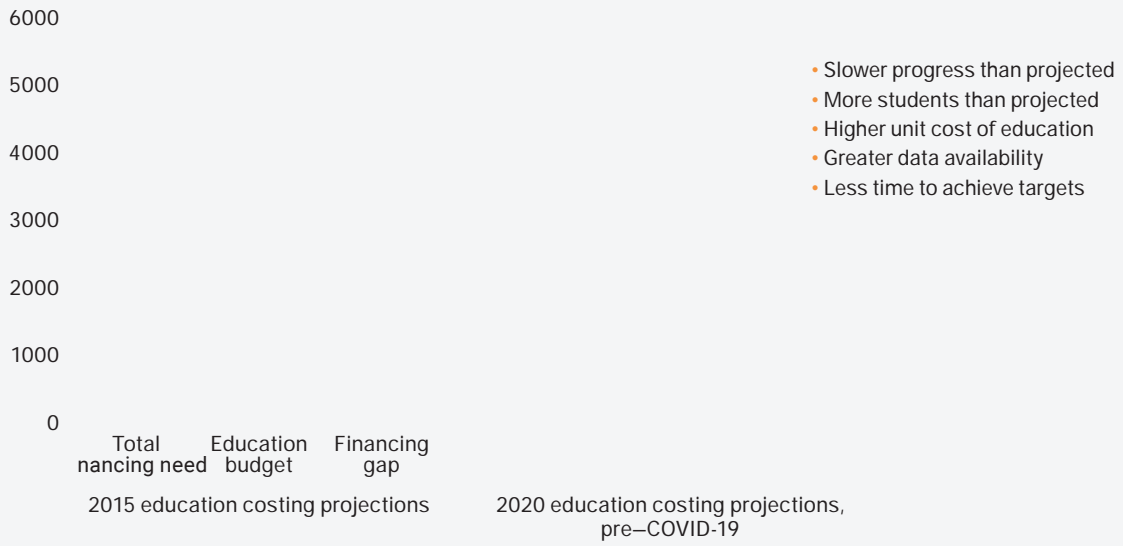# Policy Brief:
Education during COVID-19 and beyond

at large, including local communities, upon

system; ensure strong leadership and coordination; and enhance consultation and communication mechanisms.

> **REIMAGINE EDUCATION AND ACCELERATE**

I. Shocks and aftershocks

FIGURE 1: PRE-COVID-19 FINANCING GAP TO REACH SDG 4
(*millions of dollars*)

- Slower progress than projected
- More students than projected
- Higher unit cost of education
- Greater data availability
- Less time to achieve targets

```
6000

5000

4000

3000

2000

1000

   0
         Total        Education    Financing
      nancing need    budget          gap

         2015 education costing projections        2020 education costing projections,
                                                           pre—COVID-19
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In Africa, particularly in the Sahel region,
nationwide school closures due to COVID-19

a significant increase of students with very low level of achievement due in part to massive dropouts.[23] This suggests 25 per cent more students may fall below a baseline level of proficiency needed to participate effectively and productively in society, and in future learning, a result of the school closures only.[24]

UNESCO estimates that 23.8 million additional children and youth (from pre-primary to tertiary) may drop out or not have access to school next year due to the pandemic's economic impact alone.[27] The total number of children not returning to their education after the school closures is likely to be even greater. School closures make girls and young women more vulnerable to child marriage, early pregnancy, and gender-based violence   all of which decrease their likelihood of continuing their education.[28]

With the combined effect of the pandemic's worldwide economic impact and the school closures, the learning crisis could turn into a generational catastrophe.

A RIPPLE EFFECT BEYOND EDUCATION

The education disruption will continue to have substantial effects, extending beyond education. Many of these have been laid out in previous policy briefs and include, for instance, food insecurity,[29] economic instability, and violence against women and girls.

Closures of schools and other educational institutions are hampering the provision of essential services to children and communities. The loss of school meals and other health and nutrition

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27 UNESCO, "COVID-19 Education Response: How many students are at risk of not returning to school? advocacy paper, June 2020.
28 Global Partnership for Education (GPE), "Opinion: Don't let girls' education be another casualty of the coronavirus", 1 May 2020, available at https://www.globalpartnership.org/news/opinion-dont-let-girls-education-be-another-casualty-coronavirus.
29 The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) estimates that by the end of 2020 the number of people experiencing hunger will increase to 270 million, "Global Monitoring of School Meals During COVID-19 School Closures", available at https://cdn.wfp.org/2020/school-feeding-map.
30 Ibid.
31 Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC), "The social challenge in times of COVID-19", available at _____

As the health crisis unfolded, causing massive socio-economic disruptions, education systems around the world were swift to react and adapt. Governments responded quickly to ensure education continuity and protect the safety of learners and education actors by closing schools[36] and other learning spaces. However, the unequal provision of learning modalities during closures will likely create inequities in the longer term.

A WIDE RANGE OF DISTANCE LEARNING TOOLS

Ensuring learning continuity during the time of school closures became a priority for govern-

methods have received a lot of attention. Student progress can be monitored with mobile phone surveys, tracking usage and performance statistics from learning platforms and apps, and implementing rapid learning assessments to identify learning gaps.[40] Every solution has its own challenge, notably in terms of equity.

For certain sectors, distance learning came with distinct challenges. In the early-childhood sub-sector, some countries were able to put in place virtual kindergarten for children 3 – 6 years of age. Technical and vocational apprenticeship

40   UNICEF, "Putting the 'learning' back in remote learning", June 2020, available at https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/sites/unicef.org.
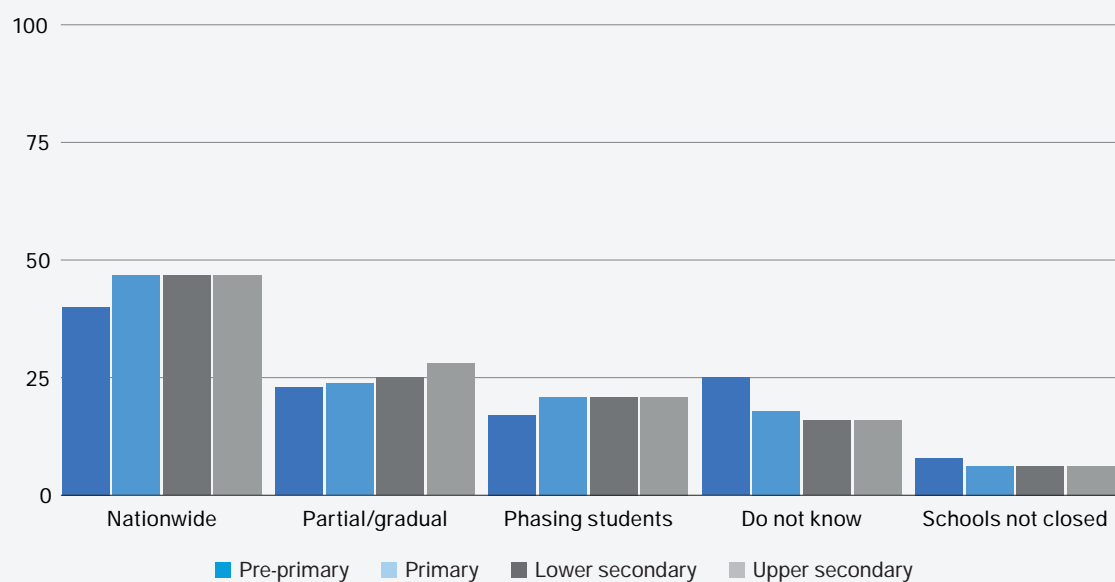
EFFORTS MADE TO PROMOTE INCLUSIVE LEARNING

As states adopt distance learning practices, students with disabilities are facing barriers due to the absence of necessary equipment, internet access, accessible materials, and the support that would allow them to follow online programmes. Some countries are developing tools and resources for learners with disabilities and their parents. This requires enhancing accessibility features, such as audio narration, sign language video, and simplified text, as well as provision of assistive devices and, in some cases, reasonable accommodation. To reach the 700 children with disabilities who are enrolled in Azraq and Za'atari refugee camps in Jordan, for example, one innovation has bu

FIGURE 6: PROPORTION OF TEACHERS REQUIRED TO CONTINUE TEACHING, BY EDUCATIONAL LEVEL AND DISTANCE LEARNING METHOD (_percentage affected by group_**)**

meet the needs of their students.[47] Without

FIGURE 8: PLANS FOR SCHOOL REOPENING, BY LEVEL (*percentage*)

Legend: Pre-primary, Primary, Lower secondary, Upper secondary

Categories: Nationwide, Partial/gradual, Phasing students, Do not know, Schools not closed

Source: UNESCO-UNICEF-World Bank Joint Survey, May June 2020, available at http://tcg.uis.unesco.org/survey-education-covid-school-closures

Preventing the learning crisis from becoming a generational catastrophe needs to be a top priority for world leaders and the entire education community. This is the best way, not just to protect the rights of millions of learners, but to drive economic progress, sustainable development and lasting peace.

with overcrowded classes and areas without basic infrastructure and services and will require additional investment.

> **PLAN FOR INCLUSIVE REOPENING:** The needs of the most marginalized children should be included in reopening strategies and adequate health measures need to be provided for students with special needs. Conducting assessments to estimate learning gaps and prepare remedial or accelerated learning programmes is essential at the time of reopening.

> **LISTEN TO THE VOICES OF ALL CONCERNED:** Given the role that parents, caretakers, and teachers have played since the onset of the crisis, an essential part of the decision-making process is consultation and joint planning for reopening with communities and education stakeholders. A lack of clearly communicated and predictable planning can lead to a loss of teachers to other forms of employment, and to more children entering the labour market, decreasing the chances that they will return to learning.

> **COORDINATE WITH KEY ACTORS, INCLUDING THE HEALTH COMMUNITY:** Measures to mitigate the risks of transmitting COVID-19 will be likely be needed in the medium term, so it will be important to reflect on the impact of various reopening strategies, by using whatever information is available and by learning from other countries. Working with health officials in planning reopening is recommended, particularly as scientific evidence continues to evolve. Coordination

cost-effectiveness of education services. Ongoing reforms and innovations tackling inefficiencies[61] should be prioritized.

Education ministries should strengthen dialogue with ministries of finance in a systematic and sustained way to maintain and, where possible, increase the share of the national budget for education (in particular when internal reallocation is feasible).

Social sectors in general, and the education sector in particular, should use their powerful voice to insist on the immediate to long-term imperative of their financing, contributing to a strong push for SDG 17.1.[62] Along with

> **FOCUS ON EQUITY AND INCLUSION:** Measures to "build back resilient" and reach all learners need to understand and address the needs of marginalized groups and ensure they

education actors — including teachers, learners, and the most marginalized — are key to the effective implementation of plans and responses, to meeting the needs of all learners, and to enhancing their resilience and that of the education system.

D. REIMAGINE EDUCATION AND ACCELERATE POSITIVE CHANGE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

In the face of global closures of educational institutions and the halting of non-formal training, there has been remarkable innovation in responses to support learning and teaching. But responses have also highlighted major divides, beginning with

Digital solutions need relevant content, adequate instructional models, effective teaching practices, and a supportive learning environment. Teacher development and professionalization are key to ensure they are sufficiently qualified, remunerated, and prepared. Governments could also strengthen systems of support for teachers, facilitators, and parents/caregivers in the successful and safe use of technology for learning.

> **EXPAND THE DEFINITION OF THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION TO INCLUDE CONNECTIVITY ENTITLEMENT:** Considerable attention has been given to the use of technology to ensure learning continuity. Those digital solutions to improve teaching and learning which are institutionalized in the aftermath of the pandemic need to put equity and inclusion at their centre, to

IV. Conclusion

The shock of the COVID-19 crisis on education has been unprecedented. It has set the clock back on the attainment of international education goals, and disproportionately affected the poorer and most vulnerable. And yet, the education community has proved resilient, laying a groundwork for the rebound.

There remains a risk of a downward spiral, in a negative feedback loop of learning loss and exclusion. Yet every negative spiral of aggravating socio-economic circumstances suggests its reverse image of a positive spiral, one which would lead to the future of education we want: one of inclusive change in education delivery, of unleashing the potential of individuals, and of collective fulfilment, in all areas of life, through education investment.

There is unlimited drive, and untapped resources, we can count on for the restoration, not only of education's essential services, but of its fundamental aspirations. It is the responsibility of governments and the international community to stay true to principles and conduct reforms, so that, not only will the children and youth regain their promised future, but all education stakeholders find their role in making it happen.