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Beyond the Pandemic:
Mapping Learning Recovery Programs in Latin America and the Caribbean

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ABSTRACT

This thesis maps the educational recovery efforts in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) after the COVID-19 pandemic. It uses the RAPID framework to systematically identify the policies and strategies in place targeted at learning recovery across the region. The study also highlights the challenges and opportunities that countries encountered during the recovery process. Information was gathered through reviews of literature and official documents, as well as 30 interviews with representatives from 19 LAC countries and five regional international organizations. The analysis indicates a diversity of programs and strategies, and despite substantial efforts by countries, significant challenges persist. However, there are opportunities for important changes in education systems, especially through the integration of technology and systemic curriculum reforms. The research underscores that while countries understand the need for more resilient educational systems to handle future disruptions, strategies for change are limited, with a significant emphasis on technological investment.

Keywords: Latin America and the Caribbean, Learning Loss, Learning Recovery, Post-COVID-19, and Policy Mapping

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Acronyms	
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CXC	Caribbean Examinations Council
EMIS	Education management information system
ERCE	Study Regional Comparative and Explanatory
EWS	Early Warning System
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IO	International Organization
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LLECE	Laboratory Latin American Education Quality Assessment
MoE	Ministry of Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
RAPID	Reach, Assess, Prioritize, Implement, Develop
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SIAGIE	Sistema de Información de Apoyo a la Gestión de la Institución Educativa (Educational Institution Management Support System)
TES	Transforming Education Summit
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESCO OREALC	UNESCO Regional Office of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNICEF ECA	UNICEF Office for the Eastern Caribbean Area
UNICEF LACRO	UNICEF Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

1. INTRODUCTION

The global learning crisis has been significantly worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. School closures and the shift to distance learning have profoundly impacted children's education worldwide (Meinck et al., 2022; Patrinos et al., 2022; Reimers, 2022). According to UNESCO Global Monitoring of School Closures[1], by mid-April 2020, 192 countries closed schools and universities, affecting more than 90% of the world's learners, in other words, 1.5 billion students and youth, especially the most vulnerable learners.

This situation was a concern because even brief disruptions in a child's education can have significant negative effects on their learning, which may persist over time and affect other areas of their life. In a situation like the pandemic, students could lose 1/3 to a full year of education in terms of learning (Azevedo et al., 2021). According to Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, (2018) and Montenegro & Patrinos, (2021), every year of schooling raises earnings by 8 to 10% a year. It is expected that the longer the school was closed, the larger the earning losses were. Thus, learning losses lead to earning losses.

According to the UNICEF Reports[2] and UNESCO Global Monitoring, schools in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) have experienced the most prolonged closure period globally. Between March 2020 and February 2021, most LAC schools remained fully closed for an average of 158 days, significantly higher than the global average of 95 days (See Figure 1).

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1 Dashboards on the Global Monitoring of School Closures Caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic. Available at: https://covid19.uis.unesco.org/global-monitoring-school-closures-covid19/. Access in: March 2024
2 Informes sobre la situación de la educación durante COVID-19. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/lac/respuesta-educativa-de-alc-frente-al-covid-19. Access in: March 2024

Figure 1 - Total duration of school closures

Total duration of school closures

- 0 weeks
- 1-10 weeks
- 11-20 weeks
- 21-30 weeks
- 31-40 weeks
- 41+ weeks
- No data

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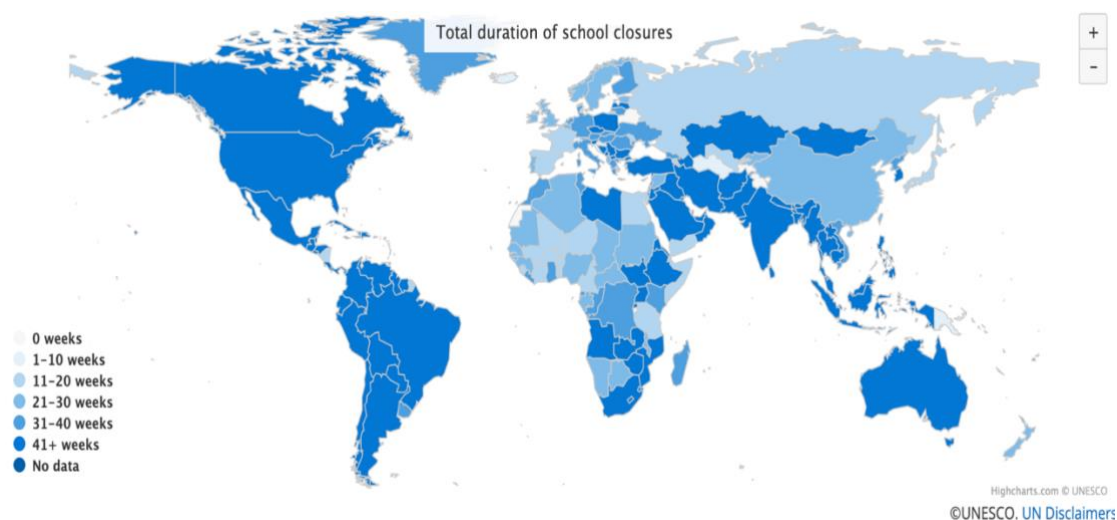
Source: UNESCO Global Monitoring of School Closures.

Furthermore, World Bank reports (World Bank, 2022; World Bank, Sanchez, et al., 2022) estimated that approximately 80% of sixth-grade students in the region could have insufficient reading comprehension skills (See Figure 2), resulting in a 12% reduction in lifetime earnings for students in the region.

Figure 2 - Learning poverty rates by region, 2015, 2019, and 2022[3]
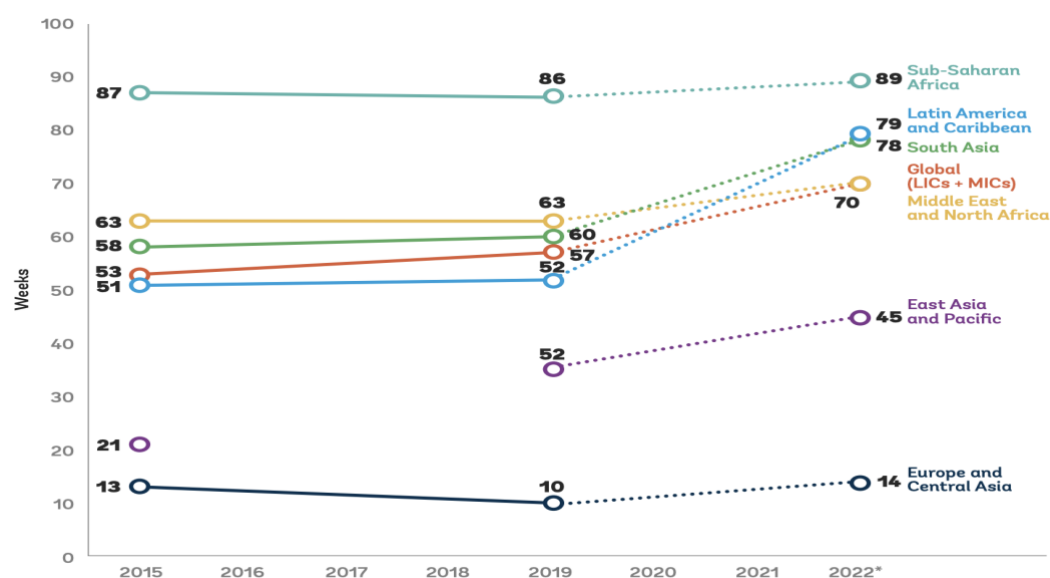
Source: World Bank et al., (2022)

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3 2022 rates are simulations. The global figure is for all low- and middle-income countries. Regional and global figures are population-weighted averages. For the East Asia and Pacific region, the 2015 and 2019 averages are not directly comparable due to major improvements in data quality and availability and the recently available new assessments for the two years.

With schools reopening, mostly in 2022 in the region, governments should shift their focus to **addressing learning loss and accelerated learning**; otherwise, the effects could worsen, as shown in Figure 3. However, the fourth round of the Survey on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closures (April-July 2022) revealed that many countries had yet to implement targeted, effective measures to address the pandemic-induced learning loss (OECD et al., 2022). Most started rolling out learning recovery programs by the end of 2022 and 2023.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the education sector in LAC grappled with issues such as inadequate funding, inequality, and poor educational outcomes. The pandemic exacerbated these challenges but also offered a chance to transform education.

Figure 3 - Illustration of learning recovery and acceleration definitions
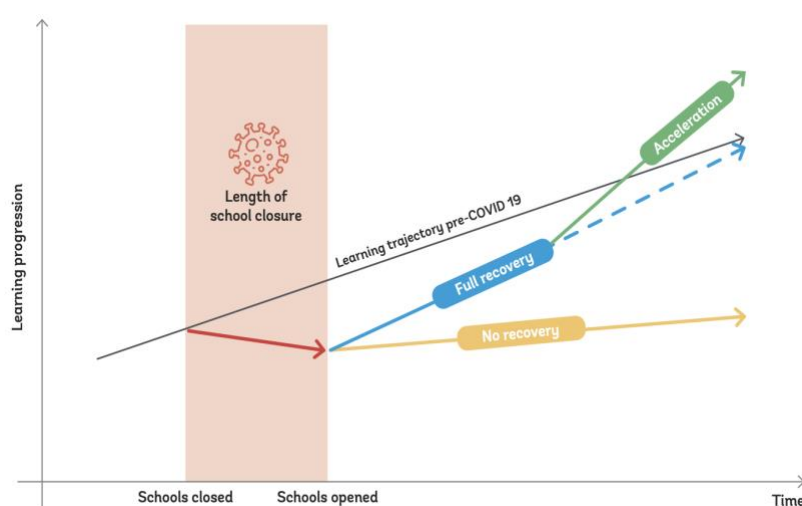
Source: World Bank et al., (2022)

In light of this context, this research contributes to education policy **by providing a systematic mapping of policies and strategies in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region for recovery learning.** As organized information on learning recovery is scarce in this region, this study seeks to bridge these gaps through comprehensive data compilation and analysis. It highlights the similarities and differences in national efforts, facilitating regional collaboration and knowledge sharing. Additionally, the research evaluates the commitment of these countries to educational recovery through their policies, programs, and interventions.

The subsequent sections will discuss the research question, methodology, and analysis of the recovery learning map, along with the challenges and opportunities faced by the countries. It concludes with policy recommendations.

1.1. Research Questions

The following questions guided the research and analysis of the research:

1. What **programs, strategies, and interventions** have countries in Latin America and the Caribbean implemented to address learning loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

This question focuses on identifying and describing existing strategies, policies, and interventions. By examining the current state of recovery learning strategies, policies, and interventions, this research can provide a picture of the countries' commitment and actions to advance education improvement in the region.

Sub-questions

a. What common **challenges** do Latin American and Caribbean countries face in learning recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic?

b. What **educational opportunities and lessons learned** have Latin American and Caribbean countries identified during and after the COVID-19 pandemic?

These sub-questions aim to identify the opportunities and lessons learned from the pandemic and post-pandemic period and uncover the obstacles that countries encountered in implementing educational recovery strategies.

2. BACKGROUND: EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In February 2020, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) had its first detected case of COVID-19 in Brazil. Since then, the virus spread fast in the region, impacting several sectors, including education. LAC was one of the regions most affected demographically by the pandemic (WHO, 2023).

In the education sector, the pandemic has exacerbated existing educational challenges and inequalities, particularly affecting the region's most vulnerable children and adolescents. The two main measures implemented by governments in education were school closures and distance learning, which deepened the educational inequalities and restricted access to essential services like meals, healthcare, and sanitation.

LAC region had the most extensive total or partial school closures. This measure affected approximately 150 million students across all education levels, from pre-primary to upper secondary, accounting for around 96% of the region's student population (Mariana et al., 2023). However, while schools throughout the region remained shut for an extended period, the duration of these closures varied significantly from one country to another, as illustrated in Figure 4 below. For example, Nicaragua stood out as the only country that did not close its schools—in contrast, Ecuador, Bolivia, Honduras, and El Salvador experienced the longest periods of fully and partially closed schools, ranging from 91 to 88 weeks from March 2020 to March 2022[4].

Also, the implementation of distance learning varied based on each country's capacity, especially regarding prior connectivity, access to devices, and teachers' preparedness (World Bank, 2022). There was a diversification of formats and a significant expansion of virtual platforms for teaching and learning combined with strategies of delivering printed materials

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4 Definition "Fully closed" when the closures affect most or all the schoolchildren enrolled at pre-primary, primary, lower, and upper secondary levels. "Partially closed" refers to situations in which schools are either closed in some of a country's administrative units, for some grade levels or are operating with limited capacity. "Fully open" means that classes are held in person for all schoolchildren and at all grade levels.

for home use, media (television and radio), and online digital solutions (applications) (Miralrio et al., 2024; Ortiz-Correa et al., 2021; Paya Rico, 2022). Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela are some of the countries that have implemented online platforms for remote learning (Suyo Vega et al., 2022). Furthermore, a 2020 study by ECLAC revealed that 10 Caribbean countries had reported implementing various distance learning strategies, especially digital ones (Parker & Alfaro, 2021).

Figure 4 - Latin America and the Caribbean (33 countries) and the world: total or partial school closures
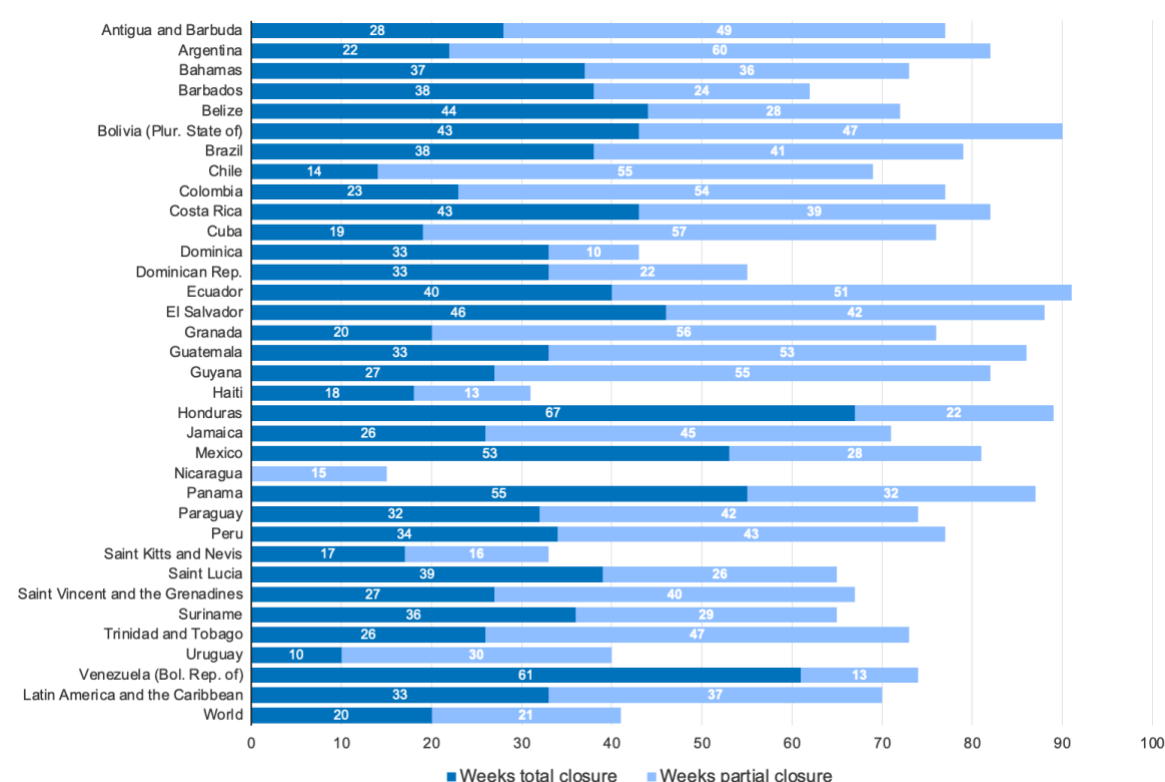
However, around 40 percent of students in the region lack access to digital or broadcast distance learning (UNICEF LACRO, 2024). Regarding Internet access in the region, less than 3 out of 10 people have Internet access in LAC (See Figure 5). Furthermore, the quality of remote learning has been highly problematic in the region (Mariana et al., 2023; UNICEF LACRO, 2024; World Bank, 2022).

Countries also adopted other educational strategies, such as television and radio broadcasts, to address connectivity issues. Mobile phones have become the most widely accessible educational device, and WhatsApp has become a popular platform among teachers because of its low data consumption and facilitation of student interactions (World Bank, 2022). Another measure that most countries took was reducing or adapting the curriculum, which was adopted by 50% of countries in the region for the primary and lower secondary levels and 55% for the upper secondary level (UNESCO-OREALC, 2022).

Figure 5 - Internet access across LAC, selected countries (%), the latest year available
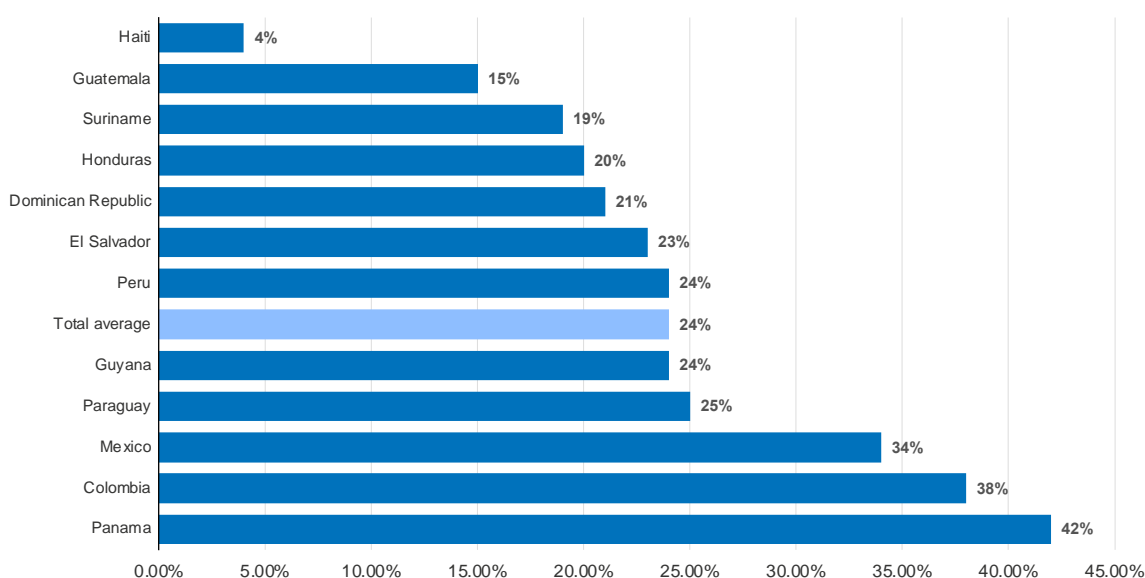
Source: World Bank, 2022 from Barron Rodriguez,Maria Rebeca et al., 2022. Note: Data for LAC includes infos from 20 countries, with the latest available data for each country.

Countries have also implemented school feeding programs to continue supporting the students' well-being. School feeding programs continued to support families, with at least 65% (21) of countries providing school meals or food to families in 2020 and 2022 (UNESCO-OREALC, 2022; WFP & IDB, 2024). Financial support was also provided to vulnerable populations, although specific measures for other vulnerable groups, such as refugees and indigenous peoples, were limited (UNESCO-OREALC, 2022).

By March 2022, 87% of countries had fully or mostly open schools. The pandemic's impact was devastating, affecting not only learning outcomes but also children's mental health and well-being. Despite significant efforts to continue education, the pandemic severely impacted learning across the region. It is estimated that, on average, the students had a learning loss of 1 to 1.8 school years, with higher relative losses in countries that were already more

disadvantaged before the pandemic (World Bank, 2022). Recent data from PISA 2022 from the 16 LAC countries exposed the educational poverty of students, positioning the LAC countries in the bottom half of the global rankings for educational quality across mathematics, reading, and science (Ortiz et al., 2020a, 2023).

In faced with this scenario of educational calamity, LAC countries have committed to addressing learning losses caused by the pandemic through various regional and global meetings. Following the Transforming Education Summit (TES), which was convened in 2022 in response to a worldwide crisis in education, 133 submitted National Statements of Commitment to Transform Education, of which 20 were from LAC (UNESCO, 2022d, 2022b, 2024b). Subsequent LAC regional ministerial meetings were convened, like the one in Buenos Aires (2022), Colombia (2023), and Chile (2024), reaffirming their commitment to educational recovery and transformation, underscoring their acknowledgment of the need to reduce educational inequalities and accelerate education (UNESCO, 2022a, 2024a). This further justifies the need to investigate how countries take measures for learning recovery and reduce learning poverty, as they all have expressed commitment to transforming education.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive research that analyzes strategies, policies, and interventions that countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have implemented to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The methodology utilized was:

- **Policy Mapping:** Conducted a comprehensive map of the policies and programs implemented by LAC countries using the RAPID framework, developed by UNICEF, UNESCO, and The World Bank. The framework offers a menu of 5 evidence-based interventions that education systems can implement to help children recover from the learning loss and accelerate it. According to the framework, governments must make sure that education systems:

Figure 6 - RAPID Framework for Learning Recovery and Acceleration
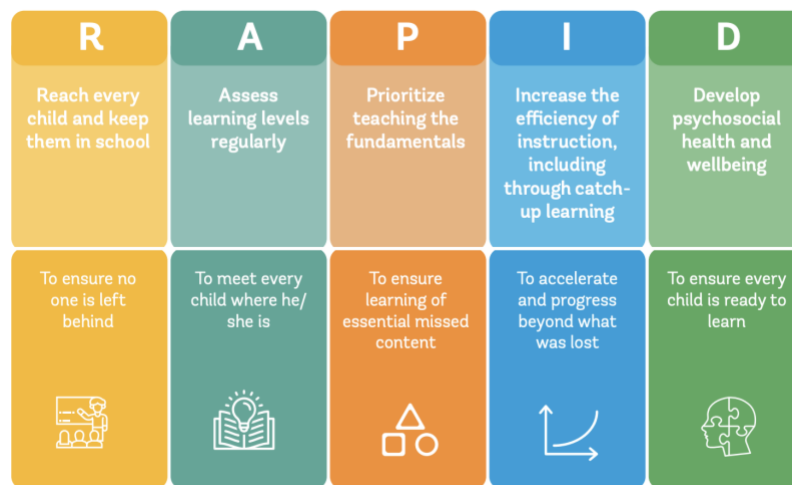
Source: World Bank et al., (2022)

The decision to use this framework for data analysis is driven by its significant potential and relevance, given the influence of the international organizations (IOs) involved in its development. These organizations contribute extensively to the region through technical assistance and cooperation. Furthermore, this framework aligns with the key actions set forth in the 2022 Declaration of Buenos Aires during the III Regional Meeting of Ministers of Education of Latin America and the Caribbean, where member states agreed on regional strategies to accelerate the achievement of SDG 4 and address the educational impacts of COVID-19 (UNESCO, 2022a).

The mapping is enhanced by data from Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), thematic literature reviews, reports from international organizations such as the World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, and information sourced from the Ministries of Education (MoE) websites.

- **Desk review:** The desk review utilized keywords such as chat-up learning, learning at the appropriate level, learning recovery, remedial learning, learning gaps, accelerated learning, learning loss, and similar to chart the existing body of knowledge in this domain. The research used well-known literature search platforms, including ERIC, Scopus, SciELO, Google Scholar, and Latindex databases. Also, reports from international organizations, such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank, were researched. The articles and reports included in the study were selected based on the relevance of the information provided for the topic researched. Moreover, the MoEs' websites were analyzed to identify information on the policies and strategies related to learning recovery.

- **Interviews:** 30 KII were conducted with 36 key stakeholders, comprising 19 females and 17 males, including policymakers, researchers, and representatives from IOs. These interviews involved participants from 15 countries across the region—7 from the Caribbean, 5 from Latin America, and 3 from Central America—and representatives from 5 international organizations (See Appendix Table 1).

  Semi-structured interview protocols were developed to ensure consistency and reliability in data collection. All interview participants received a consent form with information about the research before the interviews (See Appendix 2 - Informed Consent and Interview Script). The interviews were conducted between March and April 2024, each lasting one hour. When possible and permitted, the interviews were recorded. All interviews were transcribed into a Matrix Data Analysis to support the writing of the research.

- **Data Analysis**: The data analysis utilized a deductive approach aligned with the five measures of the RAPID Framework for policy and strategy evaluation. Conversely, the analysis of interview data, focusing on challenges, opportunities, and lessons learned, employed an inductive approach. This involved identifying patterns, themes, and insights across all interviews. The analysis anonymized the interview data, mentioning only the countries involved without disclosing the names of the participants.

4. MAPPING POLICIES

The mapping policies are based on the RAPID framework (World Bank, Sanchez, Alonso, et al., 2022). The analysis takes as its starting point the information collected by the UNICEF LACRO report "*Educational Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Latin America and the Caribbean: Analyzing Challenges and Achievements for Future Action Planning*" (UNICEF LACRO, 2024) and "*Update 36 | Initiatives and Programs for the Recovery of Learning and Rapid Framework*" (UNICEF LACRO, 2023). These reports gathered data on the five key measures of the RAPID framework from 33 countries and territories in the LAC region up until the end of May 2023.

With this base, the present research will analyze and organize the strategies implemented by the countries and will be further enriched with insights from KII, thematic literature research, reports from other IOs, and information from the MoEs' websites, providing a comprehensive view of the educational recovery efforts in the region.

It is important to note that the **mapping will not be exhaustive and will not present a detailed analysis of each policy or strategy implemented across the 33 countries in the LAC region**. The mapping aims to **provide a glimpse into the actions taken by countries for recovery learning after the pandemic.**

Appendix Table 2 summarizes the mapping of the following sections. The table displays data from 33 countries and 2 territories, showing the action levels of the strategies each country is implementing within the RAPID framework based on the UNICEF reports and the analysis presented in the following sections.

4.1. Reach every child

Monitoring educational trajectories and implementing Early Warning Systems (EWS) are crucial for identifying students who fall behind and those at risk of dropping out. This strategy not only integrates at-risk students but also ensures their continued education.

School dropout remains a significant challenge in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Despite notable improvements in education access, particularly in pre-primary and secondary education levels, including the extension of compulsory schooling to lower—or upper-secondary education since 2000, the region still faces considerable hurdles (ECLAC, 2024a).

Although it is difficult to obtain estimates that are comparable across countries on school dropout, data from the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG) by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) between 2019 and 2022 **estimated a decline in attendance during the peak years of the pandemic, but in the in 2022 the attendance had recovery**. However, the impact at the pre-primary and upper-secondary levels was particularly severe. Pre-primary education was the worst affected by the pandemic and has yet to regain its pre-pandemic attendance figures. For secondary and higher levels of education, school dropout rates in the region have increased, revealing the multiple dimensions of inequality among students at this age (ECLAC, 2024a).

Additionally, the region's dropout rate was high even before the pandemic. Dropout rates and academic exclusion were notably high, particularly in secondary and higher education, marked by significant disparities (ECLAC, 2022). It was estimated that 9.6 million girls and boys were out of school in 2022, representing approximately 9-10% of the student population (UNESCO, 2024c).

According to data collected in May 2023 (UNICEF LACRO, 2024), 17 out of 33 LAC countries have implemented or already had EWS to identify out-of-school children and adolescents. However, only 8 of the 17 have strategies for integrating them into the education system. Also, 12 countries and territories out of 33 have a system for identifying children at risk of dropping out of school, but only 9 out of the 12 have strategies to ensure the permanence of children once the risk is identified (See Figure 7).

EWS Initiatives in LAC countries after the pandemic

Educational management and information systems (EMIS) that capture nominal student data are key to developing EWSs. Some Latin American countries started developing their EMIS in the early 2000s. Chile was the first country to integrate this technology in 2000, followed by Peru (2003), Colombia (2005), Brazil (2007), Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic (2009), Ecuador (2009-2010), Uruguay (2011), Argentina (2012), Mexico (2013), Guatemala (2015), and El Salvador (2019) (Montes & Luna, 2024). However, the development of EWS to prevent

school dropouts has started to be implemented in the region in recent years in many countries before the pandemic (UNESCO-OREALC & UNESCO IIPE, 2022), and in the last 4 years, the pandemic has driven the development of ESW tools in some others due to the pandemic.

Figure 7 - Early Warning System (EWS) and School Integration Strategies
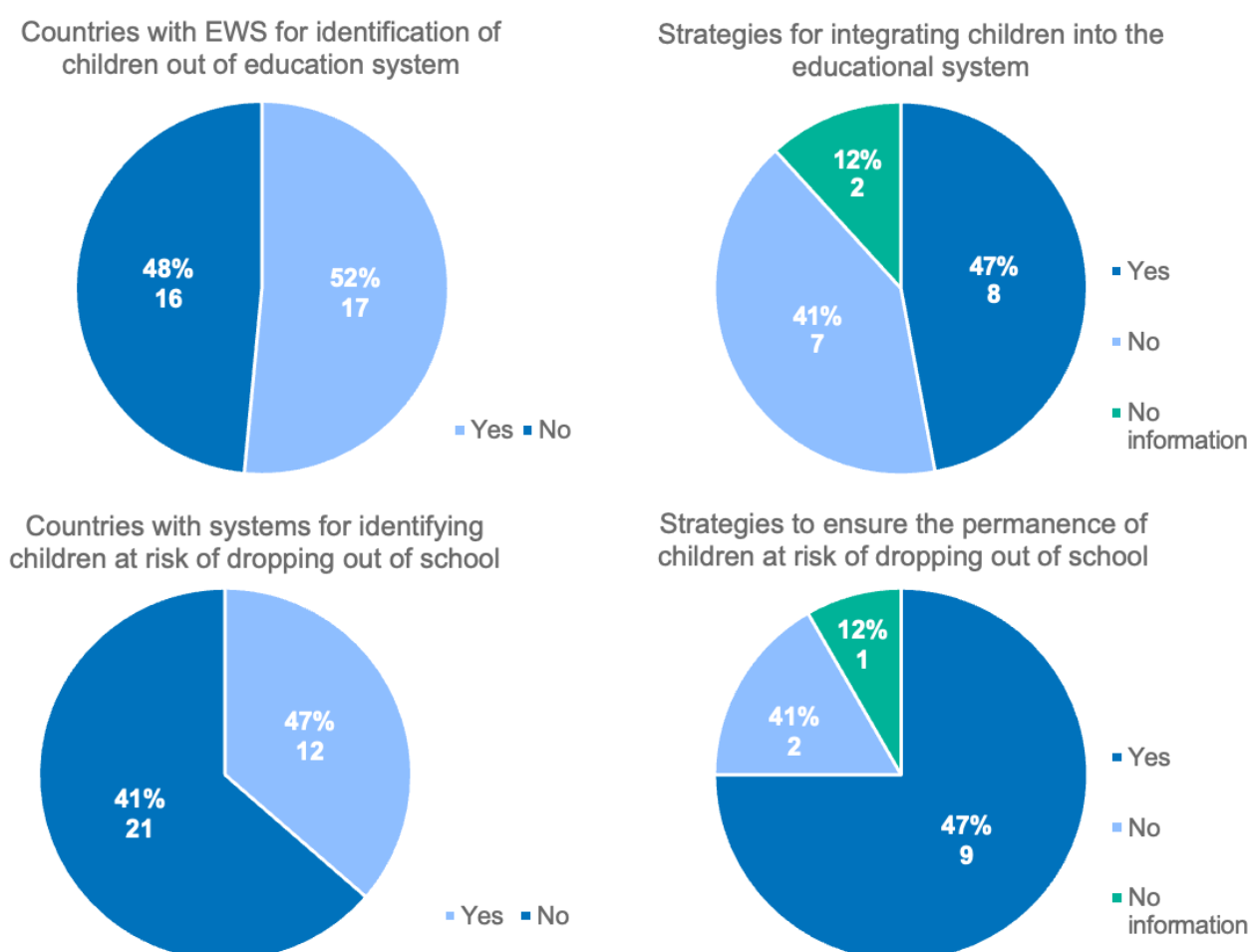
Countries with EWS for identification of children out of education system

Strategies for integrating children into the educational system

Countries with systems for identifying children at risk of dropping out of school

Strategies to ensure the permanence of children at risk of dropping out of school

Source: UNICEF LACRO, 2023. **Note:** The data contains information from 33 countries and territories in the region, out of the 36 countries

Based on the mapping, 19 countries implemented some EWS or strategies to identify at-risk students. Across <u>Central America</u>, countries like Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, and Panama made strides in implementing EWS between 2018 and 2020 to identify students at risk of dropping out (Perusia & Cardini, 2022). Conversely, Nicaragua currently lacks a formalized EWS framework.

In the Caribbean, Cuba, Belize, and Jamaica have established initiatives to identify students at risk of drop-out, while the Dominican Republic is in the process of developing its EWS. Curaçao faces challenges in identifying disengaged students due to the absence of effective tracking systems, particularly an EMIS for attendance records (Interview curaçao).

Information on EWS initiatives in the Eastern Caribbean Area (ECA) is limited. Based on the available information, Antigua and Barbuda employed a summer school program to target potential dropouts (UNICEF LACRO, 2023). Meanwhile, Anguilla stated that there was a low dropout rate and attributes it to educational welfare officers and psychologists who support students (interview Anguilla).

In Latin America, countries such as Colombia and Uruguay have well-established EWSs. Chile and Peru have recently implemented or expanded their systems to enhance monitoring and support for students. Ecuador is still developing its EWS but has some initiatives in place. In an interview with Venezuela, it was commented that teachers and principals are oriented to monitoring at-risk students. At the same time, Paraguay has an individualized student registration system but still needs to develop an EWS. In federative countries like Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico, implementing the EWS is the responsibility of the subnational level. Below is presented a summary table of the initiatives mapped (See Table 1 – EWS Initiatives in LAC countries)

Other strategies employed by some countries to reach students were re-enrollment campaigns coinciding with the school year's start and measures like transport subsidies, school meals, cash transfers, and interdisciplinary support activities to combat dropout rates and retain students.

Overall, the LAC region made significant efforts to implement and improve strategies to bring students back to school. However, only some initiatives have been taken to retain students once the risk of drop-out or out-of-school students is identified. As indicated in Figure 7, only nine countries have implemented strategies to ensure that children at risk of dropping out remain in school, and eight have a strategy for integrating these students back into the education system. It's not only a matter of identifying the problem but also of taking action to address it.

Table 1 – EWS Initiatives in LAC countries

#	Countries	Year of implementation	Name	Description
1	**Argentina**			In **Argentina** there is no nation-wide EWS. There was an incipient EWS development in some provinces in 2023. The National Back to School Program [Programa Nacional Volvé a la Escuela]5 has some actions to search for students to bring then back and strengthen their bond with the school.
2	**Belize**	2015	Early Warning System	In **Belize** a EWS was piloted in 2015 by the Truancy Unit of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, and Technology (MoESCT) who tracks school-age children and conducts home visits (UNICEF LACRO, 2023). The EWS include information of School performance, attendance, family environment, and behavioral issues. However, during the interview, there were no mentions of the system, and there is no recent public information about the system on the internet or the MoE website.
3	**Brazil**			In **Brazil t**here is no nation-wide EWS. There is the School Active Search (SAS) strategy, which was initiated in 2016. It is a technological tool that allow public authorities to identify children and adolescents outside of school and activate different strategies to (re)enrolled them. Currently there are 2,023 municipalities participating (36% of total municipalities) (UNICEF, 2023a).

5 (Argentina). Programa Nacional Volvé a la Escuela. Available in: https://www.argentina.gob.ar/educacion/volvealaescuela. Access in: March 2024

#	Countries	Year of implementation	Name	Description
4	Chile	2019	Early Alert System against school dropouts	**Chile** launched its EWS, known as Early Alert System against school dropouts [Sistema de Alerta Temprana Escolar], in 2019. In 2020, the system was expanded and strength to respond to the challenges brought by the pandemic (Perusia & Cardini, 2022). Moreover, in 2021 Chile established the National Educational Reactivation Plan, in which one of its fundamental pillars is the promotion of school attendance and reintegration (Interview Chile & Ministry of Education of Chile, s. f.).
5	Colombia	2012	Systems Information System for Dropout Monitoring, Prevention, and Analysis (SIMPADE)	**Colombia** has its Systems Information System for Dropout Monitoring, Prevention, and Analysis [Sistema de Información para el Monitoreo, Prevención y Análisis de la Deserción Escolar – SIMPADE][6], which has been operational since 2012 (Perusia & Cardini, 2022, 2022). The System helps the development of dropout-risk index based on 4 dimensions: individual, family, institutional, and contextual characteristics. In 2022 efforts were made to strengthen the national active search and enrollment management (UNICEF, 2023a).
6	Costa Rica	2018/2019	UPRE: Education's Unit for Permanence, Reintegration, and Educational Success	**Costa Rica** implemented an early warning system within the Ministry of Public Education's Unit for Permanence, Reintegration, and Educational Success [Unidad para

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6 (Colombia). Systems Information System for Dropout Monitoring, Prevention, and Analysis (SIMPADE). Available at: https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/sistemasdeinformacion/1735/w3-propertyvalue-48107.html?_noredirect=1. Access in: March 2024

#	Countries	Year of implementation	Name	Description
				la Permanencia Reincorporación y Éxito Educativo (UPRE)][7], which uses a wide range of variables related to family and social environments to identify at-risk youth.
7	Cuba	2017		In **Cuba** there is a decentralized warning systems in place, through the preventive working group established by Ministerial Resolution 111/2017. (UNICEF LACRO, 2023). No additional information and details were found on the internet to have a more comprehensive understanding of the initiative.
8	Ecuador		In development	In **Ecuador** is still developing an Early Warning system. The National Plan Learn on Time [Plan Nacional Aprender a Tiempo] places a strong emphasis on class attendance as a pivotal element in preventing school dropouts. Additionally, a strategy named Everyone in the Classroom [Todos al Aula] was launched in November 2022. This strategy focuses on identifying individuals not currently in the educational system, but also from young children to young adults with incomplete schooling (Interview Ecuador). In collaboration with UNICEF, the Ministry of Education is developing an early warning system to enhance this initiative.

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7 (Costa Rica). Unidad para la Permanencia Reincorporación y Éxito Educativo. Avaliable at: https://www.mep.go.cr/acerca-del-mep/upre. Access in: March 2024

#	Countries	Year of implementation	Name	Description
9	El Salvador	2018/2020	Information System for the Management of Education in El Salvador (SIGES)	**El Salvador** started its Early Warning Mechanism in 2018, which have been consolidated in 2020. The Information System for Salvadoran Educational Management [Sistema de Información para la Gestión Educativa Salvadoreña (SIGES)[8]] is a computer system that allows the monitoring and evaluation of education. It is composed of a centralized database which store information on all students, teachers and educational centers in the country.
10	Guatemala	2017	National Strategy for Successful Transition: ENTRE	**Guatemala** has developed a system called National Strategy for Successful Transition: ENTRE [Estrategia Nacional para la Transición Exitosa (ENTRE)[9]] to mitigate the risk of dropout between the transition to primary and lower secondary schools. This system monitors the transition and potential dropout at specific grades and education levels, emphasizing variables related to grades and learning data (UNESCO-OREALC & UNESCO IIPE, 2022). However, in interview with Guatemalan authorities, it was mentioned that the country currently lacks a strategy for tracking out-of-school students. It was mentioned that this issue emerged because a new government was elected in 2023, possibly leading to the discontinuation or need to reformulate the existing policies and strategies (interview Guatemala), thus is not sure if the strategy is still in place.

8 (El Salvador). Information System for the Management of Education in El Salvador (SIGES). Available at: https://siges.digital/. Access in: March 2024
9 (Guatemala). National Strategy for Successful Transition: ENTRE. Available at: https://www.mineduc.gob.gt/entre/. Access in: March 2024

#	Countries	Year of implementation	Name	Description
11	Guyana		School Support Unit	**Guyana** has taken proactive steps to address student dropout rates by establishing a unit called School Support Unit. This unit appoints officers specifically to track students who have dropped out (Guyana interview). No additional information and details were found on the internet to have a more comprehensive understanding of the initiative.
12	Honduras	2020/2021	Early Warning and Response System: SART	**Honduras** implemented its Early Warning and Response System [Sistema de Alerta y Respuesta Temprana (SART)[10]] in 2021 in partnership with the private sector. This system includes follow-ups to student access and ensures learners' permanence, retention, continuity, and promotion[11].
13	Jamaica	2022	Yard to Yard Find the Child	**Jamaica** has launched the Yard to Yard Find the Child program identifies out-of-school children in 2022, which is a national action to identify, locate and re-engage students. There is also counseling units and officers to follow up on students who have lost school for extended periods (UNICEF LACRO, 2023).

10 (Honduras). Sistema de Alerta y Respuesta Temprana – SART. Available at: https://sart.se.gob.hn/. Access in: March 2024

11 (Honduras). The system is part of the "Attention Plan for the Protection of the Educational Trajectories of Pre-Basic, Basic and Middle School Students: Triennium 2021-2023" ("Plan de Atención para la Protección de las Trayectorias Educativas de los educandos de Prebásica, Básica y Media: Trienio 2021-2023") which includes a more comprehensive approach to Protect the trajectory of students. Available at: https://www.se.gob.hn/detalle-articulo/1562/. Access in: March 2024

#	Countries	Year of implementation	Name	Description
14	**Mexico**	2015	SisAT: Early Warning System	In **Mexico**, there is a system that includes a set of indicators, tools, and procedures so that teaching groups, supervisors, and educational authorities have systematic, timely information on students at risk of not achieving educational goals[12]. The system is highly robust, offering an information system that operates both at the national level and within individual states. This system is designed to identify students who have left school or are at risk of doing so. However, the follow-up processes vary at the state level, where different methodologies might be employed.
15	**Nicaragua**		Early warning to protect life	**Nicaragua** does not have EWS based on indicators. There are the counselling offices of the educational communities that identify the situations of abuse, bullying, addiction, teenage pregnancy, and depression and report[13]. Also, in interview, it was mentioned that teachers and school principals are responsible for monitoring and identifying students at risk of dropping out. (interview Nicaragua).
16	**Panama**			**Panama** has a school prevention and retention network, [Red de Prevención y Retención Escolar] basically aimed at eliminating dropout, however the network is not yet fully functional (UNESCO-OREALC, 2021a).

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12 (México). Sistema de Alerta Temprana (SisAT). Available at: https://subeducacionbasica.edomex.gob.mx/sistema-alerta-temprana. Access in: March 2024

13 (Nicaragua). MINED lanzará estrategia de alerta temprana para proteger la vida. Available at: https://www.mined.gob.ni/mined-lanzara-estrategia-de-alerta-temprana-para-proteger-la-vida/. Access in: March 2024

#	Countries	Year of implementation	Name	Description
17	Peru	2020	School Alert system	**Peru** has developed the School Alert system [Alerta Escuela] in October 2020, which has become part of the Educational Institution Management Support System (SIAGIE)[14], aiming to encompass all educational institutions. It is a voluntary tool for school, and according to the Peruvian government statistics, 30% of the institutions' directors used the platform to revise at-risk situations between March and November 2021. It contains pedagogical guidelines for intervention. Some key actions taken to identify youth at risk included tutoring, remedial education programs, and the provision of printed materials (Alégria et al., 2023).
18	Dominican Republic		In development	The **Dominican Republic** is still developing an Early Warning System (EWS). In an interview, it was highlighted that the challenges faced in developing the EWS are due to the tool not being linked with nominal systems, causing issues with daily monitoring attendance tracking.

14 (Peru). Siagie Alerta Escuela. Available at: https://alertaescuela.minedu.gob.pe/. Access in: March 2024

#	Countries	Year of implementation	Name	Description
19	Uruguay	2015/2016	Protection System for Educational Trajectories	**Uruguay** has for a long time an EWS in place. The Protection System for Educational Trajectories [Sistema de Protección a las Trayectorias Educativas][15], is an online system that unifies different student records (contact data, grades, health data). It started to implement in 2016. The system generates alerts when any of the variables exceeds the defined thresholds (Perusia & Cardini, 2022). During the pandemic, the system was improved to enhance early detection of educational intermittency, particularly through the monitoring of effective class attendance (Interview 2 Uruguay).

Source: Own elaboration based on Montes & Luna, 2024

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15 (Uruguay). Sistema de Protección a las Trayectorias Educativas. Available at: https://ste.anep.edu.uy/manuales/sistemas/sistema-de-proteccion-de-trayectorias-educativas-spte. Access in: March 2024

4.2.   Assess learning levels regularly

This measure involves implementing learning assessments and diagnostics to monitor the educational progress of children and adolescents. This measure is crucial for understanding current students' learning levels, enabling teachers, school leaders, and decision-makers to tailor teaching and learning approaches accordingly. This section will examine the assessments and diagnostics of learning implemented throughout the region post-pandemic.

It is essential to highlight that several countries in Latin America developed their educational evaluation systems in the 1990s (Zacarias, 2018). Some countries with their own system include Argentina[16], Bolivia[17], Brazil[18], Colombia[19], Chile[20], Ecuador[21], and Uruguay[22]. On the other hand, Mexico discontinued its National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (INEE)[23] in 2019 and has not implemented a new national evaluation system since then. Other countries in the region, particularly in Central America, while lacking their own educational evaluation systems, have developed a complex system for collecting information on learning outcomes and educational performances within their ministries. In the Caribbean region, there is the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), which provides examinations, certification, and education services for 16 Participating Countries[24].

According to data collected by UNICEF until May 2023, 19 countries and territories out of 33 had strategies to measure learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and its assessment was conducted with different scopes and levels (UNICEF LACRO, 2023) (See Figure 8).

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16 (Argentina). Evaluación e información educativa. Available at: https://www.argentina.gob.ar/educacion/evaluacion-e-informacion-educativa. Access in: March 2024

17 (Bolivia). Observatorio Plurinacional de la Calidad Educativa. Available at: https://www.opce.gob.bo/webopce/. Access in: March 2024

18 (Brazil). Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira (INEP). Available at: https://www.gov.br/inep/pt-br. Access in: March 2024

19 (Colombia). Colombian Institute for the Evaluation of Education (ICFES). Available at: https://www.icfes.gov.co/. Access in: March 2024

20 (Chile). Agencia de Calidad de la Educación. Available at: https://www.agenciaeducacion.cl/. Access in: March 2024

21 (Ecuador). Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa (INEVAL). Available at: https://www.evaluacion.gob.ec/. Access in: March 2024

22 (Uruguay). Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa (INEEd). Available at: https://www.ineed.edu.uy/. Access in: March 2024

23 (México). Instituto Nacional para la Evaluación de la Educación. Available at: https://www.inee.edu.mx/. Access in: March 2024

24 (Caribbean) Members: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago and Turks and Caicos Islands.

Countries with post-pandemic learning
loss measurement strategies
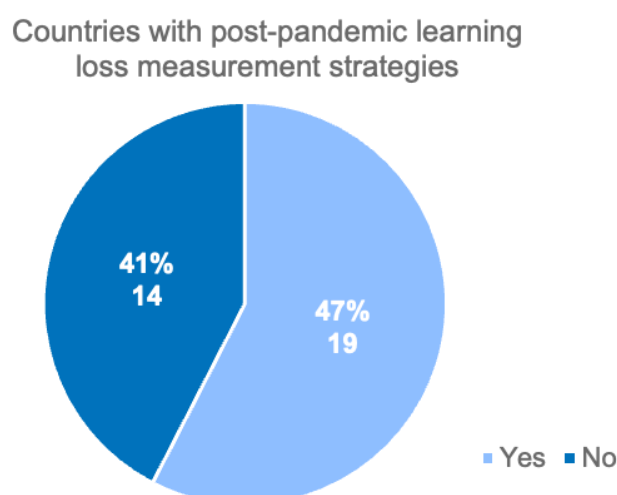
Source: UNICEF LACRO, 2023. **Note:** The data contains information from 33 countries and territories in the region, out of the 36 countries consulted. Information provided by UNICEF country offices until late May 2023.

Learning loss measurement strategies

Based on the mapping, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Peru have implemented more comprehensive national learning assessments encompassing more grades, enabling these countries to obtain a broader picture of the learning process at the national level. On the other hand, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, and Guyana conducted learning assessments in one to two grades. Also, Argentina, Bolivia, and Panama participated in the Comparative and Explanatory Regional Study (ERCE) post-pandemic, conducted by the UNESCO Regional Office for primary and secondary schools, assessing mathematics and language in third and sixth grades.

In the Caribbean region, in 2022 and 2023, the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC)[25] conducted education examinations for primary and secondary levels[26]. However, the primary aim of the assessment

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25 (Carribeean) Members: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago and Turks and Caicos Islands.

26 The Caribbean Examinations Council offers three levels of examinations and certifications: the Caribbean Primary Exit Assessment (CPEA), the Caribbean Secondary Education Certification (CSEC), the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE), The CXC Associate Degree Programme was unveiled in 2005; it is a tertiary qualification based on the CAPE certification.

Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examinations mark the end of standard secondary education and are usually taken by students after five years of secondary school. They are equivalent to the Ordinary Level (O-Levels) examinations and are targeted towards students sixteen and older.

Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE) are taken by students who have completed their secondary education and wish to continue their studies. Students who wish to sit for the CAPE usually possess CSEC or an equivalent certification. The CAPE is equivalent to the Advanced Levels (A-levels), and they are both voluntary qualifications intended for university entrance. Since it was introduced in 1998, the number of subjects offered at CAPE has increased.

was to provide certification or validation for students to continue their studies. Additionally, accessing the list of the 16 countries participating in these assessments each year was not feasible. Information on how much these countries have used this data to diagnose students' learning levels was also unavailable.

Other initiatives included conducting studies, developing assessment instruments and guidelines, and orienting teachers to implement learning assessments at the beginning of the school year, as in the case of Costa Rica[27]. Countries like Anguilla, Bahamas, Belize, Bolivia, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Venezuela implemented diagnostic evaluations on a sample base to better understand the impact on students, teachers, and the overall functioning of educational institutions. Studies were also conducted in some countries to understand particular themes or areas. (UNICEF LACRO, 2023 & Interviews).

Overall, most of the assessments were conducted in 2023. Also, the assessments varied in format: some were sample-based and others census-based, reflecting the diverse approaches employed across the region and the capacity installed. Some countries conducted more comprehensive learning assessments, including multiple grades, while others performed assessments in only one or two educational grades. See Table 2 - List of LAC Education Assessments.

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27 (Costa Rica). Lineamientos Técnicos De Evaluación Para el Aprendizaje, 2023 and Lineamientos técnicos para la elaboración de la prueba escrita. Available at: https://ddc.mep.go.cr/sites/all/files/ddc_mep_go_cr/adjuntos/lineamientos_tecnicos_evaluacion_v1.pdf and https://ddc.mep.go.cr/sites/all/files/ddc_mep_go_cr/archivos/lineamientos_tecnicos_para_la_prueba_escrita_2023.pdf. Access in: March 2024

Table 2 - List of LAC Education Assessments

#	Country	Year conducted	Grades	Assessment information
1	**Argentina**	2021, 2022 and 2023	3rd, 5th and 6th grades of primary	National tests Learn [Aprender] applied in 2021, 2022 and 2023. Participated in the Comparative and Explanatory Regional Study (ERCE) post-pandemic in 2023[28].
2	**Bolivia**	2023	3rd grade of Primary 6th and 5th grade of Secondary	Conducted three learning and diagnostic tests in 2023. Conducted the first national diagnostic test called "Iyambae" in 2023 Conducted the Test of Fundamental Academic Skills (Tofas) in 2023[29] Participated in the Comparative and Explanatory Regional Study (ERCE) post-pandemic in 2023
3	**Brazil**	2021 and 2023	2nd, 5th and 9th grades of primary 3rd and 4th year of secondary	Conducted the Basic Education Assessment System [Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica (Saeb)[30]] in 2021 and 2023. At the state and municipality level there was also some diagnostics and assessment done by the local governments.

28 (Argentina). ERCE Postpandemia 2023. Available at: https://www.argentina.gob.ar/educacion/evaluacion-e-informacion-educativa/evaluacion-regional-erce/erce-postpandemia-2023. Access in: March 2024

29 (Bolivia). Ministerio de Planificación del Desarrollo - Bolivia | Conferencia de Prensa. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/MinPlanificaOficial/videos/1001903931038692. Access in: March 2024

TOFAS https://tofas.education/ and. https://sisem.opce.gob.bo/app/sisem/adm/inscripcion

30 (Brazil). Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica (Saeb)]. Available at: https://www.gov.br/inep/pt-br/areas-de-atuacao/avaliacao-e-exames-educacionais/saeb. Access in: March 2024.

#	Country	Year conducted	Grades	Assessment information
4	Chile	2023	4th grade of primary 2nd year of secondary	Conducted the Education Quality Measurement System [Sistema de Medición de la Calidad de la Educación – SIMCE] in 2023. Also, provided an evaluation instrument, Comprehensive Learning Diagnosis (DIA), for schools to access timely information needs, which helps them take action in an agile manner.[31].
5	Colombia	2023	3rd and 5th of primary 7th and 9th of secondary 2nd year high school	Conducted the Knowledge Tests [Prueba Saber] and Knowledge 11 [Saber 11] in 2023 [32].
6	Dominican Republic	2022 2023	3rd grade of Primary and 3dr of secondary 6th grade of Secondary	Conducted diagnostic evaluations sample in 2022 and a national test for secondary school in 2023[33]. The Dominican Republic also adjusts the evaluation system, including recovery learning as a component of the assessment process (Dominican Republic interview).
7	Ecuador	2021, 2023 and 2024	4th, 7th and 10th grade of Basic education and 3rd year of Baccalaureate	Conducted more than 10 diagnostic evaluations since 2021 under the Learning on Time [Aprender a Tiempo] program.

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31 (Chile). The Comprehensive Learning Diagnosis Chile's Approach to Assess Socio-Emotional Learning in Schools. Available at: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED640393.pdf. Access in: March 2024.

32 (Colombia). Evaluaciones Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación - ICFES. Available at: https://www.icfes.gov.co/web/guest/evaluaciones. Access in: March 2024

33 (Dominican Republic). Informe Estadístico Pruebas Nacionales. Available at: https://www.ministeriodeeducacion.gob.do/sobre-nosotros/areas-institucionales/direccion-de-evaluacion-de-la-calidad/informe-estadistico-pruebas-nacionales. Access in: March 2024

#	Country	Year conducted	Grades	Assessment information
				Conducted Being a Student examen [Ser Estudiante] in 2023 in the Costa- Galápagos region, and in 2024 the region Sierra Amazônia region.[34]
8	El Salvador	2021, 2023, 2024	3rd grade primary 2nd year of secondary	Conducted the diagnostic tests "Knowing My Achievements"[35] in 2021, 2023 and 2024.
9	Guyana	2022 and 2023	6th grades of secondary	Conducted the National Grade Six Assessment (NGSA) in 2022 and 2023, to measure students' learning outcomes that are transitioning from primary schools into secondary Schools.
10	Mexico	2023	2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th y 6th grades of basic education 1st, 2nd y 3rd year of high school	Conducted Diagnostic Assessment for Basic Education Students [Evaluación Diagnóstica para Alumnas y Alumnos de Educación Básica][36] in 2023. Equipped teachers with tools to assess learning in the classroom.
11	Panama	2023	3rd, and 6th grades of primary	Participated in in the Comparative and Explanatory Regional Study (ERCE) post-pandemic in 2023[37].
12	Paraguay	2023 and 2024	3rd, 6th, and 9th grades of basic education	Conducted National Assessment of Academic Achievement of Essential Contents [Evaluación Nacional de Logros Académicos de Contenidos Esenciales-ENLACE] in 2023 [38].

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34 (Ecuador). Ser Estudiante. Available at: https://evaluaciones.evaluacion.gob.ec/BI/ser-estudiante-3/. Access in: March 2024

35 (El Salvador). Conociendo Mis Logros. Available at: https://www.mined.gob.sv/evaluacion/prueba.html. Access in: March 2024

36 (México). Evaluación Diagnóstica para las Alumnas y los Alumnos de Educación Básica 2023/2024. Available at: http://planea.sep.gob.mx/Diagnostica/. Access in: March 2024

37 (Panamá). La evaluación, una herramienta del Meduca para mejorar la calidad de la educación. Available at: https://www.meduca.gob.pa/index.php/node/5373. Access in: March 2024

38 (Paraguay). En proceso diseño de "Evaluación Nacional de Logros Académicos de Contenidos Esenciales-ENLACE". Available at: https://www.mec.gov.py/?ref=300656-en-proceso-diseno-de-evaluacion-nacional-de-logros-academicos-de-contenidos-esenciales-enlace. Access in: March 2024

#	Country	Year conducted	Grades	Assessment information
			2nd grade of elementary to the 3rd. year of high school	In 2024, the country introduced a new evaluation program called Jaikuaave, meaning "let's know more" in Guaraní[39], which is part of the Ñe'ẽry Reading, Writing and Oral Program. (Interview Paraguay).
13	Peru	2022 and 2023	2nd, 4th, and 6th grades of basic education 2nd year of Secondary	Conducted Quality Measurement Unit (UMC)[40] in 2022 and carried out the National Assessment of Learning Achievements [Evaluación Nacional de Logros de Aprendizaje (ENLA)] in 2023[41].
14	Uruguay	2020 and 2022	3rd, 6th and 9tth grades of Basic education	Conducted Learning Evaluation "Aristas" carried out by the National Institute of Educational Evaluation (INEEd) in 2020 and 2022 Also, a Diagnostic Learning Evaluation was carried out by the National Administration of Public Education (ANEP) in the Learning Evaluation System [Sistema de Evaluación de Aprendizajes – SEA] in 2022.

Source: Own elaboration

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39 (Paraguay). Jaikuaave ¡Analiza Tu Progreso. Available at: https://www.mec.gov.py/?ref=301681-jaikuaave-analiza-tu-progreso. Access in: March 2024
40 (Peru). Evaluación Muestral de Estudiantes (EM) 2022. Available at: http://umc.minedu.gob.pe/resultadosem2022/. Access in: March 2024
41 (Perú). Evaluación Nacional de Logros de Aprendizaje (ENLA) 2023. Available at: http://umc.minedu.gob.pe/resultadosenla2023/. Access in: March 2024

4.3. Prioritize Teaching the Fundamentals

This section underscores the initiatives to prioritize fundamental learning, aiming to recover the basic educational competencies and skills that students have lost during school closures.

Learning recovery programs

Countries' strategies to mitigate educational disruptions caused by the pandemic were diverse. Overall, 31 countries reported establishing measures for learning recovery programs according to the UNICEF LACRO (2023) survey. Some countries have implemented programs at the national level, while others have implemented specific strategies and initiatives at small scale.

Among the programs implemented, 25 (76%) countries and territories supported teachers in personalizing instruction based on individual student learning levels. Additionally, 19 (58%) countries adopted formative assessments to gauge student learning continuously. 15 (45%) countries pursued other educational recovery efforts, including curriculum reforms and tutoring services. 10 (30%) countries launched support and training programs for schools, 8 (24%) introduced dropout recovery programs, 7 (21%) expedited learning through accelerated programs, 6 (18%) implemented personalized learning initiatives, and 3 (9%) extended the academic year (UNICEF LACRO, 2023) (See Figure 9).

Figure 9 - Learning programs implemented by type (Number of countries)
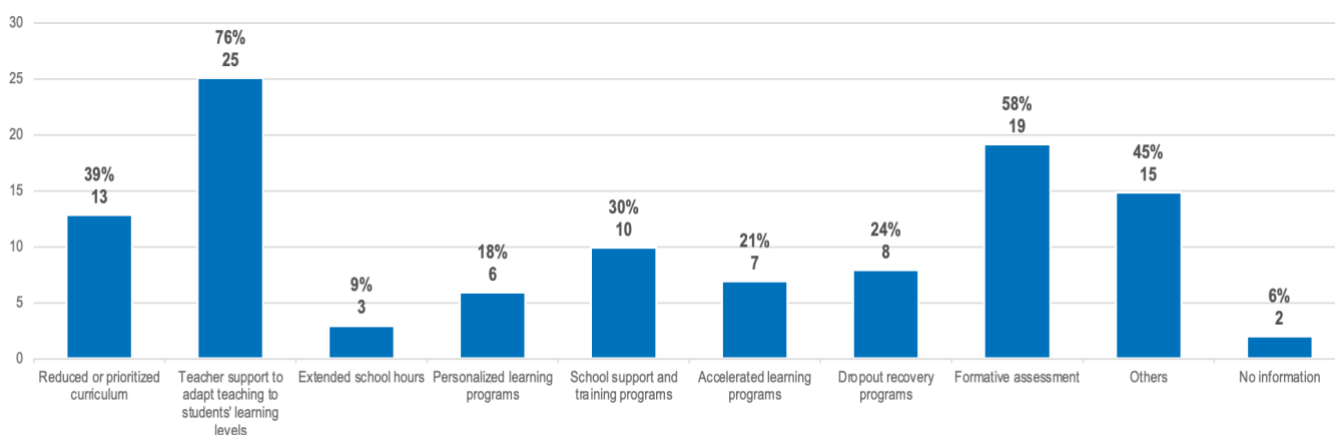
Source: UNICEF LACRO, 2023. **Note:** The data contains information from 33 countries and territories in the region out of the 36 countries consulted. Information provided by UNICEF country offices until late May 2023.

The scope of the learning recovery programs varied. Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Suriname, Uruguay, and Venezuela implemented some of these types of

recovery programs at the national level. Meanwhile, Guatemala, Peru, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti implemented strategies at the local level, at specific moments, or tailored to specific educational levels (UNICEF LACRO, 2023). Another strategy was extended school time (full-time education), which several countries are strengthening and expanding, focused on strengthening full-time education initiatives post-pandemic to enhance learning outcomes. See Table 3 –List of LAC Learning Recovery Programs.

Some of these strategies had specific targets or aimed at groups in vulnerable situations. Of 33 countries and territories in the region, 13 (36%) countries and territories concentrated their remedial strategies on urban children facing adverse conditions, whereas 9 (25%) directed their efforts towards children residing in rural settings. Strategies explicitly tailored for children with disabilities were developed in 8 (22%) countries, while 6 (17%) countries designed interventions for migrant and refugee children. Initiatives targeting Indigenous and Afro-descendant children were put in place in 5 (14%) countries, and 4 (11%) countries focused on other groups identified as vulnerable. (UNICEF, 2024; UNICEF LACRO, 2023)

Moreover, during the pandemic, Latin America and the Caribbean countries seized the opportunity to overhaul their curricula, focusing on essential competencies and skills. This led to significant curricular restructuring across the region, guided by diagnoses of student needs. Initiatives included adapting curriculum structures and content based on updated guidelines, although many adjustments were temporary (UNESCO-OREALC, s. f.), according to UNICEF LACRO reports, 29 countries and territories have prioritized fundamental skills in their school curriculums. Among those, 17 focused on strengthening digital skills, 15 prioritized improving reading and writing, 14 enhanced mathematics, and 10 countries emphasized developing socioemotional skills within the curriculum (UNICEF LACRO, 2023).

The curricular adjustments were crucial for the regions and marked the initial stage of a process that was difficult to implement and propel forward for years: curriculum reform. Before the pandemic, the region's educational curricula were perceived as a very difficult area to promote changes. The curriculum was based on traditional models that were very rigid, segmented, and poorly aligned with current educational needs (UNESCO, 2017). During and after the pandemic, countries were driven to restructure their curricula and prioritize what was truly essential for student learning. This opened a window of opportunity to overhaul the curriculum as a whole. Currently, many countries are holistically reviewing their curriculums to integrate new topics such as socio-emotional skills, digital learning, civic engagement, and climate change education but also prioritize or give more emphasis on fundamental skills for learning recovery. There is also the opportunity to contextualize the curriculum by incorporating elements from the territories and to open up an intersectionality or interdisciplinarity approach.

Table 3 –List of LAC Learning Recovery Programs

#	Country	Year started	Program	Short description
1	**Argentina**	2022	National Back to School Program One hour more	Argentina implemented the National Back to School Program [Programa Nacional Volvé a la Escuela[42]] in 2022 which has three priority areas: Identification and active search of students; Re-engagement, re-entry and permanence of students; and recovery of learning and content. Also, extended the school day in one more hour of class per day in state-run primary schools, [Una hora más [43]].
2	**Belize**	2021	Let's Catch Up Summer Camp	Belize had implemented the Let's Catch-Up Summer Camp[44] in 2021, 2022 and 2023. Over the years the program has being improved and extended. The program target preschool up to 6 grade students on subject on literacy and numeracy (Interview Belize)
3	**Bolivia**	2022	Education First	Bolivia has launched a Nacional Plan for education in 2022, the Bolivia 2025, Education First - Priority lines of action from the Ministry of Education 2022 – 2025 [Bolivia 2025, Primero la Educación Líneas de acción prioritarias del Ministerio de Educación 2022 – 2025[45]]. The plan establishes strategies for recovering learning by reintegrating students who have discontinued their studies, providing necessary support, and enhancing biosafety and nutrition within schools. However,

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42 (Argentina). Programa Nacional Volvé a la Escuela. Available at: https://www.argentina.gob.ar/educacion/volvealaescuela. Access in: March 2024
43 (Argentina). Una hora más. Available at: https://www.argentina.gob.ar/educacion/unahoramas. Access in: March 2024
44 (Belize). Let's Catch Up Summer Camp 2023. Available at: https://501academy.edu.bz/lcusc-2023/. Access in: March 2024
45 (Bolivia). Líneas de acción prioritarias del Ministerio de Educación 2022 – 2025. Available at: https://red.minedu.gob.bo/fuente/recurso/6883. Access in: March 2024

#	Country	Year started	Program	Short description
				beyond this document, no other information was found regarding the implementation of these strategies.
4	**Brazil**	2023	National Literacy Child	In 2022, Brazil launched the National Policy for Learning Recovery in Basic Education at the national level.[46] However, in 2023, the new government reformulated and changed the program (interview UNESCO Brazil). The new government established four priorities for education: literacy in early education, full-time education, implementation of new secondary education models, and enhancing connectives in schools. The National Literacy Child Commitment was established[47], setting forth two main goals for the national policy: to ensure all Brazilian children are literate by the end of second grade and to promote learning recomposition, which focus on improving reading and writing skills for those not meeting standards by second grade.
5	**Chile**	2022	Educational Reactivation Plan	Chile also implemented a national program of recovery learning called the Educational Reactivation Plan [Plan de Reactivación educativa], which started in 2022. Key learning objectives were identified for each grade level and schools were given the flexibility to implement their own study plan. The plan focuses on three main areas of activity: (1) Coexistence and Mental Health, (2) Strengthening

46 (Brazil). Exemples of States program for Recomposição da Aprendizagem. Minas Gerais (https://www.educacao.mg.gov.br/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/2023-Documento-Orientador-PRA.pdf) Piauí (https://www.seduc.pi.gov.br/projetos/78/Recomposicao%20da%20Aprendizagem)
47 (Brazil). DECREE No. 11,556, OF JUNE 12, 2023, which Establishes the National Literacy Child Commitment. Available at: https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2023-2026/2023/decreto/D11556.htm. Access in: March 2024

#	Country	Year started	Program	Short description
				<u>Learning</u>, and (3) Educational Assistance and re-engagement [48]. (Interview & UNICEF LACRO, 2023).
6	**Colombia**	2023	Long live school	Colombia started the program Long live school [Viva la escuela[49]] in 2023, which mobilize university students to voluntarily support the pedagogical processes in educational institutions, within the framework of their internships or internships.
7	**Costa Rica**	2022	Academic Leveling Plan	Costa Rica developed the Academic Leveling Plan, [Plan Integral De Nivelación Académica [50]] in 2022, which seeks to address the educational gap caused by interruptions of school schooling. The plan presents objectives, strategies and main actions to be implemented at all levels of the educational system, with a short, medium and long-term projection.
8	**Dominic Republic**	2022	CON BASE	Dominic Republic launched the CON BASE program [Construyendo la Base de los Aprendizajes (CON BASE)[51]] in November 2022 as a national approach to improve the quality of teaching

48 (Chile). Plan de Reactivación Educativa 2024 - Ministerio de Educación de Chile. Available at: https://reactivacioneducativa.mineduc.cl/. Access in: March 2024

49 (Colombia). Programa Viva La Escuela. Available at: https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/portal/micrositios-institucionales/Viva-la-Escuela/. Access in: March 2024

50 (Ecuador). MEP presenta Plan Integral de Nivelación Académica and Plan Integral de Nivelación Académica Proyección 2022-2025. Available at: https://www.mep.go.cr/noticias/mep-presenta-plan-integral-nivelacion-academica and https://apse.cr/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/plan-integral-nivelacion-academica.pdf. Access in: March 2024

51 (Dominican Republic). Programa Construyendo La Base De Los Aprendizajes Con Base. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/dominicanrepublic/media/6741/file/Brochure:%20Programa%20Construyendo%20la%20Base%20de%20los%20Aprendizajes%20(Con%20Base)%20-%20PUBLICACI%C3%93N.pdf. Access in: March 2024

Minerd evaluará resultados del programa «Construyendo la Base de los Aprendizajes CON BASE. Available at: https://www.ministeriodeeducacion.gob.do/comunicaciones/noticias/minerd-evaluara-resultados-del-programa-construyendo-la-base-de-los-aprendizajes-con-base. Access in: March 2024

#	Country	Year started	Program	Short description
				processes and the fundamental learning skills and outcomes of children in the first three years of primary education.
9	**Ecuador**	2021	Learning on Time	In 2021, Ecuador launched the National Plan Learning on Time [Aprender a Tiempo], aimed at reducing educational and learning disparities. This strategy includes five key areas: Reading and Writing, Prevention of Exclusion and School Retention, Socioemotional Support, Learning Recovery Methodology, and Strengthening Institutional Leadership. Additionally, for remote and violence-affected areas, the country provides Remote Tutoring in partnership with an international organization.
10	**Eastern Caribbean Area Countries and Territories**	2021	Let's REAP (Learning Recovery and Enhancement Programme)	At the ECA (Eastern Caribbean Area Countries and Territories[52]), interventions where implemented in all countries and territories (UNICEF LACRO, 2023). With the support of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), and Caribbean Community (CARICOM), different programs and initiatives were developed in the sub-regions, like the Learning Recovery and Enhancement Programme (Let's REAP), which encompassed 9 components[53].

52 Antigua and Barbuda, Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

53 (Easter Caribbean). CDB, CARICOM & the OECS Commission Launch Teacher Training Programme To Tackle Covid Learning Loss. Available at: https://caricom.org/cdb-caricom-the-oecs-commission-launch-teacher-training-programme-to-tackle-covid-learning-loss. Access in: March 2024

Learning Recovery and Enhancement Programme (Let's REAP) for Caribbean Schools, which has 9 components: 1. Leadership and accountability; 2. Management and communication; 3. Regional and national partnerships; 4. Teacher support and collaboration; 5. Formative assessment; 6. Inclusion, SPED, wellbeing; 7. Resources and curriculum; 8. Engagement with parents and family; 9. Engagement with community and community organizations.

#	Country	Year started	Program	Short description
				For instance, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines implemented a learning recovery program under various names, with financial support from OECS. One initiative was to hire teacher assistants—many of whom were retired teachers or individuals aspiring to join the education system. These teacher assistants visited various schools during vacation periods and sometimes after school hours to support students. Additionally, some schools initiated their own recovery programs. (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines interview).
11	Mexico	2022	National Strategy to Promote Complete Continuous Educational Trajectories and Excellence	Mexico established the National Strategy to Promote Complete Continuous Educational Trajectories and Excellence [Estrategia Nacional para Promover Trayectorias Educativas Continuas Completas y de Excelencia[54]] in 2022. The strategies aimed to promote diagnostic and formative evaluation to respond to low achievement and learning loss; Promotion of life skills and socio-emotional care; Promotion of methodologies and resources for the recovery of learning and improvement of educational achievement; construct, disseminate, and promote an Early Warning System; and promote teacher development.
12	Panama	2021	Accelerated Learning program	Panama had the Accelerated Learning Program [Programa de Aprendizaje Acelerado[55]] in 2021. It consists of carrying out the school year in two cycles, having two academic years in one.

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54 (Mexico). Estrategia Nacional Para Promover Trayectorias Educativas Continuas, Completas and De Excelencia And Estrategia Nacional Para Promover Trayectorias Educativas Continuas, Completas Y De Excelencia (Ente). Available at: https://educacionbasica.sep.gob.mx/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Estrategia-Trayectorias-ejecutivo_final_1-1.pdf. and https://educacionbasica.sep.gob.mx/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/METODOLOGIA_RT.pdf. Access in: March 2024

55 (Panama). Programa de Aprendizaje Acelerado. Avaliadle in: http://www.educapanama.edu.pa/sites/default/files/programa_de_aprendizaje_acelerado_2021.pdf. Access in: March 2024

#	Country	Year started	Program	Short description
13	**Paraguay**	2023	National Program for Reading, Writing, and Oral Literacy	In 2023, Paraguay launched a National Program for Reading, Writing, and Oral Literacy called ÑE'ÊRY[56] in the Guarani language. The program is set to continue until 2027 and includes strategies such as bringing libraries to classrooms, training teachers, producing bilingual texts (Spanish and Guarani) tailored for each educational level, and collaborating with publishing companies, among others. (Paraguay interview)
14	**Peru**	2023	Normative for leveling and educational recovery	In 2023, Peru established a six-week leveling and recovery period for basic and secondary education at the start of the school year, involving 30 teaching hours per week[57].
15	**Venezuela**	2021	Bicentennial Plan 2021 – 2022 Safe and Progressive Start of Classes.	Venezuela developed the "Bicentennial Plan 2021 – 2022 Safe and Progressive Start of Classes." [Plan Bicentenario 2021 – 2022 Seguro y progresivo Inicio de Clases][58]. Which is part of the Victoria Bicentenary Plan, based on 10 strategic that range from school health and teaching well-being to integral training and technology.

Source: Own elaboration

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56 (Paraguay). Programa Nacional de lectura, escritura y oralidad denominado ÑE'ÊRY. Available at: https://www.mec.gov.py/?ref=301623-programa-nacional-de-lectura-escritura-y-oralidad-denominado--neery. Access in: March 2024

57 (Perú). Resolución Ministerial N° .474-2022-MINEDU. Available at: https://cdn.www.gob.pe/uploads/document/file/3895187/RM_N%C2%B0_474-2022-MINEDU.pdf.pdf. Access in: March 2024

58 (Venezuela). Plan Victoria Bicentenaria, Inicio de Clases Seguro y Progresivo 2021-2022. Available at: http://www.minci.gob.ve/plan-victoria-bicentenaria-inicio-de-clases-seguro-y-progresivo-2021-2022/. Access in: March 2024

4.4. Increase the Efficiency of Instruction

This section highlights efforts to enhance instruction to improve the quality and effectiveness of education, including teacher training programs, accelerated catch-up and remedial programs, self-guided learning, and targeted instruction.

Teacher support emerged as a crucial strategy to enhance teaching-learning processes; however, mapping all the initiatives to improve pedagogical instruction in the context of learning recovery was challenging due to their diversity across countries. Some of these initiatives were already part of the learning recovery plan. Also, various organizations, including governments, universities, NGOs, IOs, and the private sector, offered teacher training with different timelines, styles, lengths, and topics. Also, some countries already have institutionalized continuing professional development for teachers, and some countries have specific institutes or organizations dedicated to the function of Continuing Teacher Education, such as Argentina, Chile, Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Uruguay (Vezub, 2019).

According to the UNICEF report, among 33 countries and territories, 28 (85%) prioritized teacher training across various thematic areas. 19 (58%) countries improved teachers' access to technology, 6 (18%) facilitated structured lesson plans, and 7 (21%) introduced specific support mechanisms for teachers to address their unique challenges. Additionally, 1 (3%) country explored alternative strategies (UNICEF LACRO, 2023) (See Figure 10).

Figure 10 - Teacher support strategies to strengthen the teaching-learning processes (Number of countries)
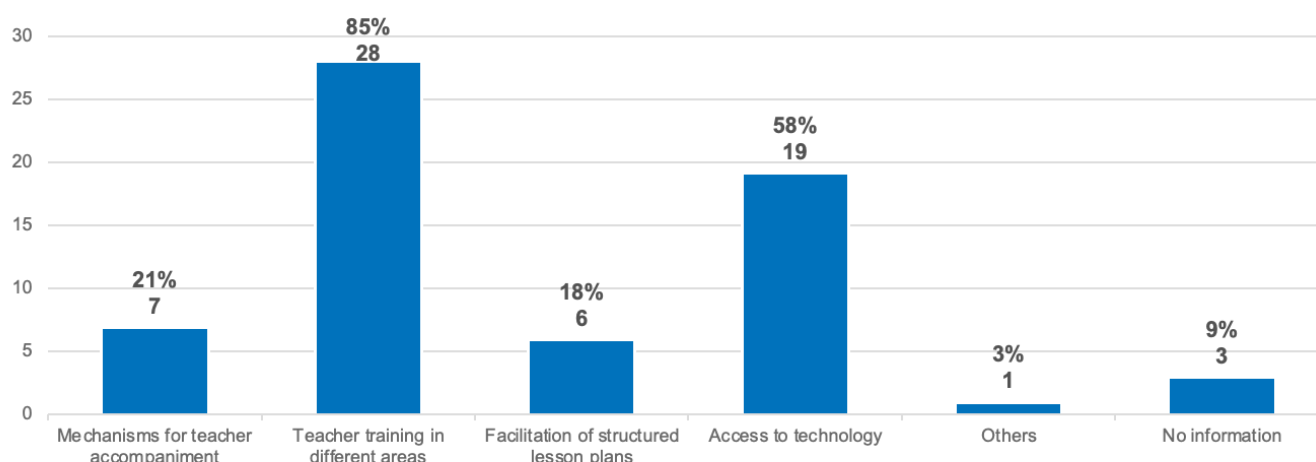
Source: UNICEF LACRO, 2023. **Note:** The data contains information from 33 countries and territories in the region, out of the 36 countries consulted. Information provided by UNICEF country offices until late May 2023.

Regarding thematic focus for teacher support, 17 (541%) countries emphasized both digital skills and basic teaching skills in literacy and mathematics. 12 (33%) countries prioritized mental health and psychosocial support for teachers, and 1 (3%) focused on other thematic areas (UNICEF LACRO, 2023).

4.5. Develop psychosocial health and well-being

This measure looks at strategies that address and prioritize students' and teachers' mental health and well-being. Additionally, it presents some initiatives to ensure access to water, sanitation, hygiene (WASH), and school nutrition to contribute to students' proper development.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for safe WASH infrastructure and school services. Before the pandemic, data on water and sanitation coverage in schools from 2013 estimated that approximately 85% of schools had water and 81% had sanitation (UNICEF & WHO, 2017). Overall, about 25% of the LAC population is estimated to lack access to drinking water, while 66% have no access to safe sanitation services. There is no recent data on this topic for schools, making it challenging to analyze the situation of services in the region. However, it is known that the quality of school infrastructure varies significantly among countries and regions within the countries.

On school feeding programs, recent data indicated a high level of political commitment and investment in school feeding initiatives. At least 19 countries have either a specific school feeding or school nutrition policy or law, which can cover 30 to 100 percent of the school population in the country. Approximately 80.3 million children across the region received school meals in 2022 (WFP & IDB, 2024).

Regarding social and emotional well-being, there is no comprehensive study on how countries address these issues in schools or include this component as a subject in the curriculum. The most recent data on this topic is the assessment of Socio-Emotional Skills in the Study from Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (ERCE) 2019, which reveals that sixth-grade students in the region had 'positive' results in the three socio-emotional skills evaluated: empathy, openness to diversity, and school self-regulation. This means that students presented positive results in the three areas. Also, it indicates that schools influence the socio-emotional well-being of students and, to a lesser extent, impact learning outcomes. The study also uncovered disparities in socio-emotional skills linked to the students' family socio-economic status and highlighted gender differences, with girls consistently reporting higher levels in all three skills compared to boys (UNESCO, 2023b). PISA 2022 results for 15-year-old students also indicate that social and emotional factors are linked to academic performance in mathematics (Schleicher, 2023). This result

suggests that socio-emotional skills impact academic performance to some extent, but most importantly, they are crucial for community and individual life.

For this research, the strategies mapped primarily focused on mental health and socioemotional support during the KIIs. Firstly, school feeding programs are usually governed by policy and law, and many countries have reinstated meal provisions upon school reopening. Regarding WASH measures, while it is known that many countries have implemented health and safety protocols, it remains challenging to determine which have specifically improved their WASH infrastructure and facilities. Secondly, socio-emotional support emerged as a critical focus during the pandemic, an area previously less emphasized in educational systems. The interviews aimed to explore how countries have incorporated this aspect into their educational strategies post-pandemic.

Psychosocial Health and Well-being Strategies

According to UNICEF LACRO (2023), countries have implemented additional measures and strategies to support students' socioemotional well-being in response to the increased need for enhanced support. From the WASH measures, only 2 (6%) countries reported implementing these measures in over 75 percent of schools in the country, 6 (18%) in more than 50 percent of schools, and 10 (30%) introduced measures in just some schools (UNICEF LACRO, 2023).

Regarding school feeding programs, 3 countries (9%) have implemented measures in over 75% of their schools, 7 countries (21%) have taken action in more than 50% of schools, and another 7 countries (21%) have initiated measures in only a limited number of schools. For the countries that take measures on school food programs, 5 indicated actions for a budget increase, 5 have made changes in menus or foods, 8 countries have implemented other measures such as redirecting funds between programs to ensure school feeding, seeking better prices, and some have indicated that there have been no changes and the program is maintained regularly (UNICEF LACRO, 2023).

In terms of mental health and psychosocial support, 3 countries (9%) have implemented measures in more than 75 percent of schools, 5 (15%) in more than 50 percent, and 11 (33%) in some schools.

However, 13 countries (39%) have not implemented additional WASH or mental health and psychosocial support measures, and 15 (45%)countries have not taken any steps to enhance school feeding (UNICEF LACRO, 2023) (See Figure 11).
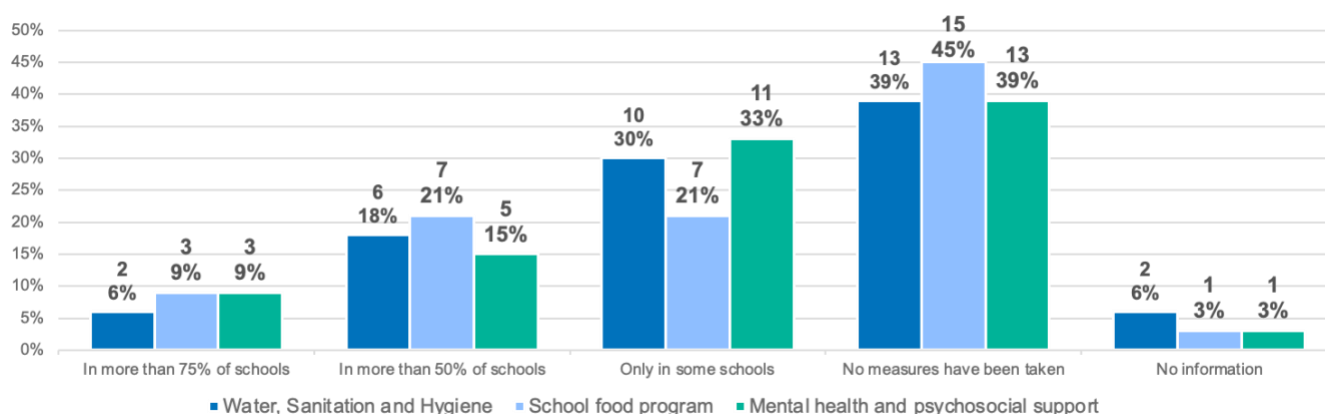
Source: UNICEF LACRO, 2023. **Note:** The data contains information from 33 countries and territories in the region, out of the 36 countries consulted. Information provided by UNICEF country offices until late May 2023.

Mental health and psychosocial support strategies

Upon the reopening of schools in Latin America and the Caribbean, authorities reported an increase in harassment and violence, reflecting the negative socio-emotional impacts of school closures (Castro & Algarra, 2022). Countries like Chile and Brazil noted unusual levels of school violence, and Anguilla saw increased misbehavior. In response, Chile implemented the "Seamos Comunidad" policy to address pandemic impacts on educational communities, while Brazil developed guidelines for school violence. (Mariana et al., 2023; Anguilla 2 and UNESCO Brazil interview).

Chile and Ecuador integrated socio-emotional learning into their recovery plans, with programs focused on mental health and well-being. **Chile'**s Coexistence and Mental Health [Convivencia y Salud Mental] program within its recovery plan focuses on socio-emotional aspects, coexistence, gender equity, and mental health, aiming to make educational institutions safe spaces for socio-emotional well-being. **Ecuador** emphasizes socioemotional support among the core components of its multi-pillar strategy, Learning on Time [Aprender a Tiempo].

Some countries have developed or expanded social-emotional programs. The **Dominican Republic** introduced counselors or psychologists to schools with at least 100 students (Dominican Republic Interview). **Panama** launched the "Socio-emotional Support Plan (PASE) [59]" in 2020, and **Uruguay**

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59 (Panamá). Plan de Apoyo Socioemocional (PASE). Available at: https://guias.meduca.gob.pa/sites/default/files/2021-07/Enfrentando%20los%20cambios%20-2021.pdf. Access in: March 2024

developed a National Plan for Coexistence and Participation[60] in 2023, which emphasized human rights education and increased the availability of psychologists in schools (Uruguay Interview). Also, **Guatemala** implemented hands-on workshops, while **Anguilla and Suriname** focused on teacher training and mental health awareness. Other countries have implemented some initiatives in partnership with IOs.

In a comprehensive strategy to address socioemotional aspects, governments have reformulated and expanded their pedagogical curriculum to include a range of cognitive and socio-emotional skills. Before the pandemic, some LAC countries had begun restructuring their curriculums to include socio-emotional components. The pandemic accelerated this process and also prompted other countries to make similar adjustments (Díaz et al., 2022). Some countries incorporating socio-emotional competence in their curriculums are **Argentina (Buenos Aires), Belize**, **Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay** (Ortiz et al., 2020a; Interviews).

Despite these efforts, significant challenges persist. A primary concern is the insufficient capacity among teachers to deliver effective socio-emotional education. Many lack the training necessary to develop and implement activities that enhance students' socio-emotional skills. Additionally, there is a dearth of evidence on the effectiveness of socio-emotional interventions, compounded by logistical and resource constraints. Cultural factors also hinder the integration of socio-emotional competencies into the curriculum, resulting in the timid and incipient development of these measures within the school system.

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60   (Uruguay).   Plan   Nacional   de   Convivencia   y   Participación.   Available   at: https://www.anep.edu.uy/sites/default/files/images/2023/noticias/noviembre/231123/Plan%20Nacional%20de%20Convivencia%20y%20Pa rticipacio%CC%81n.pdf. Access in: March 2024

5. ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This section outlines the challenges and opportunities countries face in implementing their learning recovery strategies. The insights are derived from KIIs, offering a systematic, organized, and categorized overview of the issues identified. This involved identifying patterns, themes, and insights across all interviews.

5.1. Challenges

The challenges highlighted in the interviews are not novel; they represent longstanding issues within the education sector that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

a) Political and Economic Factors

Political instability

Three interviewees mentioned that political instability is a challenge as it disrupts education by causing frequent changes in government and short mandates, interrupting public policies and educational reforms. Since 2020, all Latin American and Caribbean countries have had presidential elections, which could lead to shifting priorities and discontinued initiatives (See Appendix Table 3). Research suggests that stable governments are more likely to implement and maintain effective education reforms (Kahn, 1997; Nir & Sharma Kafle, 2013). Additionally, instability hampers economic growth, which can constrain education funding, especially during economic downturns (Aisen & Veiga, 2013; Büchs, 2021; Jackson et al., 2021), and often disrupts effective intersectoral coordination, complicating the development of stable educational strategies. Thus, sustainable governance and stable state policies are crucial for achieving significant educational outcomes (Rivas et al., 2020).

Education Finance

Education funding in LAC faces significant challenges, worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many countries had deprioritized education spending before the pandemic, leading to underfunding (UNESCO et al., 2022; Mariana et al., 2023; Bend et al., 2023). Although the LAC countries meet minimum spending standards outlined in the Incheon Declaration, which recommends allocating 4-6% of GDP or 15-20% of

total public spending to education, the actual expenditure per student remains very low compared to OECD countries (Mariana et al., 2023), hindering progress towards SDG4.

During the first year of the pandemic, public education budgets were cut, followed by a slow recovery in subsequent years (Murakami et al., 2021; Bend et al., 2023) (see Figure 12). Furthermore, a significant share of the additional spending was for recurrent costs, such as school meals, cash transfers, or other student support, leaving little financial resources for program and strategic development. Despite high-level calls for increased investment, education often competes with more politically attractive sectors like infrastructure. Effective and efficient spending remains challenging, requiring improved technical capacity and accountability.

Figure 12 – Latin America & Caribbean Government expenditure on education, total (% of GDP) | 2010-2022
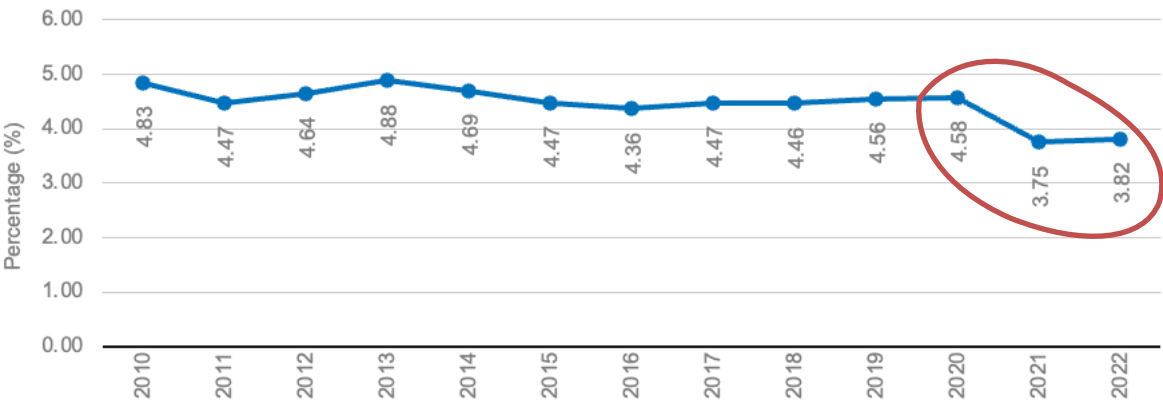
In interviews, 50% (~15) mentioned finances as one of the main problems countries face in education and highlighted a growing need for additional financial resources to develop programs that address educational challenges and even improve the quality of education.

> "I think that one critical issue is financing. It has always been. It is not because of the pandemic, but I think that in general, of course, in a region that is not rich, the macroeconomic panorama of all countries is delicate, but I feel that there is not yet a clear awareness or knowledge of the decision makers, of the ones who make the policies, of the catastrophe we are facing if the investment in the social sectors does not increase". (Interview CAF)

> *"One of the major challenges that we will always face is financial resources. If we take, for example, a simple recovery program at the micro level, like to get teachers to do extra work*

with the students to make up for the loss. You have to compensate them for that. But again, you have to have the financial resources to provide the support for the programs". *(Interview Saint Vincent and the Grenadines)*

b) Teacher Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Teacher training is critical for educational improvement but remains a significant challenge. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the need to rethink and improve teacher training, especially in technology integration. Interviewees highlighted the outdated nature of current training methods, which often focus on administrative tasks rather than essential skills like socio-emotional learning, formative assessment, and special needs education.

Many teachers feel unprepared to teach modern competencies. The 2018 OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) revealed that while socio-emotional skills are included in teacher training in many Latin American countries, teachers often feel unprepared to teach these subjects, which highlights the need for more comprehensive and relevant professional development (Jones et al., 2013; Ortiz et al., 2020b).

Professional teacher development in Latin America began in the early 2000s (Vezub, 2023). Nevertheless, countries still struggle to incorporate dynamic, transformative practices into training plans and teacher development policies.

> *"I feel that countries have a lot of difficulty thinking outside the box and incorporating more disruptive teacher development, with an aspect of innovation and, above all, focused on transforming classroom practice". (CAF Interview)*

Initial teacher training programs also need reform to adopt new pedagogical practices. Nevertheless, training tutors or trainers is one of the areas that still lacks attention. Progress has been made in instituting Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in LAC. However, it would be necessary to consolidate a body of highly qualified trainers or tutors distributed regionally and/or locally to provide good professional development with innovative practices, but if there are no good trainers, the initial training is based on outdated practices and teachings (Vezub, 2023). This is a chicken and egg paradigm.

In interviews, some countries, like Brazil, Belize, and Uruguay, mentioned that they have started restructuring their initial teacher development programs by changing the university curriculum for teaching careers. This change is necessitated as education curriculums are changing and require a shift in teaching

practices. Most of the country's interviewees have established a competency-based curriculum focusing on developing 21st-century skills. As mentioned earlier, the pandemic has prompted governments to revise and restructure their school curriculum, and these changes are echoing in the professional development careers of teachers.

During the pandemic, efforts were made to support teachers' development of digital skills. However, many teachers lack the technical competence and pedagogical skills for effective technology use in distance learning. The UNESCO 2023 GEM report emphasizes the benefits of technology in education but warns against its misuse, underscoring the need for proper teacher training (UNESCO, 2023a).

Interviews also noted the disconnect between education systems and labor market competencies, which drove curriculum reforms. Teachers' lack of capacity to implement these changes often results in the continued use of traditional methods.

> *"We still have 19th-century trained teachers. But the 19th-century trained teachers are teaching 21st-century students". (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines)*

> *"Another aspect concerns the teaching and learning approach that our educators employ. Although our curriculum is competency-based, actualizing it in the classroom remains difficult. It is a challenge for us". (Paraguay Interview)*

c) Shifting Teachers' Mindsets and Practices

Shifting teachers' practices involves transforming their underlying beliefs and mindsets, which is a significant challenge in the education system. Deep-rooted beliefs about traditional teaching methodologies, especially in subjects like reading and writing, often hinder the adoption of new strategies. Experienced educators may feel skeptical or even offended by new approaches, which can impede improvements in learning.

Interviewees from three countries emphasized the challenge of implementing training initiatives successfully, noting that these can only succeed if teachers are willing to adopt new methods. They highlighted that changing entrenched teaching perceptions is a slow process that requires careful handling and support from educational leaders.

The COVID-19 pandemic has driven change, pushing teachers to innovate and adopt alternative methods. The increasing role of technology in education is creating a systemic shift. This transition from traditional approaches to more interactive, technology-integrated systems is challenging but necessary.

> *"Before this shift, educational practices were extremely traditional, relying heavily on chalk and blackboards. This meant students were expected to remain silent and absorb the information presented by the teacher, reflecting a less interactive and more conventional approach to learning. The transition towards digital education marks a move away from these traditional methods towards a more progressive education system, enhancing interactive learning and embracing technological tools". (Curaçao interview)*

Changing beliefs requires a shift throughout the entire education system, involving policymakers, decision-makers, and the broader school community. This transformation challenges long-standing ways of thinking and necessitates a profound cultural change by involving all education community members.

d) Shortage of teachers

The teacher shortage is a significant issue impacting the quality of education. Despite the recognition of the fundamental role of teachers in national statements of commitment from the TES, this acknowledgment often does not translate into concrete actions. Factors contributing to the teacher shortage include insufficient financial incentives, poor working conditions, lack of supportive career structures, and inadequate school leadership.

According to UNESCO, the LAC region needs at least 3.2 million teachers to meet the educational goals of the 2030 Agenda. Specifically, 21 countries and territories in the region face shortages in primary teachers, while 29 face shortages in secondary teachers. This shortage is compounded by high rotation rates, with teachers leaving the profession due to various stressors, particularly in remote and conflict areas where conditions are harsh and support is minimal (UNESCO & International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2023).

In remote and rural areas, there is a significant disparity in pupil-teacher ratios and elevated turnover rates. Teachers frequently move from one school to another, disrupting continuity and stability in the classroom. Usually, in such regions, basic amenities like electricity, water, and adequate housing need to be improved, making it challenging to attract and retain teachers.

> *"A significant issue we encounter is the shortage of qualified teaching staff willing to work in these remote areas. This leads to disparities in the quality of education across different schools". (Suriname Interview)*

"It happens that nobody [teachers] wants to [work in most vulnerable contexts] because they are the most distant, the most difficult, the most challenging, and so there are no incentives for that, no incentives to go to work there". (Uruguay interview)

Additionally, there is a shortage of teachers in specific subjects, particularly those aligned with 21st-century skills and competency-based curricula. Even if the country has an adequate pupil-teacher ratio, it may still struggle to find qualified teachers in specific areas. As a result, schools often have to employ teachers who may not have the necessary expertise, reducing the quality of education.

"If we are going to build this modern post-colonial economy that we talk about, there has to be a greater emphasis on science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and STEM education. But these are the areas in which we don't have a lot of human resources, the teachers, the instructors". (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines interview)

Addressing the teacher shortage necessitates elevating the appeal of the teaching profession. This involves maintaining and increasing teachers' motivation while stimulating their professional growth and improving working conditions. The attractiveness and retention of an excellent professional involve a multifaceted approach (UNESCO & International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2023).

e) Connectivity and technology

Despite efforts, the digital divide remains a significant obstacle, particularly impacting vulnerable children and adolescents (UNICEF, 2024). The disparities in connectivity and technological infrastructure were evident during the pandemic, exacerbating educational inequalities.

A significant challenge is the lack of sufficient and reliable internet connectivity. In urban areas, about 67% of households are connected, but this drops to 23% in rural regions. Moreover, in some countries, such as Bolivia, El Salvador, Paraguay, and Peru, more than 90% of rural households do not have an internet connection (ECLAC, 2020).

The digital divide significantly hampers the effectiveness of remote learning, even in areas with adequate internet infrastructure. Challenges such as poor service quality and frequent electricity interruptions further complicate matters. Moreover, even where connectivity is available, maintaining adequate internet speed continues to be a persistent issue. For instance, platforms like Zoom, Teams, and Google Meet were widely used for proposed teaching; however, poor service quality and frequency of electricity interruptions in some areas, like Cuba, presented challenges for uninterrupted teaching sessions. Due to these obstacles,

all efforts to develop hybrid learning models have faced setbacks once schools reopened and returned to traditional classroom settings. This situation may lead to missed opportunities for integrating technologies and resources into the regular school environment.

Addressing these challenges demands a multifaceted approach that prioritizes infrastructure development, capacity building, and crafting a comprehensive digital education policy aimed at equitable technology access. Additionally, tackling the digital divide is crucial. This divide has significantly widened during the pandemic, deepening connectivity disparities between public and private educational institutions, as well as among students from various socioeconomic backgrounds. Without targeted efforts to reduce the digital divide, there is a risk of further exacerbating existing educational inequalities.

Privacy and security concerns are also critical components that require attention and have received attention after the pandemic (UNDP & World Bank, 2022). Despite the benefits, technology also poses risks, particularly regarding students' exposure to various online threats. A crucial aspect is ensuring a strategic pedagogical approach to use technology as a tool to learn. In many cases, lack of supervision during online learning sessions led to students merely signing in without active participation. Pedagogical guidance is imperative for students engaging with technology-enhanced learning environments.

> *"Another significant point is getting to the strategy because, in many instances, students were not supervised. Students tended to sign in to the online platform but were not in. You know what I mean. They were at home alone; their parents were at work; nobody was there to supervise them. They have learned very little, as they were signed on the online learning but not really paying attention or participating. And so, in many instances, teachers had to use many different strategies to ensure that they stayed signing and* participating". (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines interview)

Another important aspect is that technology should serve as a support tool for teaching and not substitute the human element of teaching. Depending solely on technology is inadequate (UNESCO, 2023a). The challenge lies in integrating the human capacity to use technology to make classes more interactive, engaging, dynamic, and with different learning and teaching formats.

5.2. Opportunities and Lessons Learned

The pandemic has undeniably harmed the education system. However, despite its challenges, it also brought valuable opportunities and lessons that could serve as catalysts for transforming education systems.

a) Education matters more than ever

The challenges of remote learning—technological limitations, lack of direct student supervision, and reduced social interaction—underscore the irreplaceable value of in-person education. These issues demonstrate that while technology can support educational processes, it cannot replace the essential human connection that underpins teaching and learning. Education in person is essential for fostering meaningful interactions, promoting social skills, and facilitating hands-on learning experiences that cannot be replicated remotely. While remote learning has advantages, such as flexibility and accessibility, it falls short in providing the immersive environment of a physical classroom. Even under the best circumstances, remote learning cannot fully replace the dynamic nature of face-to-face education. This was a lesson learning couples interviews lighted.

> "The face-to-face *education is irreplaceable" (Uruguay 1 interview)*

> *"It is sacred to keep the schools open". (Chile 2 researcher interview))*

> *"*One of the minister's firm beliefs is that schools should be the last to close, and I believe this is a sentiment we all share*". (Ecuador 1 interview)*

Despite commendable efforts from Ministry of Education officials, teachers, students, and parents, it's clear that remote learning has not fully compensated for the loss of in-person instruction. Students are recovering much of their learning loss now, reaching pre-pandemic levels of learning achievement according to some national assessments in Brazil and Chile. It has been a long recovery process, given that students are still reaching the 2019 level of achievement in 2023-2024, 4 years later.

Teachers play a crucial role in upholding the right to education, significantly impacting students' learning and well-being. Its crucial role has gained even greater importance during the pandemic. This has led to an opportunity to progress towards improved teacher policies, encompassing both initial and continuous training, career development, fair compensation, better working conditions, and increased teacher participation in educational decision-making processes.

The need for human interaction was evident not only in the learning process but also in students' socio-emotional development. Students learn important social skills such as empathy, conflict resolution, and cooperation through everyday interactions with classmates, teachers, and other school staff. They also develop friendships and support networks that can profoundly impact their mental health and overall happiness.

Keeping schools open not only supports educational continuity but also plays a crucial role in ensuring students' nutrition and safety. During periods of remote learning, there was an increased report of malnutrition and instances of physical and mental abuse. In traditional school settings, many students rely on school-provided meals as their primary source of nutrition, which helps maintain their overall health and well-being.

The pandemic also brought education to the forefront of the government's agenda, presenting an opportunity to channel more efforts towards changing education. Old educational structures were questioned and seen as outdated models that do not align with the workforce's and society's current needs. The pandemic also highlighted that countries had long neglected the need to profoundly restructure the education system, which now can no longer be overlooked.

> *"The pandemic highlighted the profound gaps in access and educational quality. This greater awareness represents an opportunity to mobilize political and social support for pro-equity reforms, such as differentiated financing, compensatory programs, and strategies focused on vulnerable populations". (World Bank interview)*

Moreover, governments acknowledge the imperative need for substantial investment in education. This also paves the way for diversifying investments, considering partners external to public authorities.

b) Education transformation

The pandemic underscored the importance of adaptability and innovation in education. This pivotal moment highlighted the need to reevaluate and transform educational systems to expand student and teacher learning opportunities.(Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Moorhouse & Wong, 2022)

During the pandemic, numerous innovations and strategies emerged at the micro-level, driven by the necessity to adapt to the context. Teachers, school principals, and subnational governments made commendable efforts to continue education despite disruptions, leading to diverse initiatives.

The COVID-19 pandemic also accelerated the rapid digital transformation of education, highlighting technology's potential. Perhaps one of the most prominent lessons learned was using technology to support learning.

> *"I think some people understand now how it is necessary for the system to change, such as the teaching style. Also, personalized individual learning can be incorporated in school".*
> *(Suriname interview)*

This shift towards digitalization has spurred pedagogical innovation and adaptation among educators, accelerating the adoption of digital tools for teaching and learning. The pandemic showed that learning could extend beyond the physical classroom, enabling flexible and personalized education. Technology, particularly AI and adaptive learning platforms, supports tailored instruction to meet diverse student needs. However, technology must be used purposefully to enhance learning.

> *"An opportunity, as well as a risk, lies in the realm of technology. It's crucial to recognize that technology can aid not only during pandemics but also in regular circumstances, enabling the creation of new and engaging experiences where technology can be a significant support. On the other hand, there is also the risk that technology is not an end in itself, it is a tool. And I don't think it can be a risk to think that children can educate themselves from home, learning on a computer and in a virtual way"* (CAF 1 interview)

Digital transformation in education management has also increased, moving away from traditional paper-based methods. For instance, while many countries and territories in the region had education management information systems in place before the pandemic, the prolonged school closures prompted the implementation of rapid solutions to address new data needs (UNESCO-OREALC, 2021b), which made MoES enhance their Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) to improve data collection and monitoring, ensuring effective responses during and after the pandemic.

c) Strength Intergovernmental Collaboration and Partnership

The pandemic has significantly expanded and strengthened intergovernmental collaboration and partnerships in the education sector. It facilitated better coordination between the education, health, social services, and labor sectors. Partnerships with organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, IDB, OEI, SUMMA, the World Bank, GPE, and the private sector in the region have provided essential technical and financial support. Despite these advancements, challenges remain in establishing a well-integrated interdisciplinary approach and sustainable partnerships. Strengthened partnerships between governments,

schools, teachers' organizations, and other stakeholders have provided valuable learning experiences. Moreover, sharing knowledge and best practices has become crucial for addressing educational challenges, especially in this unprecedented context.

The pandemic also highlighted the need for permanent intersectoral and intergovernmental coordination mechanisms. However, some challenges persist, for instance, while some countries have recognized the pandemic's opportunity to develop more integrated work with mental and physical health services in education, creating effective coordination between sectors remains a hurdle. They noted that often in education, mental and physical well-being can seem like a "no man's land," with neither health nor social services fully engaging or taking responsibility for supporting students' well-being within the school environment.

d) Recognition and Prioritization of Social-Emotional Aspects in Education

In the wake of the pandemic, there has been a notable shift toward recognizing and prioritizing social-emotional aspects in education. Previously neglected, socio-emotional aspects have now become an integral part of post-pandemic education strategies. Across the region, education systems have started to acknowledge the importance of fostering social and emotional skills in students. This recognition is evident in the efforts made by various countries to incorporate socio-emotional content into their school curriculum and learning standards, as well as the content on global citizenship and education for sustainable development (UNESCO-OREALC, 2020). Additionally, a growing emphasis has been on training teachers to effectively develop and deliver social-emotional content.

> *"Another thing that I see as an opportunity from the pandemic is the whole issue of socio-emotional skills. I think the pandemic did help and should continue to strengthen all that, not only to the social and emotional perspective of health but also to everything that UNESCO calls sustainable development education". (CAF 2 Interview)*

Post-pandemic education policies are focused on promoting holistic development. They recognize that student success extends beyond academic achievement, encompassing emotional well-being and social competence. This shift marks a significant educational step, reflecting an understanding of students' overall growth and success.

Moreover, there has been a notable cultural shift towards destigmatizing discussions around mental health, leading to increased openness in both seeking and providing support.

"There is still some tabu and stigma on mental health issues, and therefore, there is some resistance to seeking support. (…) but that is changing in Anguilla. Before, you couldn't show that you were not well in terms of mental health. People feel discriminated against, but now people are speaking out and saying, you know, I need help". (Anguilla 2 interview)

The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of addressing the psychosocial well-being of educators and school counselors for an inclusive and resilient educational recovery. It is widely acknowledged that teachers' role and interaction with students play a pivotal role in student achievement (Adnot et al., 2017; Akram, 2019; Chetty et al., 2013; Gershenson, 2016). Thus, initiatives to caring for those who care are essential to provide quality teaching.

e) Strengthening Emergency Preparedness and Response and Making Education Systems Resilience

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the urgent need for education systems to be resilient against unforeseen disruptions such as health crises, environmental disasters, and conflicts. Interviews highlighted that education systems must be prepared to adapt and recover quickly from interruptions.

"The pandemic showed that education systems need greater capacity to adapt to disruptions. This implies greater decentralization and school autonomy, curricular and pedagogical flexibility, hybrid models combining in-person and virtual learning, and socio-emotional and self-directed learning skills in students". (World Bank interview)

The urgent need for resilient education systems is undeniable, yet the response from countries has been slow in implementing necessary actions. Although the current focus is on the pandemic, it's important to acknowledge that regions have faced educational disruptions for decades, especially in areas prone to natural disasters. This challenge is particularly acute across the LAC region, with the Caribbean experiencing the most severe impacts.

"As you indicated, we had more than the pandemic. In that, immediately after the pandemic, we had an epidemic where dengue fever is concerned. The onset of the epidemic would have started around 2019. (…). So, schools were disrupted because of the dengue epidemic. I would also say, living in a hurricane zone, a hurricane belt, that annually we have the challenges of very serious flooding from heavy rains and with the sort of climatic changes that we are experiencing these days, not only are the adverse weather conditions unpredictable, but very often we move from one extreme to the other. Either severe heat in

terms of high temperatures, which we are still experiencing today, or very heavy rainfall".
(Interview Saint Vincent and the Grenadines)

LAC regions are the second most disaster-prone regions in the world after Asia and the Pacific. From 1991 to 2022, extreme events and disasters affected 190 million (See Figure 13), through 1,534 disasters between 2000 and 2022 (see Figure 14). The region not only faces significant physical exposure to hazards but also contends with a complex array of risk factors. These include climate change, densely populated cities, slow economic growth, increasing inequality and poverty, political instability, displacement, mass migration, and high levels of violence. The combination of these interconnected risks creates a vulnerable environment that severely hampers the population's ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters, so governments should take steps on these measures (UNDRR & OCHA, 2023).

Figure 13 - Latin America and the Caribbean: extreme events and disasters by sub-region | 1991-2022 (Number of events)
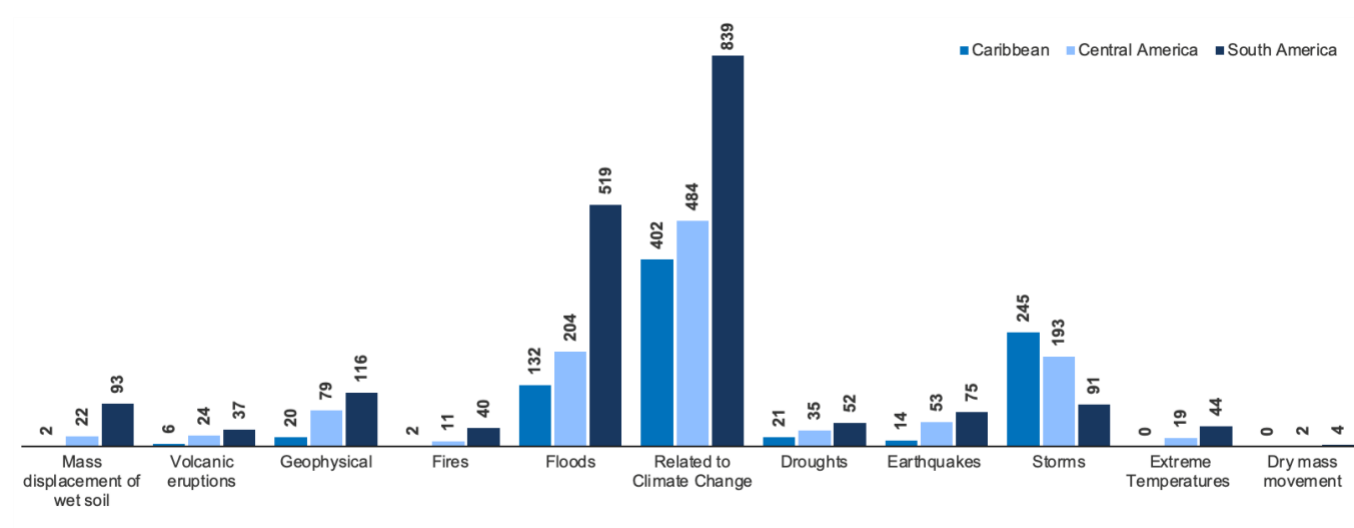
Source: ECLAC, 2024b

Figure 14 - Number of affected people by disaster by type | 2000-2022

Disaster type	Affected people
Drought	53.2M
Earthquake	15.0M
Epidemic	3.2M
Extreme temperature	5.6M
Flood	49.1M
Landslide	407.4K
Mass movement (dry)	30.2K
Storm	49.8M
Volcanic activity	3.5M
Wildfire	10.6M
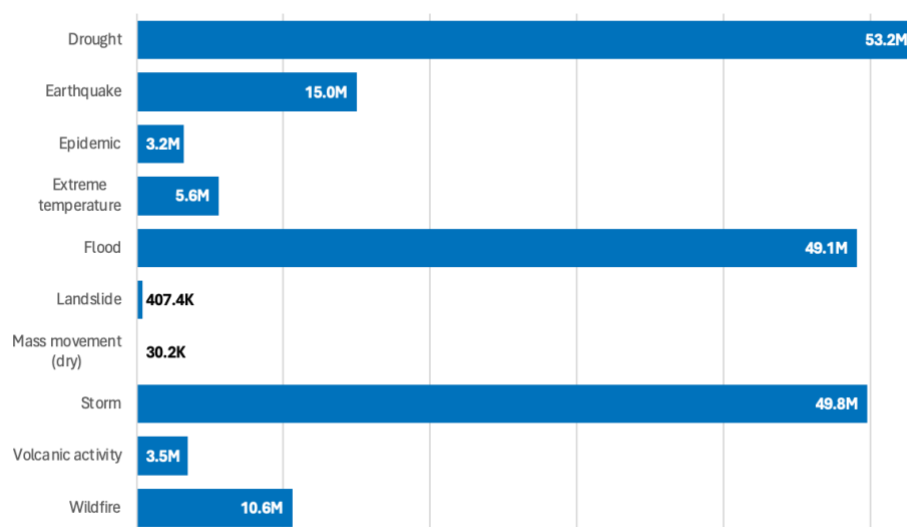
Source: UNDRR & OCHA, 2023

However, one in 3 out of 10 countries around the globe has referenced the need to strengthen the resilience of education systems to future crises and shocks in their national Statements of Commitment (UNESCO, 2022c). This lack of recognition seems to be present in the LAC region, as interviews suggested that countries might have similar problems if another pandemic happened (*USAID and CAF 2 interview).*

Although LAC countries have not extensively focused on developing preparedness and response plans, there is a recognized need to improve educational crisis preparedness and establish structured plans that can be quickly activated during emergencies. The pandemic has provided valuable experience, revealing significant learning and adaptation in managing crises, such as incorporating technology into teacher training and rethinking class structures. However, these lessons need to be systematically documented for future use (UNESCO Mexico interviews). It is also important to acknowledge the significant lack of existing literature on education in emergencies (EIE) in the Global South, especially in LAC, and the implementation of educational strategies under such conditions. This gap partly reflects the insufficient attention that countries have given to this issue, coupled with the need for greater recognition of the frequent environmental disasters that have been impacting this region for years.

Building a resilient education system requires ensuring equitable access to learning, leveraging technology for remote education, providing mental health support, training teachers and school communities, and adopting pedagogical approaches that strengthen student resilience. Community engagement and inter-sectoral cooperation are also essential to ensure safe, continuous learning and improve future crisis responses.

Countries also increasingly rely on technological investments to maintain educational continuity during disruptions, using television, radio, and online resources to support distance learning. Strengthening these areas is essential. Yet, connectivity and technological access remain significant barriers that require substantial investment and time to ensure universal connectivity. Additionally, natural disasters can disrupt the power supply and communication, as recently experienced in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, with unprecedented flooding, affecting millions of people and hundreds of thousands displaced. Therefore, preparedness must extend beyond digital education to create a genuinely resilient education system.

Long-term planning is essential for resilience. Frequent government changes disrupt continuity and undermine the development of sustained policies. Building a resilient education system requires a holistic approach.

6. CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted education systems worldwide in unprecedented ways. LAC was one of the most impacted regions, experiencing the longest school closures and the highest rates of learning poverty. Governments were ill-prepared for managing distance education, resulting in significant learning losses. In this context, education systems face heightened pressure during the learning recovery phase to become more resilient, enhance the efficiency of public spending, and address emerging learning gaps.

Overall, countries began implementing their recovery strategies relatively late, with most starting at the end of 2022 and some even in 2023. Considering that students are now regaining their pre-pandemic academic achievements three to four years after the start of the pandemic, as shown by the results of Chile and Brazil's[61] national learning assessment (students are achieving the same level of achievement in 2024 as they did in 2019), it is imperative to take appropriate actions to mitigate the long-term negative effects.

Although the mapping did not differentiate strategies specific to primary and secondary education due to a lack of clarity in policy and strategies description, observations from the interviews with IO people indicate that countries had focused more on strategies focused for primary education since challenges in primary education naturally cascade into secondary education. Therefore, many countries focus their efforts on fundamental learning for early and primary education.

The strategies adopted by LAC countries for learning recovery have been diverse and tailored to each country's unique capabilities, contexts, challenges, and structures. Some countries have implemented more institutionalized and comprehensive strategies, while others have focused on immediate recovery measures to address urgent needs through specific initiatives. Additionally, some countries leveraged already existing policies, complementing them with other learning recovery actions.

Not all programs were given the same level of priority across countries, leading to significant differences in commitment. Key gaps were identified in strategies for reintegrating and retaining at-risk students, providing socioemotional support, and addressing the needs of vulnerable groups. These differences reflect varying governmental perspectives on the pandemic's impact on education. When a government explicitly

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prioritizes certain issues, it signals urgency and encourages community action. In contrast, embedding recovery efforts within existing educational frameworks may suggest that learning loss is not seen as a critical issue requiring special intervention. Meanwhile, dedicated policies or programs for learning recovery often indicate a stronger resource commitment. However, interviews and program analyses reveal that even when education ministers recognize the importance of learning recovery, structural and financial constraints often limit their ability to take decisive action.

Looking at each RAPID measure, observe that for Reach, EWS has been implemented in about 15 countries to monitor educational trajectories and prevent dropouts, with an increase in the number of countries implementing these measures after the pandemic. However, strategies to prevent children at risk of dropping out and to reintegrate these students back into the education system remain insufficient. For Assess, 13 LAC countries have implemented post-pandemic learning assessments with varying scopes and levels. Comprehensive assessments in countries like Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Peru have provided a broader picture of the learning achievements after the pandemic, while other countries focused on some specific grades. For Prioritize, diverse strategies were implemented to support students in recovering from the learning loss. Some countries implemented programs at the national level, while others initiated specific strategies on a smaller scale. According to UNICEF, 31 countries have implemented some form of strategy, and from the mapping, it was identified that 14 countries have implemented structured programs. Also, many countries have made curriculum adjustments to prioritize fundamental skills and digital competencies. This was one of the opportunities brought by the pandemic, resulting in changes in curriculum structures by including new subjects, a more interdisciplinary approach that fosters holistic development, and changes in pedagogical methods. For Increase, countries recognized that teacher training programs are crucial for improving teaching practices. However, mapping all the initiatives to improve pedagogical instruction in the context of learning recovery was challenging due to their diversity across countries. Teacher training was offered by various organizations, including governments, universities, NGOs, the private sector, and international organizations, with different timelines, styles, lengths, and topics. In some cases, teacher training was already part of the learning recovery plan. Also, some countries already have institutionalized continuing professional development for teachers and specific institutes or organizations dedicated to the function of Continuing Teacher Education. For Develop, some countries have developed and integrated socio-emotional aspects into education by providing socio-emotional support for students and incorporating these competencies into their curricula. However, developing this competence is challenging, as many teachers lack the necessary competence to develop these skills in students. Additionally, WASH facilities and school feeding programs were provided.

Furthermore, the analysis of educational recovery strategies in LAC highlights both challenges and opportunities. The challenges highlighted in the interviews are longstanding issues within the education sector exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. These included political and economic instability, insufficient education finance, the need to improve teacher continuing professional development (CPD) and shifting teachers' mindsets and practices. Additionally, teacher shortages, poor connectivity, and technology were significant hurdles.

Several opportunities and lessons learned were also highlighted. The first and most evident was the recognition of the importance of in-person education. The challenges posed by remote learning highlight the irreplaceable value of in-person education. This brought education to the forefront of the government's agenda, presenting an opportunity to channel more efforts toward changing education. It also highlighted the potential for transformative changes in education by integrating technology into education, restructuring education systems, and changing educational practices.

Furthermore, the pandemic has expanded and strengthened intergovernmental collaboration and partnerships in the education sector. Also, there has been a notable shift in the recognition and prioritization of social-emotional aspects in education. Education systems have started to acknowledge the importance of fostering social and emotional skills in students, incorporating these components into the curriculum. This shift marks a significant step in promoting holistic development. Finally, one key lesson learned from the pandemic was the gaps in preparedness. Building a resilient education system requires equitable access to learning, leveraging technology, and comprehensive mental health support alongside community engagement and inter-sectoral cooperation. These insights can guide future efforts to build more robust and responsive educational systems.

This research aimed to contribute to educational policy by mapping the various actions taken across Latin American and Caribbean countries. Future studies can build on this foundation by examining the effectiveness of the most promising programs, particularly those showing potential to yield positive educational outcomes.

7. POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Based on the analysis, these are the main recommendations for governments to strengthen learning recovery policies and initiatives and improve the quality of education:

1. **Long-term Planning and Institutional Stability:** Implement long-term education policies that transcend political changes and foster stable governance structures to ensure continuity in educational reforms and investments.

2. **Sustainable education Funding and allocation:** Ensure adequate and sustained funding to support education recovery programs and education transformation. Secure long-term financing strategies, such as tax reforms and education finance laws, to ensure sustained funding for education. Ensure efficient and equitable allocation of educational resources to maximize value for money.

1. **Promote Digital Connectivity and Technology Integration:** Invest in infrastructure to ensure reliable internet connectivity, especially in rural and underserved areas. Provide training for teachers on the pedagogical use of technology to enhance remote and hybrid learning. Develop comprehensive digital education policies to bridge the digital divide and ensure equitable access to technology.

2. **Teacher Training**: Update and modernize teacher training programs to include essential skills such as socio-emotional learning, formative assessment, and the use of technology. Establish a body of highly qualified trainers or tutors to provide innovative and effective professional development. Restructure initial teacher development programs to align with new educational methods and curriculum changes and improve the teaching career.

3. **Comprehensive Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) and Early Warning Systems (EWS):** Develop and enhance EMIS and EWS to track students' trajectories and identify and support at-risk students. Improve EMIS to ensure robust data collection and monitoring processes. Integrate strategies for reintegrating and retaining at-risk students within the education system.

4. **Socio-Emotional Learning and Well-Being:** Integrate socio-emotional learning components into the school curriculum to foster holistic development. Provide ongoing training for teachers to effectively deliver socio-emotional education. Establish mental health support systems for students

and educators. Ensure all schools have adequate WASH facilities to promote health and hygiene. Strengthen and institutionalize the school feeding program.

5. **Strengthen Intergovernmental Collaboration and Partnerships**: Foster collaboration between education, health, social services, and labor sectors to create integrated solutions for educational challenges. Leverage partnerships with international organizations, the private sector, and NGOs to provide technical and financial support. Sharing best practices among countries and systematizing them.

6. **Build Resilient Education Systems:** Develop comprehensive emergency preparedness and response plans to ensure education continuity during crises. Promote flexible learning models that can adapt to various disruptions. Engage communities and foster inter-sectoral cooperation to build resilient and inclusive education systems.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1 – Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) list

Appendix Table 1 - Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) list

KII Category	Country/IO	Subregion	Role	Gender
Country	Anguilla	Caribbean	Education Officer, Multi-Professional Support Services	Female
Country	Anguilla	Caribbean	Community Services Planner	Female
Country	Belize	Caribbean	Head of the Teacher Support Team MoE 501academy Coordinator	1 Female 1 Male
Country	Chile	Latin America	Coordinator of the Education Reactivation Plan	Male
Country	Curaçao	Caribbean	Director of the Education and Science Sector at the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture & Sport	Male
Country	Dominican Republic	Caribbean	Vice Minister of Technical Pedagogical Services	Female
Country	Ecuador	Latin America	National Directorate of Technologies for Education	Female
Country	Ecuador	Latin America	National Directorate of Early and Basic Education	Male
Country	Guatemala	Central America	Technical Vice Minister of Education	Male
Country	Guyana	Caribbean	Director of the National Centre for Educational Resource Development (NCERD)	Female
Country	Nicaragua	Central America	General Director of Educational Planning and Programming Director of Educational Programming General Director of Teacher Training	3 Female
Country	Panamá	Central America	Deputy Director Technical Teaching.	Female
Country	Paraguay	Latin America	General Director, National Institute for Educational Evaluation	Female
Country	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Caribbean	Ministry of Education and National Reconciliation	Male

KII Category	Country/IO	Subregion	Role	Gender
Country	Suriname	Caribbean	Minister of Education, Science and Culture Deputy Director of Education	1 Male 1 Female
Country	Uruguay	Latin America	Chief coordinator of Teacher Education Program	Female
Country	Uruguay	Latin America	Coordinator of the educational center management unit of the ANEP CEIBAL Teacher Professional Development Manager	2 Male
Country	Venezuela	Latin America	Director of Management Evaluation and Transformation	Male
IO	CAF	Regional	Senior Executive of Social Development Projects	Female
IO	CAF	Regional	Education Specialist - Social and Human Development Management	Female
IO	UNESCO Brazil	Latin America	Programme Coordinator	Female
IO	UNESCO Havana	Caribbean	Programme Assistant	Male
IO	UNESCO Ecuador	Latin America	National Programme Officer	Male
IO	UNESCO Mexico	Central America	National Education Officer	Female
IO	UNESCO Peru	Latin America	National Professional Officer	Male
IO	UNICEF LACRO	Regional	Education Officer	Female
IO	USAID	Regional	Team Lead, Education and Youth	Male
IO	World Bank	Regional	Senior Economist	Male
Research	Chile	Latin America	Researcher at Pontifical Catholic University of Chile	Female
Research	Chile	Latin America	Associate Researcher at CIAE in University of Chile	Male

Appendix 2 - Informed Consent and Interview Script

Interviewees were provided with the informed consent form and interview guides in English and Spanish.

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE INTERVIEW ON EDUCATION RECOVERY STRATEGIES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Research for the Globed Master's Thesis Program

You have been invited to participate in an interview as part of data collection for research on mapping educational recovery and transformation strategies in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Before agreeing to participate, please read the information below.

Research Information:

- **Purpose:** The interview aims to gather information on education recovery strategies in the Latin America and Caribbean region.
- **Procedures**: A structured interview will be conducted to gain information on strategies, policies, and/or programs for learning recovery and acceleration, as well as other related topics such as assessment, diagnosis, learning monitoring for recovery, early warning system functioning, and well-being and socio-emotional actions. The interviewer will provide a script with key points to be addressed in the interview to guide the conversation and optimize participants' time.
- **Recording:** The interview will be recorded in audio/video format. The recording will be made to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the data collected during the interview. The recording will be used solely for research purposes and will not be shared with third parties without prior consent.
- **Duration:** The interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes and will be conducted online.
- **Risks:** The main risk of this interview is emotional discomfort that may arise when discussing past experiences or sensitive topics.
- **Confidentiality:** The information provided during the interview will be treated confidentially and used only for research purposes. All data will be anonymized, and no personal information will be disclosed without my consent.
- **Right to withdraw:** You have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time without any negative consequences.
- **Benefits:** The information collected can contribute to the dissemination of good practices and improve preparation and response to future educational crises in the region. The final work will be disseminated once the thesis is approved by the program.
- **Participation:** The participation in this interview is voluntary.
- **Questions:** If you have any questions or encounter any technical issues accessing the interview, please contact michelleferreirabrito@yahoo.com.br and m.ferreira-brito@unesco.org

Participant's Name:
Participant's Signature:
Date:
Thank you!

Informed Consent

I have had the opportunity to ask all questions about this interview, which have been answered. By selecting "Yes," I give my informed consent to participate in the interview.

Yes ☐
No ☐

PS: If the consent is not provided before the interview date, the consent may be obtained at the beginning of the interview through the verbal consent of the interviewee, which will be recorded in the audio/video recording.

INTERVIEW SCRIPT <u>FOR COUNTRIES</u> ON EDUCATION RECOVERY STRATEGIES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Research for the Globed Master's Thesis Program

Thank you very much for participating in the interview.

The interview aims to gather information on education recovery strategies in the Latin America and Caribbean region. It seeks to identify specific strategies that are currently being implemented, as well as to detail specific aspects of their execution, such as coverage, key actors involved, the institutional nature of the strategy, financing, and measures targeting the most vulnerable population.

The interviews will be divided into 3 blocks:

1. The first part aims to identify 4 types of policy strategies or recovery programs, and actions for educational transformation, such as:

    *   **Strategies to ensure coverage and permanence**, such as systems for identifying students outside the education system and at risk of dropping out, as well as associated strategies.

    *   Implementation of **learning assessments to measure post-pandemic learning loss** and how these results have been used.

    *   **Prioritization of fundamental learning** and whether there are programs targeting vulnerable groups.

    *   Actions for the development of **health and psychosocial well-being**.

    *   Actions are being taken for **educational transformation**

2. The second part aims to **identify the challenges** that the country faces for recovery and educational transformation:

    *   Identify the **factors** related to the challenges of carrying out learning recovery and educational transformation.

    *   **What needs to be done** for accelerated educational recovery and transformation?

3. The third part aims to identify opportunities and lessons learned for future educational crises:

    *   **Opportunities** the pandemic has brought to transform education and advance towards SDG 4, And how are these opportunities being used in the post-pandemic period

    *   **Lessons that can be drawn** from the pandemic and post-pandemic periods to prepare the country for future educational crises better.

Thank you!

If possible, the interviewer will welcome additional materials (documents, links) to facilitate the understanding of the elements discussed during the interview.

INTERVIEW SCRIPT <u>FOR IOs ON EDUCATION</u> RECOVERY STRATEGIES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Research for the Globed Master's Thesis Program

Thank you very much for participating in the interview.

The interview aims to gather information on education recovery strategies in the Latin America and Caribbean region.

The interviews will be divided into 3 blocks:

1. The first part aims to <u>obtain information on how the organization has supported countries </u>in their educational recovery process, as well as to understand <u>your perspective on countries' commitment to recovery</u>.

   - What **kind of support** does the organization provide to countries in their educational recovery actions?

   - What is your perception of **countries' commitment** to educational recovery?

2. The second part aims to <u>identify the challenges</u> that countries face for recovery and educational transformation:

   - What challenges are the countries facing in carrying out learning recovery and educational transformation actions?

3. The third part aims to <u>identify opportunities and lessons learned</u> for future educational crises:

   - What opportunities has the pandemic created to transform education and advance towards SDG 4? And how are these opportunities being utilized in the post-pandemic period?

   - What lessons have been learned from the pandemic and the post-pandemic period that could better prepare the country to face future educational crises?

Thank you!

If you consider it necessary, the interviewer would appreciate the availability of additional materials (documents, links) to facilitate understanding of the elements discussed during the interview.

Appendix 3 - Overview of Rapid Mapped Policies by Country

RAPID mapping analysis by country, based on the "Tracking Progress on Foundational Learning—Findings from the RAPID 2023 Analysis[62]" from UNICEF, along with contributions from research and interviews.

Appendix Table 2 - Overview of Rapid Mapped Policies by Country

No Data	No strategy in place	Have some strategy in place or are still developing	Good Strategy in place to address the problem	Very Good Strategies in place with well design program	Exemplary Strategies in place with a Comprehensive approach

Name	Region	Reach	Assess	Prioritize	Increased	Develop
Anguilla	Caribbean	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Some initiatives of the Let's REAP program (2021)	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Teacher training and mental health awareness
Antigua and Barbuda	Caribbean	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Some initiatives of the Let's REAP program (2021)	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track
Argentina	South America	Incipient development in some provinces in 2023	National tests Learn 2021, 2022 and 2023 ERCE Pos-pandemic 2023	National Back to School Program (2022) One hour more	Institutes or organizations dedicated to Continuing Teacher Education	Incorporation of socio-emotional skills in educational and curricular regulatory frameworks
Bahamas	Caribbean	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Some initiatives of the Let's REAP program (2021)	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track

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62 Foundational Learning Action Tracker 2023: RAPID status. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/reports/tracking-progress-foundational-learning-2023. Access in: March 2024

Name	Region	Reach	Assess	Prioritize	Increased	Develop
Barbados	Caribbean	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Some initiatives of the Let's REAP program (2021)	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track
Belize	Central America	There is an Early Warning System	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Let's Catch Up Summer Camp (2021)	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Incorporation of socio-emotional skills in educational and curricular regulatory frameworks
Bolivia	South America	No strategy in place	National diagnostic, ERCE Pos-pandemic and TOFAS in 2023	Nacional Plan for education (2022)	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track
Brazil	South America	2.023 municipalities (36.33%) participated in the School Active Search (SAS)	Basic Education Assessment (SAEB) 2021 and 2023	National Literacy Child (2023)	States Teacher continue training in place	Incorporation of socio-emotional skills in educational and curricular regulatory frameworks
Chile	South America	Early Alert System against school dropouts	Education Quality Measurement System (SIMCE) 2023 Comprehensive Learning Diagnosis (DIA)	Educational Reactivation Plan (2022)	Institutes or organizations dedicated to Continuing Teacher Education	Coexistence and Mental Health & Incorporation of socio-emotional skills in educational and curricular regulatory frameworks
Colombia	South America	Information System for the Monitoring, Prevention and Analysis of School Dropout - SIMPADE	Prueba Saber 2023	Long live school (2023)	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track
Costa Rica	Central America	Education's Unit for Permanence, Reintegration, and Educational Success	Provided technical guidelines for the development of written tests for teachers.	Academic Leveling Plan (2022)	Institutes or organizations dedicated to Continuing Teacher Education	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track

Name	Region	Reach	Assess	Prioritize	Increased	Develop
Cuba	Caribbean	There is a decentralized warning systems in place	Implemented diagnostic evaluations	Implemented curriculum adjustment	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track
Curaçao	Caribbean	No strategy in place	Implemented diagnostic evaluations	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track
Dominica	Caribbean	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Some initiatives of the Let's REAP program (2021)	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track
Dominican Republic	Caribbean	Still developing EWS	Diagnostic evaluations sample based 2022 National tests secondary school 2023	CON BASE programme (2022)	Institutes or organizations dedicated to Continuing Teacher Education	Counselors or psychologists in schools
Ecuador	South America	Still developing EWS	Conducted 10 diagnostic evaluations 2021 Being a Student examen - 2024-2024	National Plan Learning on Time (2021)	Teacher training embedded in the national Plan	Learning on Time Socio-emotional Competence in the curriculum & Incorporation of socio-emotional skills in educational and curricular regulatory frameworks
El Salvador	Central America	Information System for the Management of Education in El Salvador (SIGES)	Diagnostic tests "Knowing My Achievements" 2021,	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Institutes or organizations dedicated to Continuing Teacher Education	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track
Grenada	Caribbean	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Some initiatives of the Let's REAP program (2021)	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track
Guatemala	Central America	National Strategy for Successful Transition: ENTRE	Implemented diagnostic evaluations	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Delivery school workshops

Name	Region	Reach	Assess	Prioritize	Increased	Develop
Guyana	South America	School Support Unit	National Grade Six Assessment (NGSA)	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track
Haiti	Caribbean	No strategy in place	No data	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	No data	No data
Honduras	Central America	Early Warning and Response System	Implemented diagnostic evaluations	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track
Jamaica	Caribbean	Yard to Yard Find the Child program	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Some initiatives of the Let's REAP program (2021)	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track
Mexico	Central America	SisAT: Early Warning System	The Diagnostic Assessment for Basic Education Students	National Strategy to Promote Complete Continuous Educational Trajectories and Excellence (2022)	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Incorporation of socio-emotional skills in educational and curricular regulatory frameworks
Nicaragua	Central America	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Implemented diagnostic evaluations	Implemented curriculum adjustment	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track
Panama	Central America	There is the school prevention and retention network however are not yet fully functional	ERCE Pos-pandemic 2023	Implemented curriculum adjustment	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track
Paraguay	South America	No strategy	National Assessment of Academic Achievement of Essential Contents 2023 Diagnostic assessment "let's know more" 2024	National Program for Reading, Writing, and Oral Literacy (2023)	Teacher training embedded in the National Program	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track
Peru	South America	School Alert system	Sample based evaluations in 2022 National Assessment of Learning Achievements 2023 Diagnostic tests "Knowing My Achievements" 2021,	Normative for leveling and educational recovery	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Incorporation of socio-emotional skills in educational and curricular regulatory frameworks

Name	Region	Reach	Assess	Prioritize	Increased	Develop
Saint Kitts and Nevis	Caribbean	No data	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Some initiatives of the Let's REAP program (2021)	No data	No data
Saint Lucia	Caribbean	No data	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Some initiatives of the Let's REAP program (2021)	No data	No data
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Caribbean	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Some initiatives of the Let's REAP program (2021)	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track
Suriname	South America	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	H Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Teacher training and mental health awareness
Trinidad and Tobago	Caribbean	No data	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Some initiatives of the Let's REAP program (2021)	No data	No data
Uruguay	South America	Protection System for Educational Trajectories	Learning Evaluation "Aristas" 2020-2022 Diagnostic Learning Evaluation 2022	The pandemic marginally affected education	Institutes or organizations dedicated to Continuing Teacher Education	National Plan for Coexistence and Participation Socio-emotional Competence in the curriculum
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	South America	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Implemented diagnostic evaluations	Bicentennial Plan 2021 – 2022 Safe and Progressive Start of Classes. (2021)	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track	Have some strategy in place according to RAPID Track

Source: UNICEF, 2023 adapted

Appendix 4 - LAC Presidential, Legislative. and regional Election | 2020-2024

Appendix Table 3 - LAC Presidential, Legislative. and regional Election | 2020-2024

2020		
Presidential elections	**Legislative elections**	**State and/or local elections**
Belize (Nov)		Bolivia (Mar)
Dominican Republic (July)		Uruguay (Sept)
Guyana (Mar)		Brazil (Nov)
Jamaica (Sept)		Argentina (Nov)
St. Vincent and the Grenadines (Nov)		
Suriname (May)		
Trinidad and Tobago (Aug)		
Anguilla		
Saint Kitts and Nevis		
2021		
Presidential elections	Legislative elections	State and/or local elections
Ecuador (Feb-Apr)	Ecuador (Feb)	El Salvador (Feb)
Perú (Abr-jun)	El Salvador (Feb)	Bolivia (Mar-Apr)
Chile (Nov-Dez)	Perú (Apr)	Chile (May)
Nicaragua (Nov)	México (Jun)	México (Jun)
Honduras (Nov)	Argentina (Oct)	Paraguay (Oct)
Turks and Caicos Islands (Feb)	Nicaraguan (Nov)	Venezuela
Bahamas (Sep)	Chile (Nov)	Colombia (Apr)
St. Lucia (July)	Honduras (Nov)	Peru (Oct)
Barbados (Dec)	Trinidad and Tobago (Dec)	
2022		
Presidential elections	Legislative elections	State and/or local elections
Costa Rica (Feb-Apr)	Costa Rica (Feb)	
Colombia (May-Jun)	Colombia (Mar)	
Brazil (Oct)	Brazil (Oct)	
Dominica (Dec)	Bahamas (Jan)	
Grenada (Jun)	Barbados (Jan)	
St. Kitts and Nevis (Aug)		
2023		
Presidential elections	Legislative elections	State and/or local elections
Paraguay (Apr)	Paraguay (Apr)	
Guatemala (Jun-Aug)	Guatemala (Jun)	
Argentina (Oct-Nov)	Argentina (Oct)	
Antigua and Barbuda (Jan)		
Cuba (Apr)		
2024		
Presidential elections	Legislative elections	State and/or local elections
El Salvador (Feb)	El Salvador (Feb)	
México (Jun)	México (Jun)	
Panamá (May)	Panamá (May)	
República Dominicana (July)	República Dominicana (July)	
Uruguay (Oct-Nov)	Uruguay (Oct)	
Venezuela (Dez)		

Source: Davis-Castro, 2024; UNICEF ECA, 2020, 2021; Zovatto, 2021