



EDUCATION IN A POST-COVID WORLD:

Towards a RAPID Transformation



On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, resulting in disruptions to education at an unprecedented scale. As we mark three years since the onset of the pandemic, we look back at lessons learned and initiatives taken to recover and accelerate learning for all children. With schools now reopened worldwide, we look ahead to reimagining more resilient, effective and equitable education systems in a post-COVID world by building on RAPID actions towards longer-term education transformation.

Looking back

The COVID-19 pandemic brought historic education disruptions, including prolonged school closures around the world. Between March 2020 and July 2022, schools were fully closed for an average of 20 weeks and partially closed for an additional 22 weeks globally.¹ The impacts of school closures were wide-ranging, affecting not only children’s [schooling](#) and [learning](#), but also their [health and nutrition](#), [mental wellbeing](#), and protection against [child labour](#), [gender-based violence](#) and more. Three years since the onset of the pandemic, schools have now reopened worldwide.

The pandemic spurred collective efforts by countries, stakeholders and partners to ensure the continuity of learning and mitigate learning losses. In 2021, UNICEF, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Bank joined forces to launch [Mission: Recovering Education 2021](#), providing guidance and support for countries to navigate the crisis. UNICEF’s Mission: Recovering Education in Humanitarian Settings programme was launched in 27 countries and across all seven regional offices, focusing on the most vulnerable children and youth in emergency and conflict-prone settings.

Recovering education through the RAPID framework

In response to the urgent need to recover education, UNICEF, UNESCO, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the United Kingdom’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and the World Bank introduced the **RAPID** framework for Learning Recovery and Acceleration. The framework encapsulates



© UNICEF/UN0460333/AL-BASHA

five key actions to recover learning: **R**each every child and keep them in school; **A**ssess learning levels regularly; **P**rioritize teaching the fundamentals; **I**ncrease the efficiency of instruction, including through catch-up learning; and **D**evelop psychosocial health and wellbeing. To provide countries with practical guidance on implementing the RAPID framework, UNICEF and its partners also produced a [Guide for Learning Recovery and Acceleration](#), featuring a menu of policy actions and interventions which can serve as a springboard for long-term transformation, accelerating learning beyond the recovery period. UNICEF and its partners have produced a series of reports on countries’ progress against the RAPID framework using data from the Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures, UNICEF’s Pulse Survey and the Global Education Recovery Tracker (GERT) survey.²

To look back at the policy measures taken as many countries were in the process of fully reopening schools, we present regional results for the GERT survey, administered with 166 UNICEF and World Bank country offices between May to July 2022. Although these findings provide an overview of the situation during the time of data collection, we urge caution in their interpretation, as the survey results might not reflect the current situation of countries regarding learning recovery measures. To further examine the various approaches taken to recover and accelerate learning, we then present examples of solutions implemented by countries and their emerging lessons within each RAPID action.



REACH

EVERY CHILD AND KEEP THEM IN SCHOOL



© UNICEF/UN0735445/NAFTALIN

To recover learning, it is critical to encourage, monitor and support the return to school for all children. Education systems will also need to have effective measures in place to ensure all children – especially the most vulnerable – are able to stay in school. Data from the GERT shows that in 5 of 7 regions, community mobilization campaigns were among the most common measures implemented to bring students back to school (see Figure 1). Implementation of community mobilization campaigns was reported by nearly half of respondent countries in Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA), and about a third of countries in East Asia and the Pacific (EAP), South Asia (SA) and West and Central Africa (WCA). In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and SA, automatic re-enrollment and community mobilization campaigns were the two most widely implemented measures. Automatic re-enrollment was the most common measure in Europe and Central Asia (ECA), and cash transfers in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Below, we present lessons learned from countries' solutions to reach every child and keep them in school.

Community mobilization campaigns

Community mobilization campaigns can help increase attendance and re-enrollment rates. This measure can be especially helpful in ensuring the return to school for vulnerable children, who are among the least likely to return. For instance, in Iraq, [400 social mobilizers were trained](#) to conduct the 2022 annual back-to-learning campaign in six governorates and the Kurdistan Region. The campaign targeted 20,000 children (8,400 girls), including

4,000 refugees and 8,000 internally displaced children, who have dropped out of school or not yet returned to school due to the COVID-19 pandemic. By the end of 2022, 44,373 children were identified, 10,123 returned to formal education, and 3,179 enrolled in non-formal education. Similarly, in the United Republic of Tanzania, back-to-school activities in October 2022 focused on the most vulnerable children, targeting 23,088 out-of-school Congolese and [Burundi refugee children](#) (12,448 girls) impacted by COVID-19 school closures.

A multisectoral approach helps maximize the impact of community mobilization campaigns. Such an approach was implemented in China, where a Working



The remedial and catch-up classes in the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Erbil governorate, Iraq.



Grade 3 children at Maendeleo primary school, Nduta refugee camp Tanzania, distributed with scholastic materials. A total of 2,954 (1,427 girls; 1,527 boys) children enrolled at Maendeleo primary school received scholastic materials.

© UNICEF, KIBONDO, FARIDA SEBARUA@2022

Group was established to lead a [back-to-school campaign](#) with experts from the education, health, child protection, gender, communications, and monitoring and evaluation sectors. [Key messages and communication materials](#) reflected an integrated approach, and the campaign reached 241 million learners, as well as their teachers and parents, nationwide. In Ghana, regional [taskforces](#) were set up, consisting of government stakeholders, civil service organizations, religious leaders and media. The taskforces were assigned to each district to carry out multi-faceted advocacy campaigns through radio, TV and community events, resulting in nearly 100 per cent re-enrollment.³

Identification of children who are out of school or at risk of dropout

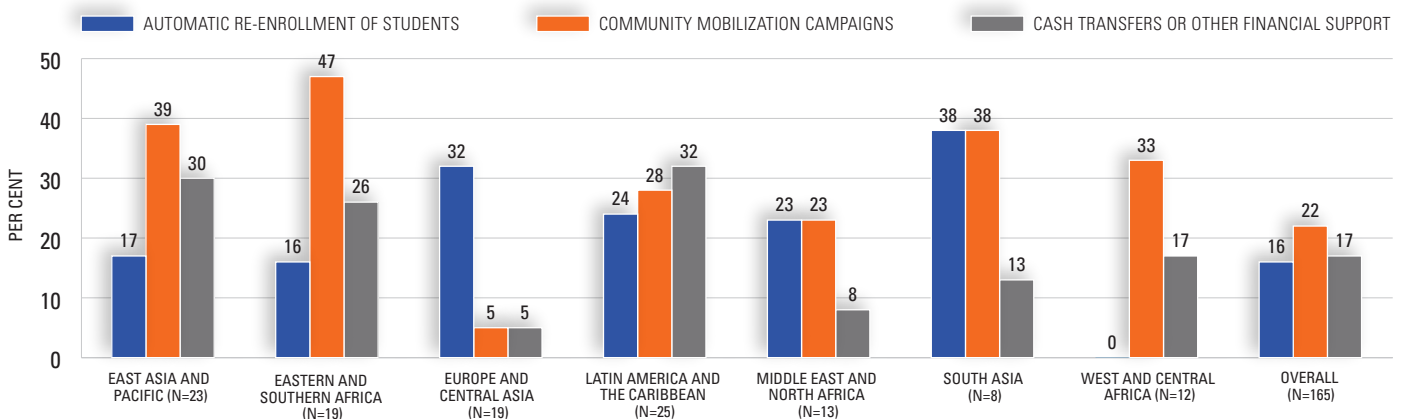
Early warning systems can help identify children at risk of dropping out before they do. In the Dominican Republic, UNICEF has supported the Ministry of Education with the publication of an Early Warning app, which allows for the identification of children and adolescents at risk of dropping out through attendance tracking. The country office aided in testing the application to ensure its use at the beginning of the school year in September

2022 for national rollout, and [demonstration videos](#) have been created to facilitate its use. Similarly, in Peru, the early warning system [Alerta Escuela](#) was launched in October 2020. Upon identification of youth at risk of dropout, interventions such as tutoring, remedial education programmes and provision of printed materials were introduced. As a result, among the 428,000 students identified to be at risk of dropout, about 89 per cent were reported to have continued studying in 2021.⁴

Mapping exercises are useful for identifying and reaching the most vulnerable out-of-school children.

In Sudan, vulnerability mapping helped identify the most vulnerable communities for targeting out-of-school children. A total of 7,674 hardest-to-reach children (3,838 girls) were identified and brought back to school. Similarly, the UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECARO), UNESCO and UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) launched the mapping of data and surveys on the education and learning of Ukrainian refugee children. The mapping exercise aimed to identify children who are still out of school and learning and to address data gaps that are critical for designing and implementing interventions.

FIGURE 1. Share of countries reporting implementation of measures to bring students back to school, by region



Source: GERT. For each region, only countries with valid responses are included.



In Surigao City, Philippines, Roxanne guides her daughter, 4-year-old Jaira, in using the learn-at-home kits provided by UNICEF. Children who will be transitioning to Kindergarten and are identified with risks for developmental delays were prioritized in the provision of kits so that parents and caregivers can continue development and learning activities at home.

© UNICEF PHILIPPINES/UN0724730/BACAREZA

A specialist assessing a child with risks of developmental delays in Surigao City.

© POLAYVAR/2022



Interventions addressing barriers to education

Strategies to address economic barriers can help mitigate the financial hardship families may have faced over the past three years of the pandemic.

In [Lebanon](#), a cash transfer programme is aimed at providing approximately 680,000 individuals with a monthly transfer of US\$20 per household member, in addition to a flat amount of US\$25 per household. The programme will dedicate \$23 million to cover the direct schooling costs of youth aged 13–18 at risk of dropping out as a result of the ongoing crisis. In Trinidad and Tobago, UNICEF is supporting 237 migrant students who continue to experience legal, administrative and financial barriers to access the national education system, through the provision of cash transfers for data packages, transportation and other education needs to enable them to access the US-accredited online education platform [Dawere](#).

Promoting inclusive education ensures the return to schooling and learning for all, especially the most vulnerable – children with disabilities, ethnic

minorities, language minorities and others. In Myanmar, [audio records of illustrated children’s story books](#) for young children with visual impairment and animated videos for children with hearing impairments are being developed. In the [Philippines](#), to address the needs of children with disabilities, UNICEF and Humanity and Inclusion have introduced the system for Prevention, Early Identification, Referral and Intervention of Delays, Disorders and Disabilities in Early Childhood in Surigao del Norte. To date, 3,780 parents of young children at risk of developmental delays were trained and supported, along with 529 child development workers. In [Bangladesh](#), when learning centers in Rohingya camps and host communities closed due to the pandemic, UNICEF supported caregiver-led education at home, distributing 435,348 workbooks and other learning resources to benefit 190,663 children (91,518 girls). By eliminating barriers to education for vulnerable and marginalized groups, education systems can ensure no child is excluded or left behind in the return to school and learning.

BY ELIMINATING BARRIERS TO EDUCATION
for vulnerable and marginalized groups, education systems
can ensure no child is excluded or left behind in the
RETURN TO SCHOOL AND LEARNING.



© UNICEF/UN0581213/KIRON



ASSESS LEARNING LEVELS REGULARLY

© UNICEF/UN0211122/NOORANI

In the GERT, at least half of respondent countries in each region reported that data has been collected to measure student learning outcomes since March 2020 (*see Figure 2*). Among respondent countries that have collected data on student learning, at least half of countries in EAP, LAC and SA reported that such data could be disaggregated by gender, while about 40 per cent of countries in ECA and ESA, a third of such countries in WCA, and a fifth of such countries in MENA reported the same. Understanding children’s current learning levels allows educators, school leaders and policymakers to make informed decisions about instructional approaches, assessment practices and other related policy actions for learning recovery.

System- and classroom-level learning assessments

At the system level, national or sub-national learning assessments can help countries make informed decisions on interventions for learning recovery. This strategy is demonstrated by efforts in [India](#), where results from the National Achievement Survey for students in Grade 3, 5, 8 and 10 and the Foundational Learning Study for students in Grade 3 will be used to gauge learning losses and inform learning recovery. A similar response is seen in South Sudan, where data from a national learning assessment focused on Early Grade Reading

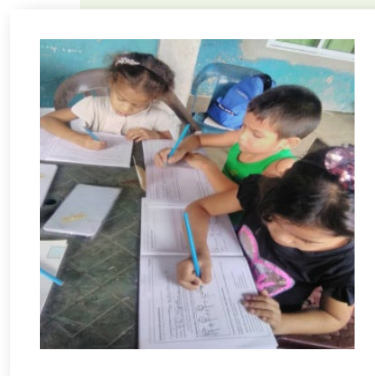
and Mathematics will be used to inform learning recovery interventions. Additionally, in Libya, UNICEF is working with the Ministry of Education to conduct a national assessment on the effectiveness of the abridged curriculum prepared during the school re-opening after COVID-19 closures.

UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN’S CURRENT LEARNING LEVELS allows educators, school leaders and policymakers to make informed decisions about instructional approaches, assessment practices and other related policy actions for learning recovery.



© UNICEF/UNI277173/DURANBOGER

At the classroom level, diagnostic and formative assessments help teachers adapt teaching plans and pedagogical approaches. Diagnostic assessments can help teachers understand students' individual learning levels upon reopening, as has been implemented in Venezuela, where initial diagnostic tests were provided to 750 out-of-school children and an additional 1,019 tests are currently being conducted. In [Sri Lanka](#), results from a task-based, diagnostic learning achievement test informed curriculum adaptation and a blended approach of classroom-based, teacher-led and home-based, parent-led remedial activities that integrated formative assessments. [Formative assessments](#), which provide ongoing feedback to teachers and students, are also essential to informing recovery strategies. For instance, in [Mongolia](#), teachers used the first two classes of the year for formative assessments to gauge children's learning levels following school closures and to tailor remedial lessons to children's specific needs. In [Gujarat](#), India, a weekly formative assessment tool, the [Periodic Assessment Test \(PAT\)](#), was used to track student performance, circulate materials and personalize remote education to students' learning levels.



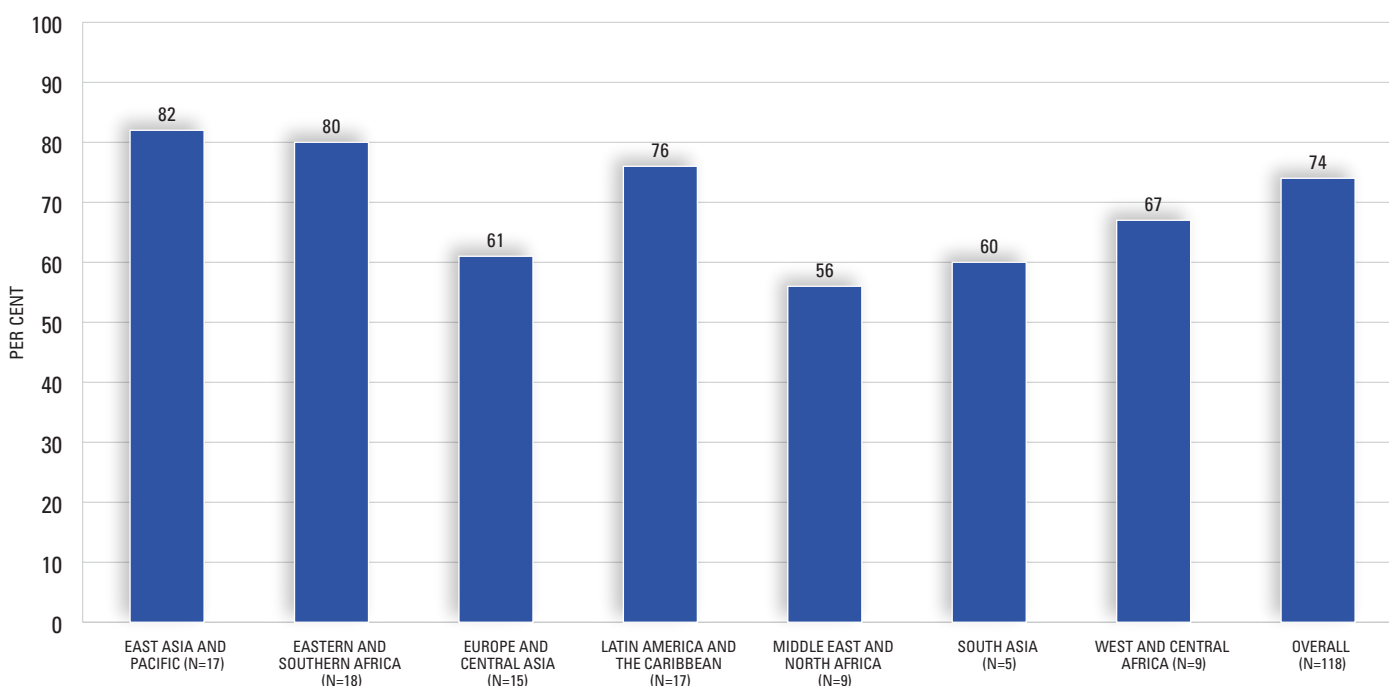
In Delta Amacuro, Venezuela, a diagnostic test was made to identify the level of skills and abilities of the children in the areas of language, mathematics, and socioemotional skills. Based on the results, the weekly activity plans were oriented.

Strengthening teacher capacity for assessment

Enhancing teacher capacity for assessment enables them to continuously assess learning at the classroom level. Support for teachers can include training on new assessment tools and methods, as well as the use of

assessment data to adapt instruction to meet students' needs. For instance, in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, UNICEF developed diagnosis instruments for schools to self-apply and use to track learning progress. To date, 936 teachers have been trained and 20,017 students (9,912 girls) have benefited. In Rwanda, UNICEF is training teachers in 200 schools to use formative assessment to identify students' learning levels. To help strengthen teacher capacity for formative assessment, UNICEF [ECARO](#) has developed a set of modules, '[Formative Assessment for Quality, Inclusive Digital and Distance Learning during and beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic](#),' which explores the many purposes, approaches and tools for formative assessment across a variety of education delivery modalities.

FIGURE 2. Share of countries reporting that data has been collected since March 2020 to measure learning outcomes, by region



Source: GERT. For each region, only countries with valid responses are included (i.e., missing and 'Don't know' are excluded).



PRIORITIZE TEACHING THE FUNDAMENTALS

© UNICEF/UN0247730/NOORANI

Severe disruptions to learning over the past three years have pushed students behind their grade-appropriate learning levels. In March 2022, results from UNICEF’s Pulse Survey – serving as the [first round](#) of data analyzed under the RAPID framework – found that fewer than two thirds of countries in each region abbreviated or prioritized the curriculum at the national level ([see Figure 3](#)). About a third of countries in ECA and WCA and about a fifth of countries in EAP, LAC, MENA and SA reported that this measure had not been implemented. To recover and accelerate learning, countries will need to adjust curricula and teaching plans to prioritize fundamental concepts, including literacy, numeracy and socioemotional skills.

Curricular adjustments

Curricular adjustments can help ensure that the most essential missed content and fundamental skills are prioritized. To make remedial classes more effective in [Mongolia](#), core subjects deemed critical to the current academic year were prioritized. Similarly, Chile’s recovery response included curricular prioritization, where the main learning goals for each grade were identified and schools were given flexibility to implement their own study plan.⁵ Curricular adjustments were also implemented in [Viet Nam](#), where dropping certain tests and modules and carrying over others to the next school year allowed students to catch up on missed learning. Teachers need adequate support to implement curricular adjustments:

in Uganda, UNICEF is supporting the implementation of the Ministry of Education’s [abridged curriculum](#) through the training of master trainers and 3,182 primary and secondary teachers, who are now teaching 580,937 learners (281,814 girls) to recover from learning loss and develop foundational skills and relevant competencies.

Foundational learning

Vulnerable children can be supported with a variety of alternative learning pathways to develop foundational skills. For instance, in [India](#), during the COVID-related closure of *Anganwadi* (early childhood development) centers, UNICEF-supported home-based learning activities engaged over 7 million families and reached more than 10 million children. For children in the tea gardens in Assam – who are among the most marginalized – volunteer-led,

TO RECOVER AND ACCELERATE LEARNING, countries must adjust curricula and teaching plans to prioritize fundamental concepts, including literacy, numeracy and socioemotional skills.



© UNICEF/UNI87084/NOORANI

Sulafa attends the e-learning center 5 days a week. Her mother, Fatima is happy with the progress Fatima is making: 'I want Sulafa to keep learning. I don't want the e-learning center to be her last stop, she can become a doctor and heal people's bodies.' Fatima is not so sure about becoming a doctor. She prefers to be a teacher, but definitely a teacher in an e-learning center.

© UNICEF SUDAN/2022/BOS



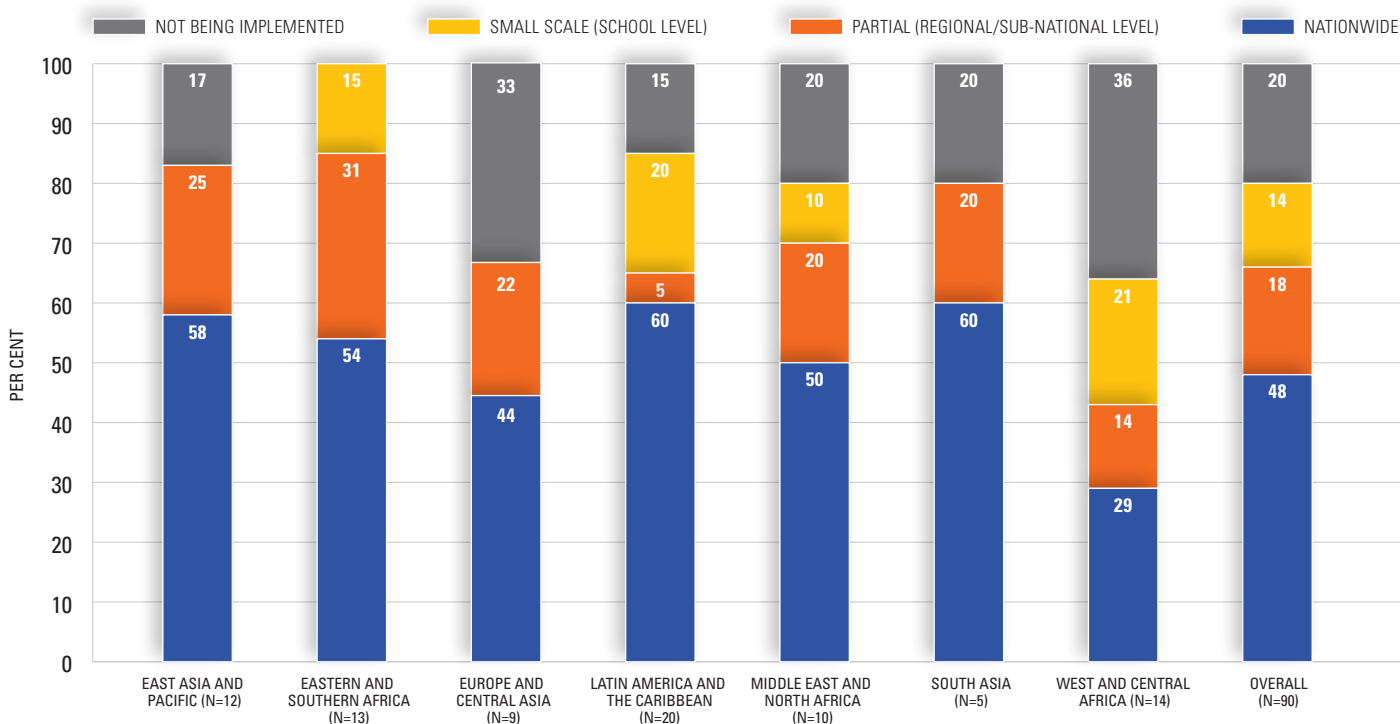
community-based in-person classes reached 160,000 primary aged children, and SMS messages with simple activities reached 56,000 primary-aged children. Countries have also introduced innovative education programmes to reach out-of-school children who lack access to formal schools: for instance, in Sudan, UNICEF is supporting [e-learning](#) centers which provide a [two-year](#) programme for [out-of-school children](#) in remote communities to learn foundational reading, writing and numeracy skills.

Along with the key skills of literacy and numeracy, socioemotional skills are fundamental to learning and can encourage children to return to school, catch up on lost learning, and adapt to new circumstances.

Efforts to support socioemotional development can include digital programmes, such as [North Macedonia's Eduino](#)

[platform](#), which offers open and free access to [4,062 video](#) lessons and over 400 games for parents to stimulate their child's development at home, with a significant portion of these resources focused on [emotional wellbeing activities](#). In the LAC region, UNICEF has organized webinars to support not just reading and writing, but also other fundamental skills such as socioemotional skills. The development of socioemotional skills can also be supported through a whole-school approach: for instance, in [China](#), the [Social and Emotional Learning \(SEL\)](#) Project aims to move beyond SEL as a stand-alone subject to reinforcing it across subjects and integrating SEL into daily activities. To continue support for SEL during school closures in China, UNICEF and the Ministry of Education developed and disseminated digital lessons on SEL and created a [resource hub](#) for parents and caregivers.

FIGURE 3. Share of countries reporting abbreviated/prioritized curriculum in March 2022, by region



Source: UNICEF Pulse Survey (March 2022). For each region, only countries with valid responses are included. Although data on curricular adjustments are available in the fourth round of the Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures, the sample size is insufficient to show regional disaggregation.



© UNICEF/UNI336323/OATWAY

INCREASE THE EFFICIENCY OF INSTRUCTION, INCLUDING THROUGH CATCH-UP LEARNING

To mitigate learning losses, education systems must support interventions that increase the amount of learning within classrooms. Additionally, teachers will need adequate training and support to ensure these interventions are applied effectively. In the GERT, at least a third of countries in each region reported implementing measures to support teachers for pedagogy and learning (see Figure 4). About two thirds of countries in LAC reported implementing these measures at sub-national or national scale. The same was reported by nearly half of countries in EAP, at least a third of countries in ECA, SA and WCA, and at least a fifth of countries in ESA and MENA. Providing extensive teacher support and utilizing proven interventions are necessary to increase the efficiency of instruction and recover learning.

Targeted/tailored instruction

Providing instruction that is appropriate to the learning levels of each child can help ensure no one is left behind. Targeted instruction is an evidence-based approach that allows educators to reach students where they are. It is also [one of the most cost-effective ways](#) for governments to improve learning outcomes. In Brazil, through the [Acompanhamento Personalizado de Aprendizagem](#) programme, students are grouped based on their learning levels for four 2-week intensive periods during which they receive targeted instruction.⁶ In Somalia, UNICEF is supporting a Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) programme, targeting 10,100 children (4,800 girls), as well as the review of the Alternative Basic Education and Primary Education curricula (Grades 1–3) to inform the design of the TaRL pedagogic package and material in two districts. In Papua Province, [Indonesia](#), [tailored instruction](#) – a pedagogical approach which modifies curriculum and classroom practices to students’ learning levels – is a vital component of the Early Grade Literacy (EGL) programme. The programme used a baseline assessment to identify

learning gaps, and teachers continually assessed progress in classrooms and adjusted teaching to individual needs. As schools reopened, EGL strategies have become integral components of COVID-19 education recovery plans.

Accelerated, catch-up and remedial programmes

Evidence-based strategies, such as accelerated, catch-up and remedial programmes, can help mitigate learning losses and get students back on track.

Countries can apply, adapt and combine these measures to meet their specific contexts and needs. In [Mozambique](#), UNICEF is supporting an accelerated learning programme, reaching 42,030 children (23,000 girls) in 30 schools, as well as 2,747 out-of-school children (1,274 girls). About a third of the children enrolled in the programme improved their literacy skills and about half improved their basic numeracy skills. In the Congo, four-month catch-up classes are provided in French, mathematics, and life skills for 10,287 children (5,349 girls) aged 6–14 years. At least 90 per cent of these children will integrate into second-chance school centers in the next school year. Following the reopening



Children attending an accelerated learning programme in Chiure, Mozambique.

© UNICEF/TDH/2022/JOJO ABACAR

of schools in the [State of Palestine](#), remedial education services were provided to an estimated 5,000 children (2,196 girls) in Grades 1–4, and teacher training for remedial learning was provided to 300 teachers. Education systems need to [deploy and scale up interventions quickly](#) to ensure all children can catch up on missed learning.

Self-guided learning

Self-guided learning activities, such as radio, TV, paper-based learning kits and online platforms, allow students to master skills at their own pace.

As these activities can be implemented in various online and offline modalities, they are able to reach a wide range of learners either in school or at home. In [Bangladesh](#), UNICEF supported the development of 2,683 television lessons, 1,056 radio lessons and 1,558 digital lessons, as well as the development of printed materials distributed to 150,933 children from marginalized groups in 842 schools. In Kenya, UNICEF is supporting Kenya’s Institute of Curriculum Development in the creation of early learning radio and TV programmes to deliver remote learning for 10,000 pre-primary children and support 100 teachers.

Digital learning solutions can improve access to learning and support learning recovery. Solutions include the [Learning Passport](#), an online, mobile, and offline tech platform enabling high-quality, flexible learning.

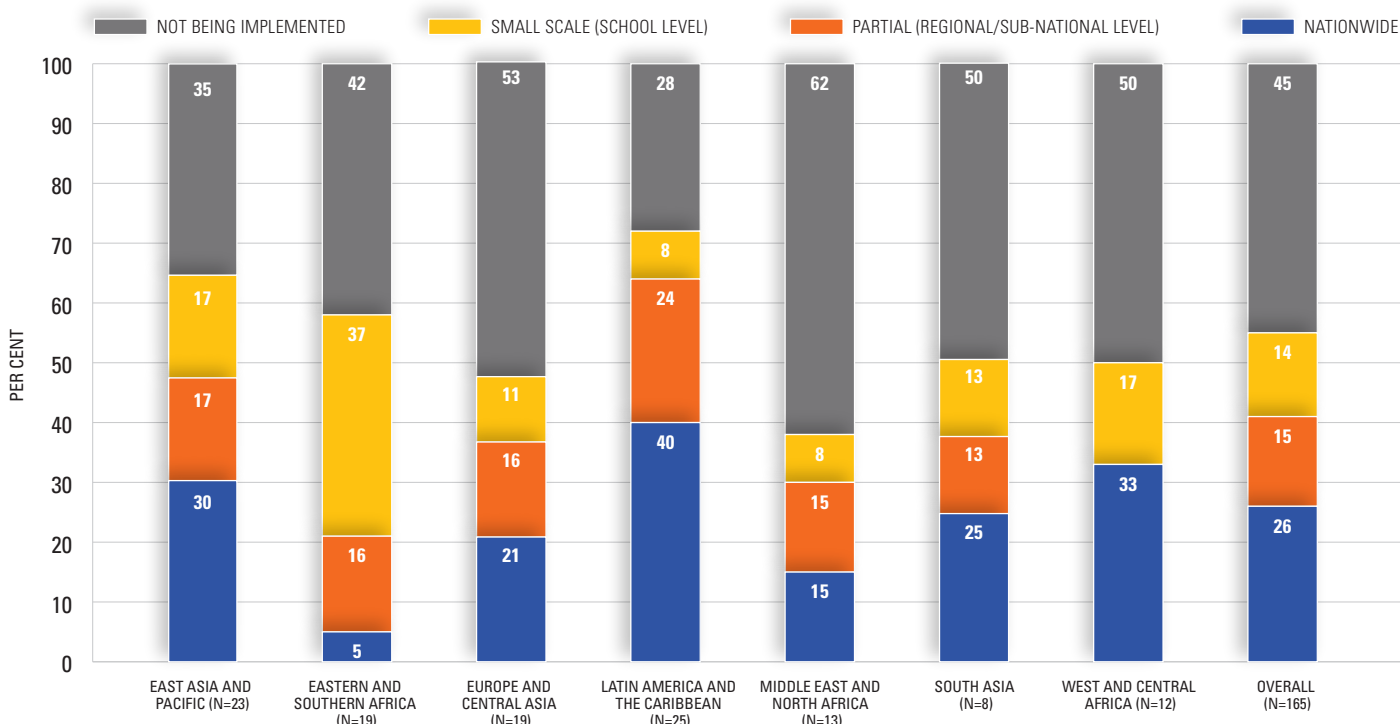


Alternative Learning Center in Sucre, Venezuela.

During school closures, the platform allowed children and youth to access quality education in numerous countries, including in [Mexico](#), the [Puntland](#) State of Somalia, and [Lebanon](#). With the support of the UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO), the platform is also being deployed in [Timor-Leste](#) (School Goes Home), [the Lao People’s Democratic Republic](#) ([Learning Passport](#), [Wisdom Warehouse](#)), [Kiribati](#) ([Learning Passport](#)), [Myanmar](#) (Open Learning), and the [Philippines](#) (offline). The Learning Passport is now reaching over 3.3 million users in 28 countries, with over 25 additional countries in the pipeline.

Digital tools provide innovative approaches to access educational content and promote inclusion. In [Jordan](#), the [Learning Bridges](#) programme links printed materials

FIGURE 4. Share of countries reporting implementation of measures to support teachers for pedagogy and learning, by region



Source: GERT. For each region, only countries with valid responses are included.



Kenya's Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) review recorded TV programmes.

© KICD/2022/ROSEAKUKA



Children participate in the recording of TV programmes developed by KICD.

© KICD/2022/ROSEAKUKA



Early childhood education teacher training session in Wajir county, Kenya.

© WAJIRCOUNTYECEDPARTMENT/2022/BILLOWHUSSEINKEYNAN



Trained teachers with children at the Volunteer Early Childhood Development and Education center in Wajir County, Kenya.

© UNICEFKENYA/2022/PAULINEAKINYI

with online resources to provide weekly activities based on core curricula for children in Grades 4–9. By the end of the 2020/2021 school year, almost 500,000 students (65 per cent girls) were reached by Learning Bridges, and 30,000 teachers accessed online teacher education on blended learning – a first in Jordan. UNICEF has also developed and implemented the online and offline [Akelius Digital Language Learning Course](#) meant to help refugee and migrant children learn the language of their host or transit country and to promote foundational literacy opportunities in formal and non-formal settings in 12 countries. Rigorous research has linked its use to significant improvements in foreign language acquisition in [Greece](#) and [Lebanon](#). Additionally, UNICEF has implemented [Accessible Digital Textbooks](#) to reach children with disabilities with inclusive learning opportunities in several countries. In [Paraguay](#), 700 children have benefitted to date from accessible educational content in alternative formats, and by 2024, the programme aims to reach 30,000 students from Grades 1–9 in 300 schools.

Teacher training and support

Central to the success of learning recovery and education transformation, teachers need adequate support to continuously improve their instructional skills. In Venezuela, training is being provided to 185 teachers supporting the catch-up and school reintegration programme *Nos vemos en la Escuela*. Similarly, in [Sierra](#)

[Leone](#), an early grade teacher training programme was launched in July 2021 to improve literacy and numeracy among children in Grades 1–3, helping more than 600,000 students acquire these foundational skills. As of July 2022, about 39 per cent of all early grade teachers in the country have been trained in foundational literacy and numeracy. Training can take on a variety of modalities; for instance, in Chad, UNICEF is supporting the production of 12 audio and video teacher training modules, as well as a virtual classroom for training teachers. To date, 300 teachers have benefitted from two in-service modules on evaluation and remediation techniques and on distance education.



Zara Sanne, a 19-year-old student, takes lessons in an integrated tutoring center in N'Djamena, Chad.



DEVELOP

PSYCHOSOCIAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

© UNICEF/UNI186429/MCILWAINE, UN PHOTO

The impact of COVID-related school closures reached far beyond lost learning, affecting children’s mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, physical health and nutrition. Data from the GERT show that the majority of countries in each region implemented additional measures related to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in schools upon reopening (*see Figure 5*). At least a third of countries in each region reported the same for measures related to mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). Implementation of measures for school nutrition varied across regions: about a fifth of countries in ECA, over a third of countries in EAP, LAC, MENA and SA, and over half of countries in ESA and WCA reported additional measures for school nutrition. With the wide-ranging impacts of the pandemic on children’s wellbeing, education systems must ensure schools are able to provide students with tailored and comprehensive support.

Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)

MHPSS services can be offered in a variety of ways.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, UNICEF [Nicaragua](#) supported the launch of a new programme called ‘I feel good expressing myself’. Through the programme, [kits containing arts and play materials were distributed across 153 schools](#), reaching 73,000 children and adolescents. Additionally, 60,000 guidebooks on providing socioemotional support and adapting curricula were

developed and distributed, giving teachers practical tools to support their students. In Bolivia, the ‘Safe Family’ helpline aims to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on children’s and parents’ mental health. Between January 2022 and end of August 2022, 22,594 calls were received, with 19 per cent of these calls referred to child protection services. MHPSS is especially critical for children affected by humanitarian emergencies: following the catastrophic earthquakes that struck [Türkiye and Syria](#) in February 2023, UNICEF trained dozens of trainers on psychological first aid and provided recreational kits for children to play, connect with peers and regain a sense of normalcy.



Members of the school club of the Kinsoundi primary school on gender-based violence in schools.
© UNICEF/CONGO/HONORINE KAYA MILANDOU/2022

With the wide-ranging impacts of the pandemic on children's wellbeing, education systems must ensure schools are able to

PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH TAILORED AND COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT.



© UNICEF/UN0499907/CZAJKOWSKITO

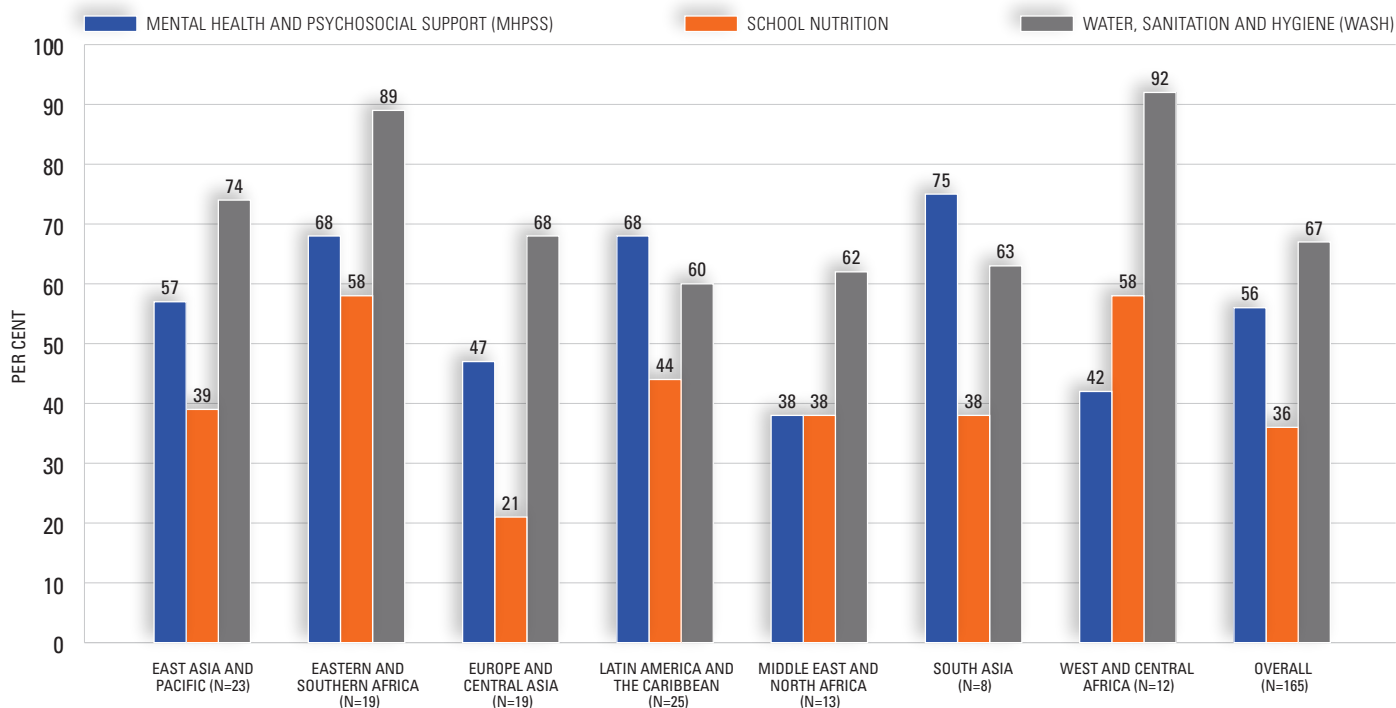
The creation of support clubs can help promote student wellbeing and safe learning environments.

In Angola, psychosocial support clubs, which will include children in and out of school, are being established to enable peer interaction and safe spaces for listening and emotional expression. In the Congo, UNICEF is supporting clubs in 105 schools with 660 student members to combat violence in schools. Through these clubs, awareness campaigns will continue during the school year to enable students to learn in a violence-free school environment.

Enhancing capacity-building for those who provide MHPSS services in schools and learning centers – such as teachers and MHPSS professional staff – ensures students receive adequate support. In [Brazil](#),

a cross-sectoral strategy was developed to address students' learning, mental health and protection needs during and after school reopening. [Three practical guides](#) were developed, and education professionals were trained on MHPSS and child protection. In [Mozambique](#), 7,600 primary school teachers were trained using an MHPSS training manual developed with the support of UNICEF and other partners. These efforts were scaled up to reach 83,000 primary school teachers in six provinces, and the manual has been integrated into on-the-job teacher training. In [Nigeria](#), 30,000 community volunteers and teachers were trained on the provision of MHPSS, including tools to deal with the stress of the pandemic and broader issues linked to insecurity and attacks on education.

FIGURE 5. Share of countries reporting small-scale or significant additional measures for student wellbeing after school reopening, by region



Source: GERT. For each region, only countries with valid responses are included.

Nutrition

Providing nutritional services can promote the wellbeing of children who lack access to healthy food and encourage them to stay in school. UNICEF Cameroon is providing nutrition supplements to children and nutrition education for parents, benefitting 10,000 children. Similarly, UNICEF Venezuela is supporting over 2,400 children and adolescents with nutritious food. With many children [dependent on school meals](#) to meet their nutritional needs, school feeding programmes are critical to supporting children's attendance and overall wellbeing. Efforts to prioritize school feeding programmes upon reopening include that demonstrated in Iraq: on the International Day of Education 2022, the World Food Programme and the Ministry of Education announced school openings would coincide with an [expansion of the School Feeding Program](#); the programme was expanded to 13 governorates in 2022, with a plan to reach 3.6 million children by 2025.⁷



Children in Falcon State, Venezuela enjoying nutritious snack.

Guidelines to all 19,000 preschools and more than 10,000 schools, benefitting more than 4.7 million children. In [Senegal](#), UNICEF worked with the Government to develop a safe school strategy and protocols and to procure essential supplies to schools, including handwashing points, soap, sanitizer and digital thermometers.

Long-term investments in school infrastructure can help build resilience by preventing future disease outbreaks and promoting overall student health. In [Ethiopia](#), UNICEF, the Ministry of Education, UNHCR and Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs supported the construction and furnishing of 60 classrooms and 96 latrines across four refugee-affected regions. In addition, 800 pedal-operated handwashing stations were set up in refugee and host community schools across nine regions. In [Papua New Guinea](#), handwashing points were established in 44 National Capital Schools to provide clean water and handwashing facilities, benefitting over 37,000 students (18,437 girls). Increasing investments in WASH infrastructure is necessary for ensuring these services are sustainable and resilient, through and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.



© UNICEF/UN0535858/DEJONGH

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities and COVID-19 prevention

Ensuring proper health protocols are in place can help encourage families to send their children back to school. UNICEF Myanmar is supporting 629 children in early childhood development (ECD) centers with the provision of hygiene kits, COVID-19 protective items and nutritional food during ECD classes. In preparing for school reopening in [Sri Lanka](#), UNICEF collaborated with the Ministry of Education and the Children's Secretariat to develop and distribute Infection, Prevention and Control

LONG-TERM INVESTMENTS IN WASH FACILITIES

ensure these services are sustainable and resilient, through and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.



© UNICEF/UN0260397/BELL

LOOKING AHEAD



© UNICEF/UN0616916/HALEEM

As we mark three years since the onset of the pandemic, schools worldwide have welcomed back children to the classroom. Demonstrating key actions in the RAPID framework, countries have made significant efforts to ensure the continuity of learning during school closures as well as the provision of comprehensive support in the reopening of schools. Although these interventions have been introduced to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic in the short term, countries can build on this momentum to transform education in the longer term. Policy actions taken now should be supported and sustained over time – even beyond the learning recovery period – to address longstanding bottlenecks, ensure future system sustainability, and achieve national, regional and global goals. Beyond the learning recovery period, and looking ahead towards truly transformative education systems, we must continue to:

Reach every child and keep them in school, by:

- + Eliminating barriers to vulnerable and marginalized groups, ensuring that the right to education for all is fully captured in national legal and regulatory frameworks.
- + Strengthening flexible models, including multiple modes of learning, to capture and retain greater numbers of students.
- + Investing in nimble and digitalized Education Management Information Systems to ensure real-time and individualized monitoring of staff and students.

Assess learning levels regularly, by:

- + Broadening the scope of assessment and competencies to be developed and assessed, such as socioemotional skills.
- + Expanding the use of formative assessments to ensure students' individual needs are met.
- + Leveraging technologies such as digitalized and hybrid assessments.

Prioritize teaching the fundamentals, by:

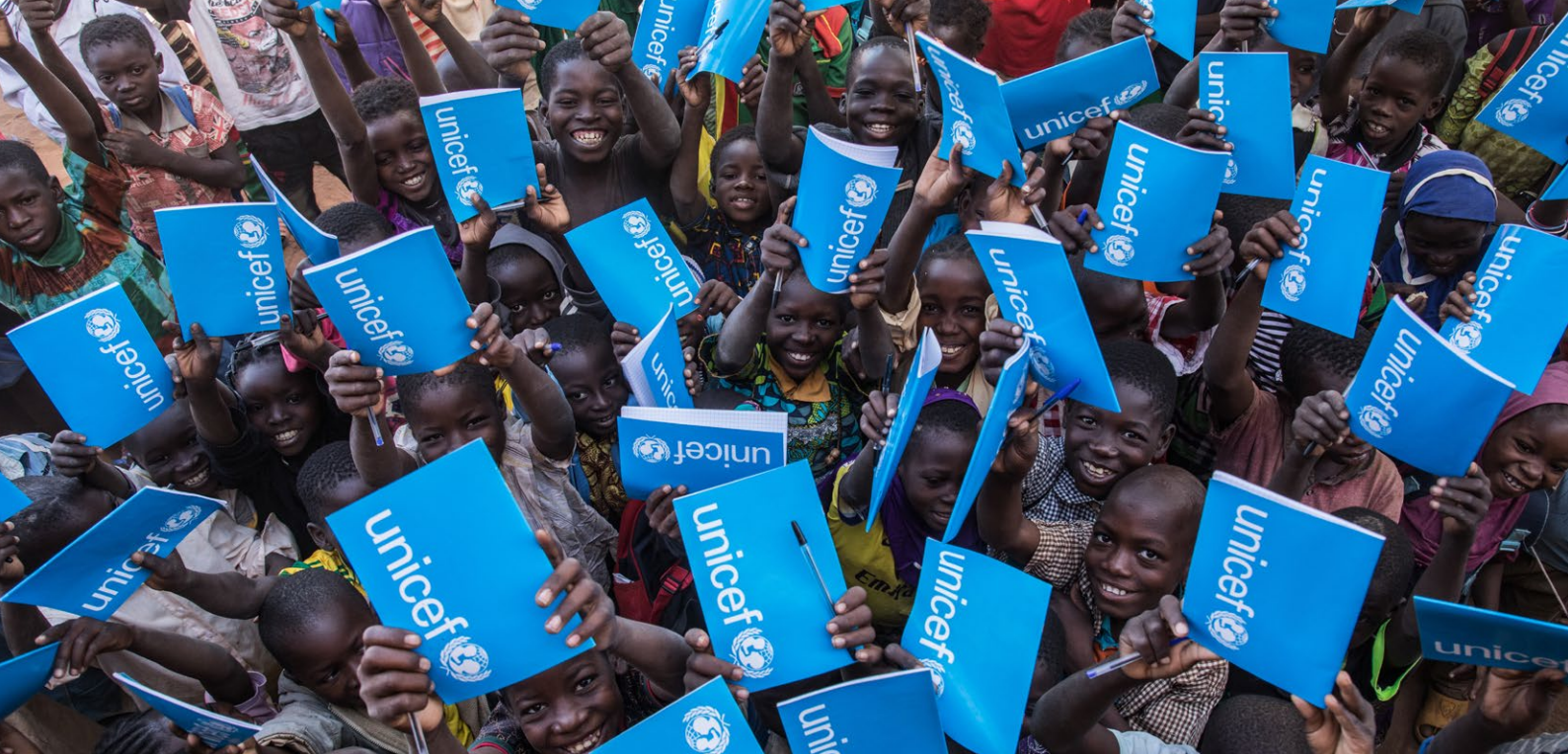
- + Ensuring coherence and consistency between the intended outcomes as specified in the formal curriculum and teaching methods, assessment tasks and learning activities in the classroom.
- + Considering the integration of social and emotional learning in the classroom.
- + Involving teachers in co-designing and facilitating curricular adjustments, and ensuring they are provided with training and guidance in implementing, adapting and prioritizing the curriculum.

Increase the efficiency of instruction, by:

- + Making teaching an attractive profession by enhancing teacher wellbeing through adequate remuneration and working conditions.
- + Ensuring tailored, continuous teacher professional development on evidence-based pedagogical approaches such as targeted instruction and on digital and other 21st century skills.
- + Investing in the digital transformation of education systems, including the development of free and inclusive, high-quality digital learning platforms and content. The [Gateways to Public Digital Learning Initiative](#) launched by UNICEF and UNESCO during the Transforming Education Summit aims to accelerate this result.

Develop psychosocial health and wellbeing, by:

- + Collaborating across sectors, including education, child protection, health and nutrition, to ensure schools provide comprehensive services.
- + Promoting good hygiene practices and health protocols and complementing this with long-term investments in safe and reliable WASH facilities.



© UNICEF/UN0354099/TREMEAU

- + Monitoring, addressing and prioritizing learners' and educators' mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, including providing capacity-building and training on MHPSS for educators.

Finally, sustainable and equitable education financing is essential to recover and transform education. Available evidence reveals issues in underinvestment, with only 4 in 10 countries meeting the benchmark of allocating at least 15 per cent of total public expenditure to education.⁸ Inequity also remains a challenge: on average across countries, the poorest learners benefit from only 16 per

cent of public funding for education, while the richest learners benefit from 28 per cent.⁹ Transforming education systems requires transformative action on financing, mobilizing additional and more effective investment in education, including through innovative instruments such as the [International Finance Facility for Education](#) (IFFEd) that can multiply scarce resources. By revamping how financial resources are raised and invested, prioritizing allocations of public spending, and promoting innovations for increased efficiency in spending, learning recovery efforts can be sustained towards long-term education transformation.

Acknowledgements

This report was produced by Anna Alejo, Karimah Naguib and Haogen Yao. Valuable comments and input were provided by Rachel Cooper, Pragma Dewan, Mac Glovinsky, Linda Jones, Anja Nielsen, Margo O'Sullivan, Juan-Pablo Giraldo Ospino, Maya Prince, Nicolas Reuge, Thu Truong, Auken Tungatarova, Frank Van Cappelle and Jean Luc Yameogo. We would also like to thank colleagues from UNICEF country and regional offices for graciously offering their inputs and reviewing examples included in this report. Cover photos (top to bottom, left to right): © UNICEF/UN0428895/Salazar; © UNICEF/UNI210680/Babajanyan; © UNICEF/UN045108/Pirozzi; © UNICEF/UN0521995/Pouget; © UNICEF/UNI308013/Schermbrucke. Report design was done by Big Yellow Taxi, Inc.

Endnotes

- 1 Information on Global Tracking of COVID-19 School Closures and Re-openings supplied by UNESCO.
- 2 The March 2022 [Where Are We on Education Recovery?](#) report presents findings from the first round of data analyzed under the RAPID framework, based on UNICEF's Pulse Survey of 122 country and fundraising offices. Findings from the second round, based on the fourth wave of the Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures and the Global Education Recovery Tracker, are available in the September 2022 [From Learning Recovery to Education Transformation](#) report.
- 3 World Bank, et al., [Guide for Learning Recovery and Acceleration: Using the RAPID framework to address COVID-19 learning losses and build forward better](#), World Bank, 2022.
- 4 World Bank, UNICEF and UNESCO, [Two Years After: Saving a generation](#), World Bank, 2022.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 World Bank, et al., [Guide for Learning Recovery and Acceleration: Using the RAPID framework to address COVID-19 learning losses and build forward better](#), World Bank, 2022.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 UNICEF, [Financing Education Recovery: A piece of cake?](#), UNICEF, June 2022.
- 9 UNICEF, [Transforming Education with Equitable Financing](#), UNICEF, January 2023.

unicef  | for every child

Published by UNICEF
3 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017

Email: education@unicef.org
Website: www.unicef.org

© United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
March 2023