

[Released on January 29, 2021]

1. INTRODUCTION

During 2020, UNICEF country offices provided ongoing support to Ministries of Education for the development of biosecurity protocols and guidance for the safe return to school. As of January 15, only 10 countries in the LAC region have fully opened their schools, while in 12 countries and territories schools remain closed and in 14 countries schools are partially open, **124 million** children and adolescents are still being affected. Despite the announcement of several countries on the opening of schools in face-to-face or blended learning modalities during the months of February and March, a second wave of COVID-19 cases has resulted in these decisions being reversed. In countries such as El Salvador, Mexico, Suriname, the educational authorities have decided to start the school year 2021 in virtual modalities, this would be the second school year without face-to-face education.

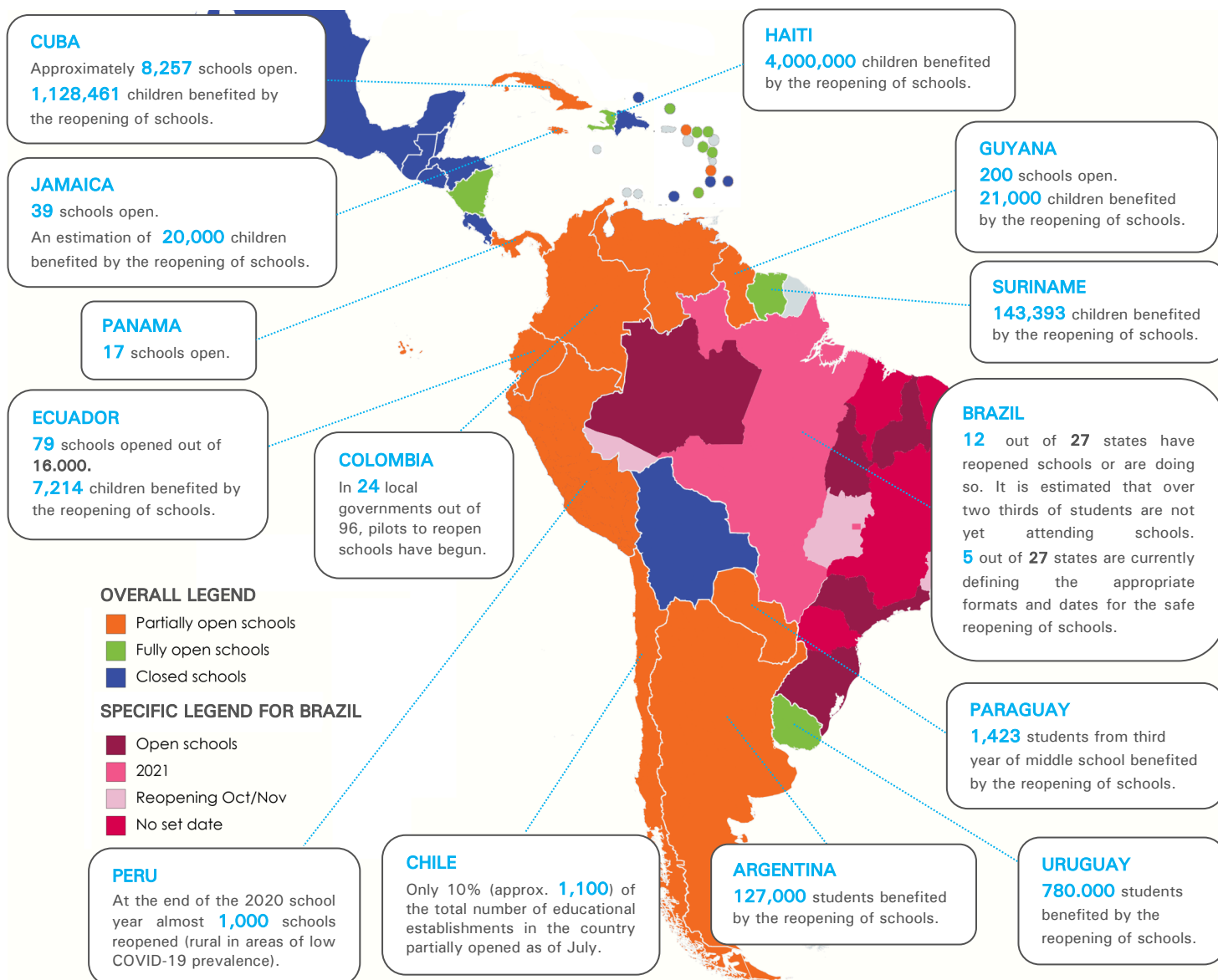
Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, have decided to rejoin classes using various face-to-face, blended or distance alternatives depending on epidemiological

conditions and the decisions will be taken at the district or territory level. In the case of Belize, the educational authorities have recommended continuing with the distance education model all this school year and resuming face-to-face classes in August/September 2021.

In Colombia, the opening continues to be partial using alternance models, however only 24 of the 96 local governments have opened the schools. In Cuba, several schools closed again due to a new outbreak and epidemiological complications.


UNICEF continues to advocate on the importance of prioritizing the reopening of schools and taking measures to make them as safe as possible by investing in prevention measures such as availability of soap and water and in the implementation of biosecurity protocols.

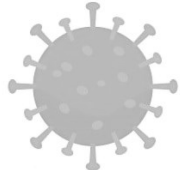
This update contains key information on the progress of the school reopening process in each one of the countries of the LACRO region.



Note for the map: Please note that we have only included information about the countries for which we have received the data on number of schools open and number of children benefited by the reopening of schools. There were not changes reported since the last report.

2. SITUATION OVERVIEW


 **12** countries and territories in the LAC region with **schools completely closed**.

 An estimation of **234** school days on average without **face-to-face classes** since school closures in mid March to January 29.¹

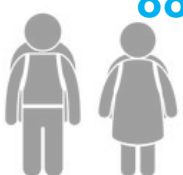
 **14** countries and territories in the region (Argentina, Brazil, British Virgin Islands, Colombia, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Guyana, Jamaica, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, St. Lucia and Venezuela) have opened their schools **partially**.


 **45M** children in 24 countries supported by UNICEF in the provision of **distance learning programmes** during school closures.²


 **85%** of countries and territories have engaged in **advocacy or communications** for school reopening.³

 **9M** children, parents and primary caregivers have been supported by UNICEF with community based **mental health and psychosocial support**.⁴


 **11M** has supported by UNICEF through **Risk Communication and Community engagement (RCCE)** actions.

 **88%** of children (124M approx.) are not receiving **face-to-face classes** in the region due to school closures.⁵

 **10** countries and territories in the region (Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Haiti, Montserrat, Nicaragua, St. Kitts and Nevis, Suriname and Uruguay) have all their schools **fully open**.

 **24** countries and territories in the region have developed **protocols** for the safe reopening of schools.

 **62%** of countries in the LAC region have decided on a **date for school reopening**.⁶

 **22** countries and territories in the region continue school lessons through **remote learning** online or via television, radio, WhatsApp etc.

 **33,233** schools implementing safe schools **protocols** (COVID-19).⁷

COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES WITH REMOTE LEARNING:

Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, ECA, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela.

Sources of information

¹ Data from [UNDP Latin America and the Caribbean #COVID19 | Policy Documents Series](#).

² Data from [Global COVID-19 SitRep Indicators](#).

³ [Global Education Cluster, Tracker analysis Advocacy, 14 August 2020](#).

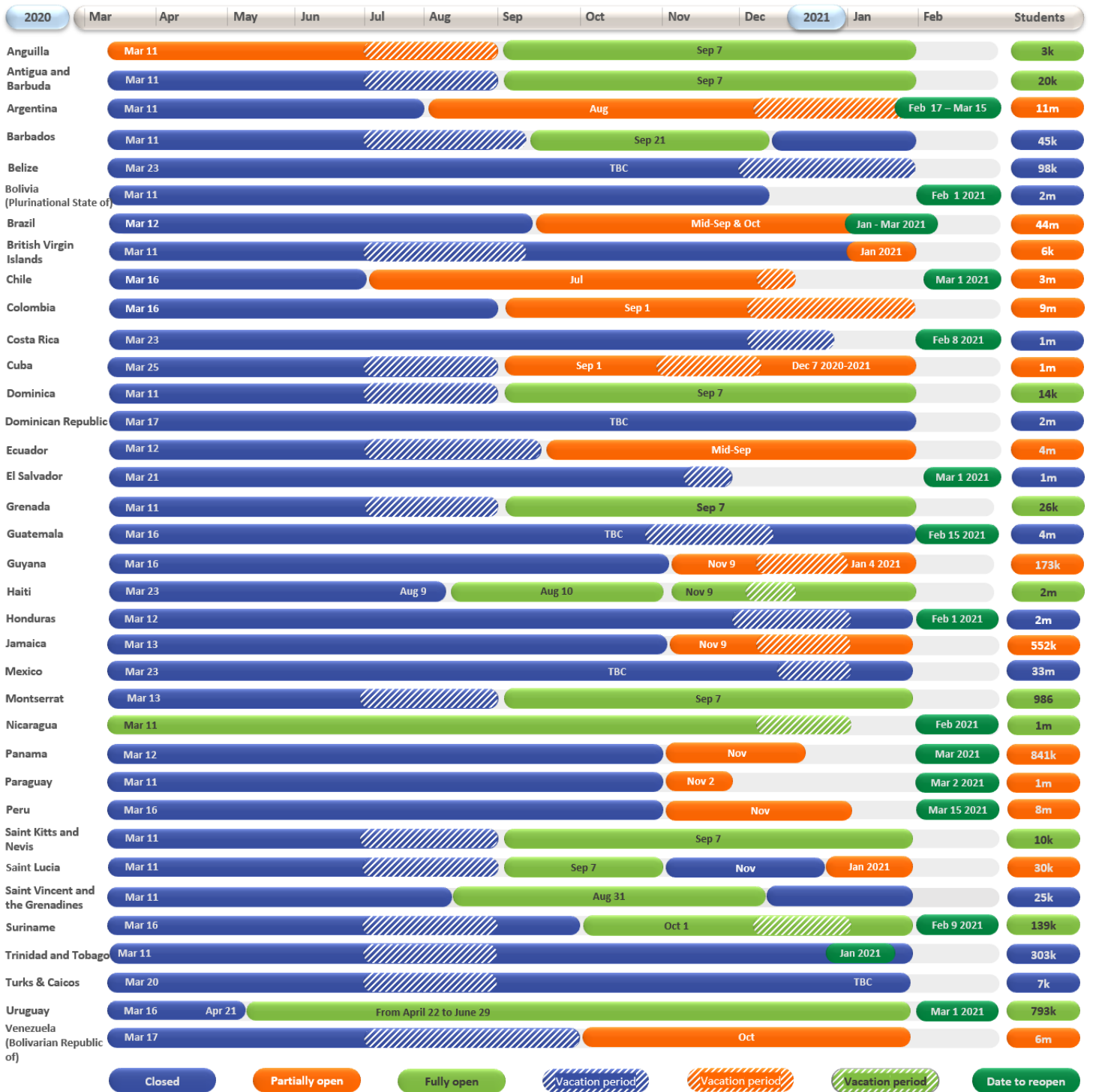
⁴ [Global Education Cluster, Tracker analysis Advocacy, 14 August 2020](#).

⁵ Data extracted from United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Institute of Statistics, 'Welcome to UIS.Stat', <http://data.uis.unesco.org/#>>. The figure 124M and the percentage 88% include the number of children and adolescents based in countries where schools are fully and partially closed, taking into account the number of children that attend face-to-face classes in countries where schools are partially closed.

⁶ [Global Education Cluster, Tracker analysis Advocacy, 14 August 2020](#).

⁷ [Global COVID-19 SitRep Indicators](#).

FACE-TO-FACE CLASSES TIMELINE⁸



Sources of information

⁸ Data reported by COs. Information consulted from December 7, 2020 to January 28, 2021.

3. STATUS OF SCHOOLS REOPENING IN LAC

ARGENTINA

Argentina is currently in the summer vacation period, meaning schools remain closed. However, the national government has referred to this assuring that the return to face to face classes is planned for this year. Although the final decision is up to each of the provincial governments, a large majority have also expressed their agreement. This will be executed by different [strategies](#) that combine face-to-face and remote teaching and learning strategies.

Although there is broad agreement regarding the return to face-to-face attendance, certain sectors expressed disagreement, especially in some jurisdictions such as the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (family organizations and teachers' unions).

The indicative reopening date will be between February 17 and March 15 with a partial reopening of schools. Depending on each province, face-to-face, remote (virtual) and combined modalities are foreseen.

BELIZE

Schools remain closed and distance education activities are being implemented. The Ministry of Education has convened a COVID- 19 education working group that is currently preparing a plan for the safe reopening of schools.

UNICEF has met with the new Ministry leadership team, including ministers, who won elections in November 2020, sharing an advocacy document on best practices for safe reopening of schools and has affirmed its support to guide safe reopening and support with resources.

UNICEF continues to share useful guidance and best practices and met with the Belize National Teachers Union to better understand the context and discuss areas for possible support.

As part of the implementation of its PLANBELIZE AGENDA, the new PUP Administration of Primer Minister, Hon. John Briceno has established a COVID-19 EDUCATION TASK FORCE to bring together relevant key stakeholders and partners in education to help guide the Government's commitment to the delivery of quality, accessible education during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to

provide specific recommendations for the safe and responsible reopening of schools for face-to-face instruction in August/September 2021 or when it is deemed safe to do so by the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

The very real and legitimate fears and concerns of all stakeholders in education must be respected. To this end, the decision to reopen schools is one that must be made in consultation with our teachers, BNTU, managements, students and parents.

The Ministry of Education and the Government of Belize shall always be guided by the advice and recommendations of our public health officials. The health and safety of our students, teachers, and schools' administrative staff will always be the primary consideration of the Task Force.

The Task Force, in making recommendations will remain cognizant of the very serious financial crisis facing the country and will therefore be very creative in their approach to this undertaking. This task force will take effect from February 1 to July 31, 2021, comprised of nine appointed members and is chaired by Dian Castillo, CEO of the ministry of education, culture, science and technology.

BOLIVIA

The government has determined the reopening of the 2021 school year. As of January 18, school enrollment began, and classes will start on February 1st 2021.

Under the above mentioned determination, and the entrance of the second wave of contagion in Bolivia, the Ministry of Education issued Ministerial Resolution 001/2021, which establishes the educational modalities to be chosen in each Educational District, according to the degree of contagion and the level of risk issued by the pertinent authorities and the Ministry of Health:

- Presential
- Semi-presential
- Distance (virtual, radio or television).

To date, the Educational Districts are in the process of planning and selecting the educational modality to be applied for the beginning of classes on February 1st, 2021. On February 1st, the Educational Districts may choose the face-to-face educational modality, if there are no contagions. if

the contagions are on the rise and the risk is medium, the Educational Districts may select the semi-presential educational modality.

BRAZIL

Schools have been closed in Brazil since March 2020. In some cases, distance education has guaranteed continuity of education for boys and girls, however, there were disparities due to social, economic and digital exclusion aspects. It is estimated that 9 million children and adolescents who were enrolled did not have access to distance activities.

Although several States had announced the normalization of educational services, the second wave of the pandemic hit governments with urgent changes in their plans. Schools are currently closed, and the Brazilian school calendar starts normally at the end of January.

Only 12 of the 27 states partially opened schools in 2020. There are schools that are still working on closing 2020's school calendar, due to the shutdown. According to the School Census, there are 57 million students in public schools in Brazil that depend on definitions on the reopening of schools.

15 of the 27 Brazilian states have defined that classes will resume at the beginning of 2021, with most schools expected to reopen between the months of January and March, with a partial reopening.

As 7 of the 27 states have not yet advanced in this process of opening schools, 5 of the 27 states are currently defining the appropriate formats and dates for the Safe Reopening of Schools. Most schools will resume in hybrid formats, with dispersed classes, small class sizes and increased sanitation measures.

CHILE

Schools remain partially open, only 10% (approximately 1,100) of the total number of educational establishments in the country partially opened as of July 2020, but mainly between October and December, until the closing of the school year on December 20.

It's not possible to determine the number of children who benefited from the reopening, since in none of the cases the reopening was for all students, only some grades returned.

The indicative date for the opening is March 1st, 2021, however, it depends on the health situation of each commune where the school is located, and it is expected that a mixed modality will be used with some presence depending on the phase of the quarantine.

COLOMBIA

Schools were opened from September 1st, 2020 on a partial basis, under alternation models, combining face-to-face and distance activities. Schools are currently in the holiday period from December until mid/late January 2021.

The Ministry of National Education set the goal that, by 2021, the entire educational system will work under alternation models, combining face-to-face and distance activities. This process is being carried out gradually, progressively and safely.

In 24 of the 96 local governments, reopening pilots have been started, many of them in private schools. Currently, public schools are on vacation, with most students starting classes at the end of January 2021. There are no official figures on the number of children benefiting from the reopening.

COSTA RICA

The opening of the 2021 school year is being prepared for February 8, 2021. A pedagogical model of curricular transformation was prepared to face the challenge of the new 2021 school year. Such model is based on the analysis of the results obtained in 2020 and the actions developed within the framework of the return strategy.

The estimated reopening date is February 8, 2021 and the Ministry's disposition is that the schools will be fully opened but will receive students in a staggered manner according to groups and numbers in order to maintain physical distancing and critical hygiene measures. The following 6 criteria are taken into consideration: capacity, alternation, schedule, entrance and exit arrangements, protocol for recess and feeding periods.

The modality considers pedagogical guidelines for the educational service. The generation of "**Combined Education**" implies the correspondence of face-to-face and remote education with the type of contents and the type of attention to be received by the students.

CUBA

Since September 1st. most of the country was opened except for Havana. Then from November 1st Havana and other municipalities were incorporated and advanced towards new phases of epidemiological control.

At present, 8,257 schools in 134 municipalities in the country are open, benefiting 1,128,461 children, and 2,512 schools in 34 municipalities are closed due to epidemiological complications.

As of January 14, 2512, schools in 34 municipalities in the country, including 15 in Havana province, were closed due to an outbreak and epidemiological complication. This means that 568,905 will receive classes via television from January 20 and until the epidemiological control indicators analyzed by the national intersectoral group for the control of the epidemic are met.

The face-to-face modality for the 1,128,461 students and the televised modality is starting January 20 through two television channels for the 568,905 students of the 34 municipalities that were closed as of January 14.

In addition, the [Cuba educa](#), [APK COVID-19](#), [repositorio virtual](#), and MiClase TV platforms are maintained.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Schools continue to be closed and implementing distance education activities. The date of reopening has not yet been defined.

UNICEF, together with PAHO, UNESCO and WB are advocating at the highest level and have requested the creation of a working group with the Ministry of Health, Education, and other actors to address vaccination and school reopening.

UNICEF is also supporting the design of accessible educational materials for primary and secondary school. This new series of materials will include orientation guides for teachers for face-to-face, blended or distance learning. These student booklets and student orientation guides are expected to be used starting in April. The school year was extended by one month and will end on July 30.

Starting in August 2020, the new authorities of the Ministry of Education designed the distance education strategy "**Apredemos en Casa**" (We Learn at Home). This strategy is composed of 4 pillars: **1.** Printed booklets with a monthly plan of activities for students from pre-primary to sixth grade of secondary school, **2.** Teacher responsible for accompanying and guiding the application at home through WhatsApp and others, **3.** Television and radio programming aimed at both students and their parents (in primary school) and **4.** Monitoring.

For the design and implementation of this strategy, the MoE had the technical assistance of UNICEF, which supported the creation of the content, design, printing and distribution of the booklets corresponding to November and December for the

2,054,236 students of all public schools in the Dominican Republic, from pre-primary to third grade of secondary school.

With UNICEF's contribution, the booklets have Braille and sign language versions, an unprecedented event in Dominican education. From the second month, the booklets are also accessible to students with intellectual disabilities by integrating easy reading and pictograms in the text.

UNICEF supported the MoE in the design of two orientation guides, one for early childhood and primary school teachers and the other for secondary schools, explaining how to implement the strategy. It also designed a guide for the training of technical multipliers of the MoE's initial and primary levels at headquarters, regional and district levels.

In addition, UNICEF provided technical assistance to the MoE in the production (including the script) of a television program that explains the daily activities in the booklets that parents should develop with primary school students. As of December, UNICEF has actively advocated for the gradual and planned reopening of schools from early 2021.

ECA (EASTERN CARIBBEAN AREA COUNTRIES)

Schools in Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Montserrat and St. Kitts and Nevis are open. Schools in Turks and Caicos, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago remain closed. Online learning continued to be used. In British Virgin Islands and St. Lucia remain with a blended modality.

Preschools and Child Care Centers are open, but there is no data on the number of children benefiting from these modalities.

ECUADOR

In January there was an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases in the country, as a result of which classes in educational institutions whose progressive return plans were approved by the National Emergency Operations Committee (COE) were suspended during January. The decision was made based on the report of the Ministry of Health and hospital capacity.

The possibility of the return will be reanalyzed on February 9, according to the health situation of the country and after the presidential elections to be held on February 7.

In the last months of the previous year, some schools were partially opened, but they are now currently closed. The learning modalities consider the progressive use of the educational facilities and must apply the recommendations agreed in the educational continuity plans.

To the extent necessary and according to the reality of each educational institution, awareness mechanisms should be foreseen in the educational community for the understanding of the phenomenon caused by the pandemic; it is expected that these mechanisms will allow in each community the promotion of self-care measures, and a progressive return to schools.

EL SALVADOR

According to the calendar presented by MoE (MINED) at the end of last year, it contemplated the beginning of the school year with partial opening of public schools in March. This involved the presentation of students to the educational centers for psychosocial care and diagnostic evaluation contemplated in February 2021, keeping students in groups and complying with all biosecurity measures. On January 5, 2021, the Ministry of Health issued a Press Release recommending the suspension of classes due to the sustained increase of COVID-19 cases and the beginning of the school year planned for February 2021.

The Ministry of Education informed through the same communiqué that it will abide by the recommendation of the Ministry of Health to suspend face-to-face return to schools and that the reopening of schools will not be contemplated until the Ministry of Health authorizes it. However, it mentions that "Despite the suspension of on-site activities, the schedule for the beginning of educational activities for all educational levels of the public and private sector will be maintained, only virtually" and will begin in February 2021. In addition, it was stated that as from January 11, 2021, the process of enrollment in the educational centers will begin. A call has been made to mothers, fathers and family referents to go to the schools as this procedure is very important for the educational continuity of children and adolescents, since it will guarantee access to the platforms that will be used to study from their homes.

When the Ministry of Health authorizes the reopening of educational centers, the Protocol of the Plan "**La Alegría de regresar a la escuela**" (The joy of going back to school) will be applied, which proposes a partial opening according to the condition of each school and a multimodal educational system will be implemented, which

includes, in addition to face-to-face education, education through MINED's internet sites, the educational television program "**Aprendamos en casa**" (Let's learn at home), virtual platforms, radio and printed educational materials.

GUATEMALA

Schools will open on February 15th, where initially teachers will be in training to acquire skills to provide psychosocial support to students and preparing to apply the protocol for safe return to classes. Students will return to classes on February 22 under a hybrid model and according to the COVID-19 alert board. Municipalities in red or orange tending to red will not open. Schools without access to water will not open, and in both groups, students will learn through distance modalities. All other schools will be open.

Students will attend according to the capacity allowed for the school according to the COVID board. Additionally, they will do so by "bubbles" or small groups of students. School meals will continue to be provided as take-home food rations. All students will start with a study guide "**Refuerzo mis aprendizajes**" (Reinforcement of my learning) which contains review exercises of the 2020 cycle competencies. Subsequently, they will receive Module 1/2021 which contains emotional support exercises, a diagnostic test and the first 20 sessions of new learning.

GUYANA

120 secondary schools reopened for face-to-face classes for grades 10, 11 and 12 on Monday, January 4, 2021 after a two-week break for the Christmas vacations.

The number of students is not available, but reports indicate that more than 70% of children in urban and coastal areas are returning after the Christmas break, while the interior of the country has registered low student participation in the new school year, with less than 50%. Inland children live in dormitories where, in the last two weeks, 30 children, 11 teachers and 13 assistants have tested positive for COVID-19. The main factor related to low participation is fear. However, in general, the face-to-face sessions in the coastal and urban areas have progressed smoothly.

Face-to-face sessions, e-learning and learning through learning packages/worksheets continue for all levels, in line with course timings.

HAITI

Schools in Haiti opened from August 10 to October 2020 to finish the previous school year and from November 9 to start the 2020-2021 school year. Unfortunately, there is no data on the number of children who returned to school. However, schools are fully reopened.

HONDURAS

All schools remain closed, the Secretary of Education (SEDUC) announced the start of classes 2021 for February 1st in semi-presential modality, based on a pilot in 18 schools to be authorized by SINAGER (National Secretary of Risk Management). It is estimated that the reopening will be done gradually by groups and by days.

JAMAICA

Schools are still closed in Jamaica. UNICEF has met with the new Ministry senior management team, including the Ministers, who won elections in November 2020. UNICEF has also shared an advocacy paper on best practices for safely reopening schools and have pledged UNICEF's unwavering support to guide the safe reopening and to support with resources.

UNICEF continues advocacy in this regard by sharing helpful guidance and best practices; UNICEF also met with the Belize National Teachers Union to understand more the context and to discuss areas for possible support. There is still not an indicative reopening date.

MEXICO

Schools in Mexico are still in virtual mode. The opening depends on the color of the traffic lights in the states: those that declare green traffic lights will have the possibility to decide on the reopening of schools. However, there has been no official notification in any state yet. The issue of reopening schools remains complicated, politically and socially. It has also been mentioned that those states in yellow will also be able to start using schools as centers for learning circles, developing initiatives of a pedagogical nature, but also of psychosocial and recreational support. At this time, it is not known that some schools are officially practicing this initiative.

The date of reopening will depend on the decisions of the authorities, based on the color of the traffic light in each state. For now, no official pronouncements have been made. States in yellow color will be able to decide, on a voluntary basis, to use school facilities in a partial manner.

PANAMA

The opening of [Comprehensive Early Childhood Care Centers \(CAPIs\)](#) has been announced as of February 1st. The school year is scheduled to begin on March 1, 2021 through the distance education modality and different strategies such as tutoring and home visits. Schools are currently in school vacation period.

The Ministry of Education of Panama issued [Decree 25](#) of January 14, 2021, which establishes the 2021 school calendar for official and private schools at the first and second levels of education, both regular and non-regular, and establishes other provisions.

PARAGUAY

The schools are closed, but the opening of the schools is planned for March 2, 2021 with a hybrid modality, a partial and total mix depending on several factors: the number of students enrolled for the face-to-face or virtual modality and the availability of teachers to carry out either face-to-face or distance education according to their health conditions per institution. Institutions in rural areas are encouraged to open fully and to analyze the total or partial opening of schools in urban areas.

Families can choose whether they wish to enroll their children in face-to-face or distance mode. In the face-to-face setting, the following options are available: full face-to-face or semi-face-to-face. The capacity of the classrooms will define the existence of "bubble groups". In the distance mode, the following scenarios are possible: with technology or without technology.

PERU

The Ministry of Education has publicly announced that the start of the school year will remain on March 15, but that until April 15 all education will be distance learning.

In parallel, and in close collaboration with UNICEF, the technical norm for face-to-face/semi-presential and distance education is being formulated. This standard will regulate the process of reopening schools. A first partial version of it (the one referring to protocols for reopening) was validated with teachers from different regions of the country, under UNICEF's leadership.

The school year closed on December 20 and the new school year starts on March 15 (consistent with Peru's regular school calendar) in this sense there are no schools currently open, which is consistent with this regular calendar. By the end of the 2020 school year, nearly 1,000 schools were reopened in rural areas with low COVID-19 prevalence.

SURINAME

Schools were planned to reopen on January 6, 2021, however due to the sharp increase in COVID-19 cases, the government decided to keep schools closed until February 9, 2021. The Ministry of Education had started the school year on October 1, as usual, and remained open until the vacations of December 22-23.

Reopening will be total, but on a rotation schedule of two or three days per week face-to-face schooling. Teachers are being provided weekly instructions to parents through WhatsApp groups.

URUGUAY

Face to face classes were resumed in a staggered manner between April and June 2020. As the opening was staggered, during the first months the opening was partial. After June, all schools opened, except for occasional closures due to the detection of virus outbreaks.

Classes went into recess due to the summer break, but until the last day of school, schools were open. Although the pandemic situation has worsened, so far there have been no concrete announcements as to whether there will be any changes for the start of classes on March 1, 2021.

It is estimated that 100 % of the children, around 780,000 children and adolescents (778,339 according to the 2019 enrollment) are benefiting from face-to-face education.

VENEZUELA

In Venezuela schools continue to be closed, In January the second moment or pedagogical period began (there are three in the school year, divided by trimesters). The distance education modality continues. The strategy of offering spaces for face-to-face pedagogical counseling in the schools during the flexibilization weeks, where some families and students attend the schools on a voluntary basis for didactic counseling actions, is maintained.

No definitive reopening date has been announced yet. In a recent statement in January, the President of the country said that it is expected to start between February and March the vaccination day for teachers and professors and then move on to a partial return to schools. In the same statement, it was reported that a presidential commission is evaluating a partial opening of schools. A mixed modality, distance and face-to-face is proposed.



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