

National Education Responses to COVID-19: Global Tracker Survey Results

Update 6

[27 August 2020]

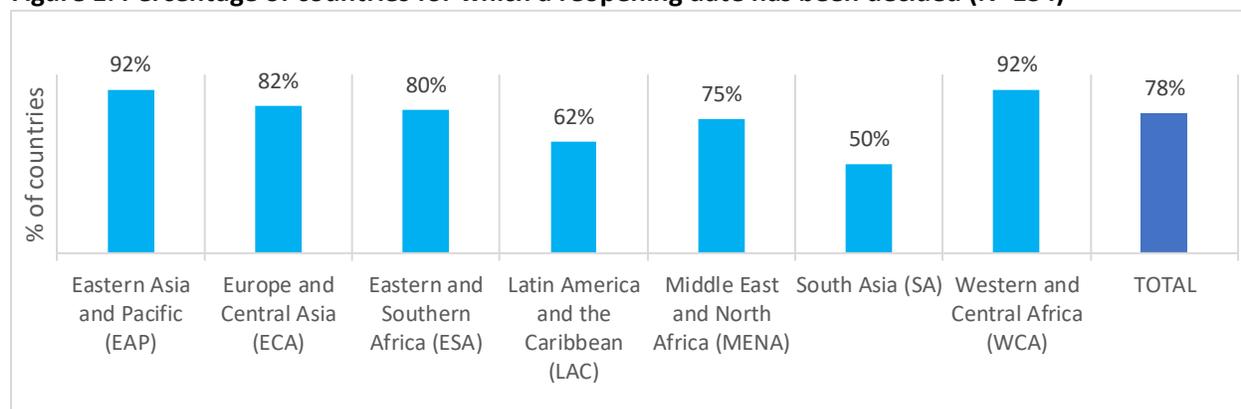


Since March 2020, UNICEF has been tracking the national education responses to COVID-19 around the world through multiple rounds of an **online survey**. The most recent round in August focused on countries' plans and preparedness for school re-opening, while also gathering information on UNICEF's advocacy to reopen schools. This update shares the key findings from this new survey, to which 112 UNICEF country offices responded. It also draws on previous-round data on planned dates for school reopening for some additional countries.

SCHOOL REOPENING PLANS AND DATE

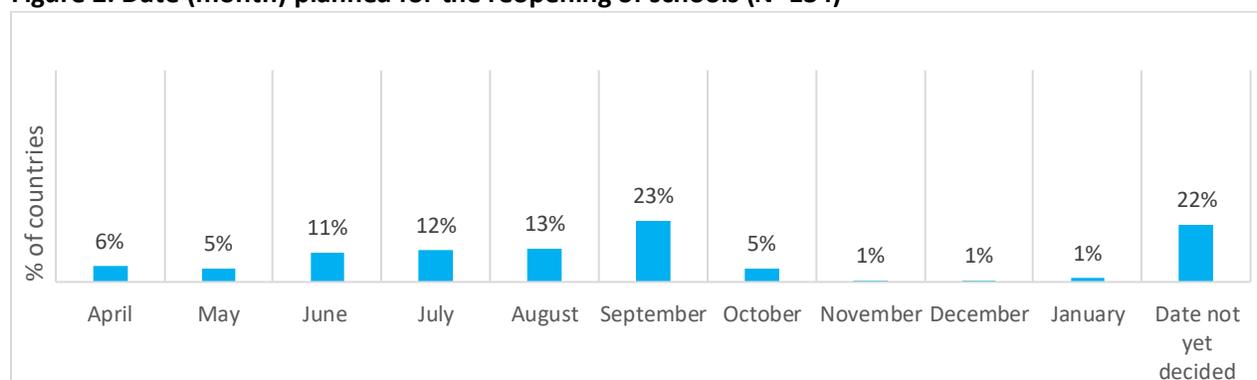
As shown in Figure 1, a large majority (78%) of countries have a date planned for school reopening. This is a significant change from May 2020, when a majority of reporting countries (64%) had not yet decided on a date for reopening schools.

Figure 1: Percentage of countries for which a reopening date has been decided (N=134)



47% of countries reported that they have or will have reopened schools by the end of August 2020, meaning millions of children have already returned to school. Another 23% of countries plan to reopen schools in September.

Figure 2: Date (month) planned for the reopening of schools (N=134)

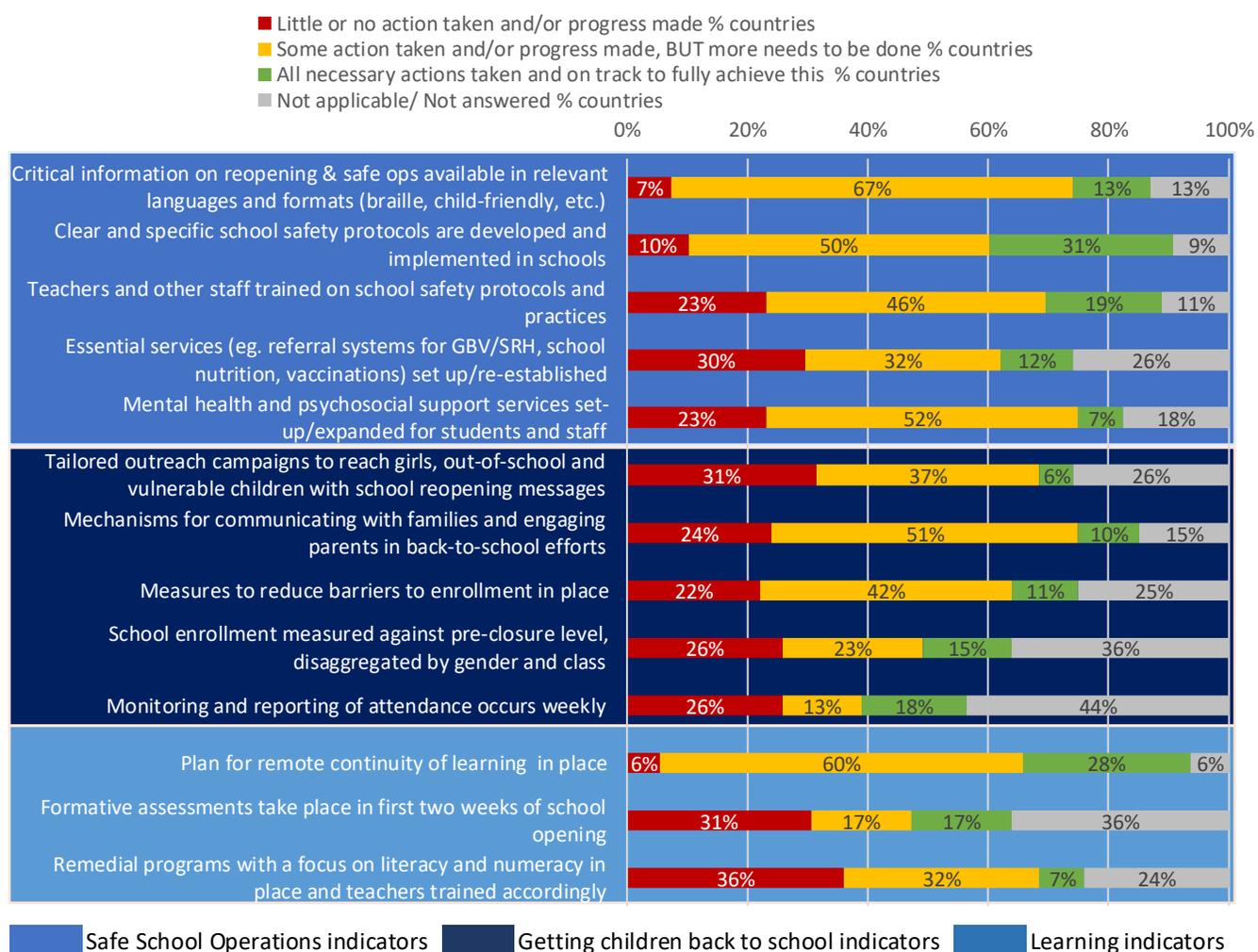


COUNTRY PREPAREDNESS FOR SCHOOL REOPENING

To better understand countries' **level of preparedness** for school re-opening, UNICEF rated national governments' progress on **13 indicators** related to implementing safe school operations, getting children back to school, and promoting learning when schools reopen. Figure 3 shows the level of action taken and/or progress made by Ministries of Education/governments on these indicators. Across the 13 indicators, more countries were reported to have taken either some or all necessary action to prepare than were reported to have taken little or no action.

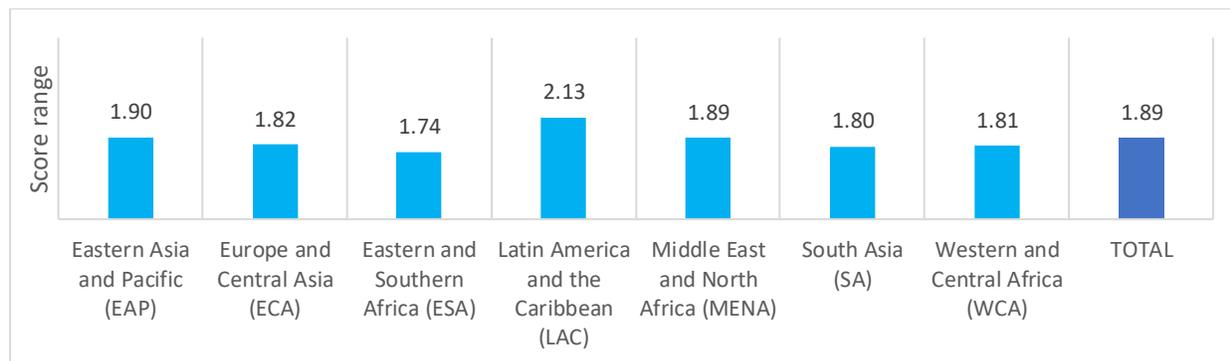
In the area of safe school operations, around 80% of countries have acted on providing critical information on school and safe school operations that is widely available and accessible, as well as on developing clear and specific school safety protocols. Fewer countries have taken steps for training teachers or preparing to restart other services at schools. For getting children back into school when schools reopen, much remains to be done. For example, only 43% of countries have made some or sufficient preparations for outreach campaigns to encourage girls, out-of-school, and vulnerable children to return to school; even fewer countries are prepared to track school enrollment and monitor the attendance of children upon reopening. UNICEF actively advocates for inclusive re-openings addressing the needs of the most vulnerable (more information further below). Finally, for promoting learning, almost 90% of countries have made progress on putting remote learning plans in place in the event of further closures; yet, around one-third of countries have taken little or no action to address the learning gaps that may result from the closures, such as by preparing to conduct formative assessments or planning remedial learning programs.

Figure 3: Country Preparedness for School Reopening (Percentage of countries, N=109)



For further analysis, countries were assigned an **average score based on how they rated their progress** made on the 13 school reopening preparedness indicators. These scores range from 1 (signifying little or no action taken across all indicators) to 3 (signifying all necessary action taken for all indicators). Globally, the average score per country per indicator was 1.89, meaning on average countries have made some progress across a variety of preparedness measures, but more remains to be done. Figure 4 shows that the average preparedness score does not vary widely by region, though countries in Latin America and the Caribbean report the highest levels of preparedness and countries in Eastern and Southern Africa the lowest.

Figure 4: Average score per readiness indicator, by region (N=109)



Snapshot of preparedness challenges for school reopening

In **Zimbabwe**, the budget allocated for preparation for school reopening from the Ministry of Finance to the Ministry of Education is taking time to trickle down to all schools that need financial support for preparedness (e.g. procurement of PPE). Given the national lockdown measure, many school staff are away from school and are unable to contribute to the preparation. Some school staff and families fear exposure to COVID-19 and have decided not to attend meetings/trainings.

The teachers' union in **Democratic Republic of Congo** has expressed reservations about the conditions for reopening of schools and the expected actions from the government to protect the health of students and teachers. Significant reductions in the national budget due to the economic impact of COVID-19 have substantially reduced both the availability of domestic resources for education and the government's capacity to sustain its abolition of school fees. UNICEF is the main support to the government for school reopening.

All primary and middle schools in **Uruguay** reopened in June 2020. Challenges regarding the implementation of school reopening include the education gap between children who have returned and those who haven't (school attendance is still voluntary), student evaluation under this particular circumstance and the workload of teachers who must juggle classroom teaching and remote learning.

In **Indonesia**, systematic monitoring of school reopening, including timely collection and analysis of necessary data, has been a major challenge. UNICEF has been supporting the Ministry of Education in developing and implementing a data collection and visualization system (dashboard) on school reopening.

UNICEF ADVOCACY ON SCHOOL REOPENING: Open Up Better Campaign

UNICEF country offices are heavily involved in advocacy for the safe reopening of schools across the world. As depicted in Figure 5, **over 80% of country offices surveyed report engaging in advocacy or communications on school reopening**. In several regions, almost every UNICEF programme country is engaged in these efforts. Only in Eastern Asia and Pacific, where the majority of schools have already reopened and several did not close for long periods, are fewer countries engaged in such advocacy with the government and partners.

Figure 5: Percentage of country offices engaged in advocacy campaigns on school reopening (N=112)

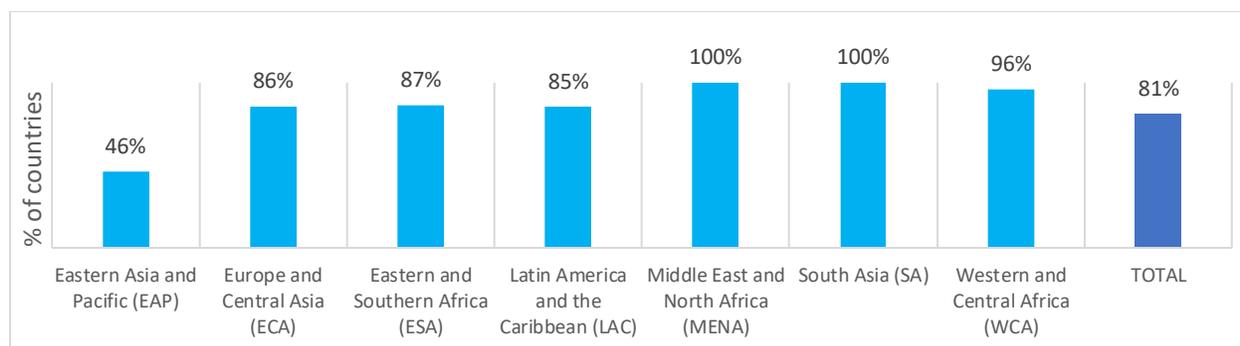
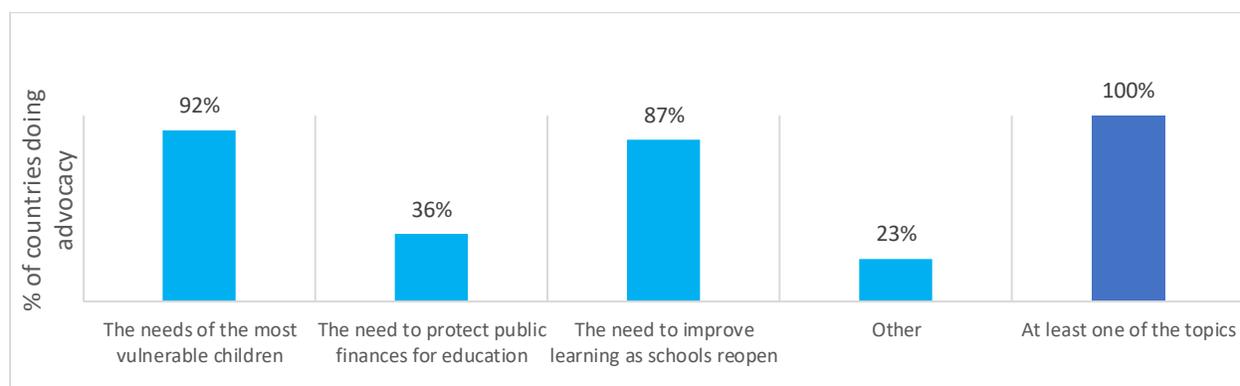


Figure 6, below, further depicts the **key messages UNICEF country offices are emphasizing** in their advocacy efforts on safe school reopening. Addressing the needs of the most vulnerable children (e.g. girls, refugees, children on the move, children with disabilities and ethnic minorities) and the need to improve learning as schools reopen are two important messages highlighted by approximately **nine out of ten of the countries in their advocacy**.

As mentioned above, only 43% of countries have made preparations for outreach campaigns to encourage girls, out-of-school, and vulnerable children to return to school, and even fewer countries are prepared to track school enrollment and monitor the attendance of children upon reopening. In this context, UNICEF’s active advocacy for the most marginalized in 92% of countries that are engaged in advocacy plays a critical role in ensuring that the needs of the most vulnerable are met. In the **“Inclusive School Reopening”** paper, UNICEF provides global guidance on how to ensure that the most marginalized children go back to school. To further enhance global advocacy and delivery on the ground, UNICEF developed **key programmatic, policy and budgetary advocacy messages** to promote, in close collaboration with partners, the return of the most marginalized to school. A focus on the most vulnerable includes **girls, refugees, children on the move, children with disabilities and ethnic minorities**. The mentioned advocacy messages are central to the **“Bringing Girls Back to School Campaign”** which is an important element of UNICEF’s larger Open Up Better Campaign. Further, as part of an interagency effort, UNICEF co-authored the recently published **“Building Back Equal: Girls Back to School Guide”** together with UNESCO, Plan International, UNGEI, and the Malala Fund.

Figure 6: Percentage of country offices highlighting key messages in their advocacy (N=91)



UNICEF’s advocacy on school re-opening aims to achieve various advocacy outcomes, the most prominent of which are the improvement of school reopening policies and resource commitments to school reopening. Although this advocacy work continues, several examples that highlight the importance of advocacy are provided below.

Examples of advocacy actions and outcomes in countries

Shift in narrative

- India** UNICEF advocacy *shifted government thinking on the importance of preparing for reopening*. The use of direct advocacy with the government rather than public advocacy has built confidence in UNICEF messages and led to concrete action, such as government requests for technical support and engagement in the development of guidelines and checklists.
- Montenegro** No public or professional debate on the reopening of schools was in place until the UNICEF country office initiated the discussion through direct advocacy with relevant institutions. This resulted in a *shift of narrative on several topics, including on the need for a flexible rather than blanket approach to school reopening*, as well as the need to involve all key actors and stakeholders in decision making.
- Somalia** A key objective has been to guarantee there is sufficient advocacy to ensure the authorities and communities are in favour of reopening schools. *This has been achieved, as there is a consensus in Somalia on the need to continue the education of children*. Both Ministries and partners have also earmarked specific funding for school reopening, considering the need for awareness raising activities and WASH improvements in the schools.

Inclusion of marginalized groups

- Cote d'Ivoire** The Ministry of Education has set a date for the next school re-entry, with specific measures aimed at supporting **girls'** return to school.
- Palestine** UNICEF sent a written communication to the Minister of Education advocating for the **most vulnerable children** to be prioritized, and had a follow-up meeting with the Minister and his team. The school reopening plan that has just been launched by the Ministry of Education has the guiding principle of reaching the most marginalized children as a top priority.
- Tunisia** UNICEF advocacy and support included a meeting with the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Social Affairs that strengthened linkages between the two ministries to ensure that Back to Learning/Back to School messages are included in social programs supporting **vulnerable families**.
- Myanmar** UNICEF's advocacy for utilizing an inclusive approach in all COVID-19 response and recovery initiatives led the Ministry of Education to *ensure consideration for **children affected by conflict, children with disabilities, ethnic minority children and out-of-school children** in risk communication products, distribution of school guidelines* and other activities. Additionally, UNICEF advocated for government resources to be mobilized for safe school reopening, which led the government to fully finance school disinfection.
- Sri Lanka** With UNICEF's advocacy efforts, the *Ministry of Education agreed to add a message on preventing associated **stigmatization and discrimination*** to a media campaign on COVID-19 prevention behaviours. This is important for Sri Lanka, where social cohesion and violence against children are key challenges.

Mobilization of resources

Mexico Advocacy and communications work towards donors has *resulted in funds being provided to UNICEF, especially for WASH in schools*. Promotion of the global framework on re-opening schools and messages related to inclusion of **most vulnerable populations**, accompanied by programmatic interventions and technical support, may have contributed to a shift in the narrative and to greater attention being paid to excluded populations in the second phase of the distance education period.

DRC Advocacy to the private sector helped *secure the commitment of corporate leaders who have mobilized their resources for education*. UNICEF secured USD 15 million in funding from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) for the response to COVID-19, which benefited from the endorsement of the National Ministry of Education and other technical and financial partners in the country. In addition, advocacy at Ministry level and during education task force COVID-19 meetings have contributed to the Ministry of Education setting up a progressive and protective reopening.