

COVID-19: PATHWAYS FOR THE RETURN TO LEARNING



The COVID-19 pandemic presents an unprecedented challenge to education globally. In early April 2020, young people in at least 194 countries—over 91.3% of the world's school-age population—were out of school.¹ When schools reopen, learners will have missed out on weeks or months of education, and those furthest behind may end up missing years. Ministries of education, school leaders, donors, and partners are beginning to plan for when and how to reopen schools. They are exploring appropriate options to help learners catch up and get back on track.

COVID-19 related school closures are having extreme impacts on learners' academic access and progress, safety and protection, social-emotional wellbeing, and health—with not all learners affected in the same way. Moreover, COVID-19 is creating challenges that will make it difficult for learners to return to school. However, the pandemic also presents opportunities for increasing access to education for marginalized groups and improving educational quality via innovations to distance learning and alternative pathways.

Education interventions during and after COVID-19 must be equitable and inclusive, meet learners' specific needs, and build the resilience of learners, families, schools, and education systems.

GETTING LEARNERS BACK ON TRACK

As education systems start to reopen and support students to return, four responses are most relevant in the return to learning: **extended instructional time, catch-up programmes, remedial education, and accelerated education programmes (AEP)**. These programmes increase the amount of instructional time, provide additional support, or prioritise learning outcomes to help learners get back on track.

Because education serves an essential protective function, first and foremost, **education planners must ensure that all learners—especially the most marginalized—are able to return to school** by addressing barriers to equitable access and learning exacerbated by COVID-19.

How can catch-up programmes and AEP be an appropriate response to the pandemic?

Catch-up programmes and AEP help learners move through grade-level competencies at a faster pace by prioritising essential literacy, math, and social-emotional skills that enable success in all content areas. In the COVID-19 response, catch-up programmes can be implemented at the national, local, or school level for learners who are able to return to formal or non-formal education and who missed less than a year of school. AEPs can help over-age out-of-school children and youth who have missed out on a significant amount of school complete primary school and transition to secondary school.

Spotlight on Out-of-School Children and Youth

Prior to COVID-19, approximately 258 million young people were out of school.² Due to the pandemic, many more who were previously attending may not be able to return, increasing this number. The response to COVID-19 must consider not only children who were previously attending formal education who are able to return, but also those attending non-formal education, those who drop out due to the pandemic, and those who were previously unable to be in school.

What are evidence-based practices to re-engage learners in education?³

- Back-to-school campaigns including provision of education materials
- Cash transfers, school vouchers, and in-kind support
- Female teachers
- WASH facilities in schools
- Community monitoring
- Consistent and reliable messaging about re-opening, e.g., dates, registration, and safe operations

1. UNESCO (n.d.) [COVID-19 Education Response \[website\]](#).

2. UNESCO (2019). New methodology shows that 258 million children, adolescents and youth are out of school.

3. Burde, D., Guven, O., Kelcey, J., Lahmann, H., & Al-Abadi, K. (2015). What works to promote children's educational access, quality of learning, and wellbeing in crisis-affected contexts.

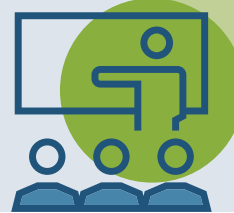
WHO BELONGS WHERE?

It is essential to identify the most appropriate education response to ensure learners return, stay in, and complete school, and so programmes can be most effective.

Were learners actively attending school before COVID-19 and missed a significant amount of school?

If learners were attending school before COVID-19, are the right age for the right grade, and missed out on a year or less of school, a **catch-up programme** is the most appropriate response. This is likely the most common programme that will be needed in the return to learning.

► **Catch-up programmes** are short-term transitional education programmes for children and youth who had been actively attending school prior to an educational disruption, which provides students with the opportunity to learn content missed because of the disruption and supports their re-entry to the formal system.



If learners were attending AEP before COVID-19, a catch-up programme may not be possible. You cannot condense an already accelerated programme, so AEPs may only be able to extend instructional time. It is essential that AE learners stay on track with formal school learners to be able sit exams and facilitate transition back to school.

If you have to reduce class size due to physical distancing, this may reduce the number of in-class hours. Therefore, you may need to condense the curriculum in addition to adjusting instructional time.



Were learners out of school for a very short period, or kept on track via distance learning?

If so, you may only need to extend instructional time, rather than implement a full catch-up programme. A catch-up programme involves a condensed curriculum and is a full programmatic intervention, whereas extending instructional time only involves slightly adapting the academic calendar and schedule.

► **Extending instructional time** may include lengthening the school day or week, shortening holidays/breaks, leveraging distance learning, or double shifting.



Are learners struggling once they return to school?

After COVID-19 related school closures, learners may struggle once they return and require additional support. Targeted **remedial education** should be provided for those who need it.

► **Remedial programmes** are additional targeted support, concurrent with regular classes, for students who require short-term content or skill support to succeed in regular programming.



Remedial support can be provided in any programme, including formal and non-formal education, catch-up programmes, or AEP. Remedial support may be provided through one-on-one or small group support, or through distance learning, in target content areas.



The recovery from COVID-19 is an opportunity to engage young people who have never been to school or who dropped out before completing their education. Over-age, out-of-school children and youth can benefit from the increased options for distance learning and alternative pathways implemented during and after COVID-19.



Are learners over-age and out of school for over a year?

If learners have been out of school for at least one year and are over-age for their grade, they may need an **Accelerated Education Programme**. This would allow learners to obtain equivalent, certified competencies and transition into formal education, technical/vocational training, or livelihoods.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATION PLANNERS

- **Assess how COVID-19 has affected learners' health, well-being, and academic access and progress, as well as the education sector's response and readiness for the recovery phase** (e.g., education workforce, educator wellbeing and training, infrastructure preparedness). The Global Education Cluster has developed a set of [key indicators and questions for COVID-19 assessment](#).
- **Use the AEWG COVID-19 Decision Tree (next page) to identify what education interventions are most useful in your country's response.** Ensure that the appropriate responses consider the range of learner backgrounds, experiences, and needs in your context.
- **If needed, use the [AEWG Guidance on Condensing a Curriculum](#) to help learners get back on track.** This involves identifying priority learning outcomes, ensuring content is mutually reinforcing, integrating subjects, and reducing repetition. A condensed curriculum should also leverage distance learning.
- **Contextualize the AEWG tools and guidance, including the [10 AE Principles for Effective Practice](#) and the [AE M&E Toolkit](#).** While AEWG materials have been developed to support AEPs, many of the same principles and practices apply for catch-up programmes. For example, alignment with national and humanitarian architecture, as well as community engagement and participation, are essential.
- **Remember, schools serve an essential protective function for many learners.** Use evidence-based practices to ensure that all learners, especially the most marginalized, are able to return.
- **Revisit policy and financing to support needed interventions.** Enabling policy and financing are critical to effective response. In emergencies, including epidemics, funds are often diverted to other sectors, and The World Bank predicts COVID-19 will have a major impact on education financing. Policies and financing need to include suitable alternative education pathways and modalities.

AEWG & PARTNER RESOURCES

Needs Assessment, Situation Analysis, and M&E

- Global Education Cluster (2020) [Key Indicators & Questions for COVID-19 Assessment](#)
- AEWG (2020) [Accelerated Education Monitoring & Evaluation Toolkit](#)
- USAID [Rapid Education & Risk Analysis](#)
- USAID [Safer Learning Environments Toolkit](#)

Equity and Inclusion

- UNICEF (2020) [Inclusive School Reopening: Supporting the Most Marginalized Children to go to School](#)
- Global Action on Disability (2020) [COVID19 and Education for Children with Disabilities](#)
- Malala Fund (2020) [Girls' Education and COVID-19](#)
- UNESCO (2020) [Conflict-affected, Displaced and Vulnerable Populations](#)

Distance Learning and Interactive Audio Instruction

- EDC [Audio Now: Responding to COVID 19](#)
- USAID (2020) [Delivering Distance Learning in Emergencies](#)
- UNHCR (2020) [How to Ensure Everyone can Continue Learning amid the Coronavirus Situation](#)

AEP and Catch-up Programmes

- INEE [Accelerated Education Collection](#)
- AEWG (2020) [Guidance on Condensing a Curriculum](#)
- USAID (2020) [Return to Learning during COVID-19: Brief](#)

- USAID (forthcoming) [Return to Learning during COVID-19: Toolkit for Policymakers, Donors, Implementers, and Educators](#)

Safe Operations

- IASC (2020) [Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention and Control in Schools](#) and [Supplemental Content](#)
- Global Education Cluster & Global Protection Cluster (2020) [Safe Back to School: A Practitioner's Guide](#)
- World Health Organization (2020) [Considerations for School-related Public Health Measures in the Context of COVID-19](#)

General Resources

- UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, WFP, & UNHCR (2020) [Framework for Reopening Schools](#)
- EDC [International Resources for the COVID-19 Crisis](#)
- INEE [COVID-19 Collection](#)
- UNESCO, UNICEF, & World Bank [Joint UNESCO-UNICEF-World Bank Webinar Series on the Reopening of Schools](#)
- Global Education Cluster [Education in Global Health Emergencies: COVID-19](#)
- UNHCR (2020) [Supporting Continued Access to Education during COVID-19: Emerging Promising Practices](#)
- UNHCR (2020) [Supporting Continued Access to Education during COVID-19: Emerging Promising Practices Issue 2](#)

AEWG COVID-19 DECISION TREE



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