



Education in times of COVID-19: Recovery and Revitalization

Policy Brief
January 2021



Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected learning at all levels and stages; from early childhood to vocational and higher education. The pandemic has had devastating effects on socio-economic and educational outcomes all over the world. This disruption will have long-lasting impacts on our societies, including economic instability, food insecurity, and community violence, among others, specifically against women and girls.

Additionally, the effects of COVID-19 on education are and will continue to be felt disproportionately by learners already experiencing marginalization due to identities such as socioeconomic status, immigration status, ability, and gender. Due to the current diverse needs of these students, educational strategies moving forward must be focused on addressing the needs of all students, including those with the largest barriers to accessing education, and evolve to continue addressing needs as they change over time. We are presented with the opportunity and challenge to reimagine and redesign an educational system that supports the needs of students, families, and teachers in a more accessible and equitable way. Funding, programming, and institutional and governmental support plays a crucial role in this process and could set a global precedent for future emergencies.



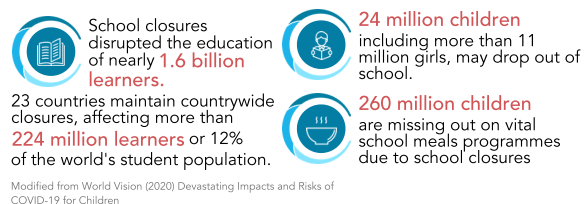
Key Messages

1. COVID-19 has had a **greater socio-economic impact** in Latin America and the Caribbean than any other emerging or developed region. When looking at recovery strategies, **Latin America & the Caribbean should be a focus**.
2. **Education is an essential human right** that is a gateway to addressing systemic inequalities and an important part of the recovery phase of the COVID-19 response.
3. **Innovation is key** to reimagining and redesigning educational systems in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as globally.
4. **Centering on the needs of the most vulnerable** in designing interventions and distributing funding will be crucial in overcoming the crisis.
5. Education should explore **collaborations** with community members, nonprofit organizations, and governmental agencies to address the psychosocial needs of students.
6. Educators play a **vital role** in shaping future generations, and institutional **support for teachers is essential** to the success of students and education systems.
7. **Improvements to infrastructure are necessary** for students, administrators, and teachers to return to in-person learning safely.
8. **Monitoring and evaluation** will be essential in guiding future programming and funding efforts and must be included in COVID-19 education response plans.

Problem Statement

UNESCO estimated that 1.3 billion learners in 186 countries were affected by school closures relating to the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020. This includes students from early childhood education programs to higher education. 463 million children, which makes up approximately one-third of the world total, have no chance to engage in distance learning through radio, television, or online.

Figure 1: Statistics on Education & COVID-19



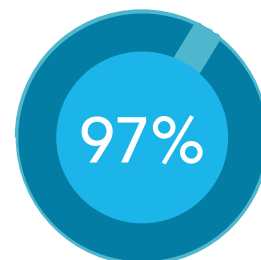
Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin America and the Caribbean have experienced huge socio-economic impacts due to COVID-19, with GDP falling between 7% and 9%. Poverty levels were expected to rise to 231 million (37.3%) by the end of 2020, with extreme poverty reaching 96.2 million (15.5% of the total population).

In this region specifically, 23 countries and 12 independent states have closed schools. This has had an effect on over 140 million children and adolescents, which adds to the 12 million children and adolescents who were already out of school.

Although distance learning strategies have been implemented across Latin America and the Caribbean, one out of three children are still not receiving a quality distance education. This is largely due to a lack of access to technology, difficulties with adapting to online teaching methods and tools, and little support provided to parents as they transitioned to playing a more active role in their children's formal education.

Figure 2: Percentage of children in Latin America & The Caribbean who have been deprived of their normal schooling



Infographic created using data from UNICEF, "Education on Hold" Report, 2020, available at <https://www.unicef.org/lac/media/18746/file/Education-on-hold-web-0711-1.pdf>

Consequences of School Closures

Students living in rural areas, migrants and refugees, girls and young women, people with disabilities, and those living in poverty are more vulnerable to the negative effects of school closures. These students have already been the focus of interventions to ensure that they have access to education before the pandemic due to systemic inequalities, and these efforts have been complicated by COVID-19. These communities face barriers to distance learning such as a lack of language-specific resources, gender-based violence, and interruptions to established therapeutic plans. An example of these disparities is in Brazil, where 92% of students in the southern region are participating in remote learning activities as compared to only 52% of students in the poorest, north-west region. These inequities are likely to result in lower levels of learning and increased rates of dropping out, which have consequences, such as lower levels of social mobility and fewer economic opportunities.

School closures have many consequences that exacerbate disparities that exist both within the education system as well as other aspects of students lives. These include interrupted learning, malnutrition, negative mental health impacts, increased exposure to violence and exploitation, increased risk of dropping out, and negative economic impacts.



Ferreira & Schoch, World Bank "COVID-19 in Latin America: A pandemic meets extreme inequality" 2020, available at <https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/covid-19-latin-america-pandemic-meets-extreme-inequality>

UN, "COVID-19 worsening gender-based violence, trafficking risk, for women and girls", 2020, available at <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/11/1078812>

UNICEF, "Nicaragua: In the midst of the pandemic, therapies for children with disabilities continues remotely" 2020, available at <https://www.unicef.org/lac/en/stories/midst-pandemic-therapies-children-disabilities-nicaragua-continue-remotely>

Gropello, E. World Bank, "The costs of COVID-19 in education in Latin America", 2020, available at <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/costs-covid-19-education-latin-america-acting-now-protect-future-our-children>

Americas Quarterly "Back to the 1960s? Education might be Latin America's most lasting scar from COVID-19" 2020, available at <https://americasquarterly.org/article/back-to-the-1960s-education-may-be-latin-americas-most-lasting-scar-from-covid-19/>

UNESCO, "Adverse Consequences of School Closures", 2020, Available at <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/consequences>

Consequences of School Closures

The impacts of educational setbacks are not only individual, but affect communities and countries on a broader scale. As a result of a loss of learning, a student's earning potential is affected. The Human Capital Index, a tool used to evaluate a child's future productivity as a worker based on their access to health and education, estimated that before the pandemic youth in Latin America were only 56% as productive if they had full access to education and health. The World Bank estimates an economic loss of \$16,000 in lost earnings over a student's lifetime due to COVID-19. These losses could become \$10 trillion dollars of lost earnings for the global economy over time.

Even before COVID-19, the world was facing a learning crisis. Fifty-three percent of children in middle and lower income countries suffered from "learning poverty", defined as the inability to read and understand a simple text by age 10. It is estimated that as a result of school closures, years of schooling (adjusted for quality) may drop from 7.9 years down to 7.3 years. The share of students in lower secondary education who do not meet the minimum competencies may increase from 40% to 50%.

Figure 3: World Bank Learning Losses in Latin America

Learning Losses in Latin America

	Baseline	Post COVID-19		
		Optimistic	Pessimistic	Intermediate
Learning Adjusted-Years of Schooling	7.7	7.4	7.1	6.8
PISA Mean Score	402	396	386	376
Share of Students Below Proficiency Minimum Level	53%	60%	64%	68%
Per Student Lifetime Earning Loss (2017 PPP\$)	-	4,422	9,750	15,229
Aggregated Cost of Foregone Earnings (Trillions of PPP \$)	-	-0.4	-0.8	-1.2

Gropello, E. World Bank, "The costs of COVID-19 in education in Latin America", 2020, available at <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/costs-covid-19-education-latin-america-acting-now-protect-future-our-children>

World Bank, "COVID-19 Could Lead to Permanent Loss in Learning and Trillions of Dollars in Lost Earnings", 2020, Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/06/18/covid-19-could-lead-to-permanent-loss-in-learning-and-trillions-of-dollars-in-lost-earnings>

World Bank, "Ending Learning Poverty: A Target to Galvanize Action on Literacy", 2019, available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2019/11/06/a-learning-target-for-a-learning-revolution>

Gropello, E. World Bank, "The costs of COVID-19 in education in Latin America", 2020, available at <https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/costs-covid-19-education-latin-america-acting-now-protect-future-our-children>

Policy Implications

The ongoing challenges that students and global education systems face are daunting. However, there are increasing opportunities to reimagine education and create learning opportunities to meet the unique needs of students growing up and learning during a global pandemic. Although students who have lived and learned during COVID-19 face many difficulties, they are also nurturing skills of resilience and flexibility. It is important that when we examine the different realities of these students, we also understand and highlight the strengths that this experience will give them and connect them to the classroom, whether that is online or in-person. Some of the considerations to take into account when reimagining education in a post-COVID world, are listed below.

I. Education must be both a funding priority and a programmatic priority

Although the focus of many interventions and funding for COVID-19 has been on health, education is also an important priority for both organizations and funders. Education is not only an opportunity for a better life, but it is also a fundamental human right. A quality education aids in the development of well-rounded individuals, it is a powerful tool in combating poverty and gender inequalities, and improves health outcomes. Latin America is considered to have some of the largest educational gaps, with the richest 21% of students being 5 times more likely to finish secondary education as compared to the poorest 20%. Access to quality education is a powerful solution to fighting inequality in Latin America and ensuring the right for the development of just societies.

Even before the pandemic education was severely underfunded, both by governments as well as humanitarian aid. The annual financing gap for achieving inclusive and equitable quality education in low- and low-income countries stood at \$148 billion. Education receiving only around 2% of global humanitarian funding, despite its proven benefits and the need for additional funding .

II. Support funding efforts for innovative approaches to remote learning opportunities, both for primary education and vocational training

Students globally and across different educational levels have had their learning interrupted. Distance learning needs to be adjusted to fit the different needs, lived realities, and available resources of students, including their language ability, age, understanding of technology, infrastructure, and at-home support.

EXAMPLES OF INNOVATION IN COVID-19 RESPONSE

Peru

Aprendo en casa: 800,000 were distributed to children in rural areas and children in the lowest quintiles of income distribution in rural areas. The tables will have internet and solar charges for families who do not have electricity. 97,000 tables will also be distributed to teachers.

Brazil

Bolsa Familia: A conditional cash transfer program will expanded to support 2.9 million Brazilians for at least 19 months. In order to participate in the program children must attend school and receive regular health services. This program supports economically marginalized individuals, with 990,000 being children and young adults and 7,000 indigenous peoples.

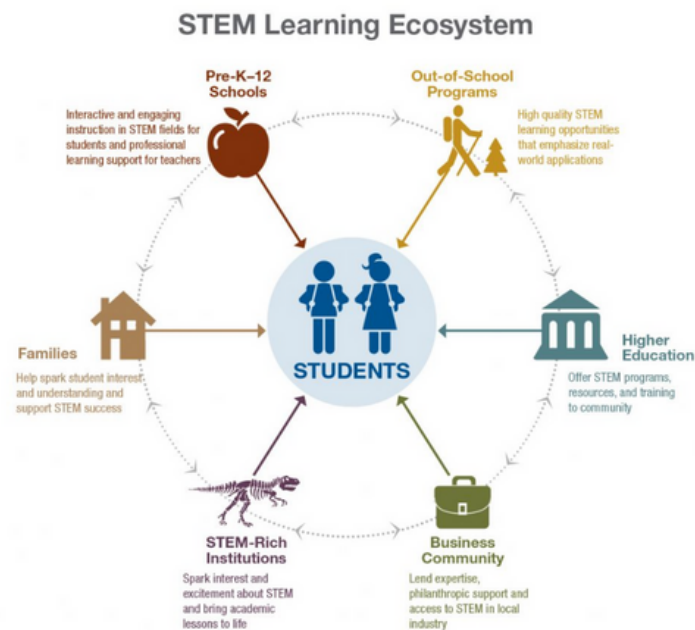
III. Distance learning methods and programs targeted towards education must center the needs of the most vulnerable students: women and girls, people with disabilities, refugees, migrants & displaced persons, students living in rural areas, and students living in extreme poverty

Distance learning has been shown to exacerbate already existing inequalities, and concerns of lack of infrastructure and lack of access to technology as well as basic needs being unmet impede learning. Organizations can play a key role in providing life-saving programs that address basic needs, especially those of vulnerable populations. This work should be included in plans that look at improving education. Funders should support organizations that explicitly address how they will serve and prioritize the needs of vulnerable populations, especially those that actively seek out the feedback and participation of members of the communities for whom they serve.

IV. Education must be a holistic approach that meets the needs of children and families through the integration of social services including mental and physical health, nutrition, and socioeconomic support programs

Schools have long been hubs for social services, including feeding and after school enrichment programs. COVID-19 has increased the need for access to social services such as mental health support, economic and food aid, as well as learning support. Schools have the potential to identify needs and connect families with these relevant services. In order for this to be successful, additional funding and collaborations with service providers will be needed.

Figure 4: “Powered Up Schools” that include holistic community supports



Vegas, E and Winthrop, R., The Brookings Institute, Report, “Before reopening schools: How education can emerge stronger than before COVID-19”, 2020, available at <https://www.brookings.edu/research/beyond-reopening-schools-how-education-can-emerge-stronger-than-before-covid-19/>

V. Support for teachers is essential to the success of students and the educational system

COVID-19 has gravely impacted teachers, changes to curriculum and adjustments in how they support students through these uncertain times have placed additional pressure on them. In addition, they are also affected by their own experience of COVID-19, such as family members or themselves getting sick, job loss within their family, and increased stress and anxiety. Training, technology provisions and programs to ensure that teachers’ psychosocial needs are being addressed are important areas to include when creating programming or looking at organizations to support financially.

VI. In order to support a safe return to in-person learning, infrastructure changes must be made

In-person learning will not be possible until there is supportive infrastructure to ensure that teachers, students, and staff are safe when they return. This includes access to running water, adequate bathroom facilities, structurally sound buildings, personal protective equipment, and enhanced cleaning measures. This could be difficult due to a lack of funding, but donors can play an important role in supporting the work of organizations who are working to provide necessary infrastructure upgrades to ensure a safe learning and work environment.

VII. Continued monitoring and evaluating efforts to understand the effects of COVID-19 on education and its broader impacts, as well ensuring that educational interventions are producing the desired results, adjusting to meet students' changing needs

It is vital to measure program effectiveness to ensure that organizations can continue applying for funding. Due to the current changing nature of education, it is also important to develop baseline data that can be used to illustrate and understand both the challenges and opportunities happening in education. These approaches to data and evaluation must also take into consideration the situation within each country and inform interventions that are specific to location and population needs rather than a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Local organizations can help guide this process using their knowledge of the community and context as well as their relationships with community leaders. Funding is necessary to engage in monitoring and evaluation, and donors play an important role in ensuring that this process is possible through their financial support.

Important Takeaways

Donors

Latin America and the Caribbean are priority areas for funding relating to education as well as basic needs during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Education is still severely underfunded even though it is an international human right as well as powerful tool to fight inequalities.

Financial support should be prioritized to organizations with innovative approaches and who serve vulnerable populations.

Funding for infrastructure will be needed for a safe return to school.

Organizations

Monitoring and evaluation efforts will be important to ensure that programs are centred on and meet the changing needs of students and community members.

Psychological needs of students will be an important focus for future programming and collaboration will be key when looking at how to support these needs.

