On average, schools in the Eastern and Southern African region have been fully closed for 22 weeks, as of 28 February 2022, according to the UNESCO Global Monitoring of School Closures. By the end of February 2022, about half of countries (10 of 22 countries) in the region saw durations of full school closures beyond the global average of 20 weeks. The total duration of school closures (fully closed and partially closed) ranges from 0 weeks in Burundi to 92 weeks in Uganda. Schoolchildren in the region have lost 150 billion hours of in-person learning.

Pre-COVID, and among countries with available data, the proportion of children who can read a simple text ranged from 5 per cent in Madagascar to 52 per cent in Botswana. A growing body of evidence shows substantial losses and worsening inequalities in learning outcomes as a result of COVID-related school closures.

In Ethiopia, students learned only 30-40 per cent of what they normally would in math, with a widening gap between rural and urban students. In Kenya, a study among primary-school children who maintained use of an online tutoring platform lost an equivalent of 3.5 months of learning in math, with larger losses for Grades 4 and 6 than Grade 8, and for students in “hardship areas” and rural schools. In South Africa, Grade 2 students lost between 50-70 per cent of a year of learning and Grade 4 students lost between 62-81 per cent of a year of learning; among Grade 4 students, learning losses were 27 per cent higher for girls than boys.

School closures in the region have long-term implications for its learners: current learners in Sub-Saharan Africa could stand to lose half a trillion dollars in future earnings.

Source: UNICEF calculation based on UNESCO Global Monitoring of School Closures, UNICEF MICS Foundational Learning Skills Module and UNESCO and World Bank Learning Poverty Index. “Can read a simple text” refers to “one minus learning poverty rate”, reflecting late-primary level of reading; countries marked with * refer to the foundational reading skill rate, reflecting early-grade level of reading (for countries without learning poverty data).
Children’s return to school is tracked through regular attendance monitoring, as cited in Botswana and Zimbabwe. Such information is communicated via reporting channels from the school/local level to the regional/national level, as in the case of Ethiopia, Kenya and Namibia.

Burundi, Kenya and Zambia participated in the COVID-19: Monitoring the Impacts on Learning Outcomes (MILO), which aims to provide information on the impact of the pandemic on learning outcomes in six countries in Africa.

South Sudan and Uganda have adapted a condensed curriculum focused on core content and subjects. In Burundi, non-governmental organizations provide remediation courses to school returnees, internally displaced persons and vulnerable communities.

Note: Data in graphs are based on UNICEF’s Pulse Survey administered through UNICEF country offices and UNICEF National Committees between 3–11 March 2022. Unless hyperlinked, information on country examples is based on qualitative responses from the same survey. Caution is advised in generalizing the results represented in the figure on the implementation and scale of remediation measures, as only a limited number of countries (those who responded to the survey and reported having remediation programmes) responded to this question.