Reopening Schools:
Facts & insights from synthesising country experiences

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Evidence Into Actionable Solutions

REOPENING SCHOOLS:
FACTS & INSIGHTS FROM COUNTRY EXPERIENCES

We investigated **161 country level school closures and 32 reopenings** in order to **compare and synthesise key decision-influencing features** for system leaders at national and local levels, and to complement existing closure tracking and reopening frameworks. This summary offers a **pragmatic glance** at the emerging results of an ongoing investigation to illuminate the **factors and influences that guide decisions**.

This is **targeted especially towards COVID-19 response and reopening task forces**, and will be **updated regularly**. At least **three independent sources** were reviewed for each reopened country, and include official databases, ministry websites, country response plans and policies, press reports, and social media announcements.

TOP-OF-MIND CONSIDERATIONS FOR REOPENING:

1. WHEN?

What is the relationship between **infection rates and school closure and reopening**?

2. PRECONDITIONS?

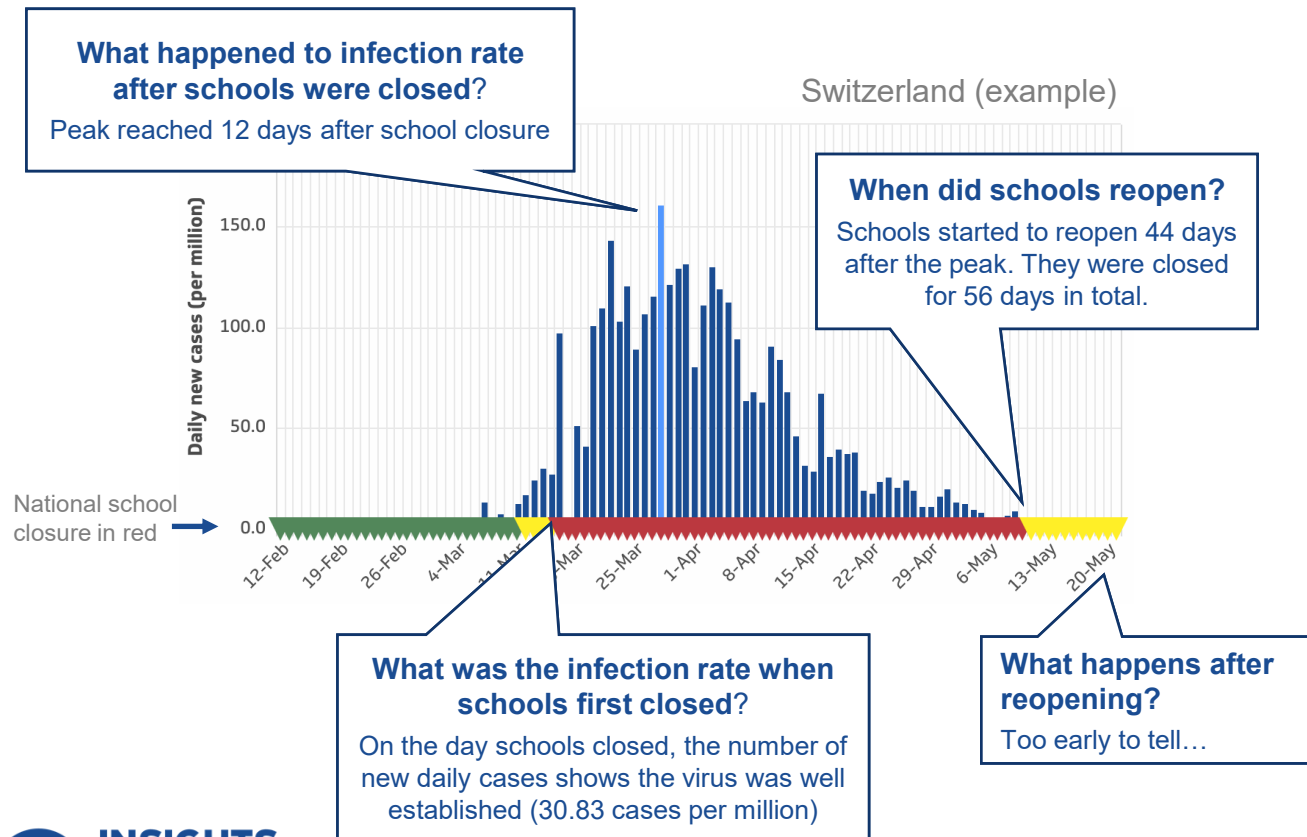What are the observed **must-haves** and critical enablers to put in place before reopening?

3. HOW?

How are countries **staging** reopening, and w**hat can be learned** from country examples?

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GLOBALLY, CLOSURE AND REOPENING ARE NOT FOLLOWING PREDICTABLE PATTERNS

WE COMBINED VIRUS PROGRESSION & SCHOOL CLOSURE DATA FROM 161 COUNTRIES FOR THIS ANALYSIS

Switzerland (example)

What happened to infection rate after schools were closed?
Peak reached 12 days after school closure

When did schools reopen?
Schools started to reopen 44 days after the peak. They were closed for 56 days in total.

Daily new cases (per million)

National school closure in red

What was the infection rate when schools first closed?
On the day schools closed, the number of new daily cases shows the virus was well established (30.83 cases per million)

What happens after reopening?
Too early to tell…

FOR ALL COUNTRIES:

+ 73% of countries closed in the **same ten-day period** from 11ᵗʰ March.

+ Infection rates reflect multiple factors, with school closures being only one contributor. Globally, there is **no consistent relationship** between school closure dates and the reported cases of infection in the population.

+ Since closure, some countries have seen infection levels drop, in many others they have risen.

+ 25 of the 32 countries that have reopened are high income countries; **on average 31 days after** the peak in infection levels.
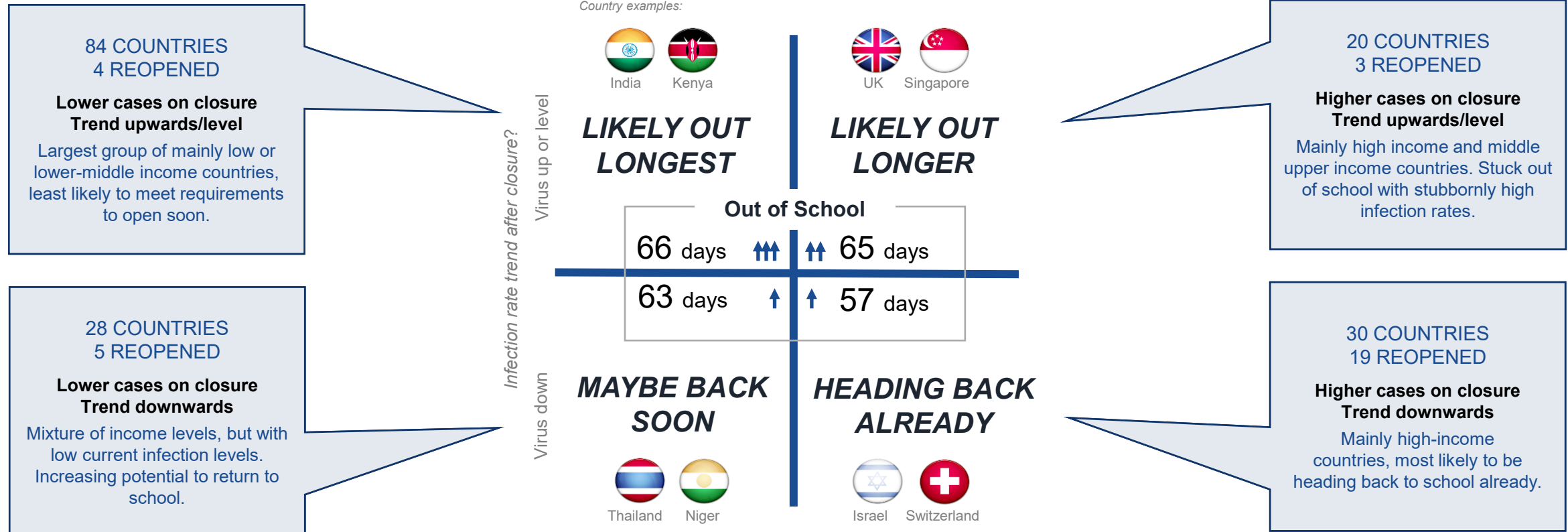
*Visit **education.org** for our COVID-19 Infection and School Status Tracker, updated daily.*

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MORE THAN HALF THE WORLD'S STUDENTS LIKELY TO BE OUT OF SCHOOL MUCH LONGER

WE ANALYSED THE DATA AND FOUND FOUR GROUPINGS THAT HELP TO EXPLAIN THE DIFFERENT NATIONAL STRATEGIES ADOPTED

Country examples:

India   Kenya

UK   Singapore

84 COUNTRIES
4 REOPENED

Lower cases on closure
Trend upwards/level

Largest group of mainly low or lower-middle income countries, least likely to meet requirements to open soon.

20 COUNTRIES
3 REOPENED

Higher cases on closure
Trend upwards/level

Mainly high income and middle upper income countries. Stuck out of school with stubbornly high infection rates.

Infection rate trend after closure?

Virus up or level

LIKELY OUT LONGEST

LIKELY OUT LONGER

Out of School

66 days ↑↑↑	↑↑ 65 days
63 days ↑	↑ 57 days

Virus down

MAYBE BACK SOON

HEADING BACK ALREADY

Thailand   Niger

Israel   Switzerland

28 COUNTRIES
5 REOPENED

Lower cases on closure
Trend downwards

Mixture of income levels, but with low current infection levels. Increasing potential to return to school.

30 COUNTRIES
19 REOPENED

Higher cases on closure
Trend downwards

Mainly high-income countries, most likely to be heading back to school already.

< 1   >1

When did schools close? (Cases per million, 7-day rolling average)

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THREE "MUST-HAVE" PRECONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL REOPENING

MUST-HAVES

1. SAFETY

Planned in close cooperation with health officials, staff & learners: distancing, sanitation, protective equipment, infection monitoring & response

+ **Distancing protocols** range from 1m – 4m per student; WHO advises 1m minimum, schools on average arrange for **1.5m**

+ **Reorganizing school day** to ensure safety (i.e., implementing half-day shifts to reduce number of people in school spaces)

+ Where running water is not sufficient, **sanitiser is positioned at entrances or by large areas**

+ **Testing is not routinely offered**: In 2 countries for teachers and learners, 1 country for teachers only, and 2 for any at-risk in the school community (note: broad school testing can result in early jump in cases previously undetected)

+ **Temperatures** are recorded upon entry in **only 10%** of countries using thermal scanners.

+ Use of masks and other protective equipment varies;

  + **One-third require masks** for teachers and students 12 years+.

  + When required, **masks are usually provided** by school or subsidised partially.

2. STAFF AVAILABILITY

Availability of educators, school leaders, and support staff

+ **Large at-risk teacher populations,** were cited as reasons for keeping schools closed in four countries, even if reopening had been advised at national level.

+ Advance consideration for all **enabling personnel**, including transport, cleaning, medical, law enforcement – teacher supply has been only one of many shortages

3. COMMUNITY SUPPORT

With support of health ministry, communication and collaborative planning with parents, teachers, business, and other civil society actors

+ Usually occurring through **multi-stakeholder reopening task forces** or extended committees, and supported by media and in some cases broad SMS messaging

+ Majority of countries reported significant **objections to reopening from parents or teachers due to safety concerns**; in two cases concerns caused postponement

+ Countries that reported **least tension with stakeholders tended to have early and deep community engagement,** and supported effective and broad communication strategies along the way

CRITICAL ENABLERS

POLICIES

Policies required to enact new requirements, for example, ongoing **distance learning, gender & whole-child responsive adjustments,** admission requirements, national exam modifications

OPERATIONAL PLANS

Plans for administering new requirement around safety, school calendar and exam shifts, entrance & exit staging, resurgence response plans, distance learning, teaching, and assessment, and **strengthening resilience** for future challenges

BUDGET & RESOURCES

Financial and other resources required to **enact and maintain reopening** under new requirements, including monitoring and assessment of response

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MEETING PRECONDITIONS REQUIRES PRIORITISATION

PRE-CONDITIONS MAKE IT **VERY CHALLENGING** TO REOPEN SCHOOLS NATIONWIDE AT **ALL LEVELS**, SO COUNTRIES ARE PRIORITISING
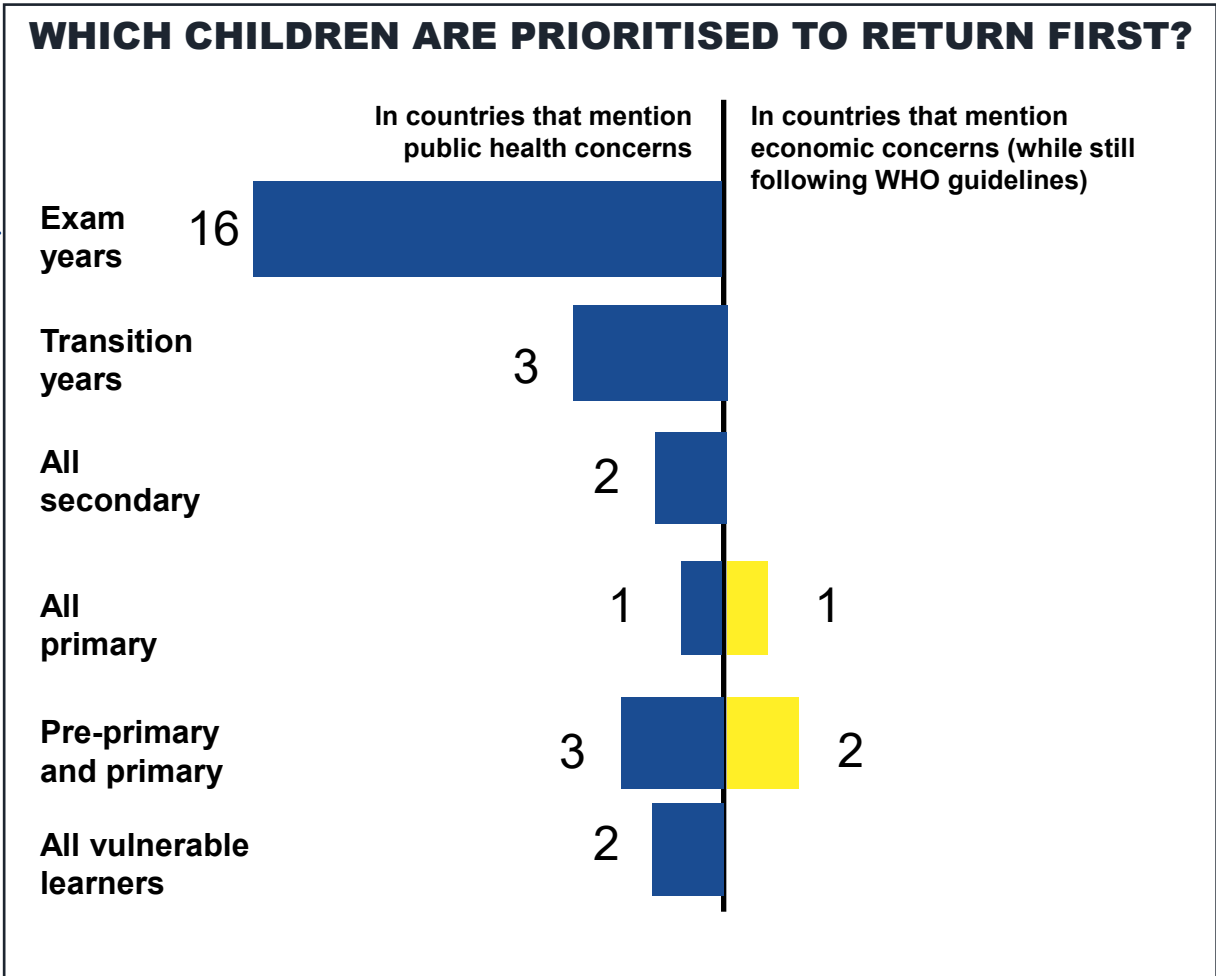
Sixteen countries prioritised learners in exam years to return first, because they require exams for advancement, exams which can be difficult to administer out of school, and because older students can better comply with distancing.

Of the 32 countries assessed, only two lower income countries have opened **all school levels simultaneously**, they are isolated island states with low and declining infection rates.

Day care and preschools are not uniformly captured in global data, as they are often provided privately, or not included in basic education plans. This likely will lead to leaving many young children without strong early learning over the course of the pandemic.

One country prioritised **the last pre-primary year to return first**, citing the criticality of solid preparation for transitioning to primary successfully

One country prioritised primary learners on the basis that they mostly **reached school in the village on foot**, not needing public transportation, unlike secondary and tertiary levels.

WHICH CHILDREN ARE PRIORITISED TO RETURN FIRST?

	In countries that mention public health concerns	In countries that mention economic concerns (while still following WHO guidelines)
Exam years	16	
Transition years	3	
All secondary	2	
All primary	1	1
Pre-primary and primary	3	2
All vulnerable learners	2	

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THERE IS GREAT VALUE IN MAPPING & SHARING COUNTRY EXPERIENCES EXAMPLES, NOT EXHAUSTIVE
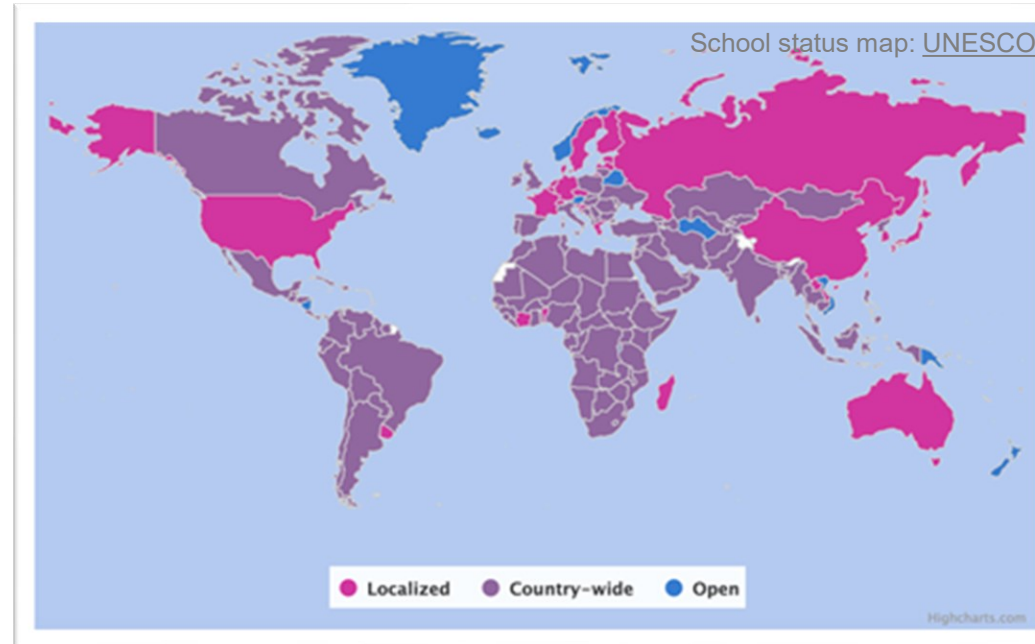
STAFF & SPACE AVAILABILITY

Early graduation of teacher trainees and other critical professions (USA) or deputising professionals for other required services (Ireland)

"Growing your own" by recruiting and supporting recent graduates and/or senior students development and training with support and mentorship of fully trained personnel (USA)

Deploying **at-risk teachers for distance teaching** within comprehensive reopening framework and planning

Using **all available** indoor and outdoor spaces to increase school capacity, **repurposing community spaces**, stadiums, churches, etc (China, Japan, others)

Inclusive task forces (Denmark), and community **reopening chaperones**, building consensus and having shared plan creation, ownership and accountability

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School status map: UNESCO

● Localized ● Country-wide ● Open

Highcharts.com

ALL NATIONS, AND ESPECIALLY **LOWER INCOME COUNTRIES**, WILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO MEET SCHOOL REOPENING PRE-CONDITIONS, THEREBY KEEPING MANY STUDENTS OUT OF SCHOOL FOR AN **EXTENDED TIME**.

WE CAN FIND STRENGTH IN CRISIS, BY LEARNING AND INNOVATING WITH ONE ANOTHER.

RESILIENCE THROUGH CRISIS

Assume prolonged / repeated closures **and permanently strengthen distance learning & teaching** in parallel to preparing reopening.

Establish **new dedicated divisions for distance learning** as part of response plans

Consider **blended learning** and ongoing distance learning policies and infrastructure (Greece, Egypt)

See *how* others are permanently strengthening distance learning (Croatia) and guides for **virtual learner assessment** & distance school leadership .

Establish **new dedicated divisions for distance learning**
Apply key lessons from Education in Emergencies in the immediate crisis and for longer term reform:
- Accelerated Education (catch-up learning, Jordan)
- Whole-Child support
- Extra safeguards for most vulnerable (UK, South Africa)

Monitor effect of COVID-19 effect on student **well-being** (Finland, China)

Prioritise **equity-advancing policies first** (Greece, France, Sierra Leone)

WHAT'S NEXT?

Questions for a next phase include:

- How can country experiences be harnessed to **better support those who remain out** of school?

- Given that a second (or more) waves are possible, how can systems, teachers and learners be **better prepared for future closures**?

We'd love to learn what would be helpful. Please contact us below to share your suggestions.

Insights for Education is a recently-established global resource for evidence-informed decision-making and implementation in education. Our vision is a world where decision making in education **reflects the best evidence to reach each learner** and improve learning outcomes for **every child.** We aim to do this by synthesising and translating relevant evidence and experience, to **help education leaders solve their toughest challenges** in strengthening equity and outcomes. To learn more please visit **education.org** or contact us: **info@education.org**

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THANK YOU

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