# Planning for education continuity and recovery: Lessons from a review of national COVID-19 education response plans

Governments around the world responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with a wide range of education plans. While the challenges faced by education systems around the world were similar, the education response plans developed were very diverse. This article presents a first set of findings from a desk review of more than 40 COVID-19 education response plans.

COVID-19 response plans were primarily developed in the Global South and were linked to financial resource mobilization.

As of July 2020, 43 countries[1] had developed COVID-19 education response plans, a sign that the international community recognized the threat posed to education, and was determined to respond quickly. At the same time, the desk review revealed that the vast majority of these countries (37) are Global Partnership for Education (GPE) partner countries, of which 35 had received GPE special COVID-19 grants at the time of this review.[2] This suggests that the development of the COVID-19 educational response plans analysed may have been largely driven by a need for funding (see *Map 1*).

Map 1: Countries that developed a COVID-19 education response plan between March and June 2020
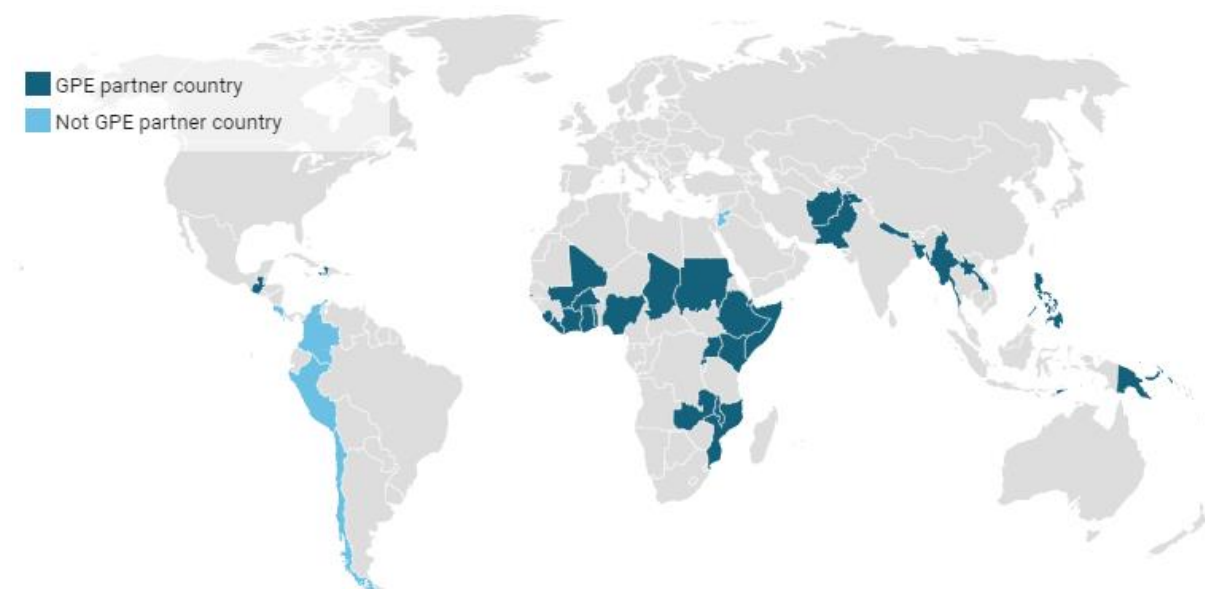
*Source:* IIEP review of national COVID-19 education response plans, July 2020

Note: Does not include countries that developed only GPE COVID-19 programme documents without a national COVID-19 education response plan.

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[1] For a full list of COVID-19 education related documents please visit : https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/

[2] As of July 2020, GPE had provided more than 40 educational COVID-19 grants. See full updated list here.

While school closures started in mid-March 2020, many countries took several months to develop their response plans.

Figure 1: Distribution of COVID-19 education response plans by month of publication
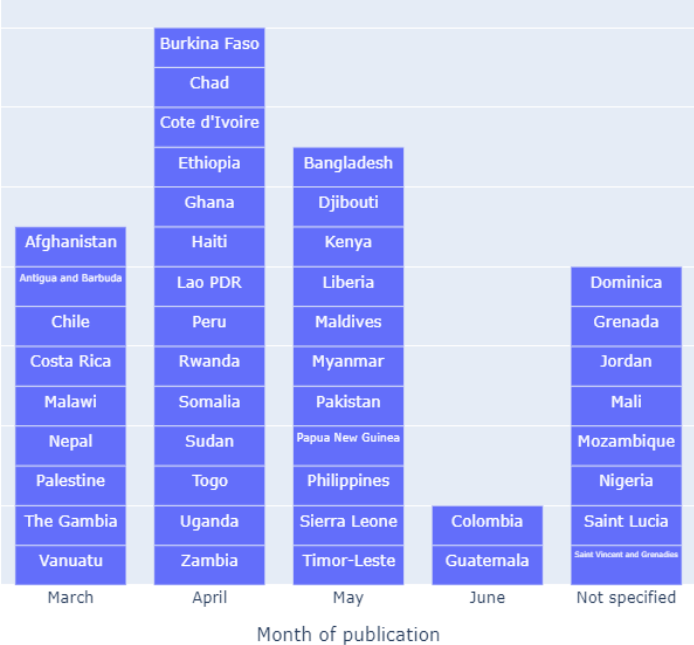
A number of countries developed their response plans at the height of the crisis (March and April 2020), within a few weeks of school closures, giving them a head start in the efforts to secure funding for education continuity and other support.

Yet, many other countries took several months to prepare a response plan. While in some cases this delay could be partly explained by a later advent of the pandemic, in other countries it may also point to limited capacities, specifically in ministries of education, to plan for Covid-19 response strategies. In any case, the delay could have potentially compromised relevance of the chosen response strategies and timely mobilization of funds for plan implementation.

Most COVID-19 national education response plans identify clear objectives and priority programmes, yet few include a costed action plan and M&E framework.

IIEP's analysis indicates that while most plans include core components such as situation analyses, objectives, and priority programmes, an important number of plans reviewed do not include logframes, M&E frameworks, or implementation and coordination arrangements (see *Figure 2*). The lack of M&E frameworks and logframes suggests that implementation may not be closely followed. Furthermore, plans prepared

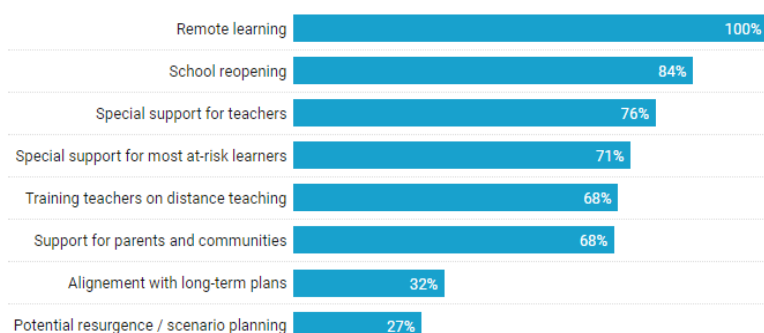*Figure 2: Core components reflected in COVID-19 education response plans*
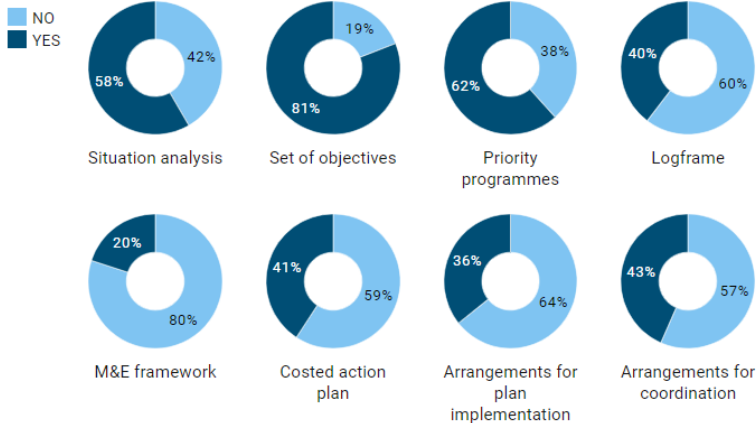
Source: IIEP review of national COVID-19 education response plans, July 2020

without a clear stipulation of the cost of activities, and hence of the funding needed to achieve expected outcomes, and without specifying implementation arrangements and responsibilities, raises questions about the feasibility of their implementation.

The vast majority of COVID-19 national education plans focus on provisions for education continuity and school reopening … but fall short on providing a long-term vision and resurgence planning.

Figure 3: Provisions included in COVID-19 education response plans

Provision	%
Remote learning	100%
School reopening	84%
Special support for teachers	76%
Special support for most at-risk learners	71%
Training teachers on distance teaching	68%
Support for parents and communities	68%
Alignement with long-term plans	32%
Potential resurgence / scenario planning	27%

Source: IIEP review of national COVID-19 education response plans, July 2020

As indicated in *Figure 3*, while three-quarters of the plans analysed include specific measures for teachers, and 71 per cent for most at-risk learners, fewer contingency plans included specific measures for parents and communities, which will likely be key to the successful implementation of these plans.

Furthermore, the vast majority of the plans focus on short-term response. Only 32 per cent of the plans analysed are aligned with long-term education sector plans and address the long-term effects of learning loss, entailing a risk for the sustainability of these emergency response strategies over time. Only 1 out of 4 analysed plans addresses risks of potential resurgence.

Undoubtedly, the wide variations between national response plans can be attributed to varying degrees of crisis preparedness and response capacity. Nevertheless, the ad hoc nature of these plans, in terms of both development and content, underscores the urgent need to rethink how countries plan for education service delivery. Ambitious actions must be taken to build and strengthen the resilience of education systems around the world, by investing in crisis preparedness through institutionalized crisis-sensitive and risk-informed planning and management at all levels of the education system.

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