



# ASEAN Policy Brief on Safe School Reopening, Learning Recovery and Continuity

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**ASEAN Policy Brief on Safe  
School Reopening, Learning  
Recovery and Continuity**

ASEAN Secretariat

September 2021



## Foreword



The global school closures in response to COVID-19 carry high social and economic costs for people across communities. In ASEAN, it resulted in an unprecedented and sudden disruption of education of around 152 million children and youths in 2020. This sudden disruption could lead to learning losses that will have long lasting economic impacts both on the students and on each country if not effectively remediated.

To this end, I would like to commend the swift actions, efforts and initiatives undertaken by the ASEAN Member States (AMS) in ensuring that learning continues. With unrelenting efforts from individuals, communities, governments, civil society organisations and private sectors, we have somehow managed to adapt. Sadly, the pandemic has also revealed weaknesses in education, including the inequalities and learning divide in which the most disadvantaged are being disproportionately affected.

We recognise that the benefits of keeping schools open far outweigh the cost of closing them. Aside from learning loss and reduced productivity, the immediate consequences of prolonged school closures such as mental distress, exposure to violence and abuse and missed school-based meals, will have detrimental effects on students' health and well-being. Evidence also suggests that the longer students stay out of school, the less likely they are to return.

In this context, the ASEAN Secretariat and UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO) worked together and developed this Policy Brief on Safe School Reopening, Learning Recovery and Continuity to provide Ministries of Education of AMS with key strategies to safely reopen schools as an urgent priority, and tackle various challenges of education disruptions.

This Policy Brief could not be more timely and relevant as countries continue to grapple the successive waves of COVID-19 sweeping across the region that could possibly extend until 2022, and given the likelihood of another pandemic in the future.

I hope that this Policy Brief and key strategies herein will help the ASEAN Member States in building a resilient education system and in ensuring that inclusion and equity principles are always at the core of the national planning, policy making, advocacies and programming efforts.

**H.E. EKKAPHAB PHANTHAVONG**  
Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN  
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## Foreword



Over the past two years, we have witnessed how COVID-19 disrupted education systems and deepened the learning crisis worldwide. Across ASEAN countries, between February 2020 and September 2021, at least 140 million children and adolescents saw their schools closed for an average of 136 days, and 35 million more have not had access to their schools for almost two full school years. A tremendous equity and learning loss is looming, and its consequences will last for generations.

UNICEF believes that schools should be the last institutions to close and the first to reopen, particularly for younger learners. Safely reopening schools may pose challenges, but the risks attached to keeping schools closed are far greater and detrimental to children’s learning and overall well-being. The efforts made by the Ministries of Education of ASEAN Member States to address the challenges of school closures and ensure learning continuity are commendable. The shared vision of ASEAN Ministers of Education and UNICEF will go a long way to recognize that equity, inclusion, and a rights-based approach are non-negotiable principles for every education system.

This Policy Brief, developed by the ASEAN Secretariat, aims to further assist member states’ governments in their endeavors to recover learning and build better education systems post-COVID. The Brief informs national level policy decisions on safe school reopening, mitigating learning loss, and enhancing

the resilience of education systems for future emergencies. This Brief sets out ambitious policy objectives for immediate action as well as outlines specific medium to long-term reforms in the context of inevitable future disruptions.

Fulfilling the Right to Education for every child and building a strong ASEAN community for the future calls for a safe and effective pathway for all children to learn happily and healthily. For this, UNICEF is committed to working with the ASEAN Secretariat towards *regional guidelines for the safe reopening of schools, learning recovery, and return to learning*, and to work with each Member State to operationalize these strategies.

**DEBORA COMINI**  
Regional Director  
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This Policy Brief has also benefitted from appraisal and feedback of a group of external and internal peer reviewers and experts from different organisations such as UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Health Organisation (WHO), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), SEAMEO Secretariat, Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE), Asia Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC), Working Group on Disability Inclusive Education, and Education International (IE).

This Policy Brief was coordinated by colleagues in UNICEF EAPRO and ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC), under the guidance of Deputy Secretary-General Kung Phoak, with significant contributions from Rodora T. Babaran (ASEC), Francisco Benavides (UNICEF), Akihiro Fushimi (UNICEF), Juliana Suarez Cortes (UNICEF), Dominique Koeppel (UNICEF), Teresita Felipe (UNICEF), Roger Yap Chao Jr. (ASEC), Amalia M. Serrano (ASEC), and Shinta Permata Sari (ASEC).

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## Acronyms

<b>ADB</b>	Asian Development Bank
<b>AMS</b>	ASEAN Member States
<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>EMIS</b>	Education Management Information System
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
<b>LAYS</b>	Learning-adjusted years of schooling
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>SEA-PLM</b>	Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children’s Fund
<b>WASH</b>	Water, sanitation, and hygiene
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization



## Executive Summary

**Schools should remain open with adequate safety and surveillance measures in place.** They should be the last to close and the first to reopen, particularly for younger learners. Therefore, the decision to close schools to control the COVID-19 pandemic should be only a last resort. The negative physical, mental, and educational impacts of school closures on children and the economic impact on society, more broadly, are too large to justify closures, except in the most severe pandemic situations.

This policy brief aims to inform national-level policy decisions in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) around safe school reopening and operations, learning recovery, and continuity in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as any future emergencies/disruptions. It intends to provide ministries of education of ASEAN Member States (AMS) with key strategies based on emerging global and regional evidence to **reopen schools as an urgent priority** and tackle various challenges of education disruptions. It also serves to strengthen the cross-sectoral work, particularly with ministries of health and social welfare, among others.

The paper has two objectives. First, it responds to the urgent needs of AMS for **immediate strategies** to ensure safe school reopening from pre-primary to secondary education, learning recovery, and continuity when disruptions occur. Second, it presents **medium- to long-term strategies** to cope with future shocks and disruptions by strengthening the education system resilience among AMS. To fulfil these two objectives, the following **recommendations** and **seven strategies** were formulated for the ministries of education of AMS.

### Key Recommendations

- 1) Emphasize the **equity principle** and inclusion of the most vulnerable populations in all strategies.
- 2) Prioritize support to **pre-primary** education and **early learning** with holistic support for young children.
- 3) Conduct effective **policy advocacy** both by the education sector and by joint efforts with key ministries (such as health and social welfare) aimed at the state leaders on the following **two policy objectives**.



### Policy Objective 1

**Immediate strategies to ensure safe school reopening from pre-primary to secondary education, learning recovery, and continuity.**



#### Strategy 1. Reopen schools for safe operation from pre-primary to secondary education as an urgent priority

- Have a clear strategic vision and plan to guide the education system to reopen as soon as it is safe to do so (with priority given to younger children and most marginalized).
- Ensure safe operations of schools for pre-primary to secondary education with health and other protocols.



#### Strategy 2. Recover losses in learning, socioemotional development, and well-being due to school closures

- Measure learning losses while also promoting socioemotional development based on formative assessment with considerations to young children and those with disabilities. Plan and adapt when and how the learning losses will be recovered (in-person). Then offer effective programmes for catch-up and remediation with prioritized/rebalanced curricula and materials (including technology). Ensure teachers are prepared and trained, students receive extra support, and parents are engaged to facilitate learning.
- Prevent dropouts and provide flexible/alternative pathways for children and adolescents who may not return to formal education or remain out of school.
- Provide a comprehensive package of support through cross-sectoral work for the well-being of children, adolescents, families, and educational staff, focusing on the most vulnerable.



#### Strategy 3. Ensure seamless learning continuity during school closure (last resort) and after school reopening

- Offer various modalities of remote learning and conditions to ensure learning continuity with flexibility and equity when in-person learning is disrupted (as a last resort).
- Utilize technology strategically and smartly for effective learning while ensuring online safety.
- Enhance the capacity of teachers while providing support to parents, particularly for young and vulnerable children.
- Prioritize well-being by ensuring health, protection, social, and other services would reach children, adolescents, their families, and educational staff at home during school closure. Focus on the most vulnerable.



**Policy Objective 2.**

**Medium- to long-term policies to cope with future shocks and disruptions by strengthening education system resilience among AMS**



**Strategy 4. Resilience: Increase resilience of the education system and personnel to prepare for, plan, and respond to future shocks**

- Develop and implement a long-term emergency preparedness, risk-informed planning, and response policy framework.
- Prepare 21<sup>st</sup>-century learners for the current and future challenges through curriculum and assessment reforms.
- Build capacity in teaching at all levels of the education system and ensure their well-being so they can respond to and bounce back from emerging, and often unexpected, various challenges.
- Strengthen communities through partnerships with civil society, the private sector, and others.



**Strategy 5. Inclusion: Prioritize inclusion of the most marginalized learners through equity-focused, multi-sectoral, and evidence-based approaches**

- Develop well-articulated cross-sectoral policies with a clear focus on the most marginalized.
- Provide a welcoming learning environment where all schools are a place of safety and inclusion for children.
- Ensure adequate funding and equitable and efficient use of resources for effective learning.
- Ensure that disaggregated data is available, analyzed, and well-used to identify and prioritize vulnerable populations with effective monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems in place.



**Strategy 6. Flexibility: Promote flexible and agile learning policies through multiple pathways and decentralized decision-making**

- Develop effective and equitable blended and remote learning policies based on evidence.
- Consolidate the education system by connecting formal, alternative education, and private sector-led learning for all students to continue their learning pathways smoothly and in a flexible manner to fulfil their right to learn.
- Revise/adapt the education sector plan and relevant policies and adjust the legal framework (if required). Equally, improve governance in planning and decision-making at national and sub-national levels.



**Strategy 7. Innovation: Pilot innovative new ideas, generate evidence, and scale up effective policies and programmes to ensure learning for all children and adolescents**

- Evaluate various programmes in terms of effectiveness (through periodic evaluation) and reform the policies and programmes based on the evidence/data.
- Pilot new ideas or approaches (including technologies) based on evidence with partners that can invest in earlier stages of experimentation, with sustainability and scaling-up in mind from the outset.





1

Introduction



## Introduction

### Objectives, Scope, and Structure

This policy brief aims to inform national-level policy decision-makers in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) around safe school reopening and operations, learning recovery, and continuity in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as any future emergencies/disruptions. It is intended to provide ministries of education of ASEAN Member States (AMS) with key strategies based on emerging global and regional evidence to **reopen schools as an urgent priority** and tackle various challenges of education disruptions. It also serves to strengthen the cross-sectoral work, particularly with ministries of health and social welfare.

The paper has two objectives. First, it responds to the urgent needs of AMS for immediate strategies to ensure safe school reopening from pre-primary to secondary education, learning recovery, and continuity when disruptions occur. Second, it presents medium- to long-term strategies to cope with future shocks and disruptions by strengthening the education system resilience among AMS. To fulfil these two objectives, the following recommendations were formulated for ministries of education of AMS.

The strategies provided in this Policy Brief focus on pre-primary, primary, and secondary education. These levels of education are prioritized from a child rights perspective. Children and adolescents need to develop solid foundational knowledge and skills for their future and to thrive in AMS. Besides, more support and guidance are required for learning recovery and remote education, particularly among young children who are less independent in their learning process.

The document includes recommended strategies based on the established and emerging evidence<sup>1</sup> as well as key principles and approaches. The key principles include equity, inclusion, a rights-based approach, and learning is at its centre with the spirit of leaving no one behind, consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals, the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, and goals of the ASEAN Education Sector.

All children and adolescents have the right to learn (not only the right to go to school)—whether they are at school, at home, or a combination—and education systems have a duty to ensure this right. Accordingly, this policy brief follows the principle of progressive universalism<sup>2</sup> to ensure investments are made where they have more returns (early years) and the most marginalized children are prioritized. It promotes a multisectoral approach, including health; water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); mental health; child protection; nutrition; and social protection to ensure the complete well-being of children and adolescents. The document has six sections. The introduction covers the objectives and scope of the policy brief. The second section provides educational challenges

that COVID-19 has placed in AMS. The third section highlights major immediate evidence-based strategies to ensure safe school reopening, learning recovery, and learning continuity during school closure (last resort). The fourth section covers medium- to long-term policies to cope with future shocks and disruptions by strengthening education system resilience among AMS. Recommended actions for regional and international cooperation are presented in the fifth section; lastly, the sixth section presents a way forward.

<sup>1</sup> Global and regional based on publications in peer-reviewed journals with meta-analysis, randomized control trials, and quasi-experimental studies. Attention was placed to meta-analysis because they reduce possible bias and omissions in single studies.

<sup>2</sup> Allocating public funding first to the lower levels of the education ladder, which include pre-primary, primary, and lower secondary, and, within these parameters, to those left behind (UNICEF, 2020).



2

Challenges Across  
ASEAN



## Challenges Across ASEAN

With the COVID-19 pandemic, education and learning have seen unprecedented disruptions for around 140 million children and adolescents in AMS over the past 18 months,<sup>3</sup> with an average of 136 days of school closures.<sup>4</sup> These may have irreversible impacts on the lives of children and adolescents across AMS, especially for populations that were already vulnerable, if further strategies and actions are not implemented. This section includes a summary of the main challenges for children's and adolescents' education in ASEAN due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### *a) Keeping schools (including pre-primary) open and safely operating in a pandemic context has been extremely challenging.*

The first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic was handled with strict containment measures. As a result, the first countries in the region were able to reopen schools in April 2020, and others reopened at the beginning of the 2020 school year (August). Most countries reopened schools (at least temporarily) after the initial closures in early 2020. To date, only the Philippines has kept schools closed or remained on an academic break since the pandemic started. Countries developed detailed guidelines on safe operations for all education stakeholders and communication campaigns in conjunction with health authorities to reopen schools for in-person learning.

With recurring COVID-19 waves with new SARS-CoV-2 variants in 2021, many schools partially or fully closed again. Most countries implemented partial closures, such as closing schools only in specific regions or for some grade levels and age groups. In some instances, schools have adopted a blended approach of reduced class time combined with distance learning (UNESCO, 2020b). This is an indicator of the challenges education systems confront to keep schools open, as education communities face challenges managing children's behaviour within entirely new parameters of social distancing and health regulations. Moreover, WASH facilities were insufficient or inadequate to meet the basic requirements in many countries (ASEAN, 2020). Furthermore, some families were hesitant to send their children to school due to fears of contagion (UNICEF & UNESCO, 2021b), especially with the rise of new variants.

By September 2021, schools were fully open in Singapore and partially opened in Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The Philippines is on an academic break, and schools are closed in Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, and Malaysia (UNESCO, 2021b)<sup>5</sup> (see map on Annex 1).

<sup>3</sup> UIS, 2019. Enrolment in pre-primary, primary and secondary education. Data extracted on 4 September 2021.

<sup>4</sup> UIS, 2021. COVID-19 Education Response. Data extracted on 2 September 2021. Excluding weekends. Figures on Annex 1.

<sup>5</sup> UIS, 2021. COVID-19 Education Response. Data extracted on 2 September 2021. Excluding weekends. Figures on Annex 1.

### *b) Education systems, in general, were not prepared for remote learning, nor were teachers, parents, or learners themselves.*

Each AMS has different country contexts with varying degrees of resources, capacities, and mechanisms, which are reflected in education systems. However, the pandemic created enormous challenges in all countries regarding remote learning. The infrastructure in most countries<sup>6</sup> was not in place for remote learning, device and internet access was not universal, and many educational institutions and households struggled to cope with the demands and skills required to implement online and home-based education (ASEAN, 2020).

Online and television broadcasting have been major platforms of instruction in AMS during the COVID-19 pandemic. Online platforms include government websites that provide learning content and video. Mobile phones and television are available in most households in AMS (UNESCO et al., 2021). Because of this and the relatively low computer ownership (on average, 38%), online learning is likely mainly done through mobile phones (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2021). A common practice is distributing paper-based learning modules and worksheets as a complement to remote learning content or as a substitute for students who have no access to television or the Internet (ADB, 2021). However, there has been a lack of teaching materials tailored to disadvantaged students, such as children with disabilities, in remote areas, and learning in their mother tongue (ASEAN, 2020). In South-East Asia, access to technology is highly unequal, with only 53% of rural children and adolescents, girls and boys, having access to the Internet at home<sup>7</sup> compared to 72% of urban children (e.g., in Indonesia, only 20% of the population in Papua have access to the Internet compared to 66% in Jakarta; UNICEF & UNESCO, 2021b). Only a small percentage of households in Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar have access to Internet broadband (ASEAN, 2020). Attendance at online or remote classes varied by country during school closures. High attendance rates are found in Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Viet Nam, and Singapore (80% or more), whereas in Myanmar and the Philippines, 70% and 35% did not attend any classes (Morgan & Trinh, 2021). As an aggravation, distance learning platforms and materials tend to overlook pre-primary students, leaving the younger children with even fewer possibilities for their learning continuity (Nugroho et al., 2021).

This affected mainly the most marginalized population. Those without access to the Internet and digital devices and those with access cannot follow learning as content does not provide accessible formats and languages. In AMS, more children from high-income households attend all remote classes (on average 20% more) than from low-income households. In Myanmar, the difference in attendance is double. Moreover, in households with at least one person who lost their job or experienced a working time reduction and were under financial difficulty, children are less likely to attend remote learning (Morgan & Trinh, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Except for Singapore.

<sup>7</sup> At home or through a smartphone.



Regarding additional support given to students, such as remedial education and tutoring, only Thailand has implemented additional in-person support to date (Johns Hopkins University eSchool+ Initiative et al., 2021).<sup>8</sup> There are also vast challenges when parents are not prepared to support children in remote learning. For instance, in Cambodia, almost 30% of parents did not teach their young children during school closures, and 74% of parents had limited knowledge of how to teach them (ASEAN, 2020).

Only 20% of countries in East Asia and the Pacific offered guidance and training for teachers on engaging with students during the crisis, compared with 30% in Europe and Central Asia and 26% in South Asia (Vegas, 2020), illustrating enormous space to increase quality teacher training. Furthermore, most national and high-stake examinations have been cancelled or postponed. There is limited information on actual learning (and learning loss) during school closures, reflecting the need for alternative modes of assessment that encourage students to monitor and manage their own learning (ASEAN, 2020). Although schools and national and subnational governments worked rapidly and creatively to facilitate students' remote learning, the pandemic highlighted weaknesses in the systems that require immediate compensation and long-term planning (ASEAN, 2020).

**c) *With schools closed and barriers to remote education, access to education is compromised and the expected increase in school dropouts will have severe long-term effects.***

Education is a fundamental right for all ASEAN children, adolescents, and young people. Still, their rights are compromised by prolonged school closures, and the risk of dropping out is expected to increase significantly. Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals aims to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all people. However, before the pandemic, several AMS were already off-track to achieve the 10 targets of Goal 4 by 2030 (UNESCO & UNICEF, 2021). As of 2019, there were 15.8 million out-of-school children and adolescents in AMS.<sup>9</sup> Because of COVID-19 in East Asia and the Pacific, around 2.7 million children are at risk of dropping out of school, of which 1.2 million are girls (UNESCO, 2020b). The estimates for South-East Asia are that 0.9% of children are at risk of dropping out (UNICEF & UNESCO, 2021b). This number is expected to increase because socioeconomic circumstances (poverty, violence at home, early pregnancies, joining the workforce prematurely, staying at home to take care of younger siblings or sick family members, etc.) are worsening, adding to a child's risk of dropping out. Moreover, pre-primary and upper secondary students are at a higher risk, particularly girls (UNESCO, 2020b).

Evidence on the impact of pandemic-related school closures from AMS is still limited, but the impact of similar events could be an indicator. American children in utero at the time of the 1918 influenza pandemic were found to have lower income and reduced educational attainment nearly 50 years later (Almond, 2006). The 1916 polio epidemic in the United States found

that children of legal working age (13 at that time) were more likely to drop out of school permanently after epidemic-related shutdowns. During the Ebola pandemic in Guinea and Sierra Leone in West Africa, where schools closed for seven to nine months, the largest increases in dropout rates were observed among youth in the poorest households (Smith, 2021). Increased school dropouts among children and adolescents are not limited to extended public-health emergencies, and they can be triggered by economic crises, such as in the 1980s in Indonesia (Azevedo et al., 2020). As the COVID-19 pandemic is both a public-health emergency and an economic crisis, the rise in dropouts is expected to be much worse. The ultimate impact will depend on the strategies countries deliberately develop to promote learning continuity to prevent students from dropping out and attract out-of-school students to return to the education system.

**d) *A deepening learning crisis will cause significant long-term learning and earning/income losses unless countries enact dedicated remediation measures.***

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the countries in East Asia and the Pacific were below the average of countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as measured by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018. Singapore and Viet Nam, however, scored above the OECD average for reading and mathematics (OECD, 2019b). Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) results in 2019 indicated that in Viet Nam and Malaysia, most Grade 5 children achieved the reading and math skills expected of them at the end of primary school. However, minimum proficiency levels of math skills stood at 8% for Lao PDR, 12% for Myanmar, 17% for the Philippines, and 19% for Cambodia (UNICEF & SEAMEO, 2020).

The effects of school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic are enormous. Azevedo et al. (2020) calculated that, worldwide, a five-month closure could increase by 25% of the students that fall below the PISA minimum proficiency level in the intermediate scenario. In East Asia and the Pacific, the increase is estimated at almost 20%. The ADB (2021) calculated that the average loss of learning in terms of LAYS<sup>10</sup> is 4.2% for Southeast Asia. Based on only a five-month closure, these figures are likely to significantly underestimate the potential learning losses of prolonged school closures (now more than 136 days on average for AMS).

National level evidence is incomplete and more studies are needed. A study in Turin, Italy, estimated that school closures during spring 2020 led to an average loss of 0.19 standard deviations in third-grade mathematics, equal to about four months of schooling<sup>11</sup> (Contini et al., 2021). A study in the Netherlands evaluated the effect of an eight-week closure on primary school performance for a scenario with a short lockdown and a high degree of digital preparedness. On average, students lost a fifth of a year of learning, but

<sup>8</sup> Information accessed on 18 August 2021.

<sup>9</sup> UIS, 2021. Latest year available 2019. Data extracted on 18 August 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Learning-adjusted years of schooling (LAYS). LAYS are the product of the amount of schooling that children typically reach and the quality of that schooling relative to some benchmark. The benchmark can be constructed differently, but this study used proficiency level in international student assessments.

<sup>11</sup> The study compared the cohort of students affected by COVID-19 and the cohort of the previous school year.



losses were up to 55% larger among students from less-educated households (Engzell et al., 2020). These results suggest that students made little or no progress while learning at home and imply much larger losses in countries less prepared for remote learning and with more extensive closures, as have occurred in most AMS. There are examples from Brazil that show students in remote education learned only 27.5% of what they would have learned with in-person education (Cossi et al., 2021) and from South Africa, where school children have lost around 54% of learning time so far (Shepherd & Mohohlwane, 2021).

The long-term effects can become colossal without compensatory action when students return to school, and the differences in countries' responses will widen inequities. The World Bank (2020a) estimated the impact of a favourable post-COVID-19 scenario, including some remediation and medium mitigation effectiveness for the effects of school closures and, in this scenario, high-income countries fully mitigated about 40% of the school year loss,<sup>12</sup> whereas developing countries fully mitigated only 30%.

When students miss out on learning opportunities, particularly for the pre-primary children, the total skill level they obtain over their lifetime is reduced, as skills beget skills (OECD, 2015). Thus, the youngest children now affected by school closures would learn less each year after they return to school because of the interruption (Andrabi et al., 2020). The evidence available points out that if one-third of a school year is missed in Grade 3, then learning in Grade 10 is one year less (compared to a counterfactual of the same children who did not miss school; Kaffenberger, 2021). More importantly, short-term remediation<sup>13</sup> was found to mitigate about half of the Grade 10 learning deficit, reducing the long-term impact of missed school to half of a school year. Regarding long-term remediation,<sup>14</sup> the effect of missed school was fully mitigated, and, most importantly, it increased Grade 10 learning above the counterfactual by more than an entire year's worth of instruction (Kaffenberger, 2021). Thus, AMS have an opportunity to revise education system practices and strengthen learning now by implementing correct measures with appropriate investments to remediate learning loss.

Without long-term remediation, consequences for children will be substantial and have shocking and lasting consequences for learning and future earnings. With only 10 months of missed classes, the average lost earnings over a typical student's lifetime is equivalent to US\$25,680 (World Bank, 2020a). Estimates of a five-month school shutdown calculate a 5% average annual reduction in expected earnings. In the absence of remedial action, the world stands to lose earnings equivalent to 16% of the investments governments have made in basic education (Azevedo et al., 2020). Without any mitigation measures, pre-primary school closures in 2020 are estimated to cost the current cohort of pre-primary-aged children US\$ 1.6 trillion in lost future earnings (Nugroho et al., 2021). For South-East Asia, ADB (2021) estimated the loss in lifetime earnings as a percentage of 2020 gross domestic product at 4.9% in the intermediate scenario and 6.5% in the pessimistic scenario.

<sup>12</sup> Measured in LAYS.

<sup>13</sup> Short-term remediation consists of teaching one third of the Grade 3 curriculum during Grade 4 before moving on to Grade 4 topics. Grade 5 starts as regular curriculum and instructional levels.

<sup>14</sup> Long-term remediation consists of short-term remedial instruction in Grade 4 and a reorientation of instruction and practices to children's learning levels on a long-term basis (by instituting formative assessments, training teachers to conduct such assessments and adapt their instruction to students' levels and needs, and prioritizing attainment of essential skills).

### e) *The most vulnerable, the most affected.*

This situation has placed a disproportionate burden on the most vulnerable children, including the most impoverished students in rural and remote areas without an Internet connection, younger children, girls, children of migrant and refugee families, children on the move, children with disabilities, and ethnic minorities. Exclusion and disparities exacerbate inequalities that disadvantage marginalized groups. The transition to non-traditional learning methods has exacerbated pre-existing disparities in school quality, resources, and teacher capacities. Children have unequal access to remote learning and family support; thus, they are excluded.

Children and adolescents from rural and poor households face barriers to accessing remote education, especially those who speak minority languages, because materials (online or printed) are usually produced in the national language. Twenty percent of girls and boys in East Asia and the Pacific (80 million children in total) were not reached by distance learning delivered online or through television or radio because they lacked devices, or policies were not geared for their needs (UNICEF & UNESCO, 2021b).

The percentage of children living in poor households in East Asia and the Pacific was forecasted to increase from 16.5% pre-pandemic to 17.3% by 2020<sup>15</sup> (UNICEF & Save the Children, 2020), meaning harsh financial conditions for families to send their children to school and the need for adolescents to support family livelihoods, which will increase dropouts for the most impoverished students.

Younger children have been significantly affected due to the lack of learning opportunities available to them. Globally, almost 70% of students who attended pre-primary education cannot be reached by digital and broadcast remote learning policies (UNICEF, 2020b). In addition, it is during the early years that the foundations for cognitive and socioemotional development are laid, leading to school readiness (Nugroho et al., 2021).

Furthermore, children with disabilities were profoundly affected when 59% of East Asia and the Pacific countries adopted remote education provisions that excluded them (UNICEF & UNESCO, 2021b). Globally, a survey of parents of children with disabilities found that remote educational programme formats were in general not accessible or useful to children with disabilities. The most accessible device was the computer, with only one-third of parents responding that it was useful (World Bank, 2020a).

The negative effect on girls is extremely high with long-term consequences. School closures put girls at risk of falling behind (Azevedo et al., 2020). Evidence from COVID-19 is still limited, but in the Ebola crisis in Guinea, girls were 25% less likely than boys to re-enrol in secondary school compared with pre-crisis levels (UNESCO, 2021a). The dual shock of the pandemic, which

<sup>15</sup> Pessimistic gross domestic product and mild distribution effect. China is excluded from the rates.



pushed adolescent girls out of school and caused families to lose livelihoods, can increase the caregiving burden (taking care of younger siblings or sick family members) that often falls to girls. Equally, there may be an increase in the likelihood of early marriage and adolescent pregnancies due to an escalation of sexual abuse and risky behaviour (Azevedo et al., 2020).

Furthermore, remote education for children and adolescents depends on parents' educational skills. This is of particular concern because parents with lower incomes tend to have lower levels of educational attainment and jobs in the informal economy where remote work is not possible. These parents are likely to be less able to support their children's learning at home and provide less emotional support.

***f) Socioemotional development was disrupted with a negative impact on mental health and well-being.***

The shocks to health and the economy caused by the pandemic are unprecedented. This crisis has affected the socioemotional and mental well-being of children, adolescents, families, and educational staff. Children and adolescents are burdened by emotional stress due to the lockdowns, household financial hardship, and anxiety over missed schooling and key examinations, separation from their peers, emotional instability stemming from uncertainty, separation from parents or caregivers, or the death of carers, such as parents or family members. Increased domestic violence linked to these factors produces extreme toxic stress, affecting especially the brain development of very young children and those with disabilities. Measures to limit social contact with peers and the community may prevent children from fully developing socioemotional skills; this is especially key for younger children.

Moreover, more attention has been given to ensuring the continuity of academic learning than to students' socioemotional development (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). Estimates suggested that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 10–20% of adolescents globally experienced mental health challenges, with half of these conditions beginning at age 14 (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020c). Adolescents' mental health and well-being, growing incidences of self-harm, and high suicide rates are of increasing concern in South-East Asia (UNICEF & UNESCO, 2021b). A global survey found that more than eight in 10 children reported an increase in negative feelings during school closures, and the longer schools were closed, the higher the level of reported negative feelings (Ritz et al., 2020).

Survey data has consistently shown increased household violence during the pandemic (Cappa & Jijon, 2021); one-third of households had a child or caregiver reporting violence in the home, and children reported that violence was double the rate when schools were closed compared to when they were attending school in person (Ritz et al., 2020). Child abuse-related injuries

rose in hospitals. However, the pandemic disrupted services, referral pathways, and the ability of children to seek help, including through schools (a key avenue to identify and report abuse), leading to a drop in police reports and cases referred to child protection services (Cappa & Jijon, 2021). A rise in calls to helplines has been reported in Singapore and Malaysia, and there is increased demand for violence shelters and women's organizations in Indonesia and Myanmar (UNESCAP, 2020). Additionally, when schools close, the food security and nutrition of children and adolescents are at risk. School feeding programmes have significant benefits for families and may represent up to 15% of daily family income, on average, globally (UNICEF, 2021b). For instance, high percentages of households cannot afford a nutrient-adequate diet in Cambodia (66%), Lao PDR (95%), Myanmar (73%), and the Philippines (59%; FAO et al., 2021). This may have enormous consequences on children's well-being and development because school feeding has been shown to increase learning and cognitive abilities (UNICEF, 2021b).



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3

### Policy Objective 1

Immediate strategies to ensure safe school reopening from pre-primary to secondary education, learning recovery, and continuity.





## Policy Objective 1

### Immediate strategies to ensure safe school reopening from pre-primary to secondary education, learning recovery, and continuity.

**Schools should remain open with adequate safety and surveillance measures in place** (WHO, 2020b). They should be the last to close and the first to reopen, particularly for younger learners. Therefore, the decision to close schools to control the COVID-19 pandemic should be a last resort. The negative physical, mental, and educational impacts of school closures on children and the economic impact on society more broadly are too large to justify closures (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2021; UNICEF, 2021c), except in the most severe pandemic situations.



#### Key Recommendations

#### I. Emphasize the equity principle and inclusion of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations in all strategies

Before the pandemic, children and adolescents from vulnerable, disadvantaged, or excluded populations have had a disproportionate burden and were affected by even more exclusion from education opportunities. This includes the most impoverished students in rural and remote areas without an Internet connection, younger children, girls, children of migrant and refugee families, children on the move, children with disabilities, and ethnic minorities. Ministries of education need to ensure that in all the strategies, they are a prioritized target population, and the education provision offers specific measures to guarantee they have access to education and can learn.

#### II. Prioritize support to pre-primary education and early learning for all strategies

The pre-primary subsector is increasing its fragility due to the pandemic. Given its crucial role in children's development, governments need to prioritize pre-primary education among all strategies: the immediate reopening of schools and learning recovery, and medium- to long-term strategies to strengthen and rebuild this subsector.

#### III. Conduct effective advocacy at the highest political level

Advocacy by the education sector as well as by joint efforts with key ministries (such as health and social welfare) should be aimed at the state leaders on the following two policy objectives to obtain necessary political support and means of implementation such as finance.

#### Evidence-Based Strategies

These are immediate short-term strategies that require urgent programme-level decisions and actions. The strategies are essential to fulfil the right to education of all children and adolescents, particularly the most marginalized and vulnerable. Thus, they need to be addressed as soon as possible, giving high priority to open schools for learning recovery. It is suggested that AMS adapt these strategies to the particular context of education provision, type of service, COVID-19 situations, and regulations in their countries.

This section presents three main evidence-based strategies to inform the decisions of AMS education systems in order to:

1. **Reopen schools for safe operation from pre-primary to secondary education as an urgent priority.**
2. **Recover losses in learning, socioemotional development, and well-being due to school closures.**
3. **Ensure seamless learning continuity during school closure (last resort) and after school reopening.**



#### Strategy 1

#### Reopen schools for safe operation from pre-primary to secondary education as an urgent priority.

##### 1-1. Have a clear strategic vision and plan to guide the education system to reopen as soon as it is safe to do so (with priority given to younger children and most marginalized).

Have a data-driven response, and work closely and in conjunction with health authorities, based on timely local data, situational analyses, or other studies. This will require a compilation of information on pandemic hardship and transmission scenarios, including new evidence related to COVID-19 variants, cases, rates of contagion, and severity among children. This should be done considering local and regional differences in COVID-19 transmission.

In the same way, there is the need to compile data on the use and effectiveness of remote learning and assess educational stakeholders' ability to provide appropriate support.

An example of coordination among ministries is found in OECD countries where some countries established a crisis management group, task force, or steering committee to work on response strategies, provide strategic advice and contribute to a communication strategy (OECD, 2020). Singapore introduced a whole-of-government approach led by a ministerial task force at the Ministry of Health and Ministry of National Development (UNESCO, 2021a). Another strategy for coordination is to create systematic partnerships with a culture of risk reduction and management with well-designed emergency preparedness, planning, and response framework (UNESCO, 2020a).



**Develop and disseminate a clear outline of the conditions or scenarios to open, for whom, when and how, and so forth. Accordingly, prepare protocols (including resurgence protocols) and guidance for all education stakeholders.**

- **Decide when to open and close schools (including pre-primary) according to the data-driven response in conjunction with health authorities, prioritizing the vulnerable population.** In each case, state the measures to be taken regarding health based on best practices (refer to strategies under point 1.2) and consider different scenarios according to local contexts, prioritizing territories or population groups where more considerable support is needed (vulnerable groups). This includes phased reopenings and opening sooner in these areas.
- **Implement preparatory checklists to assess the readiness of schools** to open, the readiness of teachers to teach, and learners to learn, including mental health and psychosocial needs assessment. Provide more support for early learning and vulnerable population.
- **Select the grades or cycles that return sooner to in-person learning, prioritizing pre-primary and vulnerable groups.** Provide alternative measures for children with underlying medical conditions and others that parents may not want to send to school. Education systems should provide the learners and parents with **options for learning:** in-person at school, remote learning at home, or via a hybrid approach, even though there are challenges of limited resources, materials or equipment, capacities, workloads, and so forth.
- **Define the learning modality for each grade or cycle** (remote, blended, hybrid, or in-person) and its progression into in-person learning.
- **Define the adaptation of the learning environment,** for instance, alternated school days or weeks, smaller in-person classes (class bubbles), or classes in shifts, hiring additional teachers to reduce class size, or making activities outdoors or outside a classroom setting. See more on 2.2.
- **Define the core curricula for each grade.** It should be condensed or prioritized among core foundational skills of maths, language, and socioemotional. See more on 2.3.
- **Plan for remedial or catch-up activities** as defined in section 2.3.
- **Plan dropout prevention and alternatives for out-of-school children.** See more on 2.4.
- **Define well-being needs and services provision** for all stakeholders. See more on 2.5.
- **Define responsibilities among decentralized decision-making levels** (national, sub-national, schools) within the education sector. An appropriate balance is essential between autonomy and support to schools in mobilizing the capacity. Capacities in schools should be fostered to the greatest possible extent, providing more support to the schools with less capacity, including pre-primary level (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020) and more vulnerable in terms of learning poverty (usually rural and marginalized).

- **Define resource allocation** for each part of the plan and ensure flexibility in using school funds and additional support needed.
- **Ensure all stakeholders' participation** in each instance of the planning process. Integrate subnational governments and the local education community (teachers, administrative personnel, families, students, and others), particularly children and adolescents, to participate in properly informing the plan and receive constant feedback. Assess their needs and alternative responses. This will give acceptance and create buy-in of the plan, ensuring that all stakeholders are heard.
- **Define criteria and indicators** to monitor the plan about school reopening, assess preparedness and needs, and evaluate and adjust measures according to local conditions.
- Annex 2 provides additional resources and checklists for reopening decisions.

An example worth noting is Singapore, where the authorities assessed the overall health situation, having a risk-based and phased approach to assess the types and format of student activities that could progressively resume. Before re-opening, the country piloted alternate in-person and home-based learning to test staggered arrival, recess, departure times, and other health and hygiene measures; then, a phased reopening approach was used (UNESCO, 2021a).

In Viet Nam, local municipal authorities decided how long local schools should be closed based on the situation in their areas while following the direction from the Ministry of Education. Provincial authorities also have been given the mandate to plan their responses at a village and community level. In Malaysia, decisions around the reopening of schools are centralized under the Ministry of Education with the advice from the National Security Council and the Ministry of Health but based on continuous stakeholder consultations. The Council and the Ministry of Education consulted with state and district education offices, public-private associations, NGOs, parents, students, private providers, and politicians. These decisions were translated into guidelines with the approval of the National Security Council and the Ministry of Health (UNESCO, 2021a).

**Develop a clear risk communication strategy that involves all educational stakeholders.**

The stakeholders include families, students, teachers, other staff, and communities providing a differentiated approach for each actor. It is crucial to develop an effective communication system, which includes consultation and feedback from multiple constituencies to build a solid consensus (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020), particularly with teacher unions. Communications should not be confused with the broadcasting of messages from leaders. The strategy should start assessing parents', students', teachers', and other staff's beliefs and fears around COVID-19 to inform appropriate messaging and identify the needs of parents and caregivers regarding the pandemic (UNICEF et al., 2020). It also needs to consider risks based on evidence of transmission and be updated frequently regarding new evidence (e.g., new variants). The communication style needs to



be concise, positive, open, friendly, culturally relevant, and flexible in responding to the characteristics of the context and in languages that each diverse stakeholder can understand. It is recommended to use a variety of channels to reach all the stakeholders. The strategy includes informing and engaging families to understand protection measures and commit to their implementation, including providing ongoing support to children at home (UNICEF et al., 2020). It also involves strengthening the role of students in sharing health messages. Additionally, it is key to disseminate the benefits of opening schools for children's and adolescents' learning and well-being as opposed to the risks and costs of closing them (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020).

For instance, a chatbot (AskJamie) in Singapore addresses questions related to COVID-19 for parents and citizens (UNESCO, 2021a).

Please refer to [Communicating With Stakeholders of the World Bank Group](#) for guidance.

Develop an inter-agency agenda for reopening with clear responsibilities, shared plans, resources, and performance indicators for coordination of cross-sectoral work.

Ministries of Education need to enhance their efforts to achieve concrete inter-agency agendas with clear shared plans, resources, and performance indicators with health, protection, social protection, and other authorities such as the Ministry of Communications or the agency in charge of the Internet connectivity. It is also crucial to revise and adjust regulations to quickly support essential adaptations to new conditions (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). It is recommended to have a coordination mechanism with the planning ministry or the office of the Head of the Government, including both national and sub-national levels.

## 1-2. Ensure safe operations of schools for pre-primary to secondary education with health and other protocols.

### **Prioritize COVID-19 vaccination for teachers and schools staff.**

National vaccination strategies should ensure that teachers and other professionals working in schools are considered when prioritizing access to COVID-19 vaccinations (WHO, 2021). This should not be compulsory but highly recommended. Another prioritization group could be parents of high-risk children (e.g., with comorbidities). Children under 12 should not be prioritised so far (vaccines are being evaluated for this age group by pharmaceutical companies as of the writing of this paper). School attendance of children should not be dependent on vaccination status.

### **Include health and WASH measures in safe reopening and operations protocols.**

Transmission in education settings can be limited if effective mitigation and prevention measures are in place. Data suggest that children and adolescents are not drivers of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a slower dynamic in younger

children (WHO, 2021). AMS have put health and safety as the highest priority (ASEAN, 2020). For instance, in Viet Nam, health and education authorities provided instructions and checklists for all educational actors, including procedures for students, preparation of school grounds and classrooms, and teacher preparation. In the Philippines, guidelines enumerate both national and local administrators' responsibilities (ASEAN, 2020). This document provides effective prevention measures that should be used based on international standards.

### ***Environmental and personal protective measures:***

Governments need to guide physical distancing and regulating the number and flow of children attending classrooms. Schools (including pre-primary) need to improve indoor ventilation, move classes outdoors, open windows, or isolate class groupings from one another. Crowds should also be avoided, including during breaks and in transportation to and from education settings (WHO, 2020b). Recent research has shown that indoor CO2 measurements by low-cost sensors hold promise for verifying good ventilation, as CO2 is co-exhaled with aerosols containing SARS-CoV-2 (Jimenez & Peng, 2021). Regarding masks, WHO's (2020d) interim guidance stated that children up to the age of 5 should not wear masks. A risk-based approach should be taken for children between 6 to 11 years, considering community transmission levels, children's capacity to comply with the appropriate use of masks and availability of proper adult supervision, and ability to maintain physical distancing and ventilation. For adolescents over the age of 12 years, the same principles should apply as those implemented for adults in any indoor space where people are together for long periods in the context of ongoing community transmission. Special considerations are required for immunocompromised children or pediatric patients with cystic fibrosis or certain other diseases (e.g., cancer) and for children of any age with disabilities or other specific health conditions that might interfere with mask-wearing.

### ***Referral system and collaboration with local health centres for COVID-19 testing of symptomatic children and personnel and contact tracing.***

Children or staff with symptoms of acute respiratory infection of any severity in areas with ongoing community transmission should not attend school until they have a negative test result (WHO, 2021). Schools need to grant them leave and advise them to isolate and seek appropriate treatment. It is required to timely test symptomatic cases, ensuring isolation of subjects, further tracing, and quarantine of their contacts (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2021). Cluster investigation of children in school settings should be organized to enable continuity of learning.

### ***WASH measures:***

It is crucial to assess facilities, premises, and the school's financial needs regarding water, sanitation, personal hygiene equipment, and cleaning practices for all the school and supplies. Schools should improve their infrastructure and associated maintenance and hygienic practices, including



ensuring handwashing facilities with running water and reliable supplies of, for instance, soap, sufficient and adequate toilet facilities, and fresh-air ventilation (WHO, 2021). When these conditions are not in place, hand sanitizer should be available. It is recommended to use the [WHO guidance on handwashing](#). Measures currently being adopted in some countries – for example, spraying the school environment with disinfectant and excessive disinfection (rather than cleaning) of surfaces have low or no value for infection control and may have adverse effects (WHO, 2021).

For adaptation and fund disbursement, areas with the greatest infrastructure deficit, especially rural areas, and marginal areas in cities, should be prioritised (UNICEF, 2021a); this should consider menstrual hygiene management-MHM.

Some AMS have provided additional funds for schools to purchase personal protective and hygiene items. For instance, in Indonesia, schools were allowed to use the School Operational Assistance if they needed supplementary materials; in Myanmar, the government provided the resources directly (e.g., masks, digital thermometers, and additional washbasins) (ASEAN, 2020).

For more information, please refer to Annex 2 and the guidelines of the WHO.<sup>16</sup>

#### **Document and monitor the extent of implementation of protocols.**

Such protocols include remedial actions where schools are unable to satisfy necessary thresholds. Provide more support for pre-primary and schools that serve the vulnerable population.

#### **Inform and train teachers, school staff, parents, and students on health and hygiene protocols.**

All education stakeholders should know and practice the aforementioned health and hygiene protocols, including physical distancing norms, ventilation, mandatory masks, handwashing or hand sanitizer, among others. Furthermore, education systems should ensure that students, parents, teachers, and other school staff are empowered to implement the measures while delivering their core roles (WHO, 2021). It is also important to have age-related measures; for instance, pre-primary personnel may need to be in close contact with young children; they should protect themselves by taking additional measures<sup>17</sup> (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Also, information needs to be available and accessible for all, incorporating child-friendly language, minority languages, and braille (UNESCO et al., 2020). It is crucial to assess the needs, provide resources, support implementation, and then evaluate the compliance and take further actions.

<sup>16</sup> on [Considerations for school-related public health measures in the context of COVID-19](#) and the [Checklist to support schools reopening and preparation for COVID-19 resurgences or similar public health crises](#).

<sup>17</sup> In terms of handwashing, child's body fluids, child's clothes, handling infant bottles, etc.

#### **Resume school programmes for routine immunization and other health services and nutrition with proper health measures.**

It is essential to continue with routine immunization and health services such as comprehensive sexuality education and nutrition in schools to ensure children's good health and well-being. School feeding programmes are vital for children's development and learning, particularly for those more vulnerable.



#### **Strategy 2**

#### **Recover losses in learning, socioemotional development, and well-being due to school closures**

##### **2-1. Recover learning losses while also promoting socioemotional development**

#### **Measure learning losses**

Determining the learning losses is a crucial first step to mitigate their consequences and provide adequate remedial or catch-up strategies. Children and adolescents, girls and boys, at home probably have different attainment due to their contexts (e.g., access to technology, the Internet, parental support, economic conditions, violence). It is crucial to assess their core language, mathematics, and socioemotional competencies, prioritizing a [formative assessment at the classroom level](#). Globally, only 58% of countries reported conducting formative assessments at the classroom level for primary or lower secondary education in 2020<sup>18</sup> (UNESCO et al., 2021). Moreover, the challenge remains on developing formative assessments for pre-primary levels, failing to assess school readiness and therefore preventing long-term dropouts and greater learning loss. Effective formative learning assessments are holistic and identify potential barriers to continue learning in literacy, numeracy, and socioemotional skills. As part of a comprehensive assessment, involving family members and peers may be appropriate. This type of assessment rewards progress, highlights areas of improvement, and motivates students to continue learning (Gutherson et al., 2011). Many students have experienced difficult situations as a result of the impact of the pandemic. This assessment should also consider those situations and focus on determining learning losses and the further need for support to retain the engagement of those students (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). AMS need to guide and train teachers on how to proceed with this type of assessment. Furthermore, to help assess the learning loss, a survey can be administered to teachers, students, and parents at the classroom and school levels. Based on these assessments, schools need to organize different types of catch-up education consistent with children and adolescents' learning losses (including pre-primary; see 2.3). Moreover, it is also important to measure system-level learning losses that can be done through a large-scale national assessment. With this information, education systems can have a national response focusing on where the learning losses are greater.

<sup>18</sup> Only over one third of countries reported steps to measure learning levels through standardized assessment in 2020.



### **Plan and adapt when and how the learning losses will be recovered (in-person)**

Central and subnational authorities and schools need to plan and reach a consensus on when and how learning losses will be recovered in person. This decision should include all the educational community (teachers, directors, administrative staff, parents, and students). This will take considerable resources, effort, disposition, and preparedness for all the education systems; thus, a laser-sharp focus on all levels is required. For different measures that might be taken, they encompass: adapting school calendars, longer terms, flexible schedules, classes in shifts, working longer hours each day (after school) or week (e.g., on Saturdays) or during holidays (e.g., summer schools), reorganizing groups according to learning level, tutoring and hiring additional teachers to reduce class size, and have more instructional time. Plans should balance the constraints of using the available physical spaces and reduced class sizes due to physical distancing. Useful guidance can be found in [Adjusting the Academic Calendar, World Bank Group](#).

### **Offer effective programmes to catch up/remediate learning depending on learning losses**

#### *Identify adequate programmes for learning recovery depending on learning losses or gaps.*

Education systems need to offer various types or programmes depending on the identified learning losses or gaps. These could be extended instructional time, remedial education, catch-up programmes, and accelerated education. If there is a small learning gap, extended instructional time could be the option. If the learning loss is significant, a catch-up option could be offered. For those students still with gaps, remedial education is needed (Accelerated Education Working Group, 2020). This means incredible challenges for schools and teachers as diverse students may have different learning gaps. Accommodating and providing flexibilization of the current formal offer is crucial. Also, education authorities need to be responsive to many children and adolescents that will not return to formal education due to the difficult situations the pandemic has placed in their lives. Thus, they need to provide alternative education for these adolescents to continue their learning (catch-up programme or accelerated). A guide for this decision could be found in [COVID-19: Pathways for the Return to Learning](#).

#### *Develop prioritized or rebalanced curricula for each programme focusing on core foundational and socioemotional learning, particularly for the youngest children (pre-primary).*

The work of rebalancing the curriculum should start with a complete child view of the essential competencies students need, including cognitive, social, and emotional areas. This is an opportunity not just to respond to the immediate conditions but to address 21st-century skills' development with gender and equity emphasis (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). The prioritized curricula should be flexible, considering they need to cover different ages,

learner levels, and unique local conditions. It is crucial to prioritize early learning because, across countries, remedial measures were considerably less likely to be implemented at the pre-primary level (UNESCO et al., 2021). The early years of life are decisive in forming a foundation for cognitive and socioemotional development. What happens during this time plays a fundamental role in shaping a person's entire life because skills beget skills (OECD, 2015). Investments at this level of education have a high return. Children who participate in early learning are less likely to repeat a grade and be placed in special education, are more prepared academically for later grades, more likely to graduate from upper-secondary education, and have higher earnings as adults (McCoy et al., 2017).

Please refer to [Adapting the Curriculum, World Bank Group](#), for more information.

#### *Align assessments with prioritized curricula and decide on progression.*

This should cover all grades, including pre-primary. Regarding progression, it is recommended to consider universal promotion whenever possible, always ensuring additional remedial efforts (UNESCO et al., 2020). The learning losses could be significant and require months to be recovered. In this regard, evidence points out that long-term strategies to teach at the right learning level (i.e., instituting formative assessments, teachers adapting their instruction and pedagogical practices to students' needs, and prioritizing children's attainment of essential skills) are required to mitigate the learning loss fully and, most importantly, increase learning (Kaffenberger, 2021). There is extensive evidence that teaching at a higher level than the children's current level significantly reduces how much they can learn (Azevedo et al., 2020).

#### *Align instructional materials with prioritized or rebalanced curricula and decide on the use of technology.*

Ensure materials reflect the prioritized or rebalanced curricula, and they are available for all students, especially the most vulnerable. Enhance gender-responsive and transformative content, with availability in ethnic minority languages and accessibility for children with disabilities. Use technology when it favours learning, as described under strategy 3.1. For instance, Cambodia is developing education videos with the private sector that include sign language for students with hearing loss (ASEAN, 2020).

#### *Train teachers on the prioritized curricula, student-centred pedagogies, formative assessments, and provide incentives and ensure their well-being.*

Teachers should be familiar with the rebalanced curriculum and deliver it with student-centred pedagogies (age-sensitive and gender-sensitive) and based on active learning, including student participation. Evidence identifies strategies such as making learning applied or hands-on (project-based learning), cooperative learning, team teaching, and peer tutoring (Aronson, 1995; Davies et al., 2011). Practical application of skills is crucial



for disengaged learners, although more traditional abstracted instruction tends to lead to further disconnection. Teachers also require solid support in formative assessments with data collection and analysis on student learning.

Teachers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic have made enormous efforts to ensure continuous learning. Remediation requires even more energy and time investment, which need to be compensated with extra remuneration and other incentives for teachers. Furthermore, Ministries of Education need to manage teacher workloads and ensure their well-being by assuring they have the psychosocial and other support required, such as providing flexible working arrangements, especially for women, who often bear most family responsibilities.

AMS could conduct a risk assessment for teachers and other staff (considering age, chronic conditions, mental health, and other risk factors), then implement a staggered approach for returning to school or flexible scheduling or alternate days (UNESCO et al., 2020; International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 [ITFTE], 2020). If teacher gaps are identified, rapid recruitment strategies (including temporary contract teachers, substitute teachers, and teaching aides) should be developed in dialogue with teacher representative organizations/unions (ITFTE, 2020).

As an example of rapid response, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami had a death toll in Indonesia that caused a shortage of teachers. The country promptly developed a programme focused on recruiting and training teachers, and within days of the tsunami, the country was able to re-enrol almost all students normally (UNESCO, 2021a).

However, more emphasis must be placed on long-term professional development and support at the national level (ASEAN, 2020). A good reference is Singapore, where the Ministry of Education focuses on professional development in assessment literacy, inquiry-based learning, differentiated instruction, support for students with special education needs, e-pedagogy, and character and citizenship education (ASEAN, 2020). For most ASEAN countries, the coverage of training on mental health and psychosocial support is very limited and dependent on the budget that is mainly provided by international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). As a notable exception, Singapore included mental health education in the national teacher training programme (Nishio et al., 2020). More information can be found in [Preparing and Supporting Teachers, World Bank Group](#).

***Deliver extra support for students who have made up their learning loss in a defined period and decide on a method for providing this support.***

It could be to offer different teaching methods, more time, or more tutoring. The evidence shows tutoring has consistent and substantial positive impacts on learning outcomes. Effects are more robust, on average, when the

educator is a teacher or paraprofessional rather than a nonprofessional or a parent. Overall effects for reading and math interventions are similar, but reading tutoring tends to yield higher outcomes in earlier grades, whereas math tutoring yields higher outcomes in later grades (Nickow et al., 2020).

***Provide age-appropriate engagement strategies to keep learners and teachers motivated, for example, mentoring, hands-on learning, career/life development, and outdoor activities.***

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed an enormous burden on children, adolescents, families, and educational personnel. The reduced possibility of collaborative work, sports, or other extracurricular activities that require close physical contact is a challenge in itself. However, it is of the utmost importance to keep learners and teachers motivated; for this, it is recommended that learning is applied or hands-on, including activities in areas relevant to students' daily lives. Moreover, some outdoor activities that limit physical contact could be encouraged, for instance, running (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2021).

Also, mentoring is an effective practice to encourage motivation. Mentors usually use positive reinforcement and take a particular interest in the students (Aron, 2003). Mentors and mentees are matched based on characteristics likely to increase relationship duration (interests, proximity, availability, age, gender, race, ethnicity, personality, and expressed preferences; Schwartz et al., 2012). Usually, mentors can be teachers, psychologists, social workers, and other community members, such as young people and volunteers. It is also important to provide career/life development activities; thus, as they grow, students can establish future goals and have strong motivation to continue their learning path. In this regard, it is important to offer clear information on how to continue educational paths and the financial support available, particularly for adolescents (Dinkelman & Martínez, 2013).

***Provide parental engagement and support with clear communications and access for all.***

Parents need to know their children's learning level and progression to support and boost learning. Schools can offer parent helplines and continue communication through texts, calls, and other means. All materials and communications should be available in different languages and accessible formats. Communications with parents should be two-way: consult with parents about how they can be involved and send effective learning practices that they can develop at home with their children and adolescents (Education Endowment Foundation [EEF], 2018). This is of particular importance in early learning



## 2-2. Prevent dropouts and provide flexible/alternative pathways for children and adolescents who may not return to formal education or remain out of school

AMS have a solid commitment to implement effective measures to enable out-of-school children and youth, girls and boys, to “have equal access to education and to benefit from continuous education (access), to remain and be retained in school (retention), and to complete such education (completion)” (ASEAN, 2016 p. 1); as demonstrated in the [ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Education for Out-Of-School Children and Youth \(2016\)](#). The work done under this Declaration and its Action Plan could be strengthened by ensuring the following strategies are in place during the current crisis:

**Ensure that dropout prevention strategies and systems are in place, such as using Education Management Information System (EMIS), to gather individual student data and monitor student attendance and learning outcomes to offer outreach activities based on these data.**

In practice, [Early Warning Systems](#) that can predict dropouts are based on indicators of students’ engagement in school and learning, such as attendance and course grades (Adelman et al., 2017), as well as other variables indicating the vulnerability of students that may be available in databases beyond education sector (such as socioeconomic status, location, and disability status; UNICEF, 2020h). For instance, linking to a national citizen registry can assist in settling the EMIS and ensure a unique identifier for all students (UNICEF, 2020g). Student-level information is needed to be analysed to identify children who are at risk of dropping out or have already dropped out (i.e., not returning to school upon reopening and out-of-school children prior to the pandemic). Then schools need to reach out to these children proactively, often in collaboration with other stakeholders (e.g., NGOs, social workers, government agencies) to understand their situation and barriers/challenges, and provide the necessary support to address their needs, with academic or wellbeing support strategies (section 2.5) at subnational/local levels. If the traditional school census/questionnaire for EMIS does not cover disaggregated data, schools can still collect and use them as an indicator of potential dropout.

Particular attention should be placed on the transition among education cycles. The focus should be on younger children who may miss early learning years or present late enrolment and on older adolescents who may need to work, have other responsibilities such as those taking care of family members, or are already married, among other reasons. Also, it is critical to prioritize, ensure, and make an extra effort that traditionally excluded populations return to education: pregnant adolescents, married girls, ethnic minorities, children with disabilities, migrants or undocumented, among others. Provide special strategies to re-engage children who could not access online learning during school closures (e.g., children with disabilities, children without access to the internet, girls who may have been engaged in domestic chores, refugees, and migrant children).

In addition, policies and regulations that inadvertently or deliberately exclude children from school should be reviewed (e.g., requirements for students to have the protective equipment that vulnerable families may not be able to afford, exclusion of pregnant or adolescent mothers, and exclusion of migrant children).

Regarding outreach activities to re-engage out-of-school children, the evidence indicates that back-to-school campaigns should target high-needs groups differentiated by gender, socioeconomic, and cultural background and provide information at a well-known place in communities. For non-returning students, an effective strategy is that someone with a meaningful relationship, usually a teacher, reach the student and parents in a way they feel connected and cared for and not judged, providing solutions on how to return to education (Davies et al., 2011). Information about the returns of education has been effective in some contexts (Jensen, 2010). However, it is imperative to provide information on financial resources to access further education due to students and families’ financial constraints (Loyalka et al., 2013), which highlights the importance of social protection systems for families. Provide particular strategies to re-engage children who could not access online learning during school closures (e.g., children with disabilities, children without access to the internet, girls who may have been engaged in domestic chores, refugees, and migrant children).

For instance, the Philippines put in place a re-enrolment strategy focused on greater flexibility to (re)enrolment: in setting enrolment dates, accepting enrolments after the opening of the school year, making the enrolment forms available digitally, and providing it physically in kiosks near schools and barangay (districts) halls, and extending deadlines for documentation. It also rolled out a media campaign and encouraged teachers to reach out to students and track enrolment (UNESCO, 2021a).

Regarding EMIS, a review in the region (UNICEF, 2020g) found that full data coverage was an issue because only some students were tracked. For instance, in Malaysia, students in the public general education sector were tracked, but not those in the private sector. Timor-Leste only tracked students in the general education subsector. Some countries cannot track students between subsectors, and others do not have the data available for subnational entities or schools. Countries wishing to pursue individual student tracking would benefit from a clear strategy and plan for implementation that considers the capacity development needs at each level of government. Moreover, all actors should be informed of the benefits of moving to individual student data (considering privacy issues), and the strategy should ensure the EMIS is developed to facilitate processes at the school level (UNICEF, 2020g).



### **Provide alternative pathways to meet the different needs of children and adolescents who cannot return to formal schools or remain out of school.**

Education systems need to adapt rapidly and urgently strengthen alternative education pathways to fulfil millions of students' right to education, developing core foundational, socioemotional, and job-specific skills. Education systems need to develop specific strategies to attract students who cannot return to formal school due to diverse difficult COVID-19 pandemic consequences and provide them with relevant and inclusive alternative education according to their socioeconomic and academic needs and age, prioritizing usually marginalized populations. Ministries of education need to map their provision of alternative education (e.g., accelerated learning programmes) and verify that they have suitable programmes for all ages, populations, and levels of education with gender and equity at their centre because the provision of alternative education tends to be fragmented. It is imperative that alternative education programmes have flexible admissions policies, lead to examinations and certifications equivalent to those in formal school, and ensure that their students can continue the learning pathway with access to both formal or alternative education, depending on their needs (Gagnon & Barber, 2015; Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2017). For this, it is imperative to establish or update equivalency standards and official recognition for alternative learning pathways (UNESCO et al., 2020). Similarly, countries need to improve the learning effectiveness of alternative programmes. Many of these are short-term projects in East Asia and the Pacific, lack quality and relevance, and are disconnected from the education system. Often, they do not provide recognized accreditation and equivalent access to further education (UNICEF & UNESCO, 2021b). Review policies and regulations that inadvertently or deliberately exclude children from school (e.g., requirements for students to have protective equipment, on migrant children, pregnant adolescents, etc.).

Some examples of alternative programmes in the region (prior to the pandemic) can be found in the Philippines with the Alternative Learning System,<sup>19</sup> a government programme to respond to the needs of those who are unable to continue in formal education through alternative, flexible learning pathways. The programme typically combines self-paced study with in-person instruction by teachers in community learning centres. In Myanmar, the Non-Formal Primary Education<sup>20</sup> programme is an accelerated two-year primary education course, offering a second chance at education for those aged 10-14 years who either dropped out of school or were never enrolled. It also has an emphasis on life skills as well as encourages children to be active members of the community. In Indonesia, Open Junior and Senior Secondary Schools target disadvantaged adolescents who, for geographic or socioeconomic reasons, are unable to attend conventional secondary schools. It includes psychological counselling and life-skills training. The programme achieved a national exit exam pass rate of 92%, and no significant difference in the academic performance of programme participants compared with traditional school students.

<sup>19</sup> [https://aa9276f9-f487-45a2-a3e7-8f4a61a0745d.usrfiles.com/ugd/aa9276\\_715b9fc68f39416199df37d4d6a9fe77.pdf](https://aa9276f9-f487-45a2-a3e7-8f4a61a0745d.usrfiles.com/ugd/aa9276_715b9fc68f39416199df37d4d6a9fe77.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/myanmar/stories/towards-brighter-future-securing-access-quality-education-all-children-rakhine>

### **2-3. Provide a comprehensive package of support through cross-sectoral work for the well-being of children, adolescents, families, and education staff that focus on the most vulnerable.**

**Prioritize well-being by assessing risk factors of children, adolescents, their families, and educational staff, and refer them to adequate services, which are provided through cross-sectoral work and the community,** particularly for the most vulnerable children and adolescents. Ministries need to place an identification, assessment, and referral process to support students and families at risk. They need to ensure all schools (including pre-primary) have this process in place to provide: financial support (e.g., cash transfers), nutrition, age-specific psychosocial support, and protection services for school-related violence and gender-based violence, health services, and other services. This need to include services for orphaned and separated children; estimates show that for every two people who die of COVID-19, one child is left orphaned, losing the mother, father, or grandparent caregiver who lived in their household (Hillis et al., 2021).

At the local level, schools, in close collaboration with and with the support of local authorities/sub-national governments, will need to map and identify services to which students can be referred and create local partnerships for the delivery of services. It also needs to make students and personnel aware of these services.

#### **Ensure schools can support their students and personnel to recover from the mental health impact of COVID-19.**

Children struggling to cope with their fears and anxieties can be identified and supported. Schools can also provide a platform to provide mental health and psychosocial support to students and referrals to specialized services. Schools and teachers should run activities that promote the well-being of students, especially in the first few weeks when schools reopen, to support students during the transition period. The Ministry of Education should provide training on psychological first aid and psychosocial support for teaching staff and school counsellors. Moreover, put in place a referral mechanism for students requiring this additional support. Where not in place, school counsellors should be appointed in every school. A lot of responsibility falls on the shoulders of teachers.

Put in place mental health and well-being programmes related to COVID-19 transmission, social isolation, and heightened risks of violence and abuse during the prolonged school closure. Train teachers (and school counsellors) on psychological first aid and psychosocial support. Implement targeted interventions, particularly for the most vulnerable populations.

Highlight the critical role schools play in identifying and supporting children, adolescents, and families at risk or whose rights were violated. Refer to recent global standards and implementation guidelines for Health Promoting Schools.





### Strategy 3

#### Ensure seamless learning continuity during school closure (last resort) and after school reopening

##### 3-1. Offer various modalities of remote learning and conditions to ensure learning continuity with flexibility and equity when in-person learning is disrupted (as a last resort).

Remote learning is not a suitable medium- or long-term alternative to in-person learning, especially for the youngest children and vulnerable populations. This alternative should be used only as a last resort when school closures are inevitable.

To achieve this purpose, ministries of education should assess the current remote learning modalities in terms of factors related to learning continuity, well-being, equity, and achievement of learning outcomes.

Furthermore, it is crucial to identify marginalized learners that are not participating in remote learning and reach out to them with adequate strategies, such as the ones mentioned below:

##### **Ensure a competency-based curriculum in a modular structure including socioemotional or transferable skills adaptable to local needs and students' learning levels.**

The curricula should be rebalanced to focus on developing core skills (Aron, 2003; Kremer & Holla, 2009) in prioritized areas such as literacy, numeracy, and socioemotional development, without being reduced or compromised (Davies et al., 2011). For this, it is crucial to have a competency-based curriculum (and not a content-based one), gender-responsive, transformative, and age-appropriate for all students.

Effective remote programmes usually have a modular structure (a portfolio approach) rather than a linear curriculum. Learning is assessed per module (Aronson, 1995). This structure is adaptable for diverse local needs and learners (Davies et al., 2011). Teachers can adapt their lesson plans to changing circumstances so that lessons are meaningful to students and to better track and identify advances in learning (Myconos et al., 2016).

##### **Offer student-centred pedagogies and practical experiences.**

Learning plans should integrate hands-on and project-based pedagogies (student-centred pedagogies with gender emphasis), including students' interests, because these bridge credential learning and actual skill learning (te Riele, 2014). The need for physical distancing during pandemic created enormous challenges for collaborative work, however, project-based learning may be developed through online, chats, and peer activities; other in-person activities can be carried out at home with family and siblings to engage students in collaboration, the latter being most relevant for younger children (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020).

##### **Maximize the reach of remote learning modalities by providing a combination of low-tech (e.g., television and radio) and no-tech (e.g., printed materials) solutions for those who cannot access high-tech (e.g., Internet) and medium-tech (e.g., text messages) solutions.**

Effective remote education programmes use a combination of strategies and modalities (e.g., television, radio, printed materials, online). It is crucial to ensure access to these modalities with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) for the most vulnerable population with an equity focus, so all students have opportunities to learn. High-quality linguistically, culturally, and age-appropriate instructional materials with a gender and equity focus and continued communication between teachers and students are key to ensure all have access, including children with disabilities. Children who have been in mother tongue-based pre-primary and primary programmes should continue to receive materials in their mother tongue. Additionally, it is fundamental to develop or adjust materials to eliminate gender bias, represent minorities, and ensure children with disabilities can use them equitably. Scripted lessons for teachers are common and a key factor for the effectiveness of remote learning. These have been proven effective in enhancing skills in low-performing contexts as they guide both what teachers teach and how (He et al., 2009).

Moreover, it is difficult to stimulate student motivation. Print and online materials should include project-based learning activities, interactive media to improve the motivational aspects of remote learning (Anzalone & Figueredo, 2003), and skills to improve or acquire the capacity of autonomous learning and self-assessing. When students have questions, remote communication is crucial, be it through phone calls, chats, text messages, virtual platforms, among others, with access for all students, especially for children with disabilities. This flexibility is critical for students' success in a remote setting (GoNext Education, 2018). If financially possible and safe, teachers could visit students and have a session on questions and doubts. For instance, in Indonesia, in some remote areas, teachers visited students' homes or organized small groups to meet face to face outside school (UNICEF & UNESCO, 2021a). Such opportunities are especially important for pre-primary children and children with disabilities who often require more individualised support and more social interaction.

Governments in the region have implemented a variety of modalities and provided guidelines for teaching and learning to education stakeholders. Comprehensive guidelines include those of Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Viet Nam, which include guidelines on physical activities for young children, parental support for home-learning, and modes of teaching and learning (ASEAN, 2020). For instance, Indonesia developed an online learning portal that provides teachers and students with limited Internet, access to learning resources, virtual laboratories, and question banks for those with limited Internet access. Cambodia provides video lessons streamed by the Ministry of Education on Facebook for



different grade levels and subject areas. Viet Nam provides a platform for distance learning, offering learning resources.

**Implement robust data and monitoring systems regarding children's participation and learning for remote learning programmes.**

Governments need to define (or redefine) how to monitor the implementation of distance learning programmes, for example, how to collect relevant information periodically, process and use them to improve programmes, and ensure students' privacy and safety on different platforms, especially digital ones. Data need to include which children have access to and participate in what modalities of learning and how to further their participation and learning outcomes. This information should be on the current EMIS and build on existing surveys rather than create another monitoring system, leading to underutilization and burden (UNICEF, 2020a).

**3-2. Utilize technology strategically and smartly for effective learning while ensuring online safety**

**Use/harness technology to enhance instruction rather than replace it and use technology in ways that evidence supports.**

Past education reforms, including technology and education innovations, have been unsuccessful because they merely integrated technology into the existing curriculum and implemented it at teachers' discretion (Vegas & Winthrop, 2020; Kremer & Holla, 2009). Technology increases academic skills only when it is part of an intervention purposefully designed to complement students' work and not replace instruction (Ganimian & Murnane, 2014; Azevedo et al., 2020). Randomized evaluations of computer-assisted learning in developed countries are consistent with this view (Angrist & Lavy, 2002, Campuzano et al., 2009).

Technology has been effective when it: (a) helps to scale up quality instruction by pre-recorded lessons of high-quality teaching; (b) facilitates differentiated instruction through computer-adaptive learning or live one-on-one tutoring (Vegas & Winthrop, 2020); (c) expands opportunities for student practice which is key in heterogeneous classrooms, for instance through a software that can assess the learners' needs and, accordingly offer questions to enhance learning (i.e., animated reviews and remedial questions; Mo et al., 2013; Carrillo et al., 2011; Kremer & Holla, 2009); and (d) increases student engagement, for example, through videos and games (Vegas & Winthrop, 2020). For early learning, educators should consider what is best for child development and then consider how technology can help early learners achieve learning outcomes. It should be integrated into the learning programme and used in rotation with (but not as a replacement for) other learning tools such as art materials, writing materials, play materials, and books (US Office of Educational Technology, 2021). Ensure online safety for digital learning platforms and equip students with digital literacy and online safety skills.

Likewise, technology's success depends on applied training to teachers and administrators (Carrillo et al., 2011). Furthermore, governments need to **close the digital divide** for the most affected and structurally marginalized populations by poverty, gender, location, language, disability, migration status, and so forth. This includes strategies to ensure school connectivity and availability of devices and the development of appropriate online/offline learning solutions (to be used to support classroom learning when possible) with Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Promoting digital skills and ensuring online safety must go hand in hand with the expansion of digital learning to ensure the safety of students.

Most AMS have broadcasted pre-recorded lessons on television and the Internet. In Singapore, the e-learning portal provides online learning material for students and teachers. However, lesson packages for children with disabilities were prepared as computer-adaptive learning (both online and offline); thus, parents and guardians can guide their children through home-based learning (ASEAN, 2020).

**3-3. Enhance the capacity of teachers while providing support to parents, particularly for young and vulnerable children**

**Support teachers in remote learning practices by offering training, peer networks, and pedagogical leadership, ensuring their well-being.**

Practical training in remote education and technology-based pedagogy is urgent and decisive for effective learning. Training commonly encompasses behaviour and classroom management, alternative or remote learning styles, inclusive approaches (identifying and supporting students not learning), and communication with families (Quinn & Poirier, 2006). Teachers also need training in new functions beyond teaching (i.e., health measures, mental health and psychosocial support, identification and referral of child protection cases, and social protection; Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). For teachers in early learning, it is crucial to provide guidance and training on how parents can support the learning process of their young children and provide remote services, such as online or teleservices, and with relevant content for young children on television, the Internet, and mobile phone technology (UNICEF, 2020i). To safeguard teachers' well-being, benefits such as sick leave and medical benefits need to be provided (ITFTE, 2020), as well as mental health and psychosocial support when required. During school closures, it is also crucial to ensure teachers' security of work conditions, appropriate remuneration, availability, and accessibility of career advancement opportunities. Particularly, the work situation for pre-primary teachers is especially tenuous, and there are limited provisions for job security (UNESCO, n.d.).

In general, AMS provided some support to teachers during the pandemic. For instance, the National Educators' Academy of the Philippines has offered professional development to basic education teachers to help them adjust (ASEAN, 2020). Malaysia, with support from UNICEF, established



the Teacher Digital Learning Community, which aims to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge required to deliver distance classes (UNICEF, 2020j). Indonesia created a network of teachers that, through a platform, enables teachers to connect, support each other, and share best practices, experiences, lesson plans, and materials (UNESCO, 2021a).

#### **Use formative classroom assessments.**

A practical, relevant, comprehensive, and continuous formative learning assessment is fundamental to making remote programmes work, and it is the alternative to summative and high-stakes exams. Students need to see how far they have advanced in a remote education environment instead of being judged strictly by test scores or how they compare to other students (GoNext Education, 2018). Useful guidance can be found on: [Learning Assessment and High-Stakes Exams, World Bank Group](#).

#### **Support parents in home-learning by providing clear guidance, detailed learning resources, coaching, and regular communications, focusing on strategies targeted at early years and to parents from vulnerable populations.**

Schools (including pre-primary) need to provide parents with information and techniques to promote a more effective environment for home learning and well-being. For this, it is necessary to offer them clear guidelines, detailed learning resources, coaching, and regular communications (for communications, refer to the strategy in point 1.2; UNICEF et al., 2020). Guidelines could include how parents can encourage children to set goals, plan and manage their time and emotions, establish a routine, and good study habits. This type of support can help children emotionally regulate themselves and their own learning (EEF, 2018, Van Voorhis et al., 2013). Strategies could include showing parents videotapes of other parents and students modelling different learning activities. Also, sending texts with actionable learning tactics and promoting positive and responsive interactions is effective (EEF, 2018). In all the mentioned strategies, it is key to promote family-friendly policies that allow both parents to take care of their children, including strategies to strengthen fathers' co-responsibility. It is also important to consider the burdens on working parents who cannot have time for home-teaching or those who need to sacrifice their careers, especially mothers. In general, communications with parents should be two-way: consulting with parents about how they can be involved and sending and teaching them effective practices considering their involvement (EEF, 2018).

The Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) worked with various ASEAN countries to provide guidelines for parents and guardians of young children. For instance, in Brunei Darussalam, the guidelines include providing a learning space for young children at home, how parents can communicate with teachers and school staff, and supporting children's learning at their own pace. Cambodia worked with

local councils to offer advice for creating a home environment conducive to learning, especially in the case of young children and their families, and raised parents' and guardians' awareness of online learning resources and television programmes. In Lao PDR, some schools disseminate information and share learning resources with parent groups via WhatsApp, social media platforms, and text messaging (ASEAN, 2020).

#### **3-4. Prioritize well-being by ensuring health, protection, social, and other services reach children, adolescents, their families, and educational staff at home during school closure**

**Prioritize well-being by ensuring services reach children, adolescents, their families, and educational staff at home**, particularly for the most vulnerable populations. Even when schools close, the assessment and referral processes need to be in place to provide cross-sectoral services. Adaptations are critical to reach children at home, finding remote alternatives or another provision type (taking health safety measures into account). COVID-19 has seen an expansion of the availability of helplines and hotlines for children and adolescents seeking help, including psychological support. Targeted interventions to reach marginalized children are critical. Communities also have a great power to create structures to support their participants, such as community centres that could be used as learning and integrated services hubs, providing Internet access and further support while always complying with COVID-19 prevention measures.

AMS have established or scaled-up social protection systems to respond to the socioeconomic effects of the pandemic, most notably cash transfers. For example, Malaysia used its registry to provide temporary cash transfers to households in the middle 40% income, and Thailand created an online and text messaging registration system that allows affected informal sector workers to apply for benefits (ASEAN, 2020). Regarding nutrition at schools, some countries have made efforts to provide the service at home or subsidies for families. For instance, in Myanmar, disadvantaged students in COVID-19 affected areas received home-delivered food during school closures), and Singapore provided meals subsidies to support students who normally receive school meals (UNESCO, 2021a).



4



## Policy Objective 2

Medium- to long-term policies to cope with future shocks and disruptions by strengthening education system resilience among AMS.



## Policy Objective 2

### Medium- to long-term policies to cope with future shocks and disruptions by strengthening education system resilience among AMS

The following policy options and recommendations cover medium-term strategic investment and encourage the development of policies. These are in addition to the strategies under section III (immediate) but are essential to promote real reforms in education systems to fulfil the right to education and learning of millions of AMS children and adolescents in the context of what will inevitably be future shocks and disruptions.



**Strategy 4**  
**Resilience: Increase resilience of the education system and personnel to prepare for, plan, and respond to future shocks.**

#### 4-1. Develop and implement a long-term emergency preparedness, risk-informed planning, and response policy framework within the structure of the ASEAN Safe Schools Initiative.

- Ministries of education in coordination with the disaster management authorities, the ministry of finance and other ministries need to have in place detailed plans, responses, and budgets available for all emergencies, based on data and different scenarios/risks (health-related, natural disasters exacerbated by climate change, conflicts, and political unrests, etc.). Thus, when emergencies happen, all the actors know how to respond and their responsibilities.
- Elaborate educational multi-risk contingency plans that define the delivery systems for learning continuity with short-term, long-term, and large-scale closures (including guidance for schools) on type of education modality, learning recovery, and assessment practices).
- Create a mitigation task force in subnational governments and every school at the local level.
- Develop and promote guidance on policies and practices of conducting multi-hazard risk analysis for school-based disaster risk reduction, preparedness, including standard operating procedures, simulation drills, contingency, and educational continuity plans.<sup>21</sup>
- Develop and promote disaster risk reduction materials to meet the different needs of children of different ages, gender, and disabilities.<sup>22</sup>
- Build upon lessons learned during this pandemic, identifying effective mitigation strategies for closures, and from the experience of other countries.

#### 4-2. Prepare 21<sup>st</sup>-century learners for the current and future challenges through curriculum and assessment reforms

- Reflect new practices of individualized and independent learning. The curricula should recognize new conditions, for instance, the need to foster

greater student agency (time management, executive functioning, self-monitoring, and self-direction) as a significant portion of their learning will require these (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020).

- Mainstream socioemotional and transferable skills and student-centred pedagogies. The evidence widely emphasizes the importance of socioemotional learning (Durlak et al., 2010, 2011). Raising socioemotional skills can strongly foster foundational skills; enhance health-related outcomes; improve well-being, employment, and income; and reduce anti-social behaviours and violence (OECD, 2015).
- Offer student-centred pedagogies and practical experiences, such as project-based learning, to achieve relevant and contextualized learning with gender and equity focus, including climate change adaptation, risk mitigation, social cohesion, and peacebuilding.
- Implement widely and regularly formative assessments.
- Implement international, regional, and national large-scale assessments to benchmark and evaluate students learning levels and education systems statuses. These types of assessments are an opportunity to identify where the learning challenges are and focus resources on the subjects, levels of education, and parts of the country and students that need the most support to have better results (usually the most marginalized). For this, assessments such as SEA-PLM are encouraged.
- Develop a policy of recognition, accreditation, micro-accreditation, and validation of prior learning that includes both formal and alternative education to accept learning wherever it has happened.

#### 4-3. Build capacity in teaching at all levels of the education system and ensure their well-being to respond to and bounce back from emerging, and often unexpected, various challenges.

**Transform pedagogical practices at all levels of the education system with ongoing professional development**, from Ministries' staff to teachers, school directors, and other personnel. Ongoing professional development needs to become a much more integral part of the work in education.

- Offer training in student-centred pedagogies and active learning, ICT skills, socioemotional skills, and mentoring with gender and equity emphasis.
- Reorient the role of the teachers towards being a facilitator of learning to reduce lecturing and increase group work and individualized learning.
- Train teachers in formative assessments that reward progress, highlight areas of improvement, and motivate students to continue learning.
- Prepare teachers for mental health and psychosocial support. For this aim, both pre-service and in-service teacher training need to be adjusted.
- Design teacher development with teacher inputs and planning, work on hands-on activities with colleagues, share their practical professional knowledge, observe teaching in other settings, and work with mentors or coaches (Aron, 2003, UNESCO et al., 2020, World Bank, 2018).
- Make investments in research and collaborate with teachers, directors, and pedagogical leaders. These have high returns, which can spread rapidly in education systems (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020).

<sup>21</sup> Comprehensive School Safety framework, UNDRR & GADRRRES, March 2017

<sup>22</sup> Comprehensive School Safety framework, UNDRR & GADRRRES, March 2017



- Provide regular support for teachers working directly with teacher training institutes and national structures such as universities to provide certified professional development.

**Ongoing professional development is necessary for teachers, school heads, programme directors, and supervisors as leaders of the educational process.** Leadership and better management in all education settings are associated with better student learning outcomes (World Bank, 2018).

- Develop directors' and coordinators' leadership skills.
- Train pedagogical leaders in helping teachers set expectations and goals based on student assessments to contribute to teaching evaluation and guarantee supportive and organized environments (World Bank, 2018).
- Ways for countries to prepare and support school leaders are found on [Preparing and Supporting School Leaders of the World Bank Group](#).

**Always highlight teachers' and educational personnel's well-being** by reviewing working conditions, facilitating flexible working arrangements for those who have to reconcile work with family responsibilities, particularly women, and offering mental health and psychosocial support.

**Review policies related to teacher recruitment and placement.** Deploy teaching staff based on minimum professional qualifications, assessing teaching competencies and personal attributes such as gender, age, culture, and language (ITFTE, 2020). Encourage the recruitment of new teachers and personnel from the local areas. They are less likely to be absent, and are more engaged, committed, and motivated (Chaudhury et al., 2006), and they can build on learners' culture, language, and experience. It is decisive to allocate teachers equitably to guarantee that the most vulnerable learners are prioritized with teachers with more capacities (ITFTE, 2020).

#### 4-4. Strengthen communities through partnerships with civil society, the private sector, and others.

**Enhance community involvement** by promoting the engagement of specific local organizations to offer **schools collaborative work to provide certain well-being services**. They can support the outreach process to attract out-of-school children and other activities to cope with barriers to education (e.g., direct costs like meals and transport or cultural barriers like attitudes towards early marriage/pregnancy). Local organizations can also provide accountability for all the educational processes, having a straightforward participatory process including all stakeholders.

**Partner with civil society and the private sector to enhance the relevance of education.** Effective education draws upon their community to forge relationships that may help learners understand the practical application of the learning goals (Davies et al., 2011). For instance, it is crucial to involve agricultural producers (often parents and family members) in rural communities to make the learning process meaningful. Notably, students' learning may be prevented by a disjunction between their culture and the

structures in the educational system. For instance, a successful approach to combat this disconnection in indigenous groups has been to engage community members in teaching-learning activities.

**Partner with the private sector to support communities with different needs** through corporate social responsibility actions, such as Internet connection or computers. Local businesses and employers play an essential role in offering internships or apprenticeships to older adolescents.



### Strategy 5

**Inclusion: Prioritize inclusion of the most marginalized learners through equity-focused, multi-sectoral, and evidence-based approaches**

#### 5-1. Develop well-articulated cross-sectoral policies with a clear focus on the most marginalized.

The Chairman's Statement of the 36th ASEAN Summit, ASEAN, underlined the importance of a holistic, multi-stakeholder, and multisectoral approach to address the multi-dimensional impacts of COVID-19 (ASEAN, 2020). The education systems alone cannot provide all the resources for augmented challenges during the pandemic that require to cover new well-being needs for children, adolescents, families, and educational personnel taking gender and equity measures.

- Address common agendas with other line ministries and develop further policies to ensure that joint or joined-up services are adequately provided, with designated resources and budgets.
- Focus resources and special programmes on the most marginalized.
- Provide joint policies (develop or strengthen) in social protection (CCTs, stipends that cover tuition fees, uniforms, transport), health provision (COVID-19 related, nutrition, routine immunization, mental health and psychosocial support, comprehensive sexuality education, etc.), protection services (violence prevention, legal services, social services, including for orphaned or abandoned children etc.), and ICT services (Internet connectivity and related technology provision), among others.
- Highlight in the policies the important role schools play in identifying children, adolescents, and families at risk or whose rights were violated.
- Include a communication component in the policies.

#### 5-2. Provide a welcoming learning environment where all schools are a place of safety and inclusion for children.

Students and staff need to feel safe, cared for, respected, and included regardless of their gender, ethnicity, economic, social, or cultural background. A welcoming environment requires positive relationships among all learning actors (Thomson, 2014). Violence in schools is detrimental to learning and attendance and will undermine investment in supporting students to catch up on learning if it is not addressed. Schools must be a safe space for students, free from school-based sexual, physical, and emotional violence perpetrated by peers, teachers, and staff.



- Train teachers in classroom management and engage in ongoing professional development with a positive orientation to behaviour and participatory processes, employing positive discipline methods.
- Provide socioemotional education for teachers, directors, school staff, and students.
- Develop, implement, and promote a zero tolerance for violence and abuse policy, including sexual violence and harassment and peer-to-peer bullying and violence with the “Whole School Approach” to tackling violence.
- Develop guidance on minimum standards for protection and ensure every school should have a child protection policy and procedure in place, with clear step-by-step guidance on how to manage child protection cases. Every school should have a trained focal point to handle child protection concerns.
- Inform children and young people about the steps they can take to mitigate risk and procedures if they are experiencing or have witnessed abuse. For more information, please refer to Annex 2 and the WHO guidelines for preventing violence in schools.
- School management should ensure that referral procedures between schools and social welfare/child protection are in place, in collaboration with the relevant agencies and Ministries (see UNICEF, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e, 2020f/Annex 2 for resources to support the integration of child protection in schools).
- In the context of early learning, provide solid pedagogically enriched environments that promote play, exploration, and hands-on learning are at the core of effective pre-primary programmes (Lego Foundation & UNICEF, 2018).

### 5-3. Ensure adequate funding and equitable and efficient use of resources for effective learning

- **Increase the education sector budget among governments’ overall budget.** It is internationally recommended that the education budget comprises around 15–20% of total public spending and 4–6% of gross domestic product. Education must be a priority as an investment during the pandemic. In particular, capacities need to be strengthened to redesign an effective education delivery system (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020), especially for pre-primary education, where the allocation should be at least 10% of the sectoral education budget.
- **Ensure equity.** Ministries of education are encouraged to implement a progressive universalism principle, where public spending is targeted for the most vulnerable populations and earlier years where social returns are highest. This principle favours allocating public funding first to the lower levels of education, including pre-primary, primary, and lower secondary, progressively. This means that if education systems have almost universal coverage at a lower level, they can continue to move investments to the next level of education. In this sense, allocations to higher levels like tertiary education should only rise if coverage comes close to being universal at lower levels, particularly in pre-primary

education, where investments should increase. Moreover, funding should be prioritized for those left furthest behind because of poverty, gender, disability, ethnicity, remoteness, and social disadvantage within these parameters (UNICEF, 2020h).

- Implement needs-based funding mechanisms where additional resources are allocated in higher needs contexts, for instance, providing block grants to targeted schools in disadvantaged communities (UNICEF, 2017) most affected by the crisis and for children with disabilities. In Indonesia, in 2014, communities managed grants to community schools, deciding and prioritizing the projects they found most relevant. These interventions improved language scores by 0.17-0.23 SD (UNESCO, 2021a).
- Ensure equitable allocation of technological resources for the most vulnerable population, including funding for appropriate assistive technologies for children with disabilities, as well as the eco-systems that need to be in place for the selection, procurement, implementation, management, and maintenance thereof. Also, ensure technology is prioritized not only for formal education but for alternative models.
- If countries have performance-based elements in per-capita funding, consider suspending or temporarily revising them due to lack of achievement or compliance because of the pandemic (UNESCO et al., 2020).
- **Ensure efficiency** by targeted mechanisms such as **teachers’ deployment** to more demanding contexts such as rural and low learning areas, and ensure equity in support staff’s professional development and salaries. In the same sense, resources could be more efficient if **capacity-building** is prioritized to contexts where the competencies of educational personnel are at lower levels.

For AMS, a valuable tool to estimate the funding needed is the COVID-19 shock costing/financing model developed jointly by UNESCO and UNICEF, which will facilitate context-specific estimation of funding requirements to reach Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals by taking into account various impacts of COVID-19.

### 5-4. Ensure that disaggregated data is available, analysed, and well used to identify and prioritize vulnerable populations with effective monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems in place.

- **Use disaggregated individual student data** for EMIS to form a register-based system that includes the most marginalized populations. The system should have learning outcomes, attendance, learning modalities, teachers’ deployment, and other relevant data, such as socioeconomic indicators (and, if possible, indicators of well-being). It should cover both formal, alternative education and private provision as a whole system. However, having data is just the first step.
- Develop **monitoring and evaluation systems to analyse information regularly** and present it in a way that all decision-makers can easily understand and use (nationally, sub-nationally, school, and classroom levels). These data



enable decision-makers to identify schools, teachers, other personnel, and students that need the most support. Also, the data can specify what type of support is required (subjects, grades or levels, etc.). The lack of prior monitoring and evaluation systems has had a complicated effect in this crisis because it leads to unknown learning outcomes of the current programmes and interventions.



### Strategy 6

#### Flexibility: Promote flexible and agile learning policies through multiple pathways and decentralized decision-making

##### 6-1. Develop effective and equitable blended and remote learning policies based on evidence.

AMS are strongly committed to “work towards lifelong learning and the digital transformation of education systems in ASEAN by fostering digital literacy and developing transferable skills among all children and young people, with a view towards ensuring that education in ASEAN is equitable, inclusive, and fit for the future” (p. 2) as established on the [Joint Statement of the Conference on the Digital Transformation of Education Systems](#). Furthermore, AMS are preparing a Declaration on the Digital Transformation of Education System that can guide blended and remote learning policies with a strategic vision for technological innovation. For this, the following points could be considered:

- Define how technology contributes to learning based on evidence of what has been effective. It is not enough to provide Internet access, computers, and even some educational technology programmes; technology should change the instructional core and complement instruction rather than replace it.
- Define if tools, platforms, and materials developed during COVID-19 are aligned with evidence on learning and adjust accordingly. For this, section 3.1 may help.
- Assess the readiness for digital learning in terms of infrastructure (connectivity, devices, and digital learning materials), teachers, schools, parents, and students related digital skills and learning from home.
- Decide how blended or remote education will work in a progressive and equitable approach for different populations as a long-term plan with implementation phases.
- Decide which adjusted tools, platforms, and materials will be integrated into the “normal” learning delivery system and which ones will be “activated” and “deployed” once future shocks hit.
- Develop teacher training in digital learning and, most notably in student-centred and active pedagogies, including formative assessments.
- Close the digital divide after assessing the needs<sup>23</sup> and drafting an implementation plan that prioritizes rural and vulnerable populations.
- Plan multi-sector and multi-partner policy implementation, with clear timelines and resources needed.
- Define long-term financing schemes and partnerships needed, for example, with technology and Internet service providers.

<sup>23</sup> Students’ access to digital platforms, computers, smartphones, and an Internet connection, disaggregated by sex and age, locality, and emphasizing the most vulnerable. Characterize learners’ access to and use of distance learning platforms.

##### 6-2. Consolidate the education system by connecting formal, alternative education, and private sector-led learning for all students to continue their learning pathways smoothly and in a flexible manner to fulfil their right to learn.

- Integrate formal, alternative education, and private sector comprising all levels of policy and programme development—from curricula, certification, educators to governance. The provisions need to communicate about referral procedures, assessments, pathways, and further support required. Clear protocols for this coordination and communication specifying responsibilities may help in the process.
- Assess the extent to which alternative, private, and community-based schools (including pre-primary) have been especially disadvantaged during the pandemic.

##### 6-3. Revise/adapt the education sector plan and relevant policies, and adjust the legal framework (if required). Equally improve governance in planning and decision-making at national and sub-national levels.

- **Update the education sector analysis** to include the reality and consequences of COVID-19. In the same sense, adjust the **education sector plan**, including policies in section 3, incorporating adjustments in the legal framework (if required).
- Regarding the education system’s governance, AMS need to ensure a **balanced division of responsibilities between national and subnational authorities and schools** (including pre-primary), putting in place quality assurance mechanisms; and engage all stakeholders in decision-making processes (OECD, 2019a) while ensuring autonomy, flexibility, and accountability.



### Strategy 7

#### Innovation: Pilot innovative new ideas, generate evidence, and scale up effective policies and programmes to ensure learning for all children and adolescents

##### 7-1. Promote innovation through piloting with rigorous evaluation for large-scale reform in mind.

- **Evaluate various programmes in terms of effectiveness (through periodic evaluation) and reform the policies and programmes based on the evidence/data.** In this regard, innovations and strategies developed in the pandemic need to be evaluated to learn from them and innovate with an evidence-based approach.
- **Pilot new ideas or approaches based on evidence with partners** that can invest in earlier stages of experimentation, with sustainability and scaling-up in mind from the outset (Robinson & Winthrop, 2016).
- **Use new technologies in an experimentation approach** by piloting them and rigorously evaluating their effectiveness in terms of learning with an impact evaluation approach.





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5

Recommended Actions for  
Regional and International  
Cooperation.



## Recommended Actions for Regional and International Cooperation

### Regional policy frameworks

- Develop a regional ASEAN strategic vision and plan to guide education systems in reopening and recovering learning.
- Promote joint work on developing a blended and remote learning regional policy framework based on evidence. This should include defining how technology contributes to learning based on evidence, a progressive and equitable approach, how to address the digital divide, and a long-term financing scheme—ensuring digital accessibility standards or policies in place.
- Develop a regional policy framework for alternative education with recognized accreditation and equivalency certification.
- Develop regional or international agreements on the mutual recognition of educational certification.
- Prioritize large-scale assessments to improve learning, such as SEA-PLM, to have a regional benchmark in learning that guides a policy framework on assessment.
- Develop a regional policy framework on long-term emergency preparedness, planning, and response.
- Develop a regional policy framework on how to prioritize funding and guarantee the equitable and efficient use of resources
- Develop a regional policy framework on tackling violence and promoting well-being in schools.

### Knowledge management

- Develop intergovernmental collaboration platforms that share school opening protocols (including resurgence protocols) and guidance.
- Share crucial examples of success with risk communication strategies and learn from regional experiences.
- Share critical practices that have helped countries prioritize or rebalance curricula focusing on core foundational skills and socioemotional learning.
- Develop regional collaboration platforms for teachers and other staff to share best practices and create a regional community of practice.
- Share effective practices in dropout prevention and effective flexible/alternative pathways.
- Share best practices regarding EMIS and monitoring and evaluation systems and procedures.
- Develop intergovernmental collaboration platforms that share best practices in cross-sectoral work and how to develop an inter-agency agenda for coordination.
- Share evidence-based practices on tackling violence and promoting mental well-being in schools.

### Research and evaluation

- Evaluate the delivery/implementation and outcomes/effectiveness of various remote learning programmes offered during the pandemic and share good practices and lessons learned.
- Carry out joint research on how to prepare teachers for formative assessments to evaluate learning losses.
- Ensure joint access to global expertise and research on teacher training regarding student-centred pedagogies and digital skills.
- Promote joint access to global expertise and research on prioritization or rebalancing curricula focusing on core foundational and socioemotional learning.
- Evaluate programmes to catch up/remediate learning and share key factors of effectiveness in terms of learning.

### Partnerships

- Promote joint engagement and dialogue with partners and multilaterals to shape partnerships with technology companies, Internet service providers, and other organizations to enhance efficiency and economies of scale.
- Develop joint partnerships with multilateral organizations and research centres to develop, implement, and evaluate teacher training focused on student-centred pedagogies and digital skills.
- Develop multiparty partnerships with the private sector, donors, and international organizations to enhance strategies and support innovation.

## 6. Way Forward

It is not enough to just reopen schools. ASEAN education systems need to rapidly adapt and urgently strengthen learning to fulfil millions of students' right to education, especially for the most vulnerable populations that the COVID-19 pandemic has placed a disproportionate burden on them, including the most impoverished students in rural and remote areas without an internet connection, younger children, girls, children of migrant and refugee families, children on the move, children with disabilities, and ethnic minorities.

Countries need to ensure learning is recovered, providing students who return to formal school with personalized and continued support to catch up and re-adjust to the school environment; otherwise, they would likely drop out. Learning must be delivered in a safe and conducive environment that promotes well-being. Furthermore, countries need to develop specific strategies to attract students who cannot come back to formal school due to diverse reasons and provide them with adequate alternative education according to their needs.

Additionally, education systems need to transform to be more flexible and adapt to current and future needs; in this way, learning cannot be disrupted by future crises, such as other pandemics, possible violence, and natural disaster, which are highly likely due to the climate crisis.

In this sense, based on this document, the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC) is committed to support countries by developing specific **technical guidelines on key issues and topics that contribute to ensuring the right to education for all.**

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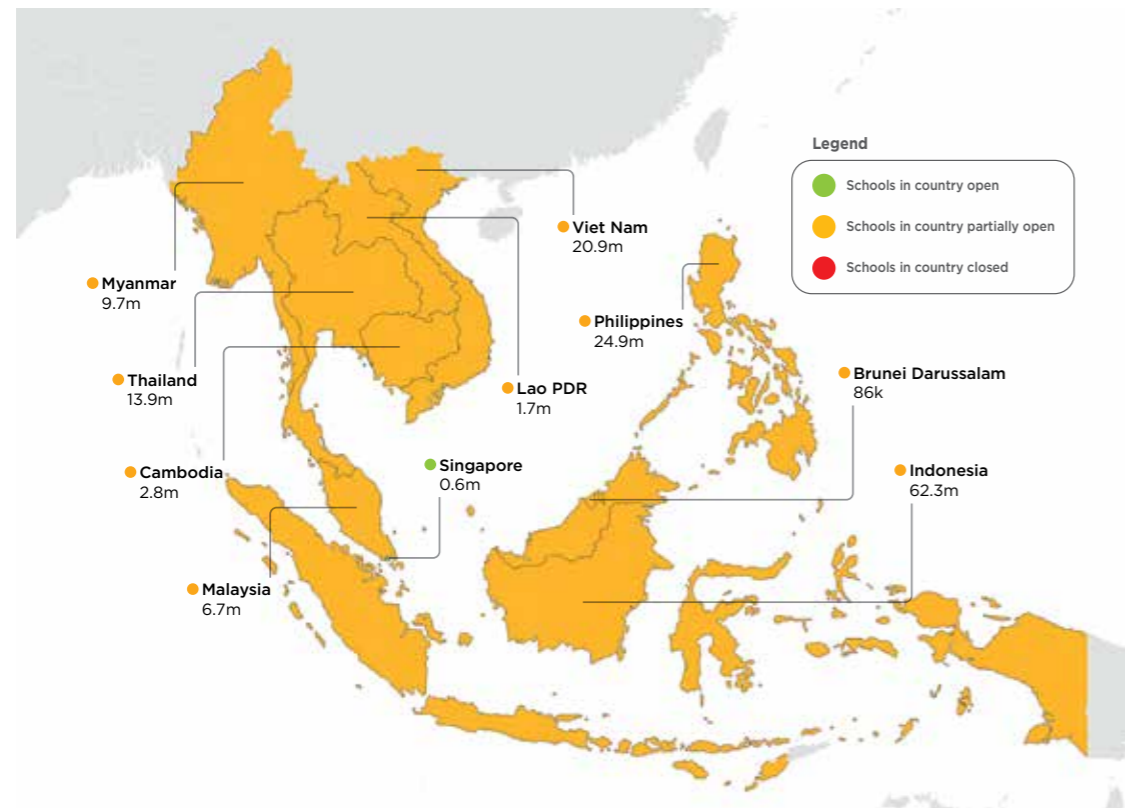
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## ANNEXES

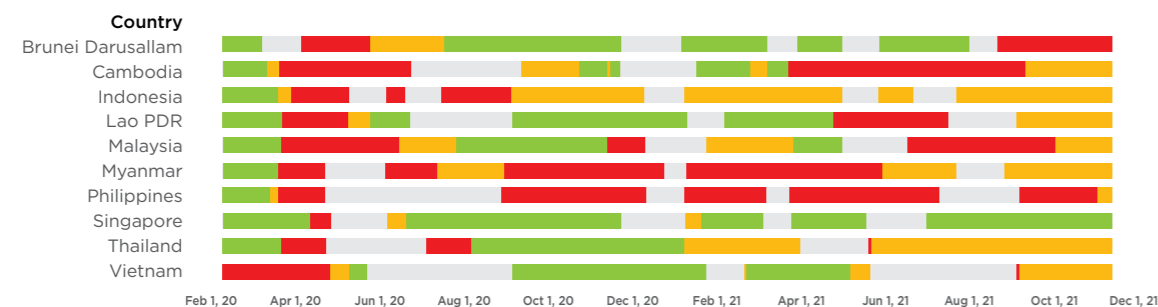
## ANNEX 1 Figures on School Closing and Reopening Due to COVID-19

Figure 1  
School Reopening – Southeast Asia



Source: UIS, 2021. COVID-19 Education Response

Figure 2  
COVID 19 Timeline of School Closures as of 18 Feb (which changes on a daily basis according to the UNESCO global database: [https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/covid\\_impact\\_education\\_full.csv.zip](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/covid_impact_education_full.csv.zip))



## ANNEX 2 Further Resources

### Resources on reopening schools

- [Framework for reopening schools 2020](#) (UNESCO et al., 2020)
- [Guidelines for Reopening of Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Education Services in Times of COVID-19](#) (UNICEF, 2020)
- [Planning for School Reopening and Recovery After COVID-19](#) (Centre for Global Development, 2020) and [Plan school reopening](#) (UNESCO-IIEP)
- [Is It Safe to Reopen Schools?](#) (World Bank Group, 2021).
- [Weighing Up the Risks: School Closure and Reopening Under Covid-19—When, Why, And What Impacts?](#) (INEE, 2020)
- [Safe Back to School Practitioners Guide](#) (Global Education Cluster and CPoAR, 2020)
- [Supporting Teachers in back-to-school Efforts: A toolkit for school leaders](#) (International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 et al., 2020).

### Resources on health and WASH COVID-19 prevention measures

- [Checklist to support schools reopening and preparation for COVID-19 resurgences or similar public health crises](#) (WHO, 2020a)
- [Considerations for schools related public health measure in the context of COVID-19](#) (WHO, 2020)
- [Mask use in the context of COVID-19](#) (WHO, 2020d)
- [Considerations for implementing and adjusting public health and social measures in the context of COVID-19](#) (WHO, 2020b)
- [CDC, Schools and Child Care Programs](#) (CDC USA)
- [Minimizing Disease Transmission in Schools](#) (World Bank Group, 2021)
- [Policy Brief, COVID-19 and the Need for Mental Health Action](#) (United Nations, 2020)

### Resources on child protection, mental wellbeing, and schools

- [School-Based Violence Prevention – A practical handbook](#) (WHO, 2019)
- [COVID-19: Integration of Child Protection in Return to School: Advocacy Brief](#) (UNICEF, 2020c)
- [Tips for Teachers and School Management](#) (UNICEF, 2020f)
- [Messages for Children and Adolescents Returning to School](#) (UNICEF, 2020d)
- [Template for Child Protection Referral Pathway between Schools and Child Protection Authorities and other Services](#) (UNICEF, 2020e)
- [Ending Violence in Schools: An investment case](#) (World Bank, 2021)
- [INSPIRE Handbook: action for implementing the seven strategies for ending violence against children](#) (Strategy 7 – Education and Life Skills, 2018)