

LATIN AMERICA

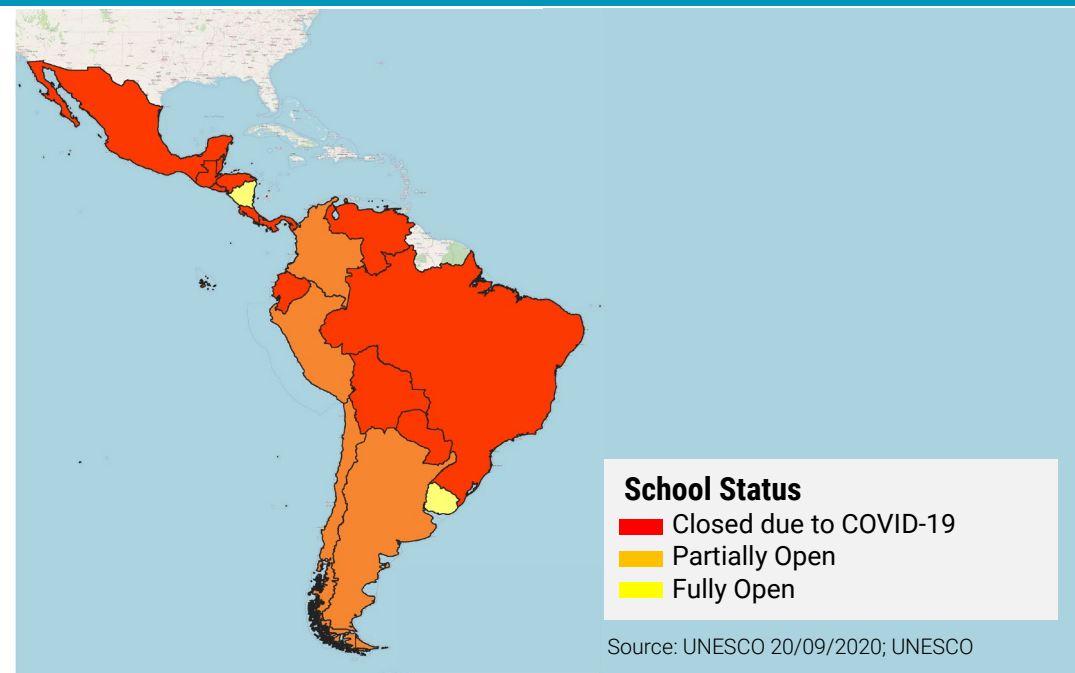
Impact of COVID-19 on education

As at 29 October 2020, Latin America¹ had reported close to 10.9 million cases of COVID-19 and close to 393,000 deaths. The region accounts for less than one tenth of the world’s population, yet has one third of the recorded deaths from COVID-19 (Johns Hopkins 29/10/2020).

Most schools in the region have remained closed since initial lockdown in March. Only two countries, Nicaragua and Uruguay, have fully reopened schools, while Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Colombia have partially reopened schools. Schools in the remaining 12 countries of Central and Southern America remain closed, the majority through the end of 2020 or early 2021 (UNICEF 30/09/2020). As at 30 September, approximately **98% of more than 131 million school-aged children in Latin America were not receiving face-to-face education** (UNICEF 30/09/2020).

Prior to the onset of the pandemic, 12 million children were already out of school, and education in the region was characterised by high dropout rates, repetition rates, and inadequate learning levels. While school closures can help reduce the spread of COVID-19, the impacts can be far-reaching:

- Digital divide is making it hard for poor households to participate in distance learning; **school closures will further deepen inequalities in the region.**
- As a result of school closures, there is a likelihood of: **increased dropout rates; increased protection concerns**, including teenage pregnancies; increased child labour and recruitment to armed gangs; **malnutrition** resulting from absence of school feeding programmes; and increased poverty due to the economic shock of COVID-19.
- Lessons learned from humanitarian situations show that **the longer children remain out of school, the higher the risk they may never return.** This is especially true for the most vulnerable children such as migrants, refugees, indigenous populations, those with disabilities, and those living in poverty (UNICEF 16/05/2020).
- In the long term, school closures result in lost learning, which could ultimately lead to **income reductions, increased poverty levels, and a further divide between rich and poor.**



About this report

This thematic report is part of the ACAPS Education and COVID-19 series, which provides analysis on the impact that the pandemic has had on education around the world.

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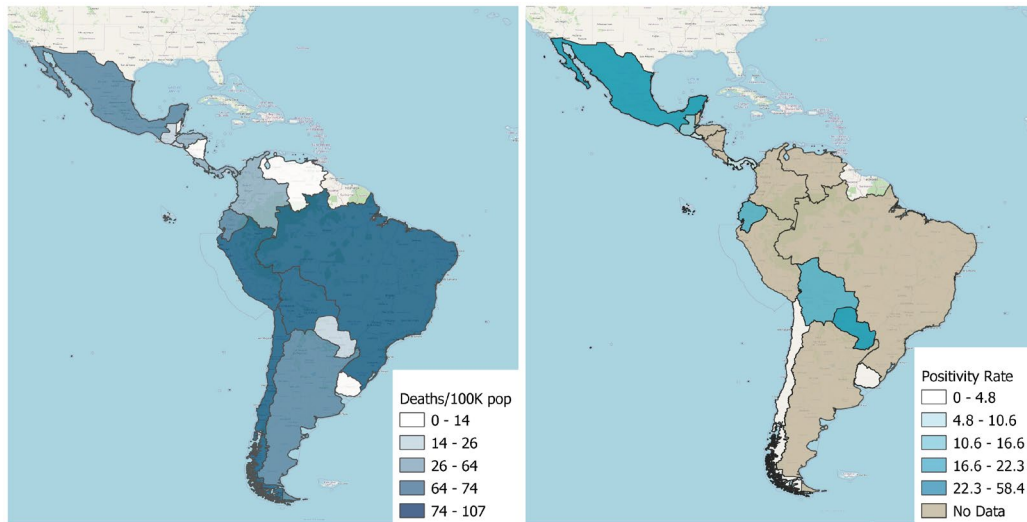
¹ In this report Latin America refers to countries in Central and Southern America (Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela).

COVID-19 and education in Latin America

The impact of COVID-19 in Latin America

Several Latin American countries have reported some of the highest numbers of absolute and per capita cases of COVID-19 worldwide. Brazil has the world's third highest total number of reported cases (after the United States and India), with a total of 5.4 million reported cases, and the second highest total number of deaths, with more than 158,000 deaths as at 29 October (Johns Hopkins 29/10/2020). With limited and unequal health care systems, many countries in the region are not prepared to handle a health crisis of this magnitude. Access to quality health care and information is of particular concern in rural and remote areas, particularly affecting indigenous people, refugees, and migrants (UN 07/2020).

Spread of COVID-19 in the region: As at 29 October, Latin America had recorded just under 10.9 million cases of COVID-19, and close to 393,000 deaths. The countries in the region with the most reported cases are *Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, Peru,* and *Chile* (Johns Hopkins 27/10/2020).



Source: Johns Hopkins 29/10/2020, Our World in Data, accessed 28/10/2020

Testing: There is a lack of data on testing in the region, and in those countries that are reporting on testing, many have performed significantly fewer tests per 1,000 people compared to other countries in the world (Our World in Data 16/10/2020). Of the countries in the region where testing data is available, *Chile* has the highest rates of testing relative to its population, with 218.1 tests per 1,000 people as at 27 October, followed

by *Panama* with 145.5. Countries with lower testing levels are Mexico, with 15.3 tests per 1,000, and Peru with 19.1 (Our World in Data, accessed 28/10/2020). Positivity rates are also high in the region, which indicates that testing is not being performed widely enough to identify all cases (Johns Hopkins 10/08/2020). According to WHO, an epidemic is under control in a country if the positivity rate is below 5% (WHO 12/05/2020). In early October, it was calculated based on Ministry of Health data, that Argentina had a positivity rate of 60% (Reuters 05/10/2020) – this is the latest available information. In late October, high positivity rates were reported in Mexico (27.9%), Paraguay (25.1%), Ecuador (19.9%), and Guatemala (15.4%). The lowest positivity rates reported in the region are in Uruguay (1.5%) and Chile (4.6%) (Our World in Data, accessed 28/10/2020).

Delivery of education during Covid-19

School closures: The majority of countries in Latin America follow the academic calendar of the southern hemisphere, which starts between January and March, and normally runs until November or December. A few exceptions are *Mexico* and *Belize*, which both follow the northern hemisphere by starting their year in August or September and ending it in June or July (Infoplease 20/05/2020). To date, children and young people have been spared the worst health impacts of COVID-19. However, education has been interrupted across Latin America (UN 07/2020). On 11 March, Paraguay was the first country in the region to close schools due to COVID-19, and by 23 March, all schools in Central and South America were fully closed (UNESCO accessed on 12/10/2020). The majority of countries have upheld full closure, with the exception of *Nicaragua*, which opened its schools again in April (CNN 20/04/2020). As at late October, 12 out of 18 countries in Latin America still had all their schools closed for in-person learning. Only two countries, *Nicaragua* and *Uruguay*, had opened their schools, while schools in *Argentina, Brazil, Chile,* and *Colombia* were partially opened. There are a total of 131.7 million students across these countries, and it has been estimated that 98% of these students were not receiving face-to-face learning as at 30 September (UNICEF 30/09/2020; UNESCO 28/10/2020).

Distance learning: The countries in the region where schools are closed – or only partially open – are all providing some extent of remote learning, either online or via television, radio, WhatsApp, or other means. However, these remote learning mechanisms are not guaranteed throughout the region, and not everyone has access to them. Vulnerable populations are often the ones who have the least access and are thus the most affected, such as refugees, migrants, indigenous people, those with disabilities, and low-income households (UNICEF 23/03/2020). The use of existing radio and television infrastructure has been utilised by many governments across the region

to ensure access for children who do not have internet access. In *Panama*, public TV and radio stations have been used for online learning and free internet access was offered for educational platforms (Americas Quarterly 05/05/2020). In other countries, including *Costa Rica* and *Chile*, the government has prepared hard copies of resources for families without internet access. **Only 50% of the population of Latin America has smartphone access. Countries including *El Salvador* and *Nicaragua* have also set up national call centres and WhatsApp channels** to deliver materials and provide support to parents (World Economic Forum 15/09/2020; Americas Quarterly 05/05/2020). Ahead of the pandemic, *Uruguay* had been guaranteeing connectivity and access to digital tools for the educational community, and had launched an initiative that provided all students in public schools with a laptop. *Mexico* took advantage of a multigrade educational television programme to ensure broader access to education (BBC 24/04/2020). In *Venezuela*, some teachers are posting assignments on physical boards outside of classrooms so that students without other means of communication can receive work (Caracas Chronicles 13/10/2020).

Barriers to the reopening of schools

Limited resources: The pandemic will likely result in increased health resource requirements, which could negatively impact the availability of funds for the education sector. There is also an expected need for additional resources when reopening schools, in order to ensure health and safety protocols linked to COVID-19 are put in place, to strengthen distance learning strategies, to hire new teachers, and to deal with the impact that COVID-19 could have on teachers' health. Furthermore, there is an expected increase in pressure on the public school system as financial constraints could lead parents to send their children to public rather than private schools (UNDP 08/2020).

Availability of teachers: It is uncertain what the availability of teachers will be if schools reopen. Many teachers have expressed concerns about returning to in-person teaching, and there will also be an additional need for teachers to ensure that social distancing guidelines are maintained. A significant number of teachers are above 60 years old or have underlying health issues and thus in the higher risk category for COVID-19. There is also opposition from teachers unions (UNDP 08/2020). For instance in Argentina, Ademys, the largest union, called for a strike in mid-October against the reopening of schools (France24 13/10/2020). Reluctance to return could be linked to worries about the ability of governments to open schools safely within the reopening guidelines due to lack of financial resources to provide adequate space for social distancing, WASH requirements, and ventilation.

COVID-19 safety in schools: Across Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), 20% of schools do not have any handwashing facilities and 20% do not have any water services at all (UNICEF and WHO 18/05/2020). Crowded classrooms are prevalent across the region (Fiszbein and Stanton 06/2018), which can create further problems when attempting to reopen schools within social distancing guidelines. The problem would be further exacerbated if public school enrolment were to increase. There will also be challenges for the schools in terms of maintaining safe ventilation and ensuring that children are taught the correct and safe use of masks when these are required.

Aggravating factors

Conflict, violence, and displacement in the region

Prior to the start of the pandemic, displacement crises and social tensions were apparent in many countries across the region. *Venezuela* and *Nicaragua* are experiencing major political crises; insurgent groups are fighting for territorial control in *Colombia*; cartel violence is on the rise in *Mexico*; and gang activity stemming from drug violence is widespread, resulting in instability across *Brazil*, *El Salvador*, *Honduras*, and *Mexico* (ACLEDE 03/2020). The continued socioeconomic and political crisis in *Venezuela* has resulted in migration and displacement, the collapse of services, and a deterioration in living conditions (IOM, accessed 28/10/2020; UNOCHA 12/10/2020).

Inadequate education systems prior to COVID-19

Before the start of COVID-19, more than 12 million children in LAC were out of school (UNICEF 18/05/2020).

Enrolment: There has been an overall increase in enrolment across the region since the early 2000s, with expansion of access to education across all levels, countries, and socioeconomic groups. Primary education has become close to universal, and both pre-primary and secondary education levels have seen significant increases (Fiszbein and Stanton 06/2018). Furthermore, university attendance rates doubled to 43% between 2000 and 2013 for ages 18 to 24 – a faster expansion than anywhere else in the world (The Economist 12/09/2020). However, there are large discrepancies between countries in the region, and there are areas where participation in formal education remains very low. In *Argentina*, *Costa Rica*, and *Mexico*, only 1% of primary school aged children are not enrolled in school, compared to *Honduras* (17%), *Paraguay* (11%), and *Guatemala* (10%) (World Bank 06/11/2019). The situation in *Venezuela* is of particular concern. After five years of no reporting, enrolment numbers were finally released earlier this year, which showed a total enrolment among school-aged children of 32% – a substantial

drop from the 51% reported in 2006. The major reasons for this reduction are dropouts and migration (infobae 20/02/2020). The percentage of children and adolescents that do not attend school in the first years of secondary education in LAC is 7.7% – almost four times higher than in developed countries (2.1%) (UNICEF 19/03/2019). Furthermore, education indicators show high levels of inefficiency, as demonstrated by high dropout and repetition rates, compounded by inadequate levels of learning (Fiszbein and Stanton 06/2018).

Dropout rates: These remain high in many countries in Latin America, which shows that many children who begin primary school do not complete their education. In *El Salvador*, *Guatemala*, *Honduras*, and *Nicaragua*, primary school dropout rates are above 20% (and above 50% in the case of *Nicaragua*). Across the region, dropout is linked to increased levels of violence as well as a need for children to earn income for their families (Fiszbein and Stanton 06/2018), and dropout is normally linked to poverty, rurality, and indigenous group membership (EJER 15/07/2017). It has been estimated that 3.1 million students in LAC are at risk of not returning to school following the disruption to education caused by COVID-19 (UNESCO 30/07/2020).

Repetition rates: Prior to COVID-19, students who completed their education were frequently taking longer than the allocated time to progress through each educational level. This requires additional resources from families and governments, and is resulting in crowded classrooms, and students who are older than their peers (Fiszbein and Stanton 06/2018). Repeating a grade is normally the result of not having achieved minimum performance standards for moving up. Increasing the quality of education can reduce the need for repetition (UNESCO 2013).

Inadequate levels of learning: According to the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests, which measure learning among 15-year-olds around the world, students in Latin America were, on average in 2018, three years behind a student in an OECD country, in reading, science, and maths. Furthermore, 50% of students in the region do not reach the basic reading proficiency level required in PISA assessment compared to 20% of students in OECD countries (World Bank 06/12/2019). In the 2015 PISA test, less than 1% of students from the region performed among the highest levels of proficiency (OECD 16/11/2017).

Learning poverty: Learning poverty means being unable to read and understand a short, age-appropriate text by the age of 10. On average, 51% of children in LAC do not have this skill, compared to 8% in the United States and 3% in the United Kingdom. The rates are lower in countries like *Costa Rica* (32%) and *Chile* (37%), compared to *Nicaragua* (70%), *Paraguay* (74%), and *Honduras* (75%) (World Bank 06/11/2019).

Inequality between rich and poor in education

There is a documented link between poverty and educational attainment in Latin America, where the chronic poor have an average of 6.02 years of education, compared to 9.2 years for those who are never poor (World Bank 2015). Some of the greatest inequalities in LAC are within countries rather than among them. For example, only 54% of children from households in the lowest decile of income in LAC attend pre-primary school and 56% attend secondary, compared to 77% and 87% respectively from households in the highest decile (OECD 16/11/2017). Latin America also has the world's highest rate of enrolment in private primary schools (The Economist 12/09/2020).

Lack of investment in public school systems and teachers

Government spending: On average, LAC countries spend 5% of their GDP on education, with *Costa Rica* and *Belize* at the top of the list, spending 7.4% and 7.1% respectively. *Guatemala* (2.8%), *El Salvador* (3.9%), and *Peru* (3.9%) are at the bottom (IDB, accessed 09/10/2020).

Teachers: The teacher situation in *Venezuela* is of particular concern. According to a union representing educators, more than 40% of Venezuela's 370,000 active teachers left their schools between 2017 and the end of 2019, many of whom are among the five million people who have migrated; others have left due to the extremely low salaries. Teachers who have stayed are dependent upon additional income to survive. It has been reported that new teachers make as little as the equivalent of US\$5 per month (VOA 04/12/2019), while the monthly food basket as at June 2020 was US\$202.46 (CENDA accessed 18/10/2020). In *Colombia*, most teachers prefer to work in urban areas rather than rural areas (OECD 2018).

Immediate impacts

Socioeconomic inequalities

It is expected that the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdowns and school closures will be most serious for children in the poorest countries, and within the poorest households in countries. Low-income countries and countries with conflicts are less likely to cope with the effects of financial recession and shutdowns. These same countries do not have the infrastructure to provide adequate remote learning solutions. Unequal access to learning will increase pre-existing gaps in access to information and knowledge. While remote learning is possible in wealthier countries and households, this poses more challenges in poorer

countries and poorer areas of a country, where access to the internet and necessary equipment – and in some cases electricity – is less widespread. Poor households are also more likely to withdraw their children from school (UN 16/04/2020; UNDP 21/05/2020).

Based on lessons learned from other humanitarian situations, the longer children remain out of school, the higher the risk they may never return. This is especially true for the most vulnerable children including migrants, refugees, indigenous populations, those with disabilities, and those living in poor households (UNICEF, 16/05/2020).

Access to electricity: According to World Bank's 2018 regional numbers, 98% of the population in LAC has access to electricity, with 99.6% in urban areas compared to 92.9% in rural areas. However, the access is not equal across the region. In many countries, including *Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Uruguay*, 100% of the population has access to electricity, while in others, access is lower, including: *Nicaragua* (71.4%), *Honduras* (81.1%), *Peru* (81.8%), and Bolivia (86%) (World Bank, accessed 17/10/2020). In Venezuela, power outages have been an ongoing problem for years (Washington Post 06/07/2020).

Digital divide: At a regional level, 67% of the population in Latin America uses the internet, but there are large differences between countries. Even in countries that are considered “well-connected”, only 40%–50% of the population in rural areas has access. In “poorly-connected” countries, this number drops to 10% on average (World Economic Forum 15/09/2020). The disparity between rich and poor households is also marked: 14% of poor students in primary education have a computer connected to the internet at home compared to more than 80% of affluent students (OECD 04/06/2020). In most European countries this number is close to 100%, even for disadvantaged students (OECD 03/04/2020).

Delivery of online learning: A limited number of schools in the region were adequately equipped for digital distance learning at the start of the pandemic. Large socio-economic differences also exist, with only 20% of 15-year-old students attending disadvantaged schools being able to access online learning platforms, compared to 50% of those attending advantaged schools (OECD 04/06/2020). In *Colombia*, based on government statistics, close to 96% of municipalities do not have the technological resources to create and provide sufficient virtual education programmes (UNICEF 30/09/2020), and only 40% of *Venezuelan* refugees and migrants with children aged 6–17 living in *Colombia* had access to online learning (GIFMM 30/09/2020).

Support at home: Students from advantaged families are more likely to have parents with higher levels of digital skills who can support distance learning (OECD 18/03/2020). In the region, many of the poorest parents have not finished secondary school and

rarely use technology beyond mobile phones. For example, in *Argentina*, among adults living with primary school students, only 40% in the poorest decile have a secondary degree, compared to almost everyone in the richest decile, and only 20% in the poorest decile had used a computer in the last three months compared to 80% in the richest decile (VOX 20/05/2020).

Gender inequalities

The effects of school closures are particularly pronounced for girls, many of whom had limited access to education prior to the pandemic and were already vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. Studies of other humanitarian crisis and past disease outbreaks indicate that COVID-19 can heighten pre-existing risks of gender based violence (GBV) against girls, prevent social, economic, and educational development, as well as threaten their sexual reproductive health (UNICEF and IRC 2020).

Domestic violence: Domestic violence, femicide, and other forms of sexual and GBV have increased as a result of COVID-19 (UN 07/2020). Before the start of the pandemic, one in three women in LAC were affected by GBV. Since the start of the pandemic, there has been a significant increase – and in some cases a doubling – of reports of domestic violence (World Bank 15/05/2020).

Gender work roles: Women and girls are especially affected by the pandemic as a result of their employment status. In LAC, women make up 74% of the health and social work force, and are therefore at a higher risk of coming into contact with someone infected with COVID-19 (CARE and UN WOMEN 31/05/2020). In most countries in LAC, 75% of the teachers are women (Stanton and Fiszbein 10/2019). With many female teachers having to juggle teaching remotely under stressful conditions, they are also caring for and educating their own children who are home due to school closures. This adds significant stress and pressure.

Teenage pregnancies: Latin America has the second highest rate of teenage pregnancies in the world, and approximately 15% of all pregnancies in the region occur in girls under the age of 20 (PAHO 28/02/2018). Data from countries in LAC illustrates that adolescent girls with no education, or only primary education, are up to four times more likely to become pregnant compared to girls who have secondary or higher education (UNFPA 29/08/2020). For instance, in *El Salvador*, 22% of girls between 15 and 19 who dropped out of school became mothers soon after (IDB 2020). Teenage pregnancies are a major reason for school dropouts in the region (Philanthropy Women 08/07/2020). During the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, school closures are thought to have been a key factor in the sharp rise in adolescent pregnancies (UNICEF and IRC 2020). Since lockdowns and school closures are expected to lead to a rise in student dropout

rates, particularly among girls, as well as reduce access to contraceptives, it is likely that teenage pregnancies will increase during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additional in-depth analysis can be found in [two global gender reports published by ACAPS](#), related to the pandemic's impact on health and protection issues as well as livelihoods.

Disability-related inequalities

In LAC there are 8 million children under the age of 14 with a disability. Before the pandemic, 70% of children and adolescents with disabilities were out of school (UNICEF, accessed 20/10/2020). Children with disabilities and special needs are especially hard to serve through distance programmes (UN 16/04/2020). In addition to access challenges in terms of internet and equipment, children with disabilities may struggle with home learning and their parents or carers may lack the teaching skills necessary to support learning needs (ECLAC 04/2020).

Inequalities for migrants, refugees, and IDPs

Children living in informal settlements or camps with limited infrastructure, and who have no access to internet, are particularly affected by the pandemic. Confinement and movement restrictions may be incentives for parties to occupy, loot or destroy school facilities, while empty schools may be targeted for military use (UN 16/04/2020). According to UNHCR, at a global level, in countries where students have returned to in-person school, the negative effects of COVID-19 on the education of refugee children can already be measured (UNHCR 14/10/2020).

Low enrolment before the pandemic: In *Colombia*, among Venezuelan migrant and refugee families, 25% of children aged 6–11 and 39% of children aged 12–17 did not attend school or college prior to COVID-19. The most frequently reported obstacles were insufficient places in schools and lack of income. Among the older age group, the need to work was also mentioned as an obstacle by 4% of households (GIFMM 07/2020). As at late 2019, only 61% of the *Venezuelan* children and adolescents living in Ecuador were attending school (El Comercio 04/12/2019).

Distance learning: When schools closed, distance learning offerings rarely involved targeted interventions to ensure accessibility to migrants and refugees. In addition to academics, migrant and refugee children are also missing out on additional services offered through schools including meals, language classes, and psychosocial support. When attempting to access remote learning, lack of access to internet, technology, and educational material are barriers that displaced *Venezuelan* children and adolescents have been experiencing (UNESCO 23/05/2020). A study performed by World

Vision in June showed that 63% of the *Venezuelan* migrant and refugee children in the region were not studying after the start of the pandemic. Among refugee and migrant families in *Ecuador*, 85% of children had their classes completely suspended without any other option to continue studying, and the remainder were not enrolled in any form of schooling at all (World Vision 06/2020).

Protection and safety concerns

90% of children in LAC between three and four years old are exposed to at least one emotional abuse risk factor, which might include: domestic violence and punishment; failure to receive early education; lack of support; or inadequate care (SOS Children's Villages International 28/05/2020). As a result of lockdowns and school closures, students from vulnerable households in particular will face an increased risk of violence, including poor and homeless, refugees, migrants, IDPs, and children living in conflict-affected areas (ECLAC-UNESCO 08/2020). 51% of children and adolescents in urban areas in Latin America live in housing conditions that are deficient to some degree, and often overcrowded (ECLAC-UNESCO 08/2020).

Child abuse: Child abuse is more likely during lockdowns and isolation, and school closures will also prevent children from reporting these types of incidents to teachers or prevent teachers from recognising warning signals. Additionally, other services have been suspended or scaled back as a result of closed schools, including social work and legal and protective services for children (UN 16/04/2020).

Online abuse: Children's reliance on online platforms for distance learning has also increased their risk of exposure to inappropriate content, online predators, and cyber bullying (UN 16/04/2020; UNICEF 14/04/2020). There are increased opportunities for online predators to engage with children as they are more vulnerable due to greater online exposure, lack of supervision, and isolation (MyITU 01/05/2020).

Child labour: There has been a reduction in child labour over the past few years in Latin America. Despite this, there remain approximately 10.5 million children aged 5–17 in child labour in the region (ECLAC-ILO 11/06/2020). Slowdowns in production, unemployment, low social protection coverage, lack of access to social security, and higher levels of poverty are conditions that historically favour increases in child labour. Lockdowns and school closures affect the participation of parents in labour markets, which results in reduced incomes for the families and creates an environment that often results in increased child labour (ILO 11/06/2020; ECLAC-ILO 11/06/2020). With more than 131 million children out of school across Latin America, and the significant financial hardship the pandemic is having on poor households, it is highly likely that child labour will increase in the region.

On a global basis, a 1% rise in global poverty levels tends to correlate with a 0.7% increase in child labour (Partners of the Americas 27/07/2020). According to the UN, the extreme poverty rate in the LAC region is expected to rise by 4.5% in 2020 (UN 07/2020), which could result in a subsequent 3.1% increase in child labour.

Child recruitment: For decades, organised crime has affected Latin America, and schools often protect children from child recruitment and gangs (UNCHR 11/05/2020). Continued economic hardship, combined with extended school closures, will likely increase gang and cartel child recruitment across the region. Previous recessions, which reduced employment levels and remittances, resulted in crime waves in several countries including *Mexico* and *Honduras* (Foreign Affairs 21/04/2020). In *Colombia*, the UN reported a 73% increase in child recruitment between 2017 and 2019 due to increases in conflict activity, and almost as many children are estimated to have joined armed groups in the first half of 2020 as in the whole of 2019 (The New Humanitarian 10/09/2020). The Coalition Against the Involvement of Children and Youth in the Colombian Armed Conflict (COALICO) reported 190 cases of recruitment and use of children, including *Venezuelans*, by illegal armed groups between 1 January and 30 June, compared to 38 cases in the same period in 2019 (UNHCR 30/06/2020). Children have been forced into armed groups, some joining voluntarily as a result of being promised regular food. The majority are boys used as coca growers, informants, and narco-traffickers. Girls are at times recruited as partners or forced into sexual slavery (The New Humanitarian 10/09/2020). In *Honduras*, children are regularly recruited or targeted by criminal gangs, and schools are one of the key places they feel safe (UNCHR 11/05/2020).

Mental health: The effects of physical distancing measures and movement restrictions on children's mental health is another concern. Children face anxiety about the negative impact of the pandemic on their lives, communities, and futures (UN 16/04/2020). The lack of everyday routines and separation from friends can also cause loneliness, grief, anger, and anxiety (IPA 12/08/2020). Furthermore, the absence of routine and school increases their vulnerability to risky behaviours (World Bank 07/10/2020). With school closures, mental health services or recreational activities have also been disrupted (ECLAC-UNESCO 08/2020). Lastly, the lack of routine due to school closures can result in increased psychosocial stress (UNICEF and UNDP 08/2020). A study of teenagers in *Peru* found that on a mental health index, teens scored 8% lower than primary school aged children, and that teenage girls had lower reported wellbeing compared to teenage boys. This is expected to be linked to teens being more affected by 'sheltering in place', as well as them undertaking additional work (IPA 12/08/2020). In *Ecuador*, a rapid response survey of high school students found that 16% had mental health scores that indicated depression (IPA 21/05/2020).

Nutrition

School meals: In addition to interrupting education, school closures impact students' diet and nutrition, especially in the most vulnerable areas (ECLAC-UNESCO 08/2020). Many children depend on school meals, which are unavailable during school closures (World Bank 04/2020). According to FAO, school feeding programmes benefit 85 million children in LAC, and are the main source of daily food for 10 million of them. The lack of school meals can pose a substantial threat to the nutritional status of many children and also reduce their ability to cope with diseases (FAO 2020; FAO 17/03/2020). **Furthermore**, many families consider school meals as an incentive for sending children to school. The loss of this incentive could result in an increase in school dropout rates (The Friedman Sprout 04/05/2020). The continuation of school feeding programmes was announced in many countries early in the pandemic (WFP 30/03/2020). However, there are no recent reports as to the status of these support mechanisms as the school closures continue. Economic shocks facing households will negatively affect the diets of children, and lockdown measures risk disrupting food supply chains and local food markets (UN 16/04/2020).

Long term impacts

Loss of learning

Learning losses arising from school closures increase the risk of long-term deepening inequalities (UN 07/2020). Lessons from previous disasters that have resulted in school closures show long-term consequences for learning. As an example, after the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan, children in the affected area were out of school for 14 weeks on average, and loss of learning resulted in long-term impacts. Four years after the earthquake, when enrolment had fully rebounded, test scores of students from the affected area placed them 1.5–2 years behind their peers from non-affected areas (RISE 10/06/2020; UKFIET 30/06/2020). Although different circumstances, if this learning loss was applied to students in Latin America currently affected by COVID-19 school closures, where many have already lost more than four months of schooling, the loss could potentially put children up to three or more years behind. It will be critical for teachers and schools to invest in assessing learning levels and ensuring that gaps are addressed.

Long-term financial implications

The learning loss that follows from school closures can have long-term negative effects on the economic wellbeing of states as well as individuals. Economists have estimated that at a global level, students in grades 1–12 who have been affected by the school closures could have a 3% lower income over their entire lifetimes. This estimate assumes that their learning losses so far are equivalent to missing one third of a school year on average, and is expected to be larger if school closures continue (OECD 10/09/2020). Given the fact that the majority of schools in Latin America are still closed as at late October, and some have announced they will not open until earliest the first part of 2021, this will have a significantly larger impact, and with the potential for a much higher income loss in the future. With distance learning's disproportionate coverage, it is very likely that students in poor households will have a much greater learning loss than those in wealthier households, thus affecting the future income potential for these individuals, and further increasing societal inequalities.

Recession

The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has predicted that COVID-19 will cause the worst recession in the region in a century, resulting in a 9.1% contraction in regional GDP in 2020 (ECLAC 15/07/2020). The main external drivers of this are: an expected 20% drop in exports; a 20% decline in remittances in the region (World Bank 22/04/2020); and reduced tourism. The reduced GDP could increase the number of poor by 45 million, to a total of 230 million, and the number of extremely poor by 28 million, to a total of 96 million (UN 07/2020). Since there is a documented linkage between poor children in LAC and lower school attendance numbers (World Bank 2015), an increase in poverty levels will ultimately decrease school attendance and performance, which will lead to a continuation of the poverty cycle.

Reduced government spending on education

The economic crisis associated with the pandemic is likely to affect the availability of public funding for education in OECD and partner countries, as health care and welfare costs are prioritised (OECD 2020). Public school enrolment across the region is likely to increase as a result of middle-class parents losing income and becoming unable to pay private school fees (The Economist 12/09/2020). Given the projected contraction of GDP in the region, the amount of resources available for education could fall by more than 9% in 2020 alone (ECLAC 15/07/2020). In *Brazil*, municipal revenues, which provide 40% of school funding, could fall by 20%–30% as a result of the recession (The Economist 12/09/2020). Reduced resources for public school students will result in a further

deepening of the divide between rich and poor since wealthier families more often have the option to choose private schools for their children. Private schools are more likely to have the resources to ensure that students are continuing education during school closures and that they catch up once schools reopen.

Information gaps and needs

- There is very limited information from Nicaragua about the impact that schools remaining open has had on the spread of COVID-19.
- There is very limited information on the current situation in Venezuela, including the educational situation pre- and post-pandemic.
- There is a lack of information about the status of remote learning in many countries in the region, or about its effectiveness and accessibility.

Annex 1: Overview of school closures and distance learning by country

Country	Status	Details on closures	Distance learning	# students
Argentina	Partially open	On 12 October, in-person attendance started at various capacities, based on local virus containment, but only 0.2% of the country's total 11 million students attend face-to-face classes daily in 2 of the country's 12 provinces. These students are from primary and secondary levels and attendance is optional.	<p>According to a household survey, 68% of the most vulnerable children and adolescents in the country were provided support in the form of printed booklets, 87% with television content with school activities, and 65% with educational radio content.</p> <p>According to UNDP, a recent study found that limited access to online education, and lack of printed booklets for many children, has severely disrupted learning, and is likely to increase the risk of students dropping out of school for good.</p>	11,000,000
Belize	Closed	Schools were meant to reopen on 10 August, but this decision was changed due to a rise in COVID-19 cases. Primary and pre-schools opened for online learning on 7 September and secondary education was scheduled to open on 5 October, but education is taking place through distance learning and not face-to-face.	Approximately 63% of students accessed distance, home-based learning during school closures.	98,000
Bolivia	Closed	A decision was made to cancel the school year – which is meant to come to a close at the end of November – through ministerial resolution.	26% of the country's students have benefited from virtual classrooms. There is work underway to reach close to 6,200 indigenous children at primary level with an educational radio programme.	2,000,000
Brazil	Partially open	UNICEF reports that the Ministry of Education has given up its role of national coordination. Schools were suspended nationally on 26 March. The government announced in September that public and private schools may resume in person on 7 October, except for lower and middle public schools, which are scheduled to reopen on 3 November.	According to a household survey, 16.6% of students did not have any activities available. The figure was 20.3% among black students and 11.4% among white students. In households living on less than half the minimum wage, 21.5% did not receive any activities.	44,000,000

Chile	Partially open	The Ministry of Education has established three fundamental pillars for the process of returning to face-to-face classes: a) voluntariness for schools and families b) compliance with sanitary conditions that safeguard the health of the educational community and c) gradualness that will depend on sanitary conditions, with the possibility of going back if necessary. As at 30 September, 47 educational institutions had opened for face-to-face classes.	Radio and television were used to reach children without internet access. UNICEF estimates by that 87% of children and adolescents would have the possibility of using a device for remote learning. However, there is a gap between the lowest quintile (77%) and the highest quintile (97%).	3,000,000
Colombia	Partially open	In-person classes were suspended on 16 March. The government has recently announced guidelines for the reopening of schools, including social distancing measures, mask requirements, ventilation requirements, cleaning protocols, health screening, and the establishment of a monitoring committee.	53% of children live in households without internet access, 81% do not have access to a desktop computer, and 78% do not have a laptop. Some initiatives have been made by UNICEF and partners to reach children without access with printed and digital resources, audiobooks, and games.	9,000,000
Costa Rica	Closed	Schools are scheduled to be closed until February 2021, when a reopening process will follow guidelines of the Ministry of Public Health in terms of dates and health protocols.	It is estimated that 34% of students have access to equipment and connectivity, 29% have limited access to equipment and connectivity, 14% have limited equipment without any connectivity, and 23% have neither equipment nor connectivity.	1,000,000
Ecuador	Closed	The Ministry of Education has been implementing the Plan for Continuing Education, which has three components: home education (educational continuity, connectivity and psychosocial support and protection); alternative education; and face-to-face education.	Governments are broadcasting educational programmes on both television and public radio.	4,000,000
El Salvador	Closed	All face-to-face learning is suspended through December 2020. A plan is currently being developed for return, which will include presence, semi-presence and non-presence.	Booklets with learning guides for all educational levels were printed and distributed to approximately 300,000 students in August. Until school reopens, the Ministry of Education has announced that virtual education will take place via radio, television and internet.	1,000,000

Guatemala	Closed	Schools will remain closed through 2020. The Ministry of Education is continuing with various modalities of distance education. It has also developed protocols for safe return to school and announced a hybrid version of distance learning and in-person starting in 2021. There are several shortcomings in schools, which will make it difficult to return.	Various forms of distance education continue to be offered: daily television programming; daily radio programming in Spanish and indigenous languages; TV programmes with sign language for people with disabilities; printed material for all levels in Spanish and indigenous languages and for students with visual impairment; text messages for mobile phones; and inserts in mass print media. Between 24 April and 20 September 2020 there were over 2 million visits to the online learning site.	4,000,000
Honduras	Closed	There has been no official communication yet, but there is a possibility that schools will not reopen this year.	Emphasis was placed on providing classes through television. Some printed materials have also been made available for those children who do not have access to the internet, television or radio. Only 40% of the country's population has access to the internet.	2,000,000
Mexico	Closed	All schools closed, and a traffic light system is in place, where schools can return when their region is in "green". As at 30 September, eight states were in "yellow".	The emphasis is mainly on educational television programming and the distribution of textbooks. In July, 89.1% of those interviewed reported that children took up distance learning during the quarantine. However, there are differences depending on a household's socioeconomic level: 84.8% in the lower income strata, 90.7% in the middle strata and 95.1% in the higher income strata were able to participate in Aprende en Casa I. Only 36% report having an internet connection, 34% have at least one computer, and 49% have two or more cellular phones, with lower percentages for households of lower socioeconomic levels.	33,000,000
Nicaragua	Open	Schools were never officially closed, but attendance dropped significantly at some point. Most students have returned to school, although some have dropped out and will not return to finish the school year.	Distance learning modalities have been in place for more than five years to guarantee educational opportunities for the most vulnerable groups, including in rural areas and working children.	1,000,000
Panama	Closed	The Ministry of Education has announced the possible reopening of schools in February 2021 and is working on reopening guidelines.	No official figures yet	841,000

Paraguay	Closed	Classes for the 2020 school year are being conducted through virtual and distance learning.	According to the Ministry of Education, 90% of teachers and students are accessing virtual platforms.	1,000,000
Peru	Closed	As at 30 September, the entire educational system was operating in remote mode. A strategic plan for the safe and timely reopening of schools in Peru has been developed by the Ministry of Education.	The state's multi-channel distance education scheme has been active since April 2020. According to analysis by the Ministry of Education, television is the main channel (48%), followed by web (29%) and radio (14%). It is estimated that, at national level, around 9% of the population are in areas with high difficulties in accessing these channels. In rural areas this figure is around 25%.	8,000,000
Uruguay	Open	All primary and secondary schools opened with effect from 29 June. Students who live with at-risk people in their homes have the option to attend in person or via distance learning.	During school closures 92% of primary students had contact with their teachers and 83% participated in school-related activities. At the first quintile only 72% participated in these activities.	793,000
Venezuela	Closed	Based on a national consultation in August and September, it was decided to start school activities in distance mode. Distance learning for primary students started on 16 September and for secondary students on 1 October.	According to the national "Every Family, One School" plan, distance learning programming was scheduled to be developed from 16 September, with the weekly publication of didactic guides for each grade through the national press and digital media, as well as daily television programming aimed at nursery, primary and secondary school students. There is no official report on the number of children who have attended remotely, or how many were left without educational care at the end of the last school year in June.	6,000,000

Sources: Ministerio de Salud 24/09/2020; AS/COA, accessed 27/10/2020; UNDP 05/2020; World Economic Forum 15/09/2020; UNICEF 30/09/2020.