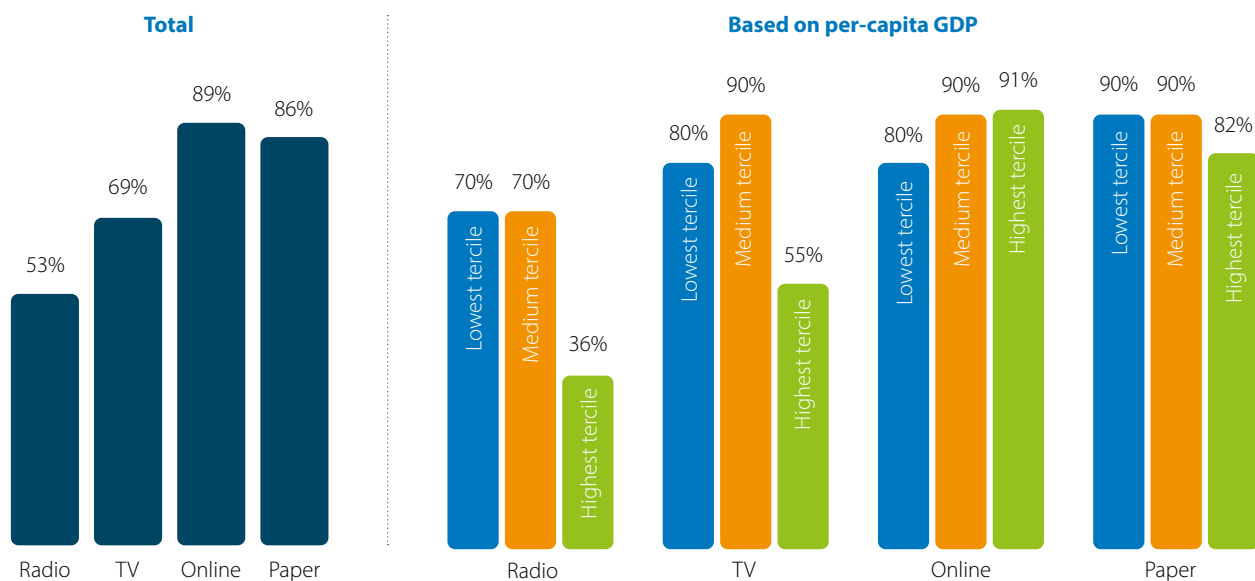
The Survey on national education responses to COVID-19 has organized these strategies into four major groups:

- ♦ **Radio.** Broadcast of learning content on the most popular radio stations in each country.
- ♦ **TV.** Broadcast of learning content through TV channels (antenna, cable or satellite).
- ♦ **Online.** Refers to the various options for making content available and monitoring learning through web portals. This can include educational platforms, digital content repositories, folders shared in the cloud, web sites, synchronous video and/or audio communication channels (such as video calls) and asynchronous channels such as messaging services, or a combination of these.
- ♦ **Paper.** Dissemination of learning content in print format through the distribution of notebooks or paper copies.

Of the four strategies analyzed, only one (online) offers the opportunity to establish two-way communication, allowing for student-teacher exchanges, a connection to the school and a virtual link to their peers. In the other three cases, given that it is unidirectional communication, monitoring of learning was not provided for per se, and complementary strategies would have been advisable<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> For an analysis of digital gaps, see UNESCO and IDB (2020). Reopening schools in Latin America and the Caribbean: Key points, challenges, and dilemmas to plan a safe return to in-person classes [https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375059\\_eng](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375059_eng).

<sup>10</sup> UNESCO and IDB (2020). Reopening schools in Latin America and the Caribbean: Key points, challenges, and dilemmas to plan a safe return to in-person classes, [https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375059\\_eng](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375059_eng), and UNICEF (2020) How many children and



**Figure 5. Percentage of countries based on distance-learning strategies implemented, total and by national per capita GDP (PPP, current dollars).**

Data sources: Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19, May-June and July-October rounds and World Bank Indicators.

**Figure 5** (left) shows that most countries' strategies focused on the development of online content and distribution of paper notebooks. The second most popular option was TV, and a little over half of the countries disseminated educational content on the radio.

The diversity of territories, contexts and conditions that characterize the region require systems to use various communication channels to reach all children and adolescents. These responses reflect the fact that the majority of the countries have deployed a combination of strategies in an effort to distribute the largest amount of learning proposals to the entire population.

**Figure 5** (right) also connects these strategies to the country's per-capita GDP, which is grouped into tertiles. It shows that radio and TV have been implemented most frequently by low- and middle-income countries that are also likely to lag in relation to Internet connectivity.

It is important to consider that there are marked gaps in Internet access within each country in the region. In a context in which the distance-learning strategies used most frequently by the countries have focused on online platforms, unequal Internet access may deepen

young people have Internet access at home? [online] <https://www.unicef.org/media/88381/file/How-many-children-and-young-people-have-internet-access-at-home-2020.pdf>.

educational exclusion gaps. To address this issue, countries have adopted measures designed to expand Internet connectivity and access.

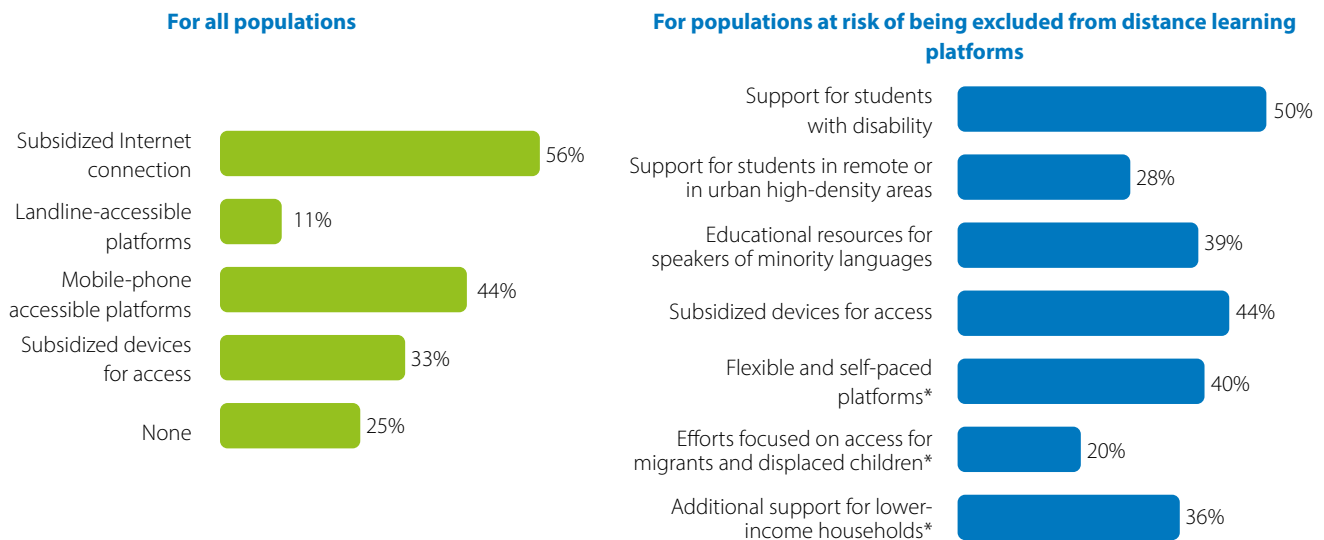
**Figure 6** (left) shows countries have implemented a wide range of policies to facilitate connectivity. There is not one preponderant solution; instead, the responses point to a diversity of scenarios.

A little over half of the countries of the region opted to subsidize Internet connections and one-third contributed to computer equipment access. In 44% of cases, there was a move to develop mobile phone-accessible content given that this is the technology with the greatest reach in the region.

Furthermore, one-fourth of the countries surveyed stated that they had not taken any action to facilitate access to online teaching platforms, at least not when they responded to the study.

The survey also explored the strategies implemented by countries to favor access to distance learning platforms for students at risk of being excluded. The responses are shown on **Figure 6** (right).

Many countries in the region reported that they had not taken specific measures to facilitate access to distance learning platforms meant for groups with the greatest risk of exclusion. Linguistic minorities displaced and



**Figure 6. Percentage of countries based on measures adopted to facilitate access to online learning platforms.**

Data source: Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19, May-June and July-October rounds.

\* Questions only included in the July-October round. As such, they represent the 25 countries that responded to the survey.

migrant children, and students with disabilities have benefited from policies designed to ensure access to distance learning content in a limited number of countries. Such measures reach just 50% of the population with disabilities.

Assistance with Internet access for families living in isolated or densely populated urban areas was a strategy promoted in 28% of cases, reflecting the prevalence of unidirectional communication media and the use of WhatsApp as a key strategy in rural areas. Just one-third of the countries surveyed have developed specific strategies for supporting low-income families.

The data suggests that such groups, which were already in a situation of exclusion prior to the pandemic, have not only seen their educational opportunities decrease due to the suspension of in-person classes, but have also been deprived of access to educational continuity strategies with distance-learning proposals tailored to their conditions and opportunities.

## Monitoring of learning

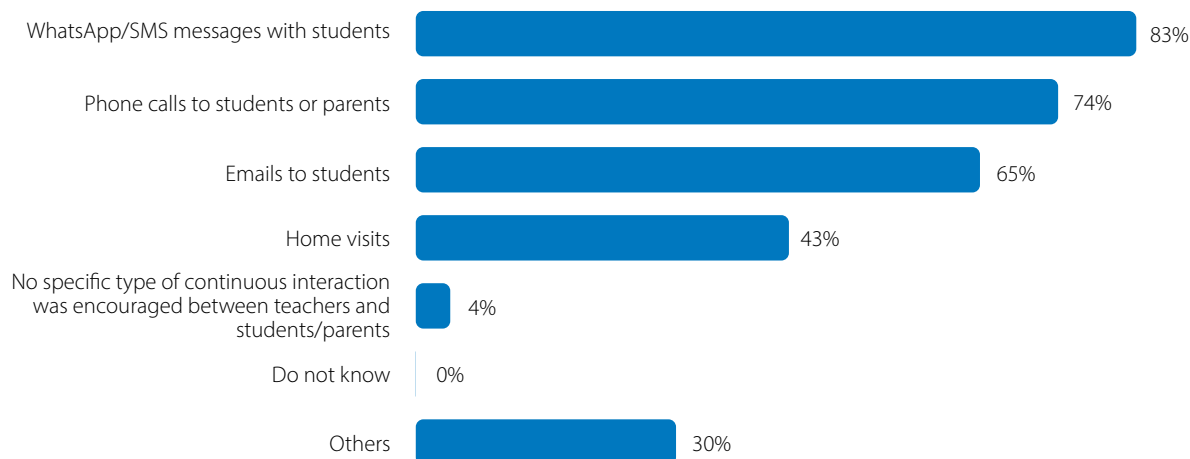
Monitoring of the learning process and students' educational pathways is a key part of the context of the pandemic. The suspension of in-person learning has generated huge obstacles to the interactions necessary to support student learning.

As has been stated, the unidirectional distance-learning strategies require other channels for dialogue and interaction to support students' work. Even online platforms require a broad set of conditions such as equipment, sufficient connectivity, knowledge of the tools, adequate space at home and the ability to work in virtual spaces, along with sufficient motivation.

As such, countries have also advanced specific strategies for schools to maintain contact with students and their families in order to monitor learning and support pathways in the various remote environments. **Figure 7** presents countries' responses to the question regarding the type of interactions that each country promoted for communication between teachers, students and families.

The majority of the countries encouraged cell phone communication between students and teachers using messaging services like WhatsApp.

Phone calls and emails have been alternative means of contacting students or their families. Some countries have opted to encourage teachers to conduct home visits, though to a lesser extent. The survey reveals that the latter was much more frequent in countries that adopted radio dissemination strategies and, to a lesser extent, those that used TV channels.



**Figure 7. Percentage of countries by type of interaction encouraged between teachers and students and/or their parents.**

Data source: Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19, May-June and July-October rounds.

The suspension of in-person classes led to the deployment of these alternative channels for distance learning and student monitoring and conditioned opportunities to monitor learning, particularly when the media used are unidirectional.

With respect to the question about the learning monitoring strategies, countries' responses reflect a context of uncertainty. A little less than half (47%) of the countries reported that they had taken steps to evaluate learning via online platforms during the May-June round (on the right side of the [Figure 8](#)), while student assessments via TV or radio drops significantly (to roughly 37%). A little less than half of the countries did not report on learning assessments in any of the delivery formats.

The round implemented between July and October (left side of the [Figure 8](#)) asked more generally about the existence of a record of students' progress. A high percentage of the countries (40%) reported that they had no such record even at the teacher level, while only some of them used online support recording strategies.

A relatively high percentage of countries reported that they do not conduct assessments and do not plan to implement them once schools reopen. This response was given by 40% of the countries for primary school

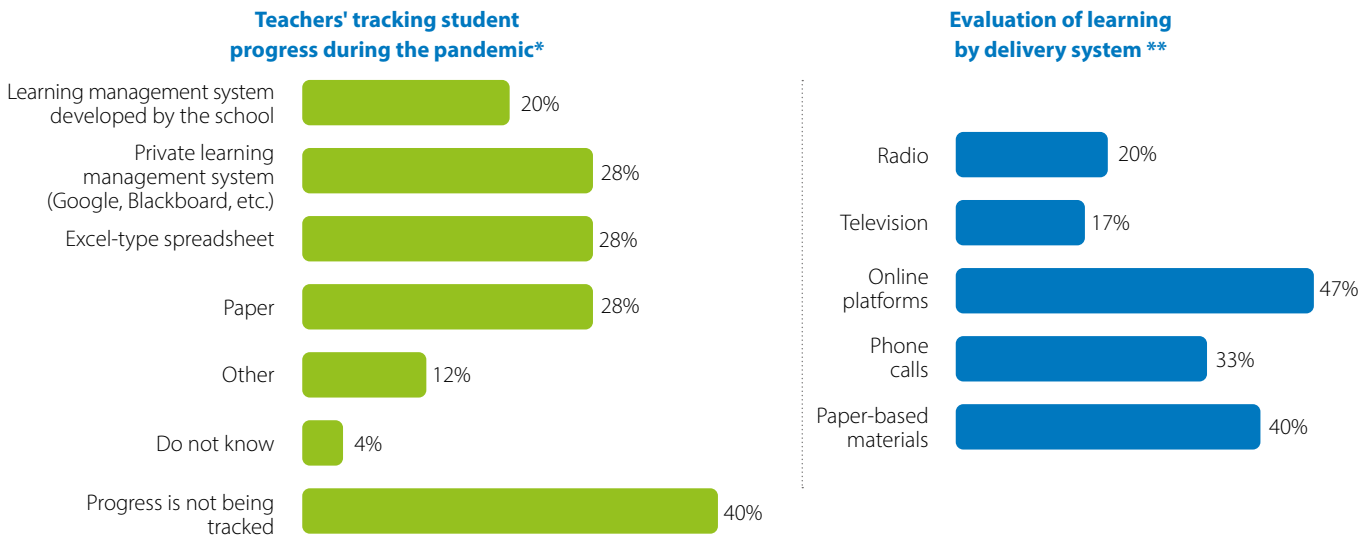
students, 44% for lower secondary school students and 52% for upper secondary school students ([Figure 9](#)).

If one also assumes that that countries which implemented school-level evaluations –or will do so once they reopen – likely do not reach all students, these responses alert us to the limited data that will be available in 2021 to assess the learning situation.

In turn, 40% of the countries surveyed stated that they would implement national standardized testing during the closure or after reopening, and the presence of assessment strategies to scale in subnational units was limited.

In the various standardized testing that the region's countries implement, it is important to ask which are "high-impact," that is, when the results of the instrument have significant consequences for individuals or institutions, such as establishing accreditation of an educational level, determining the allocation of resources to schools or admission to university.

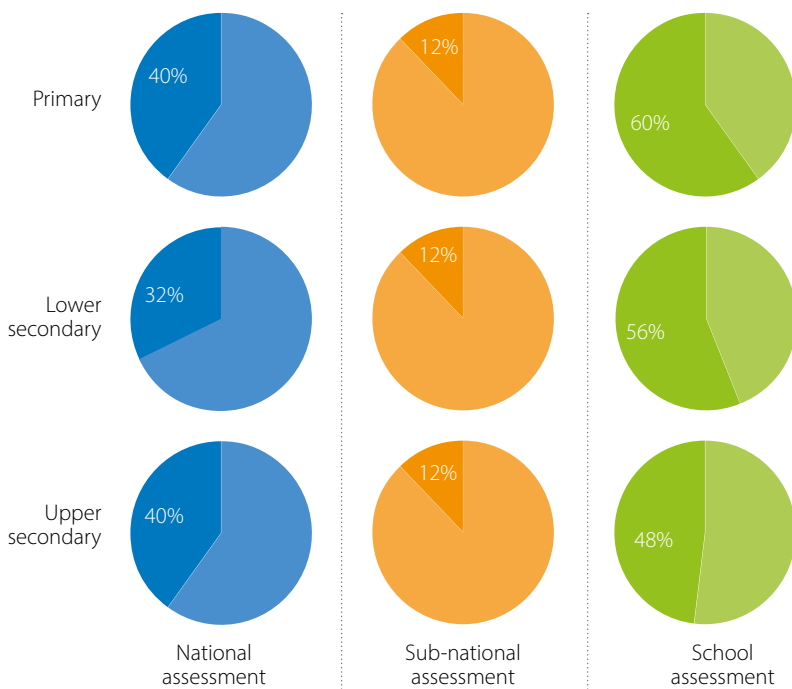
The majority of the countries that responded to the survey have a high-impact assessment for at least one educational level. [Figure 10](#) shows that most of these assessments have been suspended or rescheduled due to the suspension of in-person classes. In some cases, an online version was chosen, with greater incidence at



**Figure 8. Percentage of countries by learning monitoring strategy used during the pandemic.**

Data source: Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19, May-June and July-October rounds.

\* Questions only included in the July-October round. \*\* Questions only included in the May-June round.



**Figure 9. Percentage of countries that assessed students during school closures or after reopening, by assessment type.**

Data source: Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19, May-June and July-October rounds.

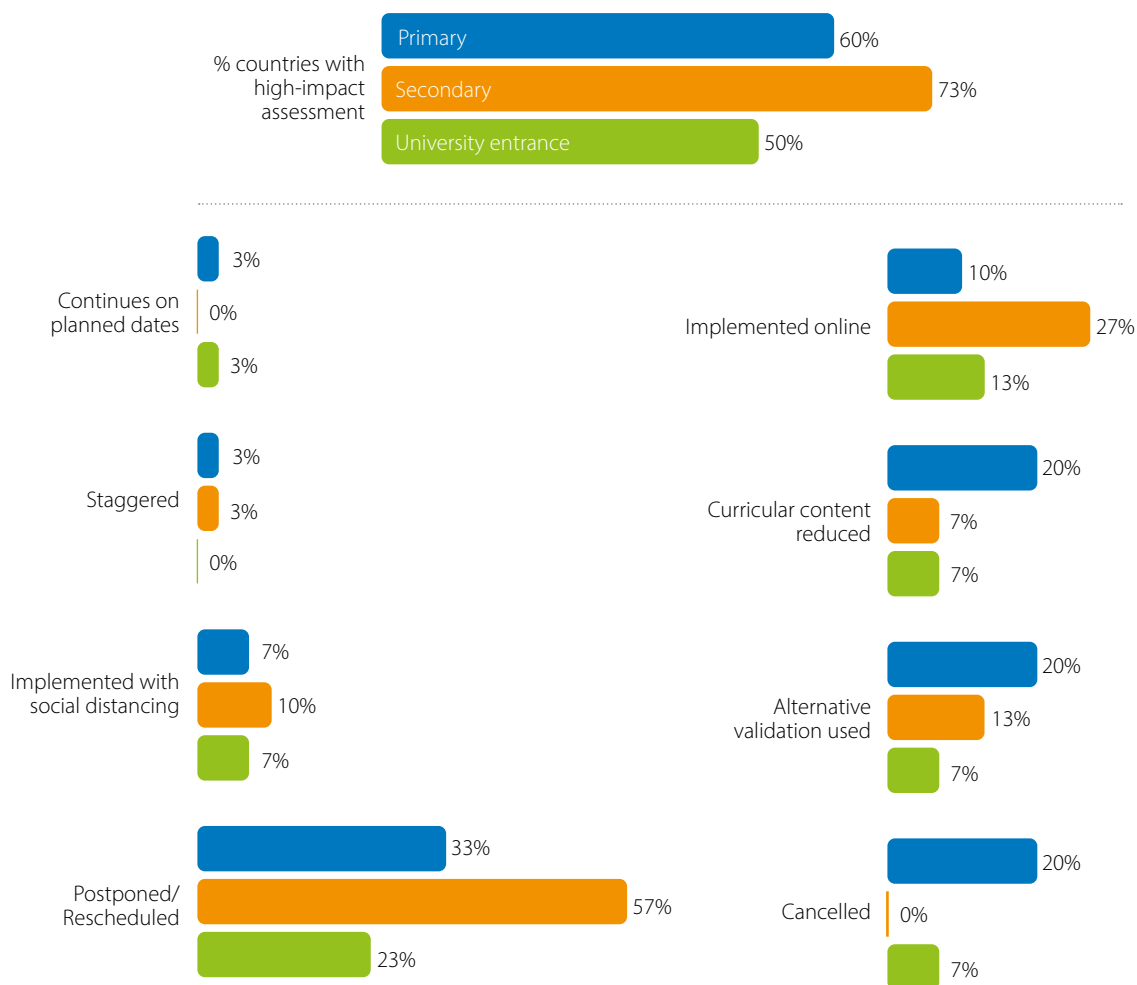
the secondary school level, or a reduction in curricular content, which occurred more frequently at the primary school level.

It is also interesting to note that there have been cases in which the country has set an alternate validation criterion for the execution of the policy measures associated with the results of the assessment. This allowed for continuity of the strategy, forgoing the need to conduct a standardized test to scale.

In short, the analysis conducted in this section on countries' responses allows us to introduce the question about what information is available – and will become available once in-person classes resume – regarding students' learning during the period in which educational continuity was conducted through distance learning modes.

It is quite likely that the majority of the countries lack sufficient data to assess the pandemic's impact on the





**Figure 10. Percentage of countries by measure adopted in regard to high-impact assessments.**

Data source: Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19, May- June round.

learning of children and adolescents in the region, and that the main source of information is the evaluations conducted by the teachers themselves, which is partial and conditioned by the type of distance-learning strategy used by each country.

### Support for families

The suspension of in-person classes generated an exceptional situation in which learning-related activities were carried out at home, for which learning approaches were received through various channels – sometimes simultaneously or in a complementary manner – designed to avoid interrupting the education process.

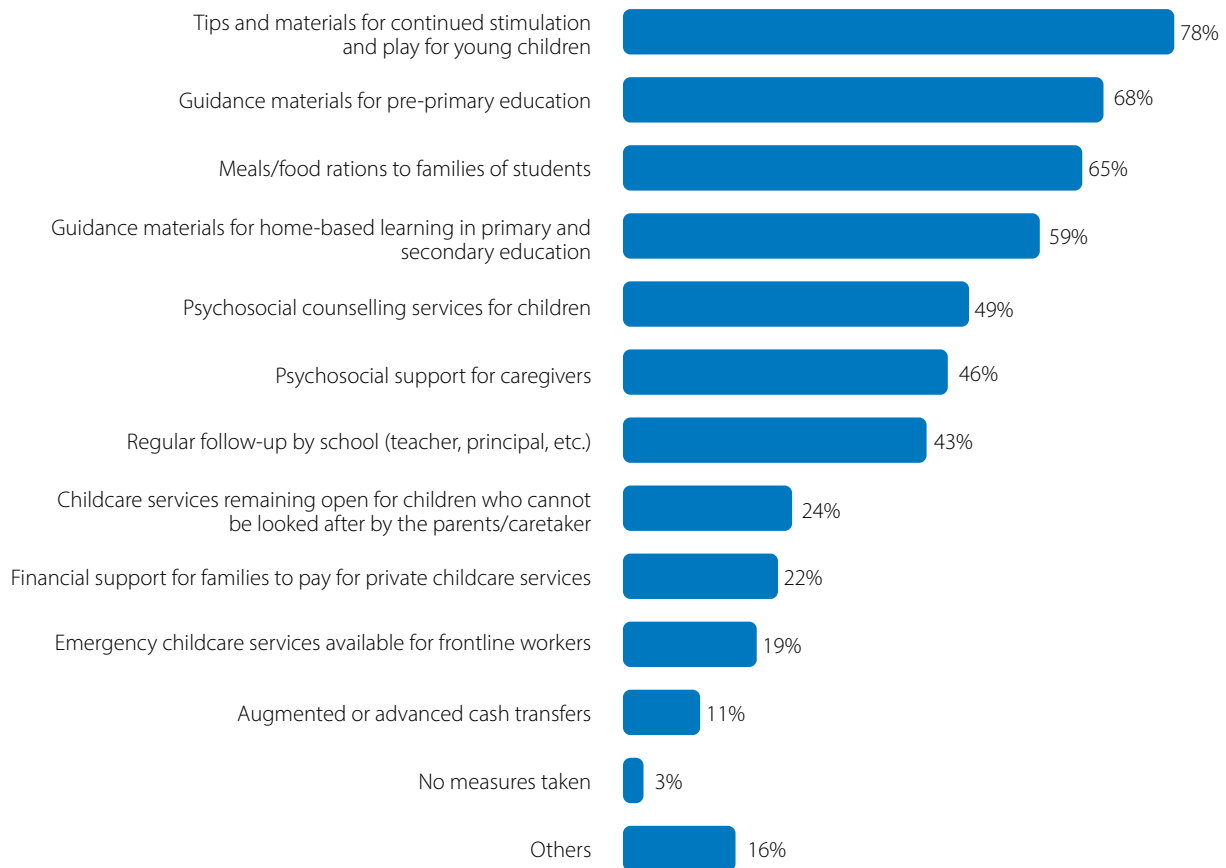
As such, in the characterization of countries' responses it is important to explore the measures implemented that aimed to support parents or caregivers. Some of these were undertaken with strictly educational

goals while others sought to provide socio-emotional support to households impacted by the crisis and/or to compensate for the suspension of access to social policies that were channeled through schools.

The data presented in [Figure 11](#) describes how frequently countries executed this type of policy in the region.

If one considers the set of 36 countries that answered at least one of the rounds that comprise the survey, a wide diversity of household support strategies and a combination of various measures can be observed.

On average, countries have used four or five of the strategies presented in the figure. Only one country stated that it had not taken measures designed for parents/caregivers and a single option was listed in only one case as well.



**Figure 11. Percentage of countries by type of measures adopted to support parents/caregivers.**

Data source: Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19, May-June and July-October rounds.

The most popular policies provided material and guidance for younger children for whom distance learning strategies are less effective and replaced the food services provided by the school through meal rations.

Furthermore, 59% of the countries also reported distributing guidelines to parents and caregivers of primary and secondary school students.

Nearly half of the countries have provided socio-emotional support to students and parents in the household and established guidelines so that teachers and principals can monitor the home situation.

It is interesting to note that most of the less-used strategies would have involved more resources. This may reflect the restrictions faced by countries in terms of increasing or reallocating the education budget in the context of the pandemic.

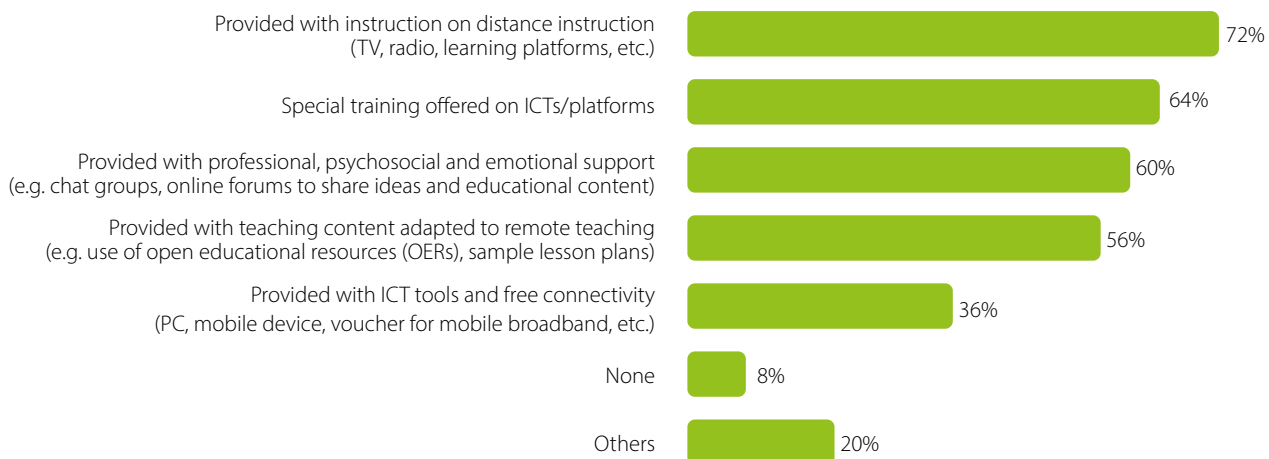
The strategies analyzed can be organized into four areas: those meant to provide support to parents who

are assisting with remote learning, those that provide economic or nutritional support, those focused on socio-emotional support and those that offer child care services.

A total 19% of the countries that responded to the surveys have covered the four areas, which reveals the development of a more comprehensive response to household needs. Meanwhile, 33% have worked with three of these four areas; most had not included the care services offer. Lastly, 42% focused on two areas: nearly half focused on socio-emotional support and favoring distance learning, with the other half engaged in educational continuity and economic support actions.

### Support for teachers

The countries' response to the suspension of in-person classes also entailed opportunities to support teachers and school leadership, which had to replace in-person learning with distance learning using various formats and organizing their own work from home.



**Figure 12. Percentage of countries by type of support provided to teachers.**

Data source: Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19, July-October round.

In the survey responses provided by the countries, 67% stated that teachers continued to teach during the suspension of in-person learning, and 29% reported that “some” continued to engage in teaching activities. The countries in the latter category were mainly those that had partially reopened the schools.

Furthermore, the countries reported that administrative and support staff (psychologists, counselors) continued to perform their duties in this different work mode in 74% of cases.

In the majority of cases, this new context of distance learning did not change teachers’ work conditions or salary (68%). Of the remaining countries, 12% chose the “Other” option, and listed situations specific to each country. For example, conditions for private school teachers were impacted, or scheduled raises were postponed. Another 16% did not answer the question.

In this context, countries executed different strategies to support the teachers’ new roles and the formats implemented during the suspension of in-person classes.

The answers also allowed the authors to identify the heterogeneity and breadth of measures implemented by countries to support teachers’ work. The main response, as shown in the data in **Figure 12**, focused on training in distance learning offerings using various platforms.

For 64% of countries, this training was specifically focused on the use of ICT educational platforms and skills. Furthermore, 56% of countries generated content adapted to distance learning for class planning.

Additionally, 60% of the countries reported that they had taken steps to provide teachers with socio-emotional support to help them to adapt to the shift to remote work and assist them in their efforts to provide student support.

Finally, only one-third of countries reported executing strategies linked to expanding connectivity equipment or facilities to improve educators’ infrastructure for teaching activities.

# What reopening plans have the countries developed?

The data suggests that education workers have conducted distance learning using their own resources and equipment in the majority of cases, raising the question over what happened to teachers who lack connectivity and the learning strategies tied to those educators. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the region's countries have had to respond quickly and effectively to the need to suspend in-person learning and create strategies for distance-learning. They also have had to plan for the return to in-person learning.

As indicated in the first section, the majority of the countries have tried to partially reopen schools (in some specific cases, these have been full reopening processes) in order to reintroduce some sort of in-person learning. The time of year and duration of the experience are linked with each country's decisions and conditions and the start and end dates of the academic year.

This reopening is also linked to the capacity to execute internationally recommended measures to guarantee biosafety conditions, such as maintaining social distancing and implementing hygiene protocols.

This section describes the main strategies that the countries reported as of the completion of the survey, including the measures that had been implemented and those planned for school reopening.

The information analyzed reflects the progress made, decisions taken and uncertainties that the countries had as of the third quarter of 2020, shedding light on the decision-making process within the unique dynamic imposed by the pandemic. The situation may have changed in the following months.

The data in **Figure 13** reveals marked differences in the situation of the countries based on the time in

the academic year in which the COVID-19 pandemic erupted.

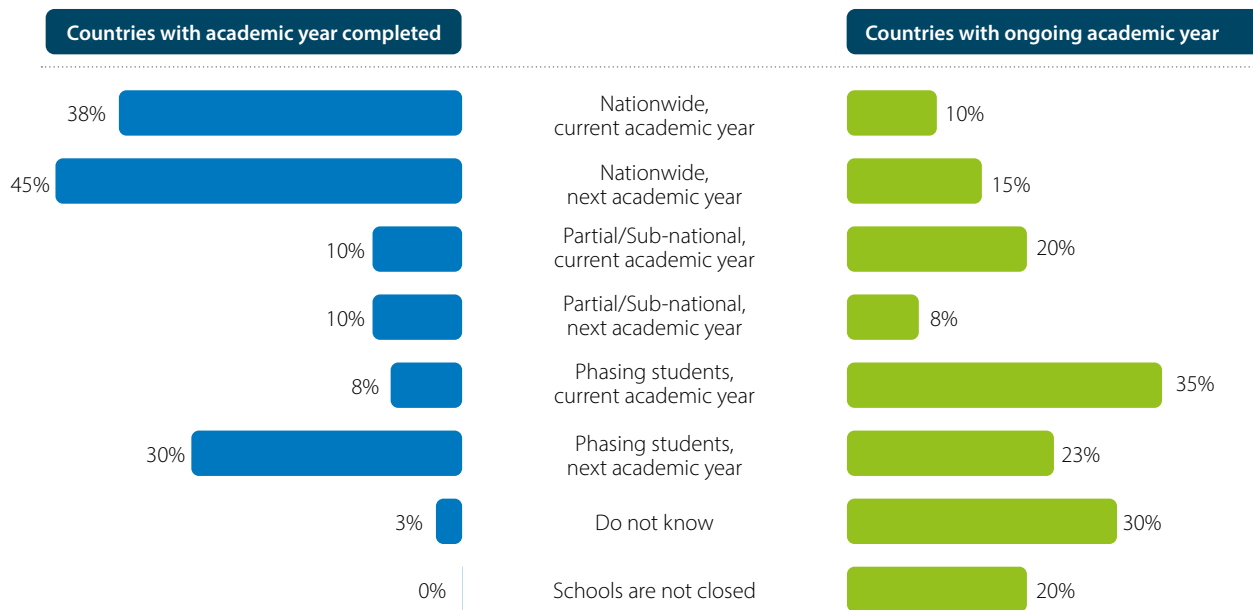
The countries that had concluded the academic year when the survey was implemented (July-October 2020) expressed greater clarity on their reopening plans. The majority reported that there would be a national return to in-person classes during the fourth quarter of 2020, and 30% stated that they were planning a phased reopening.

In contrast, the situation was different for countries that were in the middle of the academic year. The suspension of in-person classes happened during the first few weeks or months of the academic year, which, as has been evidenced, led to a larger number of class days affected. In these cases, the governments were shown to be more inclined to adopt partial opening formats that were gradual or scaled and/or only applied in geographic areas with limited virus infection rates. The noteworthy aspect of this case is that one-third of this group of countries reported that they did not yet have plans to return to in-person learning.

In addition to reopening plans, we analyzed countries' planned support strategies following reopening in order to mitigate the negative impact of suspended in-person classes.

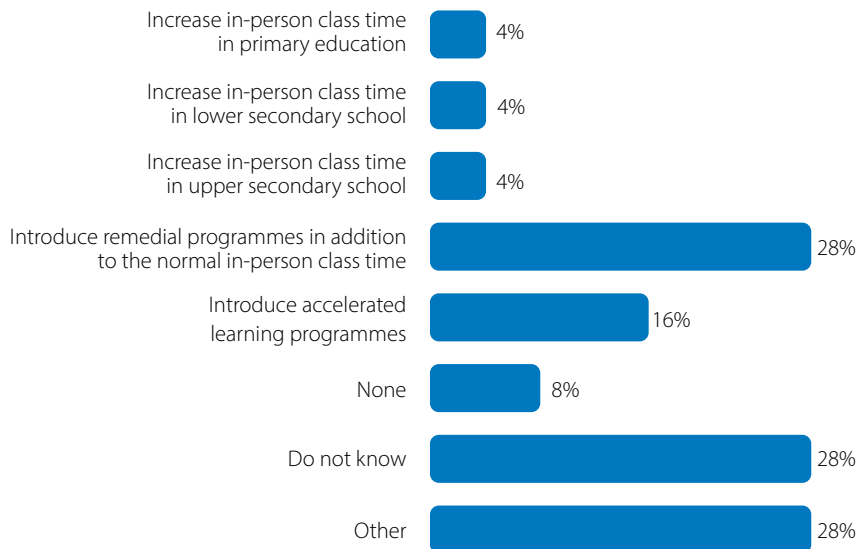
The responses presented in **Figure 14** show countries' third quarter 2020 plans to strengthen learning, demonstrating a variety of alternatives.

Nearly all of them planned to implement a strategy, with only 8% lacking a plan. Roughly one-fourth of the countries expected to promote recovery programmes complementary to class time, which was one of the most frequently mentioned options.



**Figure 13. Percentage of countries based on school reopening plans and the situation of the academic year upon second round survey completion.**

Data source: Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19, July-October round.



**Figure 14. Percentage of countries based on additional support programmes to be provided following reopening.**

Data source: Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19, July-October round.

Two pieces of information are noteworthy. First, when asked about planned support strategies, 28% chose the “Other” option, which can be indicative of the newness of the situation, with challenges in offering options that respond to each country’s particular situation.

Various options were mentioned, from countries reporting that subnational governments or the schools themselves would determine the best strategies, to those that established plans to reorganize the school day; offer classes during school vacation; implement

projects for adaptation, prioritize the curriculum and/or make it more flexible; or implement a three-step pedagogical plan that includes assessment, leveling and curricular prioritization, to name just a few of the responses.

The second piece of information is that at the time the survey was implemented, 28% of the countries stated that they did not know which school reopening support

programmes to develop for students, demonstrating a context of uncertainty.

It is likely that countries have made progress since they filled out the surveys with respect to decisions and plans for returning to in-person instruction, learning support and strengthening strategies. The information that was collected during the third round of the survey (February/March 2021) will allow these aspects to be more clearly defined.

# Conclusions

Latin American and Caribbean countries' education responses to address the pandemic demonstrate a varied capacity to respond to an uncertain context. They have implemented different strategies to address the population's educational needs and include various stakeholders and areas of intervention.

Both the policies developed during the period in which in-person classes were suspended and the first reopening experiences reveal a markedly heterogeneous situation. There are no shared approaches or strategies, though there are similar situations associated with the start date of the academic year, which impacted on the number of class days affected.

Another common aspect is that the measures employed have generally required lower investment, while costlier ones have not been frequently applied. This reveals the tension between the multiple demands that arise in this context, with countries' limited economic resources and the effects of the economic crises and resulting impacts on public spending.

The number of days without in-person classes shows that Latin American and Caribbean countries faced difficulties in 2020 in finding adequate paths for returning to in-person learning. By the end of the year, several countries – including the most populous – had not managed to begin their reopening processes.

It is worth noting uncertainty about the near future in the responses. This is another new development brought on by the pandemic for educational systems that are used to very predictable and inertia-based behavior. It has added tension to processes focused on how educational policies are planned and executed, as these tend to be based on certain conditions and expectations that have been impacted.

There is also a significant unknown related to the loss of learning opportunities. The information available,

as well as the data that we expect to have in the near future, are mainly based on what the schools produce. This is a key resource for teachers, but it has limitations when it comes to building a national perspective.

It is likely that the information collected during the third round of the survey will provide greater clarity on these aspects, mainly in regard to how the countries addressed reopening projects in early 2021.

It is not yet possible to precisely assess the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on education in the countries of the region. We know that it will have short-term consequences and likely medium- and long-term impacts.

In this context, protecting and even expanding educational investment in a timely and efficient manner can help to reduce the pandemic's current and future adverse impacts on education. The recent Global Education Meeting Declaration on the situation of post-COVID-19 education emphasizes the need to increase or maintain the share of public spending on education to at least 4-6% of GDP and/or 15-20% of spending.<sup>11</sup>

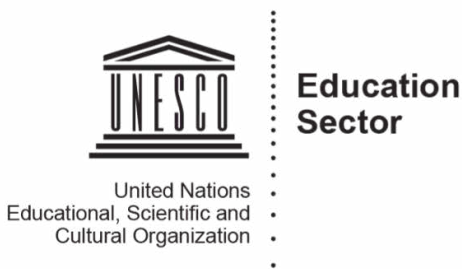
One of the priority aspects to be considered for 2021 will be to build a rapid system assessment to understand the seriousness of the impact and to be able to take appropriate action. It is also important to strengthen information resources to understand the effects of the pandemic, assess the scope and impact of the measures taken and plan the return to in-person learning.

It will be especially important to focus policy on populations at greater risk of exclusion given that now more than ever they need specific, effective actions to be taken so that inequities are not exacerbated.

<sup>11</sup> UNESCO (2020). Extraordinary Session of the Global Education Meeting Education post-COVID-19: 2020 Global Education Meeting Declaration (online). <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374704>.

## UNESCO Education Sector

Education is UNESCO's top priority because it is a basic human right and the foundation on which to build peace and drive sustainable development. UNESCO is the United Nations' specialized agency for education and the Education Sector provides global and regional leadership in education, strengthens national education systems and responds to contemporary global challenges through education with a special focus on gender equality and Africa.



## The Global Education 2030 Agenda

UNESCO, as the United Nations' specialized agency for education, is entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, which is part of a global movement to eradicate poverty through 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Education, essential to achieve all of these goals, has its own dedicated Goal 4, which aims to *“ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”* The Education 2030 Framework for Action provides guidance for the implementation of this ambitious goal and commitments.



## Contact

### Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (OREALC/UNESCO Santiago)



[santiago@unesco.org](mailto:santiago@unesco.org)



<https://es.unesco.org/fieldoffice/santiago>



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