

Education Systems' Response to COVID-19

Brief March 3rd, 2021

- By February 25th, learning modalities vary widely across regions. Remote learning dominates in MENA and LAC as schools in most countries were closed throughout January and February. In EAP, in-person education has largely resumed, with stringent social distancing measures. The regions of SAR and ECA are relying on hybrid education, where the infrastructure allows. Across SSA however, the primary mode of learning is in-person. Remote education quality, effectiveness, and engagement continue to vary widely across and within countries.

Table 1. Education service delivery across the regions (data as of Feb 25)

Modality of Education	SAR	ECA	MENA	EAP	SSA	LAC	Total
Remote education	2	16	6	5	6	13	48
Hybrid education	6	32	7	7	10	14	76
In-person education	0	17	6	13	20	9	65
On extended break	0	1	0	4	1	6	12

Source: WB-Johns Hopkins University and UNICEF's COVID-19 Education Response Survey and Tracker(forthcoming). Please note that in these calculations countries may appear across more than one type of learning modality reflecting their multiple approach (e.g countries having hybrid education for some grades and remote education for others).



LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATION

- **Schools for more than 168 million children globally have been completely closed for almost an entire year due to COVID-19 lockdowns, according to new data released yesterday by UNICEF.** Furthermore, around 214 million children globally – or 1 in 7 – have missed more than three-quarters of their in-person learning. The analysis on school closures report notes that 14 countries worldwide have remained largely closed since March 2020 to February 2021. Two-thirds of those countries are in Latin America and the Caribbean, affecting nearly 98 million schoolchildren. Of the 14 countries, Panama has kept schools closed for the most days, followed by El Salvador, Bangladesh, and Bolivia
- **Schools are beginning to reopen in certain parts of Europe after another round of closures due to the more infectious variant of the virus.** [Germany](#), [Scotland, UK](#), and [Austria](#) are a few examples where countries are slowly reopening after winter shutdowns. The [German national ministry of education](#) presented a national guidance note for the reopening of schools and effective and feasible COVID-19 prevention measures, based on available analytical evidence and extensive consultations with infectious disease specialists, education experts, parents, pupils, teachers, and school directors, with the WHO and EU as observers. However, in countries like [Italy](#), schools remain closed amid concerns over new variants.
- **In Higher Education, universities in the USA welcomed students back for the spring semester, but instituted new testing protocols. However, COVID-19 variants and the large influx of students have already driven outbreaks.** The University of Michigan saw an increase in cases of the new deadly [variant](#), along with [University of Texas](#), [University of Miami](#), and recently the [University of California](#), Berkeley. Whereas students were sent home in the fall, many universities are opting for campus-wide lockdowns.

- **Remote schooling strengths and weaknesses were recently analyzed by a study carried out by the EU.** The study also highlighted how education is being provided in general, role of teachers, and key subjects impacted. 150 key stakeholders coming from five Member States that represent different degrees of readiness to use digital technologies in education were interviewed.
- **Teacher vaccination and testing more prevalent in OECD countries, but slow to roll out across the globe.** In the UK, following the launch of rapid asymptomatic coronavirus (COVID-19) testing in secondary schools and colleges on January 4th, [staff in primary, school-based nurseries, and maintained nursery schools are also being offered](#) the opportunity to take part in regular asymptomatic testing. In the USA, [as of this week at least 28 states and the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico](#) have made some or all teachers eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Across Germany, teachers (including pre-school, Kindergarten, and day care for the under 3s) [would be moved to priority group 2 for vaccinations](#), right after the 80-plus and critical medical personnel.
- **The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released guidelines to reopening schools on February 16th.** They included **“five key mitigation strategies” for returning to in-person school safely:** the universal and correct wearing of masks; physical distancing; washing hands; cleaning facilities and improving ventilation; and doing contact tracing, isolation, and quarantining.
- **More information is being gathered on those worst affected by the school closures. In England** [data taken from 6,000 primary schools](#) and nearly 1.5 million pupils found a steep drop in the proportion who were reading, writing, and doing maths to the level expected at the end of last summer.



RESEARCH AND LATEST FINDINGS

- **The implementation of various tutoring programs around the world seem to be one effective way in which children are learning and catching up.** [Tutoring – defined here as one-on-one or small-group](#) instructional programming by teachers, paraprofessionals, volunteers, or parents – is one of the most versatile and potentially transformative educational tools in use today. A recent study with [96 randomized evaluations](#) of different tutoring models found that [80 percent](#) of the studies led to markedly improved outcomes. Another [evidence review](#) finds that small group tuition is also effective, although variable depending on the quality of teaching and the subjects being delivered. Tutoring has been highlighted in some [briefs](#) and [studies](#) as a [policy option](#) to consider to counter learning losses caused by the pandemic.
- **The ‘catch-up tuition’ programme in England, which provides additional tutoring opportunities for students most afflicted by COVID-19, could be a model worth emulating.** In Italy, [low cost online only tutoring](#) provided by volunteer university students increased academic performance as well as improved socio-emotional skills and overall wellbeing among middle school students. [Researchers in the US](#) are exploring how to scale up tutoring and include it as a permanent feature of their education system, they propose to use high school students and college graduates to tutor elementary students, and estimate costs for a national program to reach between US\$ 5 - 16 billion per year.
- **A recent report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) highlights that children in the UK, repeating a year of school should be considered as part of radical catch-up efforts.** [Today’s children face losing £350bn in lifetime earnings unless the UK’s governments invest in radical catch-up efforts](#) when the pandemic is over. The IFS said other options could also include the use of large-scale tuition in the summer and extended hours to make up for the lost classroom time.

- **A recent USAID review highlights on distance learning mechanisms and effects.** The purpose of this review is to support education practitioners, donors, implementers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations, and other stakeholders in applying best practices to monitor and evaluate distance learning initiatives designed for diverse learners and implemented both within and outside of learning institutions.
- **A recent Save the Children report centered around the impact of COVID-19 on refugee children around the world.** These effects include limited access to information caused by language and cultural differences, coupled with the geographic marginalisation, lack of access to basic services, such as education and health, and to adequate employment.
- **A study conducted by the Azim Premji University in India** has revealed that around 92% of children have lost at least one ability related to language — either expressing themselves orally or through writing, reading words, or understanding the words they read — during the pandemic year. The study also found that 82% of the children surveyed had lost at least one mathematical skill they had already learnt, like identifying single and double digit numbers or addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.
- **The new joint World Bank – UNESCO Education Finance Watch (EFW)** found that education budgets are not adjusting proportionately to the challenges brought about by COVID-19, especially in poorer countries. Despite additional funding needs, two-thirds of low- and lower-middle-income countries have, in fact, cut their public education budgets since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

World Bank Blogs, Events, and Other Resources

World Bank Blogs:

- COVID-19 response: Where we stand now, and the road ahead ([English](#), [Spanish](#))
- Realizing the promise of effective teachers for every child – a global platform for successful teachers ([English](#))
- The changing role of teachers and technologies amidst the COVID-19 pandemic: key findings from a cross-country study ([English](#), [Spanish](#))
- Measuring early childhood outcomes comparably across countries without sacrificing local relevance: can it be done? ([English](#), [Spanish](#))
- Realizing the returns to schooling: How COVID-19 and school closures are threatening women's economic future ([English](#))
- What can education systems learn from football? ([English](#), [Spanish](#), [Portuguese](#))
- How to use technology to help teachers be better and to make life better for teachers ([English](#))
- COVID-19 spurs big changes in Pakistan's education ([English](#))
- Let's continue investing in Sri Lanka's future generations ([English](#), [Sinhala](#), [Tamil](#))
- The urgency and opportunity to return to learning ([English](#), [Portuguese](#), [Spanish](#))
- The opportunity to build back better from COVID-19: Fostering gender parity in education and skills development for a larger workforce ([English](#))
- International Day of Education 2021; Harnessing the promise of innovation in education ([English](#))
- Remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic: How countries have faced the challenge of implementing multichannel education delivery strategies ([English](#))
- Burundi: On the path of "learning of the future" ([English](#), [French](#))