CATCHING-UP IN EDUCATION AFTER COVID-19:

How to address the learning loss in KIX LAC countries

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SUMMA

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OECS
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About this report

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About the Knowledge & Innovation Exchange (KIX) initiative

The KIX initiative seeks to connect the expertise, innovation and knowledge of Global Partnership for Education (GPE) partners to help developing countries build stronger education systems. Through the sharing and funding of proven solutions and innovations, KIX will: (a) ensure that evidence-based solutions get in the hands of national policy makers and directly feed policy dialogue and planning processes; (b) build capacity to produce, integrate and scale knowledge and innovation in GPE partner countries. For that, KIX has built Regional Hubs in different regions, where partners come together to share information, innovation and best practices. KIX is also a funding mechanism that provides grants at the global and regional levels to invest in knowledge generation and innovation, and to scale proven approaches. The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) is the grant agent for KIX.

Led by a consortium integrated by SUMMA and OECS, the KIX for the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) hub will work between April 2020 and December 2023 to support country partners' systems education development and to contribute to guarantee the right to education in **Dominica, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent & the Grenadines** (country partners). To achieve its goal, the LAC KIX has defined three pillars: (I) policy agenda setting; (II) knowledge mobilization & exchange; and (III) regional and local capacity building.

About SUMMA

It is the first Laboratory of Education Research and Innovation for Latin America and the Caribbean. It was created in 2016 by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), with the support of the Ministries of Education of Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay. Since 2018, the Ministries of Guatemala, Honduras and Panama have also joined. SUMMA works on three strategic pillars that allow the promotion, development and spread of cutting-edge research aimed to address the main challenges in the region and promoting shared work agendas; fostering innovation in education policies and practices to provide solutions for the main education problems in the region; and advance collaborative networks that allow the exchange between policy makers, researchers, innovators and the school community.

About the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS)

OECS is an intergovernmental organization dedicated to regional integration in the Eastern Caribbean. Guided by strategic objectives, OECS works in different programmatic areas and in all its Member States to consolidate a common economic space for sustained economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection.

Executive Summary

The purpose of this document is to address the challenges of learning loss recovery given the consequences of the health crisis in the world, and specifically in the KIX LAC countries: Dominica, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and to propose recommendations to address the learning loss due to the pandemic.

The impact of COVID-19 on the educational systems of the KIX countries in Latin America and the Caribbean is high and the closure of schools affected the entire region. For this reason, several strategies have been implemented. The KIX LAC center has identified three main dimensions:

(i) Offering distance education. The KIX countries (like most countries in the world) developed digital strategies to face this new context, but due to connectivity problems, countries had to look for alternatives such as radio, television and printed material.

(ii) Protection of students' health and well-being (with a focus on nutrition). It is recognized that the school is a place of knowledge, but also a place of care, which is why the countries of the region, to a greater or lesser extent, adopted policies for the continuity of feeding programs, as well as programs against violence and programs that facilitate social-emotional support.

(iii) Training and support for teachers in this new context. The teaching staff was strongly affected by the pandemic, which meant that countries had to multiply their efforts to train educators on the use of technologies and to equip them with the necessary materials.

These policies are described and analyzed below, also covering the challenges of reopening schools and learning recovery strategies in the KIX LAC countries, which have both been objectives of the region's governments. Recommendations are proposed to address those challenges.

Contents

1. Introduction

In 2020 1.6 billion children and young people were affected by school lockdowns in the whole world, and 462 million were not able to stay connected either through digital means nor other distance learning programs (UNICEF data hub, 2020), with students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, people with disabilities and girls (Girl Effect and Vodafone Foundation, 2020) being the most affected. Out of them, 160 million are in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), where the pre-pandemic situation was already alarming (ECLAC-UNESCO, 2020) in terms of availability of resources as well as coverage and equality in educational access, continuation and achievement (García Jaramillo, 2020).

Not only the learning process has been eroded or even interrupted, but other consequences such as discontinuation of children nutrition, teachers and students distress, higher drops-out rates, increase in domestic violence and social isolation have also emerged (UNESCO, 2020), and it is very likely that this affects specially girls (higher exposure to abuse, early pregnancy, more time to domestic work), as it has been learnt from previous crises (García Jaramillo, 2020). Furthermore, in the region, more than half of students in urban areas live in poor settlements, which in turn interferes with their development (ECLAC-UNESCO, 2020).

The positive role of schooling is undeniable in enabling children and young people to have better opportunities, especially in emergencies. However, for longer or shorter periods between 2020 and 2021, schools all over the world –including LAC–remained closed, forcing governments to deploy several kinds of policies both to ensure the continuation of classes for every child as well as hers and her teacher´s well-being.

How was the impact of the pandemic in KIX LAC countries (Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala , El Salvador , St. Lucia, St. Vt. & the Grenada.)? What have governments done to tackle the closures´ costs? What strategies are being implemented for catching-up? These questions are answered in the pages that follow[1].

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[1]It is important to note that El Salvador and Guatemala joined KIX LAC in the second half of 2021, therefore, the information from these countries was incorporated at a later date.

2. The impact of COVID-19 in the KIX LAC´s educational systems

As soon as the first COVID-19 cases were detected in LAC territories, most countries in the region −with the exception of Nicaragua− decided to implement different levels of quarantine, which in general implied closing schools; this occurred −with variation of days− in March, thus interrupting different moments of the academic year, depending of the country's school calendar. In Haiti, most schools had been closed even before the pandemic, because of the *peyi lock* or "country shut-down" due to the energy shortage[2].

The strict closure during the first months was generally followed by a period where countries allowed some groups of students to attend face-to-face classes. While in some countries of Latin America the openings were related to the (community or not) circulation of the virus and the tracking policies, in some others −as in Guyana and the Eastern Caribbean− the decision had to do with educational purposes, such as letting students prepare for high-stakes examinations (Annex - Table 1).
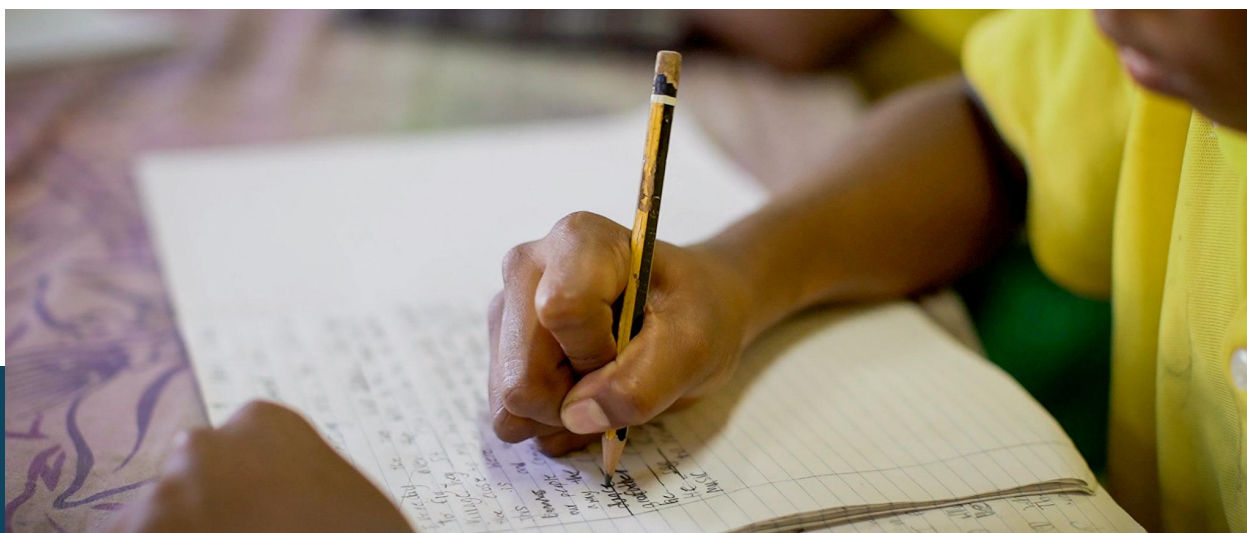
Researchers have estimated the effects of missing face-to-face classes. A group of studies concentrates on its impact on the students´ educational and life trajectories. Some estimations for the region, for example, project a decline in high-school enrolments to levels similar to those in the 1960s (Lustig et al., 2020; Neidhöfer et al., 2020). The absence from schools might also contribute to increasing child labor in LAC countries (Castelló et al., 2020).

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[2] Schools were shut down right after the beginning of the academic year, in September 2019.
Photo credits: GPE

On the other hand, other studies have pointed out the economic cost of the learning loss. For example, a year of closed early childhood centers may imply a decrease of 6,3% of GDP in the Caribbean and 7,4% in Central America (López Boo, 2021). In the world, countries may experience a decrease of 1.5% in their GDP along the rest of the century (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020).

What is more, evidence from the US (Aucejo et al., 2020), Latin America (Neidhöfer et al., 2020) and Europe (Engzell et al., 2020; Maldonado & De Witte, 2020) suggest that low-SES students will have fewer opportunities than their wealthier peers.

Projections for KIX LAC countries are consistent with these estimations. In Guyana, for example, the most affected students live in the hinterland regions, who usually are also of low-socioeconomic status; they account for 34% of the country's learners (Global Partnership for Education, 2020). According to a survey, in the (tri-island state of) Grenada, 63% of the students were unable to have any online instruction during the period, especially in the Eastern District (Knight, Marshall, Jason, et al., 2021). A study about the situation in Honduras estimates that distance education reaches just over half of the students, which means leaving behind approximately 800 thousand children (OUDENI-UPNFM, 2020). In Guatemala, the closure of schools has affected more than 4 million students (DIPLAN 2020) and in El Salvador about 80% of classroom teaching was lost, which means at least 1.5 years of effective learning loss (UNICEF 2021).

3. KIX LAC countries' strategies to ensure education equality during lockdowns

The closure of schools forced governments not only to shift massively to distance education provision, but also to generate conditions that guarantee that all children, young people and also teachers could be included in the new modality. For that, three kinds of measures were typically implemented: (a) the provision of distance education in itself; (b) the protection of students´ health and well-being (particularly nutrition); and (c) teacher training & support for the new context. These policies are described and analyzed below for the KIX LAC countries.

3.1 PROVISION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

Governments implemented different strategies to ensure the provision of education during the lockdown, which in general included both synchronous and asynchronous instances through the internet, but also more traditional means such as television, radio, flash drives, textbooks and worksheets. Although being connected is important to foster participation and interactivity, the penetration of the internet in the region is still low, so the potential of television and radio for reaching students is high (Table 1). The availability of these devices is, in all cases, lower in rural and poor households.

Table 1. Access to internet & computer

	Households with radio	Households with television	Households with personal computer	Households with internet access	Population with access to internet
Dominica	*	*	*	16%	70%
Grenada	*	*	*	23%	59%
Guyana	*	*	26%	24,17%	37%
Haiti	48%	30%	8%	4,2%	32,4%
Honduras	75%	72%	21%	19,50%	31,7%
Nicaragua	*	*	11%	11,60%	27,8%
Guatemala	65.3 %	70.6 %	*	17%	*
El Salvador	29,92	86.9%	16.7 %	23,4 %	30%
St. Lucia	*	*	*	36,6%	50,8%
St. Vincent & The Grenadines	*	*	*	19,5%	22%

Source: WEF – Global Information Technology Report, World Bank & UNICEF (2011-2016). National Institute of Statistics 2018, Guatemala. Household Survey 2020, Government of El Salvador

For example, the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training (MNEVT) in **Haiti** created a digital learning platform called PRACTIC[3]. Because of the low penetration of the internet, it also broadcasted lessons on TV as well as a reading and writing program over the radio in the Port-au-Prince area. It also distributed radios to a number of households. It is estimated that 20.000 students benefited from this policy (American Institute for Research, 2021b). In **Guatemala**, the *"Aprendo en Casa" (I learn at home)* program was carried out with the objective of continuing the educational process despite the closure of schools. This program included learning sessions through television, radio and printed media. In 2021, the program was updated and changed its name *to "Aprendo en casa y en clase" (I learn at home and in class)*, where a hybrid teaching system with self-learning guides were created (MINEDUC 2021). In **El Salvador**, the immediate measures were to prepare teachers to guide families and the government also provided material with pedagogical guidelines. Subsequently, the "Educational Continuity Plan" was established, which worked mainly with radio and printed educational material to reach the population without internet access.

In **Guyana**, the Ministry of Education offered web-based platforms for online instruction, downloadable resources from the Ministry's website, TV programs on the Guyana Learning

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[3] www.pratic.menfp.gouv.ht

Channel, radio broadcasts, printed worksheets and other resources[4]. Radio programs (interactive sessions for grades 1,2 and 3 on social studies, science and math) and worksheets were distributed mainly in the hinterland regions. Students in grades 10, 11 and 12 were authorized to go to school in November, to prepare for the regional exams (American Institute for Research, 2021a; Global Partnership for Education, 2020; UNICEF, n.d.).

In all the Eastern Caribbean countries, governments provided special accommodations for students taking examinations. In general, these students were allowed to be taught in school in small groups or on special days and even attend classes during the break.

In **Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**, lessons were broadcasted via television and social media every morning in a week-day from April to June 2020. The videos (in most disciplines) and other materials could also be downloaded from the Ministry's website. To facilitate online teaching, the Ministry provided the platform MS Suite for Education, although some schools chose other platforms and regular communication means. For those students without internet access, workbooks and other materials were also distributed (Knight, Marshall, et al., 2021b).

Table 2. Types of intervention during lockdown, per country

Country	Intervention
Dominica	- Grade tracking platforms. - Videos online, on television and on radio. - Flash-drives to students without internet. - Worksheets to students without computers. - Guidelines about students with special needs and early childhood education.
Grenada	- Over 60 videos on MSTAR Learning Support Platform. - Television and social media (YouTube and Facebook) broadcast videos. - Partnership with private companies for free data and cell-phone provision. - Socioemotional counseling through a hotline. - Printed material for students with special needs.
Guyana	- Web-based platforms (Ministry´s website). - TV programs through Guyana Learning Channel. - Radio broadcasts. - Printed worksheets.
Haiti	- Digital learning platform (PRACTIC). - Lessons on State TV. - Reading and writing programs over the radio (capital area).
Honduras	- Online platform with videos and material. - Lessons on television (Telebásica) and social media (Facebook). - Distribution of textbooks.
Nicaragua	*For students attending face-to-face classes* - Protocols for safety protection were released. *For students not attending face-to-face classes*

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[4] The impact of the COVID-19 was exacerbated due to the political context and the lack of operating budget.

	• Television programs. • Printed material.
Guatemala	• Digital Platform MINEDUC • Virtual school libraries • TV and radio learning sessions • Printed material (guides) • Digital resources •
El Salvador	• Radio and television • Printed material (educational guides and informative and orientation circulars) • Digital platforms (Google Classroom) • Digital reading plan
St. Lucia	• Online instruction. • TV programs. • Radio programs. • Printed material.
St. Vt. & the Gren.	• Streaming through social media such as Facebook. • Broadcast of lessons over TV (IKTV). • Online instruction through MS Suite for Education (platform Education Alive). • Workbooks.

Source: Own elaboration on the basis of cited studies & OREALC/ UNESCO database. Mineduc (2021), Mineducyt (2021).

Similar measures were implemented in **Saint Lucia**: online instruction, TV and radio programs, and distribution of printed material (Knight, Marshall, et al., 2021c).

On the other side, the government of **Grenada** developed an e-learning platform, MSTAR Learning Support Platform, which concentrates videos and materials to equip teachers, administrators, families and students. They were also broadcasted on television and social media (YouTube and Facebook). To support online instruction, the government provided a device to each teacher, and an alliance was developed with two companies (Digicel and Lime) to secure free data and cell phones to vulnerable students. Moreover, an app was developed for students to practice for the tests. Printed material was sent to students with special needs (around 160). For parents, teachers and students emotionally affected, a counseling hotline was provided (Knight, Marshall, Jason, et al., 2021).

In **Dominica**, there was also a massive shift towards online instruction. The Ministry of Education provided grade tracking platforms for students to view their grades and teachers track attendance and print report cards. It was complemented with other material to support virtual learning as well as some spaces (hotlines and zoom sessions) to assist families and students. Flash drives containing various lessons were provided to students with no connectivity whereas workbooks were given to students without computers. All lessons were broadcasted via television and radio (Knight, Marshall, et al., 2021a). Guidelines for early childhood education and students with special needs were also available online, together with a guide with psychosocial support (OREALC/ UNESCO Santiago, 2020).

In the case of **Honduras**, the government used different means to deliver distance education. Initially, it tried to create an online educational community, but the capacity to generate new material was not enough to satisfy the demand (Moya, 2021), so additional measures were taken, such as streaming over the national television (Telebásica), social media (Facebook) and the distribution of textbooks. Actually, the Congress passed a law that approved that at least one hour per day should be dedicated to educational contents both in radios and television programs (Moya, 2021). Meanwhile, thanks to the support of the IADB, the country has been working on improving connectivity in schools (OREALC/ UNESCO Santiago, 2020).

Finally, in **Nicaragua**, the government decided to keep schools open, although they were allowed to deliver distance education twice a week. (Otero, 2021). In order to ensure safety, guidance to teachers and students included protocols on hand-hashing, using of masks and social distancing (Ministry of Education of Nicaragua, 2021). However, it is possible to perceive a reduction in attendance allegedly to families´ fears of contagion. For those not attending, television programs were broadcasted and printed material was distributed. This situation may require that schools work on curriculum prioritization in 2021 (Otero, 2021).

3.2. STUDENTS´ HEALTH & WELL-BEING POLICIES

Not only the schools have an educational purpose, but also a sanitary one. In this sense, preventing children and young people from going to school might have jeopardized their physical and mental health. As a response to that, most countries implemented policies that ensure the continuation of lunch programs and some also developed some initiatives aimed at protecting their psychosocial health.

In the case of **Guyana,** the government continued with the provision of food, although different sources disagree on the extent of the contribution[5] (American Institute for Research, 2021a). In **Haiti**, although there was a delay in the reception of COVID-19 relief funds, food subsidies were provided to approximately 60.000 students (just over 1%) (American Institute for Research, 2021b). In **Guatemala**, the school feeding program that had already been established continued, but the regulations were modified, allowing the delivery of food rations to families corresponding to the number of school days. Food delivery days were organized in schools by principals and teachers (Muller and Zelada 2021). For its part, the government **of El Salvador**, at the beginning of the closure of the schools (March 2020), carried out an inventory of food at the schools, in order to organize its distribution. In addition, the Minister of Education verified, in March 2020, the delivery of school milk to the neediest communities (UNESCO).

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[5] While according to GPE, it distributed biscuits and juice to students and cash vouchers to 15.000 students on the coast, hot meals to almost 27.000 in the hinterlands, the IADB informs that the service of hot meal only restarted to schools that were open during the exam preparation period (American Institute for Research, 2021a; Global Partnership for Education, 2020; Inter-American Development Bank, 2020).

In the Caribbean islands, governments also implemented measures aimed at ensuring all children diet. In **Saint Lucia**, the Ministry of Education distributed food packages to the households of students in need once a month. Similar policies were implemented in **Grenada**, were approximately 5.000 students benefited from the SEED program which provided them food and transportation, and in **Dominica**, where schools and their staff were in charge of identifying and feeding vulnerable students (Knight, Marshall, et al., 2021a, 2021c; Knight, Marshall, Jason, et al., 2021).

Provisions in this regard were contemplated in the strategy developed by the government of **Honduras** with the support of USAID (Moya, 2021). In **Nicaragua**, the Ministry of Education funded playful material for students at schools and the nutrition programs were not suspended (Otero, 2021).

3.3. TEACHER TRAINING & SUPPORT

In the majority of developing countries, teachers were not yet prepared to use technology as an instructional tool. The new normality required, therefore, that governments had to multiply their efforts to train educators with ICT skills and, in some cases, to also equip them with the devices.

In the region, **Honduras** offered training programs to teachers and principals, as well as free internet to access educational resources (Moya, 2021).

El Salvador, through the Ministry of Education, announced the delivery of computers so that teachers could continue their work virtually, and also disseminated pedagogical guidelines to ensure student learning. Similarly, the Ministry committed, in the period between November 2020 / May 2021, to train teachers in health protocols, use of digital tools, learning recovery methodologies, and strengthening psycho-emotional skills (MINEDUCYT 2020, circular n°14, 17).

In **Guatemala**, the dissemination of health protocols and an intense vaccination campaign for teachers were carried out. In addition, training was provided on the use of resources, the hybrid teaching model and evaluation (MINEDUC 2021). However, it is important to point out the need for these instances of teacher training to be in line with the demands and needs of teachers, since it is essential to have a teaching staff that is prepared to face this new scenario.

One of the most important initiatives implemented by the Ministry of Education in **Guyana** has been *ProFuturo*, a 100-hour, online, in-service training program for teachers that focuses on innovation and ICT skills in remote teaching, lesson planning, and classroom management skills. For the 2020–2021 academic year, *ProFuturo* training was mandatory for all teachers; more than half of the country's teacher population was participating by the end of last year. The training is free on major Guyanese mobile networks (American Institute for Research, 2021a).

In **Dominica and Grenada,** the ministries of education implemented different plans to train teachers for virtual instruction. On the other hand, the role of the Arthur Lewis Community College in **Saint Lucia** was critical for the provision of online training to teachers (Knight, Marshall, et al., 2021a, 2021c; Knight, Marshall, Jason, et al., 2021).

In **Haiti**, as the Ministry of Education had chosen the MS Suit for Education platform to support learning across levels, teachers received training on this (American Institute for Research, 2021b).

4. Schools's reopening in KIX LAC countries

The physical opening of the schools differed from country to country. However, in general, governments followed some common guidelines that is possible to synthesize:

- *Physical reopening took a blended approach* (that is, a combination of both virtual and face to face lessons). At least in 2020, online contact was considered in parallel to in person classes.

- *Different groups attended different days.* In some cases, as in Nicaragua, students went for 3 days at school while they were allowed to stay 2 days at home. In the Eastern Caribbean or Guyana, for CSEC examinations, or in Haiti, some students had to go to school to prepare for the tests.

- *Physical distance, sanitation and other safety measures were considered.* Protocols were developed and communicated with students, teachers and families.

- *Plans were agreed with large groups of stakeholders.* There is little evidence about the extent of agreements, but there are examples, as in Honduras, where the Ministry worked together with other organizations.

- *Devices for students and teachers who couldn´t attend in person classes were provided.* As the region still faces important challenges in terms of technological infrastructure, governments are speeding up in delivering computers or mobiles for work.

- *Facilities are being improved.* When possible, there has been restoration and upgrade of infrastructure, increasing water storage, general repairs such as plumbing or pumping of sewer tanks. Sometimes new uses are given to old spaces (such as gyms, libraries or laboratories).

- *New facilities are being built.* In some cases, it was not enough to repair the existing ones, so it was necessary to construct new ones (such as dining rooms).

5. Recovery strategies for learning loss in KIX LAC countries

Recovering from learning losses during the period that schools remained closed has been one of the goals of the governments of the region. In **Guyana**, thanks to the support of the World Bank and the Global Partnership for Education, the Ministry of Education has been implementing a diagnostic tool that will help them design remedial lessons for students. They also trained teachers to use the tool and worked in strengthening the monitor & evaluation system (American Institute for Research, 2021a).

In Haitian public schools, the catch-up classes (between August and October 2020) were aimed at 9th year of the fundamental cycle and 3rd year of the secondary cycle students, who had to prepare for exams. Despite these efforts, still the difficulty level of the exams needed to be reduced in order to make them more accessible to students (American Institute for Research, 2021b).

Grenada prepared both a short-term and a long-term plan for leveling-up students. Among the decisions for the short-term, it is worth mentioning the design of a special remedial program for children transitioning from primary to secondary schools, providing additional instructional sessions during vacations, uploading all remedial material to the MSTAR platform, among others. For the long-term, Grenada´s plan includes additional training for teachers to improve the use of technology and blended teaching (Knight, Marshall, Jason, et al., 2021).

Saint Lucia is also beginning to draft an academic recovery program, starting with a diagnostic assessment and adjustments to the grade 6 exam. Ultimately, some authorities believe it will be key to have an assessment that accurately reflects this unique reality and its learnings (Louis & Pemberton, 2021). **El Salvador** has planned for the 2021 school year a diagnosis of the learning gap of students, in addition to an academic leveling of a maximum of 10 weeks (MINEDUCYT 2020, Bulletin No. 23). Similarly, in **Guatemala** a diagnostic test was applied for the beginning of the 2021 school year, with the purpose of understanding the status of students in basic skills at each level.

6. Addressing the learning loss: recommendations

Because of the COVID-19 crisis, most countries were forced to close their schools for long periods, affecting millions of children and young people. Sooner or later, teachers and students had to shift to online instruction and other means of distance education provision.

Despite the numerous efforts for continuing with the delivery of education, evidence shows that the lack of in person instruction negatively impacts learning, with girls, students with special needs and from low socio-economic status being the most affected. Consequences, actually, might be long-lasting.

How to make up for those losses? What can countries do to address the learning loss? Critical policies of a learning recovery plan are summarized below:

- **Prioritize education by allocating specific and sufficient budgets** to address the COVID-19 negative impacts. Data from UNESCO shows that low and lower-middle income countries already faced a financing gap of USD 145 billion to achieve the SDG4 before the pandemic and, because of it, that number will increase between USD 30 and 45 billion. However, the cost of not allocating a budget to leveling-up and improving learning conditions would imply a much higher cost (UNESCO-GEM Report, 2020).

   Despite the urgency, governments are falling short. Out of the almost USD 91 billion allocated to stimulus packages in the world because of COVID-19, only USD 8.6 billion went to education in low and low-middle income countries. It is estimated that in the LAC region the stimulus package directed to education was of about USD 2.2 million (UNESCO Education Sector, 2020).

   In the world, countries whose aid packages focused on recovering training skills include Australia, Brazil, Guatemala, France, Malaysia and the United Kingdom (UNESCO Education Sector, 2020), where the government created *the COVID-19 catch up fund* to help schools in the process of recovering (Department of Education, UK, 2020). In the region, an interesting example is the *Proposal for the Prioritization of the Educational Sector Strategic Plan 2021-2030* by a consortium of universities, media and other organizations in **Honduras**, which includes a recommendation for protecting investment in this area (Moya, 2021**)**.

- **Strengthen teacher professional development programs** on topics such as focused pedagogies, socioemotional skills teaching, blended instruction and curriculum prioritization (Bárcena & Uribe, 2020).

- **Implement academic diagnostic tools** that allow students to assess the current skills and domains that students master. Because of the lockdown, in 2020 most countries in the region suspended large-scale assessments, which was a reasonable strategy for the moment; other countries don't have the regular practice of rigorously monitoring their students´ learning. However, in order to design concrete pedagogical strategies in each discipline according to what each group needs, it is critical that states implement tests again −at least in samples of the population− and systematize results as soon as possible. This strategy should be replicated at the sub-national and school levels, in order to design even more precise interventions.

- **Adjust learning goals and curriculum to the new context**, not only considering the ground that has been lost but also incorporating and/or strengthening the kind of skills that are fundamental in this new order (such as self-directed learning, resilience, caring for others, etc.). (ECLAC-UNESCO, 2020). This does not mean necessarily that contents must be reduced; it might require, probably, to merge some or to create new clusters around new thematic priorities. What is undeniable is that the planning strategies schools had before 2020 have to be updated to fit into a reality that demands more flexibility and surgical preciseness.

- **Give support to the implementation of catch-up pedagogies**, **prioritizing on the most vulnerable groups**. Governments will need to promote the implementation cost-effective practices such as:

  - Regular assessment and feedback.
  - One-to-one (EEF, 2020) or small-groups tutoring by teachers (EEF, 2018) or by college students (Gallego et al., 2010; Torgerson et al., 2018). Although this last alternative is less impactful than the first one, it is more affordable.
  - Alternative teaching programs for accelerated learning like "teaching at the right level"[6] or focusing on foundational skills (Conto et al., 2020) showed also positive results specially with groups that had been left behind.
  - Other successful initiatives in post-emergency contexts (Baxter & Bethke, 2009).
  - Low-tech solutions such as SMS and WhatsApp[7], should be studied as potential tools to boost learning.

In all cases, attention must be given to students in early grades and transitioning from one educational level to another (Di Pietro et al., 2020).

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[6] https://www.teachingattherightlevel.org/
[7] It has been already used by Pratham Education Foundation, showing promising results:
https://www.pratham.org/covid-19-response/connecting-with-children-learn-and-fun/

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Table 1. Online learning materials for teachers and students

Dominica	http://education.gov.dm/support-material
Grenada	https://www.mgovernance.net/m-star-learning-support-platform
Guyana	http://guyanalearningchannel.com/
Haiti	http://menfp.gouv.ht/#/resources
Honduras	https://cevirtual.se.gob.hn/cevirtual/ http://www.educatrachos.hn/
Nicaragua	https://nicaraguaeduca.mined.gob.ni/
Guatemala	*https://www.mineduc.gob.gt/digecade/* *Mineduc Digital*
El Salvador	*https://sites.google.com/clases.edu.sv/educacionvirtual/inicio*
Saint Lucia	https://training.education.gov.lc/
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	https://www.svgcdu.org/remote-learning

Source: Own construction, on the basis of https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse

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