In March 2020, when the government of Argentina closed schools across the country, around 10.5 million children and adolescents experienced disruptions to their education. To safely re-establish face-to-face learning, Argentina’s Federal Council of Education created a special advisory group to develop general guidelines and protocols. Six months later, Argentina restarted face-to-face schooling, with a limited number of students allowed to attend. By February 2021, 24 provinces had agreed to prioritize full in-person classes. Meanwhile, full attendance was allowed again in March 2021 and by September (under resolution 404/21) the Federal Council of Education had recommended full in-person attendance throughout the educational system. While school re-openings vary across the country based on the prevalence of COVID-19, 94 per cent of students have returned to face-to-face classes.

In May 2021, Argentina’s Federal Council of Education, with technical support from UNICEF and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), launched the Federal Observatory of classrooms re-opening. The Observatory produced periodical reports that compiled data on the number and percentages of schools and students without face-to-face classes and the rate of vaccination among teachers from all 24 of Argentina’s provinces. The reports were published every 15 days and are part of Argentina’s larger Return to School re-opening plan. The plan identifies students at risk of not returning to the classroom and helping them to stay in school by providing them with learning services and supplies.
As part of the plan, students can also access alternative learning and catch-up programmes, an assessment of any learning loss they may have experienced. The plan also allows for teacher training on how to use open, digital education resources to support their students’ learning recovery. The plan is in line with the type of work countries worldwide must undertake to get children back into school following the COVID-19 closures. The goals of this work aligns with the Mission Recovery Education 2021, a year-long partnership between UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank focused on providing support to countries as they re-open their schools.

RESULTS ACHIEVED
As schools re-opened in Argentina between 2020 and 2021, UNICEF supported the National Recovery plan in these ways:

- Support to the multimedia National Programme, Seguimos Educando, which reached more than 9,525,000 students through educational TV and radio programmes and printed booklets.
- Providing priority provinces and programmes with educational booklets and school supplies, helping more than 10,300 adolescents living in vulnerable and rural territories to continue their learning.
- Technical assistance and support to generate knowledge were provided to 1) inform and disseminate the National Learning Continuity Evaluation, and 2) develop five UNICEF Rapid Assessments to measure the impact of the pandemic on children and adolescents schooling.
- In September 2021, more than 23,000 directors and teachers received training through the Juana Manso digital platform, the National Teacher Training Institute, and the SDG initiative #4, focused on strengthening new educational strategies and settings.
- Eight Return to the Classroom reports have been published since 29 May 2021. The final report will be an analysis of the country’s handling of school re-opening during the COVID-19 pandemic and will serve as a guide for addressing future emergencies.
- A study on best school practices to guarantee school re-opening in difficult and vulnerable contexts has been developed. The aim was to provide insights into effective strategies to ensure safe schools and in-person learning for the most vulnerable children and adolescents.

LESSONS LEARNED
Everyone should play a key role in deciding when schools re-open. In Argentina, the decision to return to face-to-face learning fell not only on specialists in the education and public health fields but also teachers, family members, caregivers and students. Their decisions were guided by results collected in provinces from across Argentina and shared in the Return to the Classroom reports. By expanding the decision making process, and providing all stakeholders with up-to-date knowledge on how the pandemic was effecting each province, the Federal Council of Education was able to reach a consensus on protocols and regulations. Each provincial ministry of education was then able to tailor their province’s re-opening plan based on its need and the resources available, such as school supplies, personal protective equipment as well as water, sanitation and health (WASH) facilities.

NEXT STEPS
UNICEF and partners will support Argentina’s Ministry of Education as it expands its digital connectivity into all provinces and distributes ICT equipment to schools located in rural as well as high-need areas. This expansion will lead to sustainable school support, while also aiding in the monitoring of how effective learning recovery actions are. Additionally, this expansion will help strengthen intersectoral partnerships between the education, health and social development sectors as future programmes aimed at reaching out-of-school children and adolescents are developed.