



# Impact of COVID-19 on Accelerated and Alternative Education Programs

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**European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations Department (ECHO)**  
**International Rescue Committee (IRC)**  
**Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)**  
**Plan International**  
**Save the Children**  
**United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)**  
**United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**  
**United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)**  
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**War Child Holland**

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The Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) is a global open network of members who are working together within a humanitarian and development framework to ensure that all individuals have the right to a quality, safe, relevant, and equitable education. INEE’s work is founded on the fundamental right to education. For more information and to join INEE, visit [inee.org](http://inee.org).

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# List of acronyms

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
<b>ABE</b>	Alternative Basic Education
<b>AE</b>	Accelerated Education
<b>AEP</b>	Accelerated Education Program
<b>AEWG</b>	Accelerated Education Working Group
<b>ALP</b>	Alternative Learning Program
<b>ALS</b>	Alternative Learning System
<b>BLP</b>	Better Learning Program
<b>CBP</b>	Chalo, Badho, Padho
<b>CwD</b>	Children with Disabilities
<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus disease
<b>CSR</b>	Corporate Social Responsibility
<b>CWTL</b>	Can't Wait to Learn
<b>EMIS</b>	Educational Management Information System
<b>GBV</b>	Gender Based Violence
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communications Technology
<b>IFC</b>	International Finance Corporation
<b>ILO</b>	International Labor Organization
<b>INEE</b>	Inter-agency Network on Education Emergencies
<b>IRC</b>	International Rescue Committee
<b>KCEP</b>	Kindergarten Catch-up Program
<b>KG</b>	Kindergarten
<b>NEET</b>	Not in Education, Employment or Training
<b>NFE</b>	Non-Formal Education
<b>NRC</b>	Norwegian Refugee Council
<b>OOSC</b>	Out-of-School Children
<b>PSS</b>	Psychosocial Support
<b>SAGE</b>	Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education
<b>SMS</b>	Short Message Service
<b>TVET</b>	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development

# Executive summary

This report provides an analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on accelerated and short-term alternative education programs. The study focuses on alternative and accelerated education programs targeting out-of-school children which were in place pre-COVID and analyzes the impact of COVID-19 on such programs. The study does not focus on programs that were put in place in response to COVID-19, though this is identified as a further area of study. The study was commissioned by UNICEF on behalf of the Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG), hosted by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE).

## Research scope and methodology

The following programs were explored as part this research:<sup>1,2</sup>

- (i) **accelerated education programs** targeting disadvantaged, over-age, out-of-school children and young people, and which provide the formal curriculum in a shorter time
- (ii) **short-term alternative education programs** including:
  - a. **catch-up programs**, short-term transitional courses targeting children whose education was disrupted by an emergency
  - b. **bridging programs**, short-term, courses preparing students for entry into a new education system
  - c. **remedial education programs**, giving additional support to children in school.

Topics explored were categorized as:

- state of accelerated and alternative education programs with a focus on the impact of COVID-19 on enrolment, program scale, funding and program recognition
- impact of COVID-19 on the method of program delivery, including lessons, teacher-training, parental and community engagement, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E)
- skills provided by these programs and changes resulting from COVID-19
- impact of COVID-19 on community participation.

The research was carried out in steps. First, accelerated and alternative education programs were identified through desk-based research, and programs not relevant to the study were removed. Second, program funders and implementers of relevant programs were contacted and information gathered. Third, information was analyzed and key themes and messages were identified for each research question. Finally, results were synthesized and reported.

The research was conducted between January and April 2022. The study, therefore, presents findings up until April 2022. Findings should be generalized with care as the research covered only 36 programs.

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1 [Accelerated Education Working Group, Key Program Definitions](#), INEE, October 2017.

2 While accelerated education programs are also considered alternative education programs, this report distinguishes between accelerated education programs, which usually last a year or more, and other *short-term* alternative education programs, which are usually implemented over a few months.

## Research findings

- **COVID-19 led to a decrease in enrolment in accelerated and alternative education programs and an increase in dropout.** Anecdotally, program implementers mentioned that the opportunity cost of schooling<sup>3</sup> increased during the pandemic as beneficiaries joined the labor force to support their families. Limited access to technology also affected access to remote learning and increased dropouts. The study also found that COVID-19 resulted in a decrease in resources for **accelerated and alternative education programs**. Competing priorities facing donors and governments, especially related to health, led to a decrease in funds.
- **There is a low level of inclusion of existing accelerated and alternative education programs in governments' education recovery responses.** These programs are specifically geared towards children who have missed months and years of schooling and are well placed to support ministries in overcoming COVID-19 related learning losses. Hence, the low level of engagement with these programs by governments is surprising. One possible explanation for the limited adoption of these programs by governments to minimize COVID-19 learning losses is that schools in many countries opened in late 2021, so perhaps governments are still gauging the situation and planning their recovery response. As a result of the limited adoption of these programs to reduce learning losses, most programs reported no change in program scale
- **Most programs employed non-tech ways to support learning during COVID-19 related closures.** Self-learning materials and in-person small group tutoring were the most common ways to deliver lessons. Programs using technology used low-tech methods, like phones<sup>4</sup>, to support learning. Almost all programs mentioned limited access to devices and lack of electricity and internet as the biggest challenges in using technology. This was expected, as these programs serve the most vulnerable and disadvantaged populations.
- **Programs have a limited focus on digital skills and no change was reported in terms of skills and support provided, as a result of COVID-19.** In terms of skills provided, all accelerated and alternative education programs included in the study reported providing foundational literacy and numeracy skills and transferable skills<sup>5</sup>. Few, however, focus on digital skills which are critical to participating and engaging in today's workplace, and have become even more so after COVID-19. The impact of COVID-19 on the content provided was limited to health-related information campaigns, and in a few cases, the inclusion of digital skills training to enable students to access remote learning. Most programs, however, reported no change in the skills provided or content covered as a result of COVID-19.
- **Few programs demonstrate a sustained commitment to gender-transformative action. Accelerated and alternative programs in general, also have a weak focus on children with disabilities (CwD). No change was reported in the support provided to disadvantaged populations, as a result of COVID-19.** The study examined the support provided to disadvantaged children including girls, CwD, children on the move and ethnic and linguistic minorities. Results show that accelerated and alternative education programs demonstrate gender sensitivity in their program designs and approaches, and that they act to address barriers affecting girls' participation and completion. However, most programs measure the success of these efforts by whether they have managed to achieve gender parity in their enrolment numbers. Few programs demonstrate a sustained commitment to gender-transformative action. Further, accelerated and alternative programs in general, have a weak focus on CwD, which are among the most vulnerable populations. Few programs collect

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3 Opportunity cost refers to the value of something given up to obtain something else. Working children and adolescents have to give up their wage in order to attend schools; therefore, the opportunity cost of schooling goes up as child labor force participation increases.

4 Both basic and smart mobile phones

5 [Transferable skills include cognitive skills such as problem-solving, setting plans and goals; socio-emotional skills such as empathy, coping with stress; and social skills such as communication, collaboration.](#)



disaggregated enrolment data, and hardly any have mechanisms in place to integrate CwD into classes. Similar findings emerge for children on the move and those belonging to ethnic and linguistic minorities. Children from these disadvantaged populations are represented in enrolment in some programs, however, hardly any cater to their specific needs. No change was reported in the support provided to disadvantaged populations, as a result of COVID-19.

- **Barriers to transition to the formal system still exist<sup>6</sup>.** One of key objectives of accelerated and alternative education programs is to integrate children into a formal education system or the labor force (depending on age). While, on paper, all programs support this, the study found that barriers to transition still exist. These include limited access to schools, non-alignment with the formal education system calendar<sup>7</sup> and high stakes summative assessment.<sup>8</sup> Few programs reported working with children beyond completion of the program to ensure effective integration into higher levels of education.
- **Community members engage with the program in several ways, however, they seldom initiate or direct decisions.** They help identify out-of-school children, provide learning spaces, conduct community mobilization campaigns and participate in the management of the learning centers. While all programs reported involving the community in program design or implementation or both, the study found that members of the community seldom initiate or direct decisions. One of the possible reasons for this could be their limited capacity. Community engagement changed so far as to support remote learning as a result of COVID-19,<sup>9</sup> however, this engagement was still limited to following the guidance provided by program implementers, rather than initiating action and taking ownership.

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6 Here, the focus is not on demand-side barriers (such as increased opportunity cost of schooling, pregnancy, etc.), which have increased as a result of the pandemic. Rather, the focus is on administrative and logistical barriers such as recognition of the completion certificate given to the beneficiaries, existence of schools nearby etc., which have not been affected by COVID-19.

7 Completion of the accelerated or alternative education program is not aligned with the timeline for admission into the formal education system.

8 High stakes assessments leading to low pass rates prevent transition into the formal education system.

9 Providing access to mobile phones, radios; supporting children to attend in-person small group tutoring etc.

## Key recommendations

Based on research findings, the following are some key recommendations to policymakers and education partners working in the area of accelerated and alternative education.

- **Utilize cash transfers, scholarships and parental engagement to improve enrolment and reduce dropout in accelerated and alternative education programs.** Conditional cash transfers, i.e., monetary transfers to low-income households, have been shown to be an effective way to increase school enrolment, attendance and retention. Cash transfers may be unconditional, conditional on children's school attendance or unconditional with 'soft conditions' or labelling (i.e., providing clear messages on the objective of the transfer on an unconditional program) depending on context<sup>10</sup>. Other effective means to improving enrolment include scholarships and parental engagement. These can be employed to improve enrolment and retention of out-of-school children in accelerated and alternative education programs in the wake of COVID-19.
- **Share best practices of accelerated and alternative education programs with education ministries and make efforts to include these programs in national education recovery responses.** Accelerated and alternative education programs work with children who have missed a few months or years of schooling and these aim to bridge learning gaps. These programs, therefore, offer important lessons and experiences which should be leveraged by governments as they plan their learning recovery responses.
- **Use context-dependent and appropriate strategies to support learning during emergencies, especially for the most marginalized.** Most programs included in the study employed non-tech ways to support learning during COVID-19, due to limited access to devices and lack of electricity and internet. Programs that used technology, mostly used low-tech phone-based solutions such as WhatsApp. High-tech solutions may not be appropriate for delivering lessons to out-of-school and other vulnerable populations. They can, however, be used to support other aspects of program implementation such as M&E and providing support to teachers. **Efforts should also be made to use digital solutions to enable access to the most marginalized and disadvantaged populations**, i.e., the key beneficiaries of these programs. program resilience to emergencies should be strengthened, keeping on-the-ground constraints in mind.
- **Include basic digital skills as part of the curriculum for accelerated and alternative education programs.** Digital skills are critical for meaningful engagement and participation in interconnected economies to which technology is inextricably linked. At the very minimum, *information and data literacy skills* which include browsing, searching, filtering, evaluating and managing data, information and digital content, and; *digital communication and collaboration skills*, which include interacting, sharing, engaging in citizenship, collaborating through digital technologies and managing digital identities<sup>11</sup> should be provided.
- **Address systemic barriers that prevent girls from participation and completing education through community awareness campaigns, parental engagement and advocacy campaigns.** This study found that there was no change in the support provided to girls, CwD and other vulnerable populations as a result of COVID-19. Several reports find that COVID-19 disproportionately affected girls<sup>12</sup> and CwD<sup>13</sup> access to education. Despite this, few programs included in this study, reported providing additional targeted support in the wake

10 UNICEF. (2020). *Response Analysis Tool: Effective decision making on the use of CVA for education outcomes in emergencies*.

11 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *A Global Framework of Reference on Digital Literacy Skills for Indicator 4.4.2*, Information Paper No. 51, UNESCO, Paris, 2018.

12 Kwauk, Christina, Dana Schmidt and Erin Ganju, [What do we know about the effects of COVID-19 on girls' return to school?](#) Brookings, Washington, D.C., September 2021.

13 United Nations Children's Fund, *Children with Disabilities: Ensuring their inclusion in COVID-19 response strategies and evidence generation*, UNICEF, New York, 2020.

of COVID-19, to ensure participation and retention of girls, CwD and other vulnerable populations. Few programs demonstrated a sustained commitment to gender-transformative action even pre-pandemic. Addressing systemic barriers that prevent girls from participation and completing education is key to increasing transition and completion rates among girls.

- **Make accelerated and alternative education programs inclusive.** Programs in general, also have a weak focus on CwD. Few programs collect disaggregated enrolment data, and even fewer have mechanisms in place to integrate CwD into classes. There is a strong need to make these programs inclusive. This would involve reviewing and revising the curriculum, creating inclusive learning materials, training teachers and creating inclusive learning spaces. Out-of-school CwD are among the most vulnerable populations, and integrating them into education programs is essential to realize the goal of inclusive and equitable quality education for all.
- **Address barriers to transition to the formal system.** Transitioning to the formal system is critical to ensure that out-of-school children complete their education and that accelerated and alternative education programs are able to fulfil their mandates. Advocacy campaigns to ensure program recognition; alignment of the accelerated and alternative education program curriculum, academic calendar and assessment with the formal education system, improving access to schools are some ways to ensure smooth transition to the formal education system.
- **Empower community members to take full ownership of the program.** While all programs include community members in program design and/or implementation, there is still limited ownership of these programs at the community level. Community capacity development that empowers members to take full ownership of the program is essential for sustainability of these interventions.



# Introduction

This study was commissioned by UNICEF on behalf of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG). The study focuses on alternative and accelerated education programs targeting out-of-school children which were in place pre-COVID and analyzes the impact of COVID-19 on such programs. The study does not focus on programs that were put in place in response to COVID-19, though this is identified as a further area of study.

The AEWG is an inter-agency working group and comprises education partners working in the field of AE. The group has representation from Education Conflict and Crisis Network, IRC, NRC, Plan International, Save the Children, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNICEF, USAID and War Child Holland. The five main objectives of the AEWG are to:

1. ensure that more governments include accelerated education programs (AEPs) in their national education plans and policies
2. strengthen the evidence base for accelerated and alternative education
3. contribute to improving the quality of such programs
4. ensure that AEPs are better resourced by all key stakeholders for scale and quality
5. strengthen the COVID-19 response by AEWG resources.<sup>14</sup>

AEWG has also developed a five-year learning agenda, ending in 2022. This has two broad objectives. The first is to further assess the efficacy of accelerated programming using the 10 principles for effective practice<sup>15</sup> in terms of outcomes:

- access and equity
- equity of learning outcomes that meet set standards
- completion, and transition to multiple pathways
- further formal or non-formal education (including vocational training)
- supporting the creation of livelihood opportunities.

The second is to evaluate the contribution of AEPs to the national and global provision of equitable access to good quality basic education (particularly for fragile, insecure, and underfinanced environments) and their cost-effectiveness.<sup>16</sup>

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14 Accelerated Education Working Group, *AEWG 2020: Year in Review*, 2021.

15 Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, *Accelerated Education: 10 Principles for Effective Practice*.

16 Accelerated Education Working Group *Accelerated Education Working Group: Learning Agenda*.

Accelerated and alternative education programs are also recognized in UNICEF's 2020–2030 education strategy, *Every Child Learns*,<sup>17</sup> as one of the key approaches for improving learning and skills for the most marginalized and vulnerable populations affected by humanitarian situations. These programs are aligned with the goals mentioned in the education strategy, in particular, to:

- increase equitable access to learning opportunities for hard-to-reach learners, both in humanitarian contexts and other settings
- provide them with validated and accredited non-formal learning pathways
- increase engagement with adolescents and providing pathways to secondary education, particularly for girls and young women.<sup>18</sup>

This study contributes to the AEWG's learning agenda as well as helping to strengthen learning recovery by focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on accelerated and alternative education programs. The study also provides an opportunity for UNICEF to assess and consolidate the evidence on a range of such programs which UNICEF country offices have recently supported and/or implemented, to demonstrate where and how they can help the agency to meet the goals of its education strategy.

The research is intended for policymakers and education partners working in the area of accelerated and alternative education. It provides accessible summaries of best practice and aims to support efforts to strengthen program resilience in the wake of COVID-19.

It is also critical to situate this study in the context of learning recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic – globally, 2 trillion hours of in-person learning were lost and 80 per cent of countries experienced learning loss. Learning poverty in low- and middle-income countries has surged from 57 per cent pre-COVID to an estimated 70 per cent. In low-income countries, only one in ten children can read a simple text by age ten and less than half of youth are on track to attain the full range of skills needed for school, work, and life. In this context, accelerated and alternative education programs have the potential to support learning recovery, yet according to a Pulse Survey conducted by UNICEF in March 2022, two-fifths of governments implemented neither accelerated learning programs nor catch-up programs at any scale. As such, the “RAPID” Framework bears relevance for this study as well, particularly the “I” of the framework which stands for “increase catch-up learning.”<sup>19 20 21</sup>

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17 United Nations Children's Fund, [UNICEF Education Strategy 2019–2030](#), UNICEF, New York, 2019.

18 United Nations Children's Fund, [Secondary Education Guidance, Multiple and Flexible Pathways](#), UNICEF, New York, 2020.

19 UNICEF, UNESCO, & World Bank. (2022). [Where are We on Education Recovery?](#)

20 World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, FCDO, USAID, & Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (2022). [The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update](#).

21 UNICEF, & Education Commission. (2022). [Recovering Learning: Are Children and Youth on Track in Skills Development?](#)

# Research scope

The overall objective of the research was to understand the impact of COVID-19 on accelerated and alternative education programs in terms of enrolment, program scale, funding, skills provided, delivery methods and community participation. The study focused on four specific types of programs.<sup>22</sup>

## Accelerated education programs

A flexible, age-appropriate program, run in an accelerated timeframe, which aims to provide access to education for disadvantaged, over-age, out-of-school children and youth. This may include those who missed out on, or had their education interrupted by, poverty, marginalization, conflict and crisis. The goal of AEPs is to provide learners with equivalent, certified competencies for basic education using effective teaching and learning approaches that match their level of cognitive maturity.

## Catch-up programs

A short-term transitional education program for children and youth who had been actively attending school prior to an educational disruption, which provides students with the opportunity to learn content missed because of the disruption and supports their re-entry to the formal system.

## Bridging programs

A short-term targeted preparation course that supports students' success, taking various forms such as language acquisition, and/or other existing differences between home and host education curricula and systems for entry into a different type of certified education.

## Remedial programs

Additional targeted support, concurrent with regular classes, for students who require short-term content or skill support to succeed in regular formal programming.

## Questions explored

For the program types mentioned above, key questions examined as part of the research were categorized as follows.

### 1. State of accelerated and alternative education programs

- a. **Enrolment:** How did enrolment for these programs change as a result of COVID-19, especially for marginalized / disadvantaged populations (i.e., girls, young people on the move, those affected by displacement, young people with disabilities, and minorities)?

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<sup>22</sup> Accelerated Education Working Group, *Key program Definitions*.

- b. **program scale:** Were these programs replicated or expanded to meet the growing student needs as a result of school shutdowns caused by COVID-19?
- c. **Recognition:** To what extent did the policy environment for these programs change as a result of COVID-19? Were there efforts to institutionalize these programs through policy or legal frameworks? Were these programs linked or aligned with national education priorities and plans? Were the certificates / competencies provided by these programs recognized by the government? Was the curriculum used by these programs accredited and aligned with the national curriculum? What was the impact of COVID-19 on program recognition?
- d. **Funding:** How did COVID-19 affect funding for these programs, if at all?

## 2. Impact of COVID-19 on delivery methods

- a. How did COVID-19 affect the way these programs were delivered?
- b. What were the different methods used by accelerated and alternative education programs to deliver content, train teachers, support parents and the community and to carry out M&E during COVID-19?
- c. Was Edtech used and, if so, what were the biggest challenges in using it?

## 3. Skills and other support provided

- a. What types of skills did these programs cover? In particular, did these programs provide foundational literacy and numeracy skills, transferable skills,<sup>23</sup> digital skills and job-specific skills? Did programs provide other support to beneficiaries, such as mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)? Did COVID-19 result in any change in the skills and other support provided?
- b. How did these programs support learners' transition to multiple and flexible learning pathways?<sup>24</sup> What were the barriers faced by program graduates in accessing different pathways?
- c. How did programs cater to the needs of disadvantaged groups like girls, CwD, other vulnerable populations?

## 4. Community participation

- a. What role did the community play in designing and implementing accelerated and alternative education programs?
- b. How did these programs align with the INEE community participation standard?<sup>25</sup>

Apart from answering these questions, some interviewees also provided information on implementation constraints, adaptations and future plans. These were also included in the analysis where applicable.

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<sup>23</sup> Also known as life skills, soft skills, socioemotional skills, twenty-first century skills

<sup>24</sup> Formal, non-formal, on the job and community based

<sup>25</sup> International Institute for Educational Planning, 'Community Participation', *Guidebook for planning education in emergencies and reconstruction*, IIEP, Paris, 2010, pp. 105–130. )

# Methodology

The research was carried out in four steps. First, accelerated and alternative education programs were identified through desk-based research. AEWG members, including UNICEF country and regional office staff, were contacted and asked to share programs covered by the study. The author then reviewed the mapping of accelerated education by the AEWG in 2019. These methods highlighted 82 programs, of which 32 were then discarded because they had ended before the pandemic began (January 2020), or because they weren't accelerated, catch-up, bridging or remedial programs.

Program funders and implementers were then contacted, which was facilitated by AEWG members. The response rate was close to 80 per cent. For each program, key informant interviews were conducted to understand the scope of the program and the impact of COVID-19 on its main outcomes. program implementers were also asked to share relevant documents. Information was collected for 36 programs in this manner.<sup>26</sup>

Following the interviews and collection of key documents, information was analyzed for each program separately and then a wider thematic analysis was carried out to identify key trends and messages. Finally, the results were synthesized and presented. It is important to note, however, that given the research covered only 36 programs, the findings of this study should be generalized with care.

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<sup>26</sup> The list of programs included in the study is provided in Annex 1

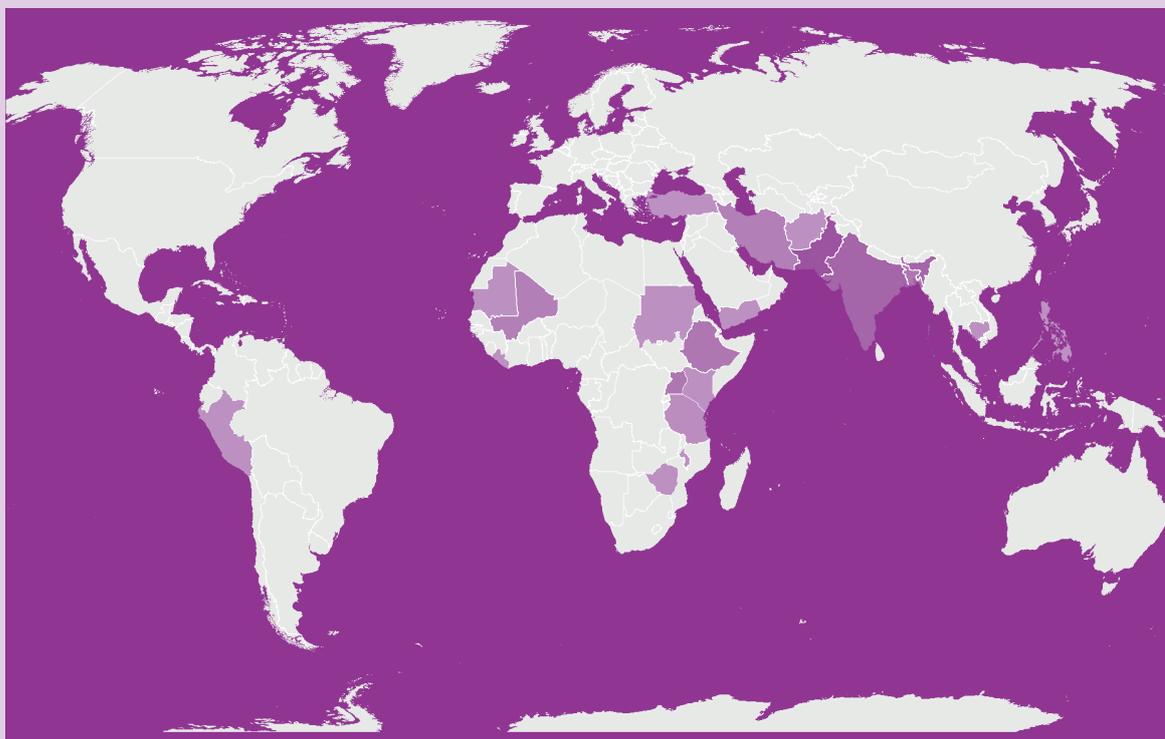
# Program profile

Programs from seven regions – Latin America and the Caribbean; West and Central Africa; Eastern and Southern Africa; the Middle East and North Africa; Europe and Central Asia; South Asia; and East Asia and Pacific – were included in the study, as shown in the map. Eastern and Southern Africa and South Asia were heavily represented.<sup>27</sup> This was not by design, but was rather a result of the availability of information and the response by program staff.

In terms of age, most programs targeted children and adolescents between the ages of 9 and 19, followed by children under 9. A third of all programs targeted both children and adolescents. More than 80 per cent of the programs<sup>28</sup> were accelerated education. The rest were short-term alternative education programs, including ones for catch-up, remedial and bridging learning.

As can be seen in the graph, most of the programs focused on the primary education level. Few targeted the upper secondary (grades 10–12) or the pre-primary level, although some focused on multiple levels of education. The ‘other’ category in the graph includes programs that were not aimed at a specific education level. This, for example, includes the digital language acquisition course, Akelius, which supports language learning among refugees, migrants, and linguistic minorities for learners across the world and of all age groups.<sup>29</sup>

## Geographic coverage<sup>30</sup>



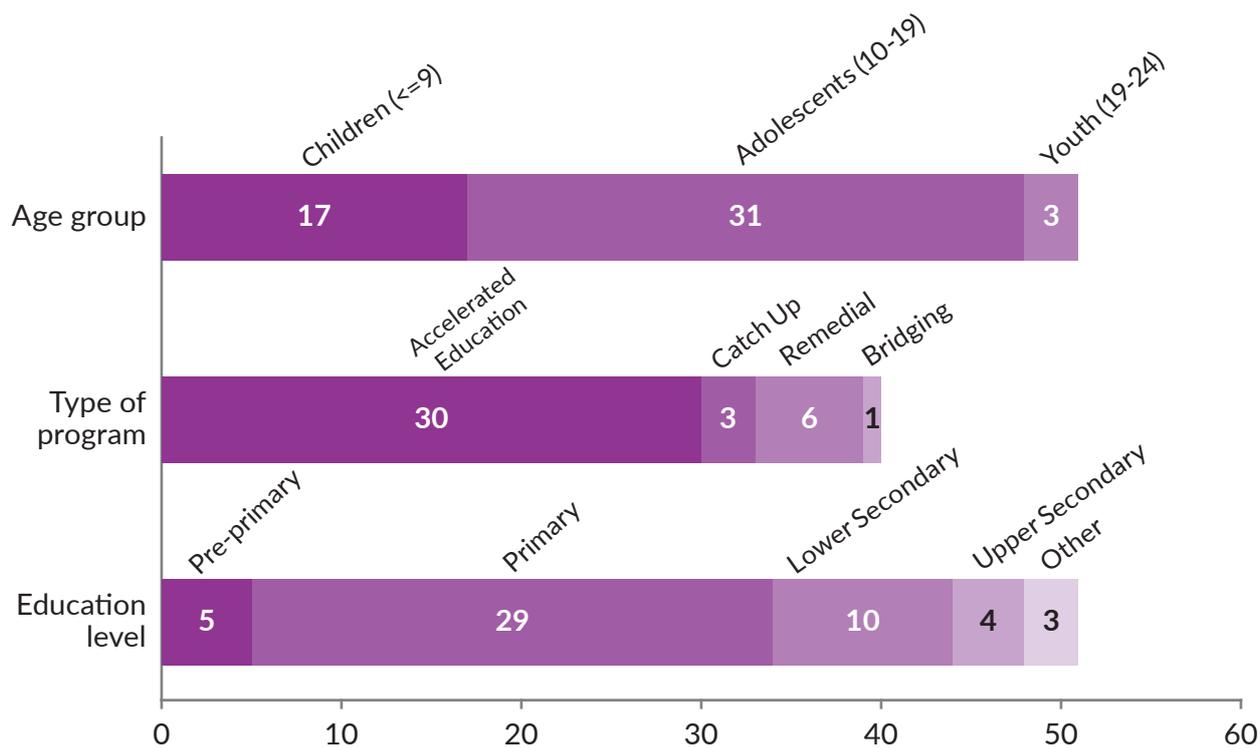
© Australian Bureau of Statistics, GeoNames, Microsoft, NavInfo, OpenStreetMap, TomTom, Wikipedia

27 13 of 36 programs included were from Eastern and Southern Africa and 11 from South Asia.

28 80% of the 36 included in the study

29 United Nations Children’s Fund, *Reimagine Education Case Study*, UNICEF, Mauritania, December 2021. UNICEF. (2021). *UNICEF Reimagine Case Study-Mauritania*. UNICEF

30 The density of country colors on the map corresponds to the number of programs included in the study from those countries. Countries that appear to be darker or denser have a greater number of programs reflected in the study, while countries that appear lighter or less dense have fewer programs reflected.



Governments sponsored a quarter of the programs, overseeing their design, allocating budgets for implementation, and with monitoring carried out by government officials. International organizations and / or NGOs ran the remaining programs. However, even for those programs, government ministries were involved in designing programs and/or providing learning spaces in formal schools, allocating government-paid teachers and supporting program monitoring through principals and other education officials.<sup>31</sup>

31 This was true for all programs run by international organizations and/or NGOs

# Research findings

Findings from the study were organized by research questions and are detailed below. As mentioned above, questions were grouped into four categories:

- state of accelerated and alternative education programs
- impact of COVID-19 on methods for program delivery
- skills and other support provided
- community participation.

Results presented below have been classified accordingly.

## State of accelerated and alternative education programs

### Enrolment<sup>32</sup>

#### SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- most programs reported that COVID-19 led to a decrease in enrolment, higher dropout and lower retention
- reasons for this could include increased opportunity cost, inability to access remote learning and migration.

Most of the programs – for which information was available – reported a decrease in enrolment, higher dropout and lower retention as a result of COVID-19.<sup>33</sup> One accelerated education program, supported by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in Iran, had to suspend all activities due to government regulations that closed schools and learning centers and prevented in-person gatherings. This program has not restarted.

This overall finding, about the damaging effect of COVID-19, is critical. To the extent that program attendance is correlated with learning, it can also be argued that COVID-19 adversely affected learning for children attending these programs. While a systematic analysis to understand the reasons for lower enrolment and higher dropout has not been conducted, program implementers mentioned increased opportunity cost, inability to access remote learning and migration as possible explanations. Globally, COVID-19 related lockdowns reduced household incomes, with low-income households affected the most. At least two thirds of households with children have lost income since the pandemic hit

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32 Enrolment information was not available for 12 of the 36 programs. Enrolment data is still being collected for programs that started operations in late 2021, and for government programs.

33 15 of the 24 programs reported a decrease in enrolment, and one had to suspend operations due to COVID-19.

in 2020.<sup>34</sup> The ILO estimates that an additional 8.9 million children could be involved in child labor (up from 160 million in 2020) by the end of 2022 as a result of rising poverty by the pandemic.<sup>35</sup> This increase in child labor may have increased the dropout rate for accelerated and alternative education programs. Limited access to devices at home also made access to remote learning difficult. In India, migration from urban to rural areas during the lockdown resulted in higher dropouts.

It is worth noting that a couple of programs anecdotally reported a higher attendance rate during the pandemic than before. The accelerated education program supported by NRC in the Democratic Republic of Congo reported that, pre-COVID, classes were affected by frequent teacher strikes and security threats to learning centers. When learning centers were closed because of COVID-19, learning at home and community tutoring methods were implemented. These methods were unaffected by teacher strikes. Further, since learning was at, or near, learners' homes, students and parents were less concerned about security threats and engaged more readily with the programs. Indeed, after schools reopened in Kenya, there was a slump in enrolment for an AEP supported by the NRC. The staff reported that small group community classes, which had flexible timings and were close to children's homes, encouraged higher attendance. These findings highlight the importance of providing these advantages for programs targeting the most vulnerable.

Only two programs reported an increase in enrolment. Both were implemented by Pratham, an NGO in India. One was the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) program<sup>36</sup>. When COVID-19 led to school and learning center shutdowns, Pratham implemented a community-based 'catch-up campaign', that used the TaRL methodology. More than 25,000 local volunteers, most of whom had previously engaged with TaRL, conducted instructional activities and games in small groups in their neighborhood. Community volunteers also implemented the Mohalla Math Learning Camp in August 2021 and the Mohalla Language Learning Camp in September 2021<sup>37</sup> to build and refresh foundational reading and math skills. These 'mini learning camps' reached approximately 200,000 children in Grades 3–6, across 9,500 communities. In comparison, prior to the shutdown in 2019–2020, TaRL reached 135,000 children in Grades 3–5 across 3,000 locations. Since its inception, one of the implementation models for TaRL has been through local volunteers in community-based learning camps. This means it was perhaps easier for the program to build on its existing methods in adapting to the strictures imposed by the pandemic.

The second program was Pratham's Second Chance, which is focused on helping girls and women aged 16 and above to complete Grade 10,<sup>38</sup> irrespective of the last grade they finished or how long ago they dropped out. The scale of the program was expanded in 2021. More communities were targeted and program offerings were diversified as well. For example, a learner who was only interested in acquiring foundational literacy but not in completing secondary schooling was allowed to enroll and engage for a limited duration. Further, the program leveraged existing content and developed a High School Readiness pack to minimize learning losses among children at the secondary level due to COVID-19 and to prevent them from dropping out.

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34 At least two-thirds of households with children have lost income since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

35 International Labour Organization and United Nations Children's Fund, *Child Labour: Global Estimates 2020, trends and the road forward*, ILO, Geneva and UNICEF, New York, 2021. .

36 Pratham's TaRL methodology has been adapted and is being piloted in several countries as a remedial program in the aftermath of COVID-19.

37 Mohalla refers to community in Hindi.

38 A Grade 10 qualification is critical in India to access higher education or TVET programs and is usually the minimum qualification for many government jobs.

## Program scale and government adoption

A majority of the programs, for which this information was available, reported no change in the scale of their program as a result of COVID-19.<sup>39</sup> Only three programs reported being scaled-up as a result of increased demand resulting from the pandemic.<sup>40</sup> Apart from the Pratham programs mentioned above, another program that is being scaled up is the Luminos Second Chance program in Liberia which focuses on primary school-aged children who are out of school, and provides a 10-month condensed curriculum covering Grades 1–3. In the coming academic year, the program plans to reach 5,000 children, up from 3,150 in 2021–2022. This expansion is in response to growing needs as a result of COVID-19 related school shutdowns, as well as the positive results shown by the program.

### SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- There has been a low level of adoption and adaptation of *existing* accelerated and alternative learning programs as part of governments' education recovery response
- Possible explanations for this could be that governments are still gauging the situation and planning their recovery response and also that there is limited coordination between the formal and non-formal education systems.

Worldwide, the school closures sparked by the pandemic resulted in lost school years and increased learning losses. While education ministries are trying to accelerate learning and provide remedial support to students in school, program implementers in this study reported surprisingly low levels of adoption and adaptation of *existing* accelerated, catch-up and remedial programs as part of governments' education recovery response. Only four programs included in the study stated that elements of the program were adopted by the government as a response to COVID-19.<sup>41</sup> Key examples of accelerated and alternative education programs leveraged to minimize COVID-19 losses are highlighted in the box below.

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39 Information was not available for 10 of the 36 programs. Of the 26 remaining, 17 reported no change in scale, 2 suspended activities, 2 were unaffected by COVID-19 as they were new, and 5 were scaled up.

40 Although five programs were scaled up, 2 increased their scale for reasons unrelated to COVID-19.

41 Information was not available for 10 of the 36 programs.

## Use of AEPs to minimize COVID-19 learning losses

### Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE), Zimbabwe

The SAGE project implemented by Plan International UK and funded by UK aid, targets highly-marginalized, out-of-school adolescent girls in 11 districts across Zimbabwe by providing high quality learning opportunities and supporting them to move successfully into formal education, training or employment (including self-employment). The project provides high-quality accelerated non-formal education across 132 accessible and girl-friendly community-based learning hubs. The girls enroll in a two-year program of accelerated learning that covers content from kindergarten to Grade 5. After completing the program, girls transition onto clear and supported pathways to further training, income generation or continuing in mainstream education. Elements of the program have been adopted by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE). Materials developed by SAGE during COVID-19 school shutdowns, including the learner workbook, have been approved by the ministry for distribution as a reading material for formal education.

SAGE is also developing effective practice videos to help with the professional development of government teachers. The method of community learning (in small groups) is recognized in the MoPSE's catch-up strategy for learning.

### Alight Educate a Child, Pakistan

Alight Pakistan, in collaboration with Educate a Child (EAC), implemented a program to provide educational opportunities for 1 million out-of-school children in Pakistan from 2018 to 2021. The program promoted education for them in two ways. If the identified child was at the appropriate age level and there was a formal school nearby, the program supported the admission of the child into the formal education system. However, if the child was out of school and overage or there was no formal school nearby, then the child was enrolled in a non-formal school established by the program. Non-formal schools ran in the evenings in formal government schools or at a community provided space. Over the past three years, Alight Pakistan has benefited more than one million children through 232 non-formal schools and government schools in 56 different districts. The government has adopted several components of the program developed during COVID-19. The Punjab textbook board approved supplementary textbooks developed as part of the COVID-19 response and these will be printed and distributed in non-formal education (NFE) schools with the support of UNICEF. The books are also being used by the Punjab literacy department for catch-up education related to COVID-19. Alight also developed a radio-based learning initiative which was adopted by the federal government and scaled up in all its provinces. The government is also adopting the online teacher training program developed under the program.

One possible explanation for the limited adoption of these programs by governments to minimize COVID-19 learning losses is that schools in many countries opened in late 2021, so perhaps governments are still gauging the situation and planning their recovery response. As of February 2021, 21 per cent of 143 countries that participated in the National Education Response Survey conducted by UNICEF, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Bank reported that schools were fully closed due to COVID-19.<sup>42 43</sup> Further, the survey revealed that the extent of learning loss is often not measured. Only two thirds of the countries reported that remedial measures to address learning gaps were widely implemented for primary and secondary school students when schools reopened.

Another reason could be that these programs are viewed separately from formal education programs. Given their place in the education system, it is likely that governments are not actively looking to them for solutions to COVID-19 related challenges in the formal education system. In either case, accelerated and alternative programs provide a pathway to children who have missed years of formal education and their experiences and resources can, and should be, leveraged to overcome challenges caused by COVID-19. There is an urgent need to highlight successful programs and share best practices with policymakers and to ensure that these are reflected in national education recovery responses.

## Recognition

### SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- There is high level of recognition of alternative and accelerated education programs.
- Completion certificates are recognized by education ministries and programs are increasingly acknowledged in national education plans and priorities.
- However, the extent to which these programs integrate with national plans and policies varies by country.

All programs, for which this information is available, reported that the curriculum used is aligned with the government curriculum and the certificates provided at the end of the program, and upon passing a summative assessment, are recognized by the host country's education ministry. Programs are also increasingly acknowledged and recognized in the national education plans and priorities. A key priority for all governments included in the study is to reduce the number of out-of-school children. Governments recognize that non-formal education programs, including accelerated and alternative education, are critical to this. However, the extent of integration of these programs with national plans and policies varies by country. In Ethiopia and the Philippines, there are separate policies to manage and implement alternative education programs like the alternative basic education program and the alternative learning system. In other countries, while non-formal education (NFE) programs are recognized in education plans, there are no policies to guide their implementation. The box below highlights some examples of close integration of accelerated and alternative education programs with national education policies.

42 28 per cent of lower-middle income countries, 15 per cent of upper-middle income countries, and 28 per cent of high-income countries reported that schools were fully closed across all education levels due to COVID-19. Low-income countries did not report any full school closures at that time though schools were closed intermittently.

43 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization et al. *What's next? Lessons on Education Recovery: Findings from a Survey of Ministries of Education and the COVID-19 pandemic*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2021.

## Alignment of AEPs with national education plans and priorities

### Accelerated Learning Program, Cambodia

The accelerated learning program (ALP) aims to improve over-aged school enrolment at the primary level, to reduce school dropout and to contribute to inclusive learning outcome of every child in the country. The ALP provides a special curriculum covering four main subjects (Khmer, mathematics, social studies and science). It combines the curriculum of Grade 1 with Grade 2, Grade 3 with Grade 4, and Grade 5 with Grade 6. Students attending the program can complete primary education in just three years. The ALP has been identified as one of the strategies to reach out-of-school-children in the Education Sector Plan (2019–2023). Further, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) has formulated the ‘Policy of Non-Formal Education’ which is used as a guideline for the implementation of NFE programs, including the ALP.

### Alternative Learning System, Philippines

The Philippines Department of Education (DepEd) ALS program is a second-chance for learners who cannot participate in, or cope with, the formal school system. It offers a basic literacy program (BLP) in reading, writing, and numeracy, and an elementary and secondary-level program where the learners must take an accreditation and equivalency (A&E) test to obtain an equivalent diploma. The DepEd recently expanded the program coverage through the ALS-Education Skills Training (ALS-EST) with a focus on training in employment skills. In 2019, the government approved the ALS Act which officially recognizes ALS as a learning pathway for disadvantaged children and other vulnerable people. The government has also recently established the Bureau of Alternative Education within the ministry to oversee the program’s implementation. The passing of the ALS act has also increased funding for the program.

The Accelerated Education Evidence Review, completed in 2020,<sup>44</sup> found that significant gaps remain when it comes to sustained and meaningful policy-level commitment to AEPs, particularly in:

- government ownership and oversight of AEPs as a long-term strategy for addressing the needs of marginalized and disadvantaged learners
- financial allocations to AEPs from national budgets
- alignment and integration of AE learners within EMIS systems
- consistent transition pathways from AEPs into formal education.

This study echoes the findings of the evidence review. While accelerated and alternative education programs are increasingly being recognized, there is a need for meaningful policy-level commitment to ensure an adequate budget and equitable allocation of resources for them.

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<sup>44</sup> Shah, Ritesh and Liyun Choo, *Accelerated Education Evidence Review: Strengthening the Evidence Base for Accelerated Education*. Accelerated Education Working Group, 2020.

### SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- COVID-19 affected funding for accelerated and alternative education programs.
- Programs that had to fundraise during the pandemic faced difficulties as donors and governments prioritized health-related interventions.

COVID-19 affected funding for accelerated and alternative education programs. Programs that had already been allocated funding when the pandemic hit were not affected, but programs that had to fundraise during the pandemic faced difficulties<sup>45</sup> as the priorities of donors and governments shifted to health-related interventions and fundraising events were cancelled. Almost all programs included in the study reported reorganizing their budgets to make space for resources needed to support changes caused by COVID-19 and remote learning. The box below highlights an example of how COVID-19 affected program funding and what measures organizations adopted.

### Impact of COVID-19 on funding

Pratham is primarily donor-funded. Its funding fell because of:

- a decrease in Indian Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) budgets
- the cancellation of fundraising events globally
- funders' prioritization of health and livelihoods more directly impacted by COVID-19.

Pratham altered its budget to minimize the costs of delivering remote learning. This included training volunteers to use materials from their surroundings to make teaching resources.

Further, fundraising was targeted towards organizations with specific COVID-19 education grants. The pandemic also led to Pratham changing its communication strategy with donors. Previously, Pratham's program reporting was linked to what had been specified in donor agreements. However, during the pandemic, Pratham shared the strategic shifts in its programs with donors, and enabled more frequent conversations, which helped donors develop a more detailed insight into Pratham's challenges, solutions and progress. It also helped them realize the extent of Pratham's work and built their confidence in the organization's ability to affect change.

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<sup>45</sup> Funding information was not available for 11 of the 36 programs. Of the remaining programs, 12 reported no change in funding, 6 reported a decrease as a result of COVID-19, 2 reported a decrease unrelated to COVID-19, 2 reported a marginal increase related to COVID-19 (to purchase additional supplies such as face masks and sanitizers) and 3 reported an increase unrelated to COVID-19.

## Impact of COVID-19 on the delivery methods

### SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- Most programs pivoted to non-tech ways to support learning. Self-learning materials and in-person small group tutoring were the most common ways of delivering lessons.
- Programs using tech, supported learning in low-tech ways with phones (both basic and smart phones).
- Only a quarter of the total programs reported supporting teachers during COVID-19 related lockdowns. The most common means of doing this was by phone (calls, text).
- Phone calls and texts were also used for community engagement, although very few programs reported this during the pandemic
- Almost all programs mentioned that limited access to devices, electricity and the internet were the biggest challenges in using Edtech to support learning during COVID-19.

COVID-19 affected program delivery methods in several ways. Lockdown meant programs had to rethink the manner in which:

- lessons were delivered
- teachers were supported
- parents and communities were engaged
- programs were monitored.

Technology was exploited to support remote delivery, however, the low number of households with devices posed a considerable challenge to remote learning. The ways in which programs adapted to COVID-19 are described below, by type of activity.

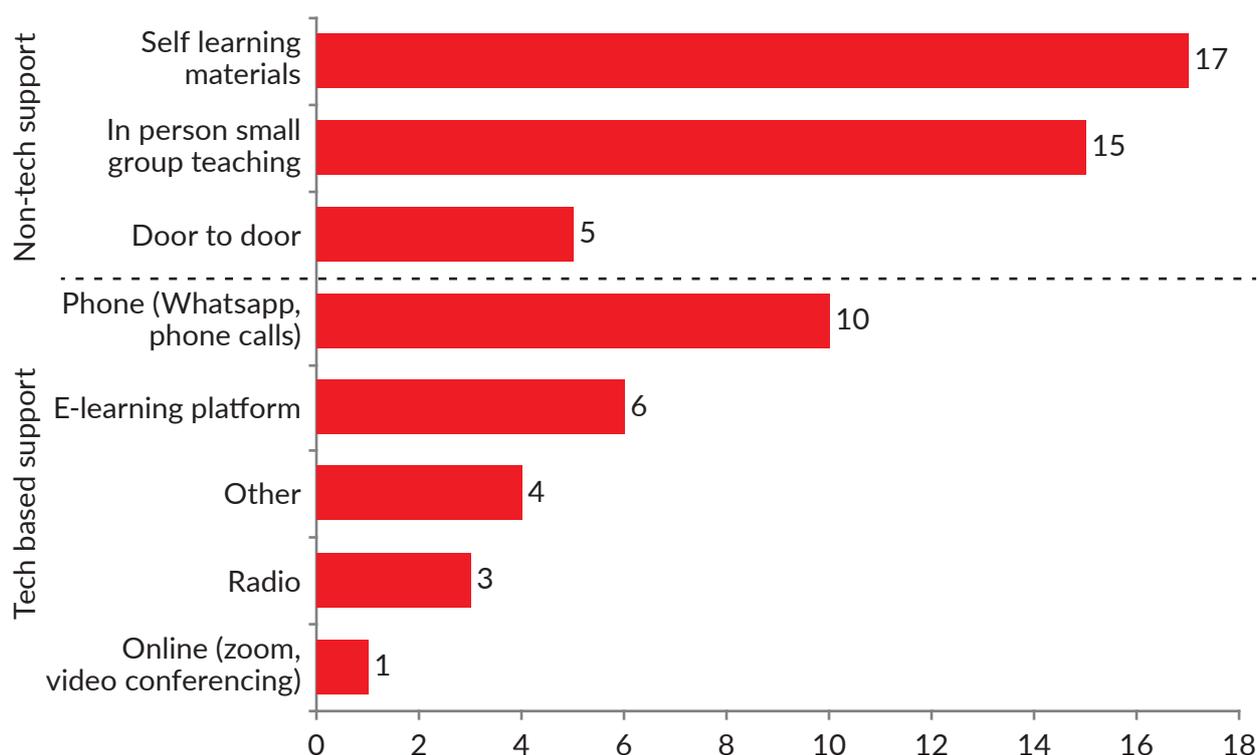
## Lesson delivery

Programs changed their lesson delivery methods in several ways in response to COVID-19.<sup>46</sup> Self-learning materials (SLMs) were printed and distributed, small group in-person community tutoring support was provided and, in some cases, door-to-door teaching support was also provided by learning facilitators and teachers. These comprised the non-tech ways in which learners were supported during pandemic related lockdowns. Programs also exploited technology to support learners. As can be seen in the graph, phone-based support through phone calls, WhatsApp and SMS were most popular. This mirrors the findings of UNICEF's research in South Asia, which also found that mobile phones, and especially messaging platforms like WhatsApp – were the most common technology for learning during school closures.<sup>47 48</sup>

E-learning platforms were also developed specifically for accelerated and alternative education programs such as the ICT4ALS in the Philippines. Some programs devised radio-based learning content. The 'other' category includes PDFs, learning apps, SD cards with content and teaching in shifts.

Most programs pivoted to non-tech ways to support learning, as can be seen in the graph. SLMs and in-person small-group tutoring were the most common ways of delivering lessons. Programs that used tech, utilized low-tech modalities like phones (both basic and smart phones) to support learning. Examples of innovative tech-based support are highlighted in the box below.

### Impact of COVID-19 on lesson delivery



46 Information is not available for 5 of the 36 programs. Additionally, 2 were suspended, 2 were not affected by COVID-19 as they started implementation after schools reopened. Information presented is for 27 programs.

47 Nagesh, Radhika, et al., *Reopening with Resilience: Lessons from remote learning during COVID-19 in South Asia*. United Nations Children's Fund Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, 2021.

48 Van Cappelle, Frank, et al., 'An analysis of the reach and effectiveness of distance learning in India during school closures due to COVID-19', *International Journal of Educational Development*, vol. 85, iss. C, 2021.

## Tech based support provided to learners during COVID-19

### Phone based support

**Accelerated Learning for Girls Project, Pakistan:** This project, implemented by Save the Children, was designed to cater to the educational needs of out-of-school-girls aged nine to eighteen, especially for physically challenged girls and girls with special needs. The program provided accelerated learning through 70 accelerated learning centers in the Sindh province between 2018 and 2021. During school closures caused by COVID-19, learning support was provided through WhatsApp. Each learning facilitator created a WhatsApp group for her accelerated learning center (ALC) students. Project staff, including the project coordinator and M&E team were included in all groups to ensure that culturally acceptable and appropriate content was shared with the children. All project staff in direct contact with the children were female.

Facilitators developed video and voice-message based lesson plans which were shared with children through WhatsApp and cell phones in the ALCs. Materials were shared with children on their parents' phone. Facilitators also kept in touch with children, and resolved any issues, by phone. Lessons were also conducted by phone for children without internet access.

### Radio-based support

**NRC Accelerated Education program, Kenya:** NRC operates accelerated education programs in two camps in Kenya – Dadaab and Kakuma. The program provides a compressed form of the Kenyan primary / lower secondary curriculum to refugee children from Somalia, Sudan and Ethiopia, usually using the local language or their mother tongue. The program also provides psychosocial support (PSS) to all students, through the NRC's 'Better Learning program. This emergency PSS for children in crisis-affected communities is a big component of the programs in Dadaab and Kakuma. During school closures caused by COVID-19, NRC distributed solar powered radios and designed and implemented radio-based learning programs for AEP students. The lessons were heavily scripted. The Better Learning Program was delivered by radio as well.

### E-learning platform

**Alternative Learning System, Philippines:** The ALS program was converted to blended learning to ensure learning continuity during COVID-19. In the early weeks of the quarantine, measures were implemented that restricted in-person learning sessions. In response, the ICT4ALS content repository (via Google Sites) was set up, with the support of UNICEF, to ensure that ALS implementers and learners have quick and easy access to DepEd-certified self-directed learning materials during the pandemic. The website offers a collection of more than 750 online resources and tools for ALS implementers and learners.

### Online classes

**Pratham Second Chance program, India:** A dynamic delivery structure, involving a transmedia approach, was used to connect and engage with learners. Support was provided through multiple platforms like WhatsApp, Zoom and other Google tools. A combination of remote and in-person session plans were mapped, taking into account the local circumstances.



## Teacher support

Speed Schools Uganda delivered text messages several times a week to learning facilitators to guide them in their continuous professional development; in the delivery of community-based classes ('micro classes'); and in taking COVID-19 precautions and urging students and families to do the same. The NRC-supported accelerated education program in the DRC provided teachers with audio guides, flash drives and support through WhatsApp.

## Program monitoring<sup>49</sup>

Phones (calls, text), online forms and mobile data-collection platforms such as SurveyCTO were used to collect key information. The box below highlights two programs which successfully monitored implementation remotely.

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<sup>49</sup> Only four programs reported developing remote systems for program monitoring during COVID-19.

## Remote program monitoring during COVID-19

### Kindergarten Catch-up program, Philippines

The KCEP is an alternative education program, implemented by the Department of Education, that provides the 40-week curriculum in five months or two months (depending on context) in the child's mother tongue. The program is targeted towards children who are 5 years and above and who have not attended kindergarten because they do not have access to public schools or day-care centers and who may be experiencing difficult circumstances. The program is delivered in schools (if there are available rooms), day-care centers or home-based and community-based playgroups. During school shutdowns caused by COVID-19, the program's methods changed, with parents supported in implementing KCEP at home, through using WhatsApp and phone calls. They provided guidance on re-purposing home-based materials for KCEP activities, administering play-based learning and monitoring children's progress. Self-learning materials were also provided and children were supported through radio and TV based programs (these were open to all children). After the end of each activity, parents sent a photo or video to the learning facilitator who was responsible for recording each child's progress. Parents in remote areas gave the weekly reports to the facilitator in person (following COVID-19 protocols) and collected the next week's assignment.

### Keeping Girls in School, Bangladesh

The Keeping Girls in School program, supported by UNICEF, targeted the most marginalized adolescent girls in the community who had dropped out of school, and girls who were underperforming at school (in Grades 7 and 8) which put them at higher risk of child marriage. The intervention provided specially designed tutoring support in math and English for underperforming girls in school. Further, female mentors also led skills-building and life-skills awareness sessions that challenged the norms and restrictions for adolescent girls. The intervention was implemented in 24 schools between 2019 and 2021. During COVID-19, these sessions were held in small groups by phone conference calls.

The project activities were monitored through an online system even before COVID-19, in addition to physical monitoring by project staff. A real-time online monitoring system for the program was developed on the SurveyCTO platform. This cloud-based, android-friendly platform can show dashboards for all monitoring data. Two prescribed forms were developed on SurveyCTO for monitoring project activities, which was particularly useful for managers. These forms were:

- an attendance-tracking form for session participation
- an assessment form for measuring session quality.

The monitoring system was adapted for COVID-19. In the session attendance form, girls who joined the phone-based session sent a screenshot of the conference call to the facilitator. The screenshot registered the duration of the girls' participation in the session. At the same time, the quality-assessment form was also modified and updated accordingly.

## Parental and community engagement<sup>50</sup>

Phone calls and WhatsApp messages were used for parent and community engagement. An example of this is the Accelerated Learning for Girls program in Pakistan. During school closures caused by COVID-19, WhatsApp messages and phone calls were used in community awareness campaigns. Learning facilitators shared COVID-19 prevention messages and information through SMS, phone calls and WhatsApp message groups with children, families and village education committees. Messages related to child abuse, child marriage and girls' education were also shared on WhatsApp groups with beneficiary households and the committees. Members of the committees were also encouraged to report child abuse cases over private WhatsApp messages, and through the hotline number, to program officials.

## Challenges to using technology

Almost all programs mentioned that their biggest challenges in using Edtech to support learning during COVID-19 were limited access to devices, electricity and the internet. This is not surprising, since accelerated and alternative learning programs typically serve disadvantaged populations. High-tech solutions may not be appropriate for delivering lessons to out-of-school and other vulnerable populations. They can, however, be used in M&E and providing support to teachers.

## Skills and other support provided by the programs

### SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- There is a strong focus on foundational literacy, numeracy and curriculum specific skills. Most programs reported providing transferable skills and other support (well-being and psychosocial support) as well.
- There is limited provision of digital skills training.
- COVID-19 had minimal impact on the types of skills offered through programs and other support provided.

Skills / support covered by the programs	Number
Foundational skills / curriculum specific skills	36
Transferable skills	27
Digital skills	6
Job readiness skills / vocational skills	6
MHPSS (Mental health and psychosocial support)	12
Other – Menstrual hygiene and management, community awareness campaigns on key issues (child marriage, GBV etc.)	10

<sup>50</sup> Only six programs reported developing remote systems to engage parents to support learning at home. Further, only one program reported engaging the community remotely.

Skills provided by the programs were categorized into four groups, in line with UNICEF's global skills framework.<sup>51 52</sup>

- **Foundational skills:** These include basic literacy and numeracy skills. These are essential for further learning, productive employment and civic engagement.
- **Transferable skills:** These are also called 'life skills'; 'twenty-first century skills'; 'soft skills' or 'socioemotional skills'. These include problem-solving, negotiation, creativity, empathy, communication, entrepreneurship and financial literacy.
- **Digital skills:** These skills enable young people to use and understand technology, search for and manage information, create and share content, collaborate, communicate, build knowledge, and solve problems safely, critically and ethically.
- **Job-specific skills:** These are also called technical and vocational skills. These are associated with occupations – such as agriculture, technology and engineering, and support transition of youth into the workforce.

Apart from the skills mentioned above, programs also provided additional support to beneficiaries, including:

- MHPSS
- counselling for refugees and those who had experienced trauma
- menstrual hygiene and management awareness to girls
- community engagement on key issues such as child marriage and Gender Based Violence (GBV).

All programs included in the study provided foundational literacy, numeracy and curriculum-specific skills. With the exception of two programs, all supported beneficiaries in other ways as well. Most programs reported providing transferable skills. Programs used the term broadly to mean skills such as communication skills, socioemotional skills, negotiation, creativity, empathy, financial literacy, entrepreneurship and problem solving. There was lack of clarity on what was covered under transferable skills by each program. This was because programs don't teach these skills explicitly, but rather embed these in stories used to develop reading skills or implement them as a pedagogic strategy.<sup>53</sup>

Few programs reported providing digital skills to students and, of the programs that do, two (described in the box below) added this as a result of COVID-19. This is an important finding, as these skills are vital in an increasingly digital world, particularly after COVID-19. Apart from this addition COVID-19 did not have a drastic impact on course offerings, apart from a couple of programs that added digital skills modules (described in the box below).

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51 United Nations Children's Fund, *Global Framework on Transferable Skills*, UNICEF, New York, 2019.

52 Note that while the latest framework contained in [Recovering Learning: Are Children and Youth on Track in Skills Development?](#) includes entrepreneurial skills, in addition to the four types of skills highlighted in the text of this report, entrepreneurial skills are not included in this report as the analysis did not identify programs focusing on entrepreneurial skills.

53 For example – stories that challenged gender norms, promoted tolerance, pair or group work to promote collaboration.

### Advancing Action for Adolescent Girls Program, Pakistan

The A3G program targets out-of-school girls between the ages of 9 and 19 in rural areas of the Southern Punjab province in Pakistan. It has three strands -education; vocational skills and livelihood; and life skills (this is cross cutting). It expanded its life skills strand as a result of Covid-19 and added modules that taught basic ICT skills to students including:

- using WhatsApp
- opening an email account
- using smart phones
- accessing information online.

The project partnered with the British Council- backed English and Digital for Girls Education (EDGE) to implement the new module.

### Let us Learn, Bangladesh

The UNICEF initiative, Let us Learn in Bangladesh, offers three learning pathways for out-of-school children:

- a community-based pre-primary program
- an ability-based alternative learning for children 8–14
- an alternative learning pathway for children between 14-18 years.

The ALP pathway added a digital skills component as a result of COVID-19.

## Support provided to marginalized populations

### SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- Few programs demonstrate a sustained commitment to gender-transformative action. Accelerated and alternative programs, in general, also have a weak focus on CwD.
- Few programs collect disaggregated enrolment data and hardly any have targeted mechanisms in place to integrate vulnerable populations into classes. Similar findings emerge for children on the move and those belonging to ethnic and linguistic minorities.
- Limited change in the skills and support provided by programs to marginalized populations, including girls, CwD, children on the move and children belonging to ethno-linguistic minorities as a result of COVID-19.

## Girls

Most accelerated and alternative education programs included in the study demonstrated gender sensitivity in their design and approach. Two-thirds of the programs explicitly mentioned their focus on girls. However, a third of these interventions limited their attention to ensuring gender parity in enrolment and did not have specific courses or support systems to systematically address gender-related demand side barriers to participation and retention.

Programs that included targeted mechanisms for girls provided support in various ways:

- **Community mobilization campaigns** were conducted on critical issues such as the importance of girls' education, GBV and child marriage. An example is UNICEF's Bete program in Ethiopia which conducted GBV awareness sessions in the community to increase girls' safety.
- Apart from mobilization campaigns, some interventions also devised **specific courses targeted towards girls**. Modules covered menstrual hygiene and management, life skills, gender equality, basic rights and safeguarding awareness against GBV and financial literacy. The Keeping Girls in School program, in Bangladesh, included skills-building and life awareness sessions that challenged norms and restrictions for adolescent girls. Skills sessions included computer training, financial literacy and basic health service skills.
- **Programs also offered different implementation methods to ensure girls' participation**, including flexible timings, nearby centers, single sex classes and female teachers. The Educate a Child program, implemented by UNHCR in Pakistan, is a good example of this. As part of the intervention, two courses are provided – Alternative Learning program (ALP) primary and ALP secondary. The program is targeted at Afghan girls in refugee settlements. ALP primary helps refugee girls cover the five-year primary education curriculum in 32 months. ALP secondary helps girls cover three years of secondary curriculum (Grades 6, 7 and 8) in 18 months. The program ensures that girls are able to participate by ensuring that the centers are close to their homes as young girls are restricted from travelling far. A transportation allowance is also being planned for older ALP secondary graduates to enable them to attend formal high schools. Other ways in which girls are supported by these programs are providing access to female mentors and challenging gender norms through stories used to develop reading.

COVID-19 did not have an impact on course offerings for girls. Programs that provided tailored support to girls, continued providing support remotely using phone calls and texts. The box below describes an alternative education program for girls that provides offers multiple transition pathways after completion and provides extensive support to increase participation and retention.

## Advancing Action for Adolescent Girls (A3G), Pakistan

The A3G program, implemented by Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi in Pakistan, supports flexible schooling options for second chance education for vulnerable and disadvantaged adolescent girls (aged 9–19) in rural areas in the marginalized southern region of the province of Punjab. The program has three strands:

**Education:** Under this, three programs are offered:

- **Chalo, Parho, Badho (CBP):** The CBP program is offered to girls who are aged 12–19 years and who have never been to school because of displacements, emergencies and conflicts. The program offers a 90-day course which provides bursts of remedial learning in literacy and numeracy mapped to the Grade 2 curriculum.
- **Short-term accelerated learning program:** This is offered to OOS girls who have been out-of-school for less than one year. It provides opportunities for girls to complete their primary or middle school education. In six months, girls are able to take their primary or middle school completion exam. A formative assessment is conducted at the start, and only girls who are thought able to complete the program, are enrolled.
- **Long-term accelerated learning program:** This is offered to girls who have been out of school for more than two years. These girls have had some basic schooling. An 18-month program is offered to these girls, which covers Grades 3,4 and 5 or Grades 6,7 and 8, depending on their initial level. On completion, girls move to either the formal education system, vocational system or the labor force (depending on age).
- **Vocational skills and livelihoods:** This strand is offered to girls who are over 15 and are not in education, employment or training. The three-month courses, certified by the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission, aims to equip the girls with abilities that are in high demand locally and which can financially benefit them, including domestic tailoring, dressmaking, machine embroidery, beautician training, digital training, poultry farming, kitchen gardening and handicrafts. The trades are selected based on the needs assessment of each village to ensure maximum benefit for the girls. Each cohort is followed by the 'Siyani Sahelian Nesting', a six-week entrepreneurial training on business development including financial literacy, operations management, marketing strategy and business modelling. The girls are further connected to the industry to increase their wage-earning opportunities.
- **Life skills:** Life-skills education is provided to all beneficiaries enrolled in remedial/vocational courses. This 60-hour program aims to equip adolescent girls with core life-skills, creating a positive change in their attitudes. It incorporates strong values of leadership, communication, health and hygiene, and critical thinking. The program emphasizes education as a tool for empowerment, and also raises awareness about the rights of women by using mobile cinemas, workshops and documentary films in partnership with local organizations – SOC Films and Girls Rising. The program also conducts girls' education awareness campaigns in the community and engages other household members to change their mindset about girls' education. Community members also facilitate identification of out-of-school girls and participate in the recruitment of qualified local female teachers.

## Children with disabilities

Accelerated and alternative education programs have a weak orientation towards children with disabilities (CwD). Of the programs covered in the study, only 14 mentioned their focus on CwD, of which nine limited their attention to ensuring representation in enrolment. Only one program reported using inclusive teaching methods. Support for CwD is usually limited to providing assistive devices such as wheelchairs, glasses and conducting community-based campaigns on the importance of providing education. There was no change in the support provided to CwD as a result of the pandemic. The box below highlights two examples of programs that support CwD in innovative ways.

### Supporting CwD through AEPs and ALPs

#### Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE), Zimbabwe

In order to support CwD, the project has partnered with a teacher training college to build volunteer capacity on supporting learners with disabilities. There is also a conscious effort to reflect CwD in the learning materials. Learning materials are also being converted into disability friendly formats such as audio and large fonts. The program currently enrolls about 400 girls with disabilities.

#### Can't Wait to Learn, multiple countries

Can't Wait to Learn (CWTL) uses games on tablets to help children achieve basic literacy and numeracy. It is used as a catch-up or remedial program depending on context. CWTL is a self-guided serious gaming format that takes children through a curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education, providing the opportunity for children to work toward primary-level certification. The format is designed to help address entrenched issues of stigma and discrimination by including characters with disabilities or albinism. The learning software is co-created with children and young people in each country. CwD also participate in consultation workshops, and the contextualized reading games have been designed to reflect these groups of children as far as possible.

## Children on the move (IDPs, refugees)

While children on the move, including Internally Displaced People (IDPs) and refugees, enroll in accelerated and alternative education programs, few programs included in the study have special courses to promote their participation and integration. COVID-19 had no impact on the kind of support provided to IDPs and refugees. The box below showcases a good example of a program that is geared towards refugee children.

## Accelerated Learning Program, Turkey

The ALP, launched in 2018 by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and UNICEF, supports out-of-school adolescents and youth to make up lost years of learning and transition into formal education, with a specific focus on Syrian refugee children. It covers the formal Turkish curriculum for Grades 1-8 in a compressed time period. The entire course is split into four modules (ALP A, B, C and D). Each module is for four months and covers two grades. Apart from the formal curriculum, all students are offered intensive and MoNE-certified Turkish language courses. Compulsory courses include Turkish, math, science, social science and counselling. In each of the public education centers (where ALP is implemented), a teacher is assigned to provide mentoring and psychosocial support to students inside and outside the classroom. Further, inclusive teacher training is provided to ALP teachers to better respond to the needs of the refugee children and provide support post transition.

Since its inception it has reached 33,249 children between 10-18 (48 per cent girls) using face-to-face methods. The ALP curriculum is being digitized so that ALP learners will be able to participate remotely in the ALP despite any challenging circumstances (e.g., stay-at-home restrictions). This online platform will ensure continuity of learning during COVID-19 as well as during other emergencies, but it is also envisaged as a tool to reach greater numbers of out-of-school adolescents in Turkey, particularly girls, disabled young people and others who may face gender, geographic and other barriers to reaching physical ALP facilities.

Children on the move are a key priority group given the overlapping and multiple vulnerabilities and forms of discrimination that these children often face, affecting their access to good quality education. Given their importance, a separate annex (Annex II) has been included with this study that provides case studies highlighting the support provided by accelerated and alternative education programs, reviewed under this report, to these vulnerable groups of children.

### Ethno-linguistic minorities

Accelerated and alternative education programs, reviewed in the study, also include ethnic and linguistic minorities. However, as with children on the move, very few provide specific support targeting these groups. Only two programs reported having specific support systems for increasing participation and retention of ethnic minorities. The SAGE project in Zimbabwe conducted community-based campaigns and engaged heads of the religious minority community (Apostolic community) to ensure girls' participation in the program. The other example is the mobile alternative basic education program described in the box below.

## Mobile Alternative Basic Education, Ethiopia

This is a government program implemented in partnership with UNICEF and other donors. It specifically targets Pastoralist children who are mobile for more than five months of the year. An accelerated primary curriculum that covers four years of education in three years, is provided. The program has flexible timings, that are decided in consultations with the community to suit the children. The mobile school sites are also selected in consultation with tribal leaders. Mobile classes are usually organized under a tree, in small huts and small tents. The learning facilitators are also members of the community and they move with the children.

## Transition pathways

### SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- While all programs, theoretically, support transition to the formal education system or the labor market, there are barriers to this.
- Barriers include unavailability of schools, government regulations preventing access to formal education for certain groups (such as girls or refugees), low completion rate, and misalignment with the formal education system calendar.

Well-defined transition pathways from accelerated and alternative education programs to formal education systems or the labor market are critical for the programs' success. All accelerated, catch-up and bridging programs included in the study, reported supporting transition to the formal education system after completion of the program and upon passing the summative assessment conducted at the end of the program. Programs supported transition to the primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, TVET or the labor market depending on age. The box below describes a program that provides multiple transition pathways to children upon completion.

### Skills for Life, Uganda

Skills for Life is an adolescent focused program that adopts a multiple pathways approach to build life and work skills among adolescents. Each of the four pathways offered represents a standalone opportunity, though it is expected that transition from one pathway to another adds more value to the young person and allows successful transition to independent work life.

*Foundational skills (literacy and numeracy):* This pathway is targeted towards overage and out-of-school adolescents and young people. It uses tested approaches such as TaRL and AEP in Uganda. It is implemented in schools and out-of-school learning centers.

*Life skills and competencies for the 21st century:* This pathway, builds on the UNICEF life-skills program and provides core competencies for 21st century – including skills as self-esteem, communication, critical thinking, resilience, decision-making, negotiation, cooperation – within both in school and out-of-school clubs that UNICEF supports in target districts in the country.

*Transferable skills, innovation and social entrepreneurship:* This has two components:

- a standardized skills-for-innovation and social entrepreneurship curriculum called “UPSHIFT”
- Tech4Good ICT skills.

These components build on the logic of complementary power of advanced skills training and ICT skills training (including digital skills learning through a digital platform “Kolibri” initiated by UNICEF, now a government e-learning platform accessed by learners who are in and out-of-school).

*Employability (mentorship and referral):* The last pathway serves as referral for learners who have completed the other trainings to help them get a job or further training.

While on paper, all programs support transition to the formal education system or the labor market depending on the beneficiary age and interest, there are, in reality, still barriers to this.

The lack of nearby schools is a big challenge faced by the pastoralist community in Ethiopia that prevents transition to the formal system. In response, upgraded mobile ABE centers have been established by the government that cover the curriculum for Grades 5 and 6.<sup>54</sup> In Mali, a lack of schools and security threats were also listed as barriers to transition in the program d'accès à l'éducation pour tous les enfants (PACETEM) program.

Apart from limited access to schools, government regulations also prevent transition. In Afghanistan, girls are banned from studying beyond Grade 6 under the new regime, so female beneficiaries of the NRC- supported AEP drop out after completing the program.

An evaluation of the government ALP in Lebanon found that the program doesn't always run-on time or align with the formal education calendar, resulting in low transition rates to the formal system. The ALS in Philippines also had poor transition rates due to a difficult, high-stakes, summative assessment resulting in low pass rates. From 2016 to 2018, the proportion of learners who completed the program was 65 per cent, the proportion who took the accreditation and equivalency test was only 27 per cent and the proportion who passed was only 18 per cent.<sup>55</sup> The majority of learners left the program without certification of any learning they had acquired, and those who wanted to reattempt certification by retaking the exam had to wait a year to do so. The Philippines has since completed a feasibility study on micro-credentialling, which backs the recognitions of attainment of small units or circumscribed areas of learning.

Addressing barriers to transition is critical to ensure that out-of-school children complete their education and accelerated and alternative education programs are able to fulfil their mandates. There was no change in the transition pathways available to children after program completion, as a result of COVID-19.

## Community participation

### SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

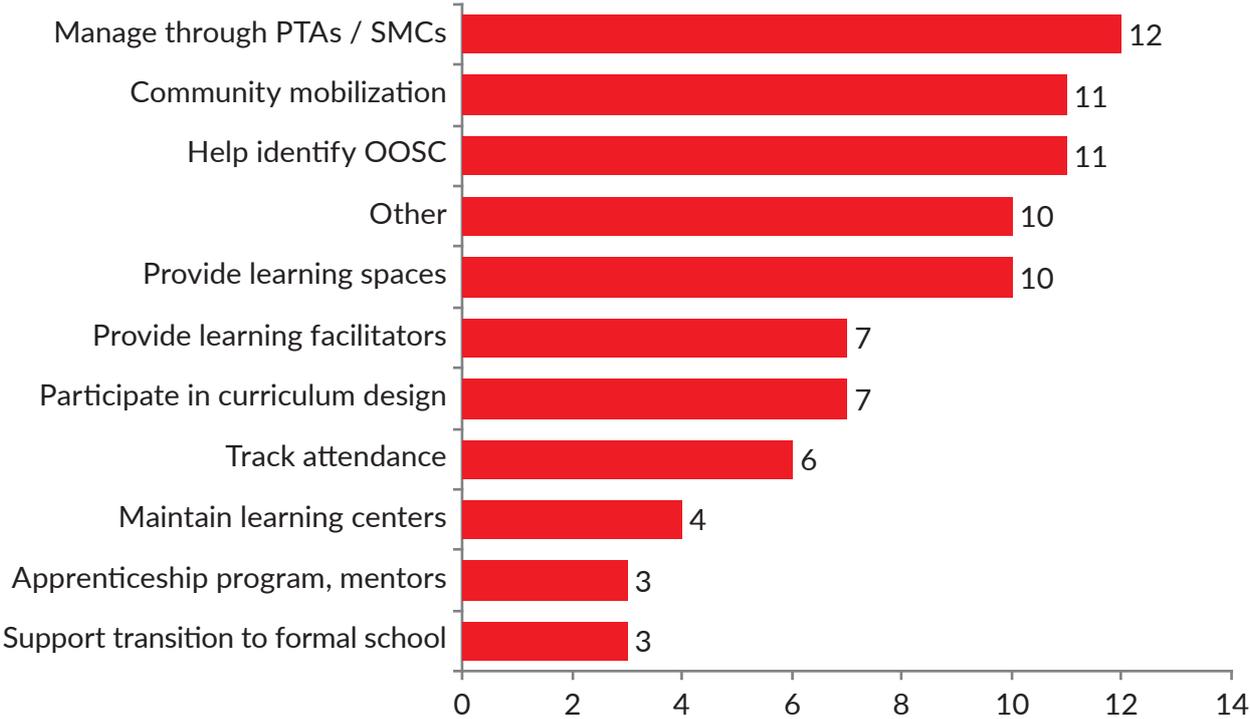
- Community members engage with programs in several ways. They help identify out-of-school children, provide learning spaces, conduct community mobilization campaigns and participate in the management of the learning centers.
- However, while they participate in program design and/or implementation, the study found that they seldom initiate or direct decisions. One possible reason for this could be limited capacity at the community level.
- Community engagement changed so far as to support remote learning as a result of COVID-19, however, the engagement was still limited to following the guidance provided by program implementers rather initiating action and taking ownership.

54 The mobile ABE program provides a curriculum that covers Grades 1- 4 in the formal education system

55 Milligan, Sandra, et al., *Feasibility Study on Micro-certification for the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the Philippines*, Assessment, Curriculum and Technology Research Centre, University of the Philippines, n.d.

All programs, for which information was available, reported involving the community in the design or implementation of the program. Community members engage with the programs in several ways. They help identify out-of-school children, provide learning spaces, conduct community mobilization campaigns and participate in the management of the learning centers through parent teacher associations and school management committees. Other support (as shown in the graph, above) includes deciding class schedules, creating learning materials, participating in self-help groups and helping draft and implement school action plans. The box below highlights an example of how communities participate in program implementation.

**Community participation**



**Speed Schools, Ethiopia and Uganda**

The Speed School accelerated learning model delivers the first three years of the national curriculum in just 10 months to out-of-school children between the ages of 9 to 14. The learning and skills fostered through Speed School prepares children to join government schools at the 4th-grade level. The program also includes self-help groups (SHGs) for mothers. SHGs provide an income generation opportunity for mothers and aim to promote savings.

Community participates in three ways – (1) Through SHGs for mothers. (2) Community management committees – these committees help manage schools with AEP classes. They are involved in classroom repairs (provide manpower, financial resources), sometimes help with meals (in case they are part of the school program) and help maintain student attendance. (3) Communities also contribute to learning. Key members from the community mentor children and serve as role models. Parents also help with creating learning materials for children.

According to the guidebook for planning education in emergencies and reconstruction<sup>56</sup>, eight different levels of community participation are possible at any given time. These are:

- manipulation: communities are manipulated
- decoration: communities are used as needed
- tokenism: communities are used in a perfunctory or merely symbolic way to give the appearance of real participation
- communities are assigned but informed
- communities are consulted and informed
- communities participate in project implementation
- communities initiate and direct decisions
- communities initiate, plan, direct and implement decisions.

In most programs, communities participate in program implementation, however, they don't initiate or direct decisions. While COVID-19 changed how communities participated in program implementation, it did not lead communities initiating or directing decisions, i.e., pushing community participation to a higher level. During COVID-19 related lockdowns, parents supported learning at home and helped children access remote learning as far as they could. However, participation in most programs was still limited to following the guidance provided by program implementers.

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56 IIEP, 'Community Participation'.



# Conclusion and recommendations

Building on the findings and key issues raised in the previous sections of the report, this section provides a summary and some recommendations for a way forward for accelerated and alternative education programs in the wake of COVID-19.

- **Enrolment in accelerated and alternative education programs decreased due to new demand side constraints resulting from COVID-19.** Low-income households were hit by income shocks, which resulted in beneficiaries joining the labor force, and this increased the opportunity cost of schooling. Limited access to technology also affected access to remote learning. There is an urgent need to address these demand side constraints.

**Recommendation:** Cash transfers, i.e., monetary transfers to low-income households have been shown to be an effective way to increase school enrolment, attendance and retention. Cash transfers may be unconditional, conditional on children's school attendance or unconditional with 'soft conditions' or labelling (i.e., providing clear messages on the objective of the transfer on an unconditional program) depending on context<sup>57</sup>. Other effective means to improve enrolment include scholarships and parental engagement<sup>58</sup>. These can be employed to improve enrolment and retention of out-of-school children in accelerated and alternative education programs in the wake of COVID-19.

- **Funding for AEPs and ALPs has decreased, given competing priorities facing donors and governments, especially related to health.**

**Recommendation:** program implementers should think of innovative cost-effective ways to support out-of-school children. There is a need to leverage new sources of funding. Programs could also engage communities more and encourage them to provide financial and other inputs.

- Worldwide, the pandemic resulted in school closures leading to lost school years and increased learning losses. While Ministries of Education are trying to accelerate learning and provide remedial support to students in school, currently, **there have been surprisingly low levels of adoption and adaptation of existing accelerated, catch-up and remedial programs as part of governments' education recovery response globally.**

**Recommendation:** Best practices of such programs should be shared with governments and efforts should be made to ensure that the experiences and resources of accelerated and alternative education programs are leveraged as countries plan their education recovery response.

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57 UNICEF. (2020). *Response Analysis Tool: Effective decision making on the use of CVA for education outcomes in emergencies*.

58 Muralidharan, K., & Glewwe, P. (2016). Improving Education Outcomes in Developing Countries: Evidence, Knowledge Gaps, and Policy Implications. In E. A. Hanushek, S. Machin, & L. Woessmann, *Handbook of the Economics of Education*, Vol 5 (pp. 653-743).

- **Most programs pivoted to no-tech ways to support learning during COVID-19.** SLMs and in-person small group tutoring were the most common ways of delivering lessons. Programs that used tech, used low-tech modalities like phone to support learning. Almost all programs mentioned limited access to devices, electricity and internet as the biggest challenges in using Edtech to support learning during COVID-19. This is not surprising, since accelerated and alternative learning programs serve the most disadvantaged populations.

**Recommendation:** High-tech solutions may not be the most relevant way to support learning for out-of-school and other vulnerable populations. No-tech and low-tech options for distance learning are critical to ensuring learning continuity during a crisis. High-tech solutions can be used to support other aspects of program implementation such as M&E and providing teacher support. There is a need to strengthen program resilience to emergencies, keeping on-the-ground constraints in mind. Useful resources for countries include UNICEF guidance on distance learning methods.<sup>59</sup> Additional guidance is also provided in remote learning resource packs (focusing on radio, print, TV, digital technology and mobiles) developed by UNICEF and the World Bank.<sup>60</sup> These packs are designed to support officials in national and international agencies tasked with designing and implementing effective remote learning opportunities for children in development and humanitarian contexts as well as with strengthening existing remote learning programs.

- **Few programs offered digital skills pre-COVID. Further, most programs reported no change in the skills provided as a result of COVID-19.** Digital skills are critical for meaningful engagement and participation in interconnected economies to which technology is inextricably linked. These skills have also become more important because of COVID-19.

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that accelerated and alternative education programs include digital skills in their curriculum. At the very minimum, information and data literacy skills which include browsing, searching, filtering, evaluating and managing data, information and digital content, and; digital communication and collaboration skills, which include interacting, sharing, engaging in citizenship, collaborating through digital technologies and managing digital identities<sup>61</sup> should be provided.

- **Few programs demonstrate a sustained commitment to gender-transformative action. Programs in general, also have a weak focus on CwD. Few programs collect disaggregated enrolment data, and even fewer have mechanisms in place to integrate CwD into classes.** This study found that there was no change in the support provided to girls, CwD and other vulnerable populations as a result of COVID-19. Several reports have found that COVID-19 disproportionately access to education for affected girls<sup>62</sup> and CwD.<sup>63</sup> Despite this, few programs included in this study reported providing additional targeted support in the wake of COVID-19, to ensure participation and retention of girls, CwD and other vulnerable populations. While programs demonstrate gender sensitivity in their program designs and approaches, most programs measure the success of these efforts by whether they have managed to achieve gender parity in their enrolment numbers.

**Recommendation:** Addressing systemic barriers that prevent girls from participation and completing education through community awareness campaigns, engaging parents and advocating policy-level action, is key to increasing transition and completion rates among girls. There is also a strong need to make accelerated and alternative programs inclusive. This would involve reviewing and revising the curriculum, creating inclusive learning materials,

59 United Nations Children's Fund, *Guidance on Distance Learning Modalities to Reach all Children and Youth During School Closures: Focusing on low- and no-tech modalities to reach the most marginalized*, UNICEF, Kathmandu, Nepal, 2020.

60 Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, [Remote Learning Packs](#), INEE, 2022.

61 UNESCO, *Digital Literacy Skills*.

62 Kwauk, Schmidt and Ganju, *Effects of COVID-19 on girls' return to school*.

63 UNICEF, *Children with Disabilities*.

training teachers and creating inclusive learning spaces. Out-of-school CwD are among the most vulnerable populations, and integrating them into education programs is essential to realize the goal of inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

- **Barriers to transition into the formal education system still exist.** These include limited access to schools, non-alignment with the formal education system and high-stakes summative assessments. Few programs work with children beyond completion of a program to ensure effective integration into higher levels of education.

**Recommendation:** Address barriers to transition to the formal system. Some ways of ensuring a smooth transition include advocacy campaigns to ensure program recognition; and alignment of the accelerated and alternative education program curriculum, academic calendar and assessments with the formal education system.

- **Community members still lack the capacity to initiate and direct decisions.** They engage with programs in several ways. They help identify out-of-school children, provide learning spaces, conduct community mobilization campaigns and participate in the management of the learning centers. However, while all programs reported involving the community in program design or implementation or both, decisions are still initiated externally.

**Recommendation:** Providing training that empowers members to take full ownership of the program is essential for sustainability of these interventions.



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# Annex I

Name of the program	Type	Country
Skills for Life	Multiple pathways approach	Uganda
NRC AEP Kenya	Accelerated Education program	Kenya
Pratham Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL)	Remedial Education program	India / multiple countries
Cambodia ALP	Accelerated Learning program	Cambodia
Accelerated Learning for Girls project	Accelerated Education program	Pakistan
NRC AEP Uganda	Accelerated Education program	Uganda
Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE)	Accelerated Education program	Zimbabwe
NRC AEP Iran	Accelerated Education program	Iran
Second chance Liberia	Accelerated Education program	Liberia
Speed schools	Accelerated Education program	Uganda
Speed schools	Accelerated Education program	Ethiopia
Alternative Learning System program (ALS)	Accelerated Education program	Philippines
Educate a Child	Accelerated Education program	Pakistan
Educate a Child	Accelerated Education program	Yemen
NRC AEP Afghanistan	Accelerated Education program	Afghanistan
Alight Educate a Child	Accelerated Education program	Pakistan
Let us Learn	Accelerated Education program	Bangladesh
Keeping Girls in School	Remedial education / catch-up	Bangladesh
Accelerated Education program for Out-of-school Children and Adolescents in disadvantaged and crisis-affected areas	Accelerated Education program	Pakistan
The Project for Enhancement of Non-Formal Education	Accelerated Education program	Pakistan
Can't wait to learn (CWTL)	Accelerated learning program / remedial program (depending on context)	Uganda, Lebanon
NRC AEP DRC	Accelerated Education program	Congo, Dem. Rep.
Advancing Action for Adolescent Girls	Accelerated Education program	Pakistan
Second chance program	Accelerated Education program	India
Complementary Basic Education in Tanzania	Accelerated Education program	Tanzania
Integrated program for out-of-school children	Alternative learning pathway (includes catch-up elements)	Tanzania
Alternative Basic Education program	Accelerated Education program	Ethiopia
Bete program	Accelerated education program	Ethiopia
Accelerated Learning program	Accelerated Education program / Bridging program	Turkey
program d'accès à l'éducation pour tous les enfants au Mali	Accelerated Education program / Remediation program	Mali
Soporte Pedagógico	Remedial education	Peru
Alternative Learning program	Accelerated Education program	Sudan
Functional Literacy program	Catch-up program	Malawi
Akelius Digital French Course	Accelerated Education program / Remedial program	Lebanon, Mauritania
Lebanon ALP	Accelerated Education program	Lebanon
Kindergarten Catch-up Education program	Accelerated Education program	Philippines

## Annex II

### Case studies: Accelerated and alternative education programs for children on the move

This annex provides some case studies of accelerated and alternative education programs included in this study, which support IDPs, refugees and other children on the move.

#### Accelerated Education program, Kenya

NRC operates its AEP in two camps in Kenya- Dadaab and Kakuma. The Dadaab refugee camp, created 30 years ago, was once the largest refugee camp in the world, hosting up to 500,000 Somalis. The [Kakuma](#) camp was established in 1992 after the '[Lost Boys of Sudan](#)', a group of roughly 20,000 young boys fleeing from civil war in Sudan, settled in Kenya. This camp is also where many [Ethiopian](#) refugees settled after fleeing their home country due to political instability. Currently, the program enrolls 2,000 learners in Kakuma and 1,900 learners in Dadaab. While the program aims to achieve gender parity in enrolment, program staff noted that enrolling and retaining girls is a major challenge. NRC staff also acknowledged that inclusivity, especially for students with disabilities, is particularly challenging in Dadaab. They emphasized the difficulty in recruiting students with disabilities without specific services to overcome barriers (e.g., getting to school for children with limited mobility).

The Kenya Institute for Curriculum Development's non-formal basic education syllabus and curriculum is utilized in these programs. The curriculum offers a recommended "condensing" of material for accelerated programs, in which formal Standards 1–4 are condensed into NFE Level 1, Standards 5–6 into NFE Level 2, and Standards 7–8 into NFE Level 3. Each level is for one year and entry into the formal school system can occur after each level of the program, depending on the learner's age. Kenya is currently transitioning from the 8-4-4 curriculum to a competence-based curriculum. Level 1 under the new curriculum covers Grades 1 and 2; Level 2 covers Grade 3 and Level 3 covers Grades 4 and 5. Students transition to Grade 6 after completing Level 3. Refugee children are allowed to sit annual national examinations and, on passing, are awarded official Kenyan certification in both primary and secondary education.

The program provides the Kenyan primary / lower secondary curriculum in less time, usually using the children's local language or mother tongue. The program also provides psychosocial support to all students. The 'Better Learning program, which is NRC's flagship education-in-emergency PSS intervention for children in crisis-affected communities is a major component of the programs in Dadaab and Kakuma.

One key aspect of the NRC AEP is community participation through the Boards of Management (BoMs), parent teacher associations (PTAs) and community mobilizers. BoMs/PTAs are selected and trained to support in school management. Community mobilizers also play a key role in creating awareness and telling the community about the AEP. Through community mobilizers, guidance is provided to prospective parents, children and persons with disabilities. Follow-up on mobilization clinics is conducted for individual families or groups. The PTAs help in identifying out-of-school-children, supporting enrolment in the AEP centers and conducting community mobilization campaigns on critical issues such as girls' enrolment.

During COVID-19 school closures, the program adapted by:

- implementing small-group learning in the camp
- distributing SLMs to older children
- conducting lessons – including for BLP sessions – by radio with radios distributed by NRC and scripted lessons
- supporting teachers using WhatsApp for coordination and communication.

### Bete program, Ethiopia

'Bete', meaning 'My Home' in Amharic, is a joint education and child protection initiative, led by UNICEF, is designed to provide a safe space for boys and girls living in the midst of humanitarian emergencies in Ethiopia by integrating accelerated learning, child protection and skills development. The program has four key objectives:

- providing hard-to-reach out-of-school children including IDPs, refugees and children in host communities from ages 6-18 with accelerated education and skills development
- protecting children who experience, or who are at risk of, violence, exploitation, neglect and harmful practices by providing them with social service welfare, case management services and referrals, mental health and psychological support, education and justice
- leveraging cross-sectoral resources and maximizing results with an integrated approach
- providing adolescents with transferable skills, conflict-sensitive, peacebuilding and social cohesion opportunities.

Bete program targets displaced pre-primary, primary and secondary school-age children, including adolescents (up to age 18) in physical locations set up during rapid onset of emergencies. The program has five tracks:

- **Track 1:** The first track is for children aged between 6–7. These children are offered an eight-week Accelerated School Readiness (ASR) program delivered by a trained facilitator based on the ASR curriculum developed for the respective region and adapted to the local language.
- **Track 2:** This is for children aged 7–9. These children are offered a semi-condensed and flexible formal early primary curriculum. The program targets children who do not have access to formal education. Children access curriculum content that condenses contents from Grades 1 and 2 and enables them to join Grade 3 in formal primary school.
- **Track 3** is for children between 9–14 years. These children receive an accelerated primary curriculum. The program targets over-age children who have never been to school. It compresses Grades 1–3 and allows transition to Grade 4 upon completion.
- **Track 4** is offered to children who have dropped out of Grades 5 or 6. The children are offered catch-up classes to cover curriculum content in those grades, allowing them to take the regional standardized assessment and transition to secondary school.
- **Track 5** offers standard secondary school options to IDP children aged 15–18 years.

All children receive transferable skills (life skills) training. Twenty sessions, each of 90 minutes, are delivered through active-learning methodologies through after-school clubs. Apart from transferable skills, all children are also provided MHPSS services. The program started implementation after schools reopened post-COVID. Classes are held in-person ensuring that the COVID-19 regulations are followed. In 2021, the program reached 104,900 children

through its child protection services, and 72,043 through its learning initiatives, providing skills development to 17,048 children.

## NFE Learning Passport, Lebanon

Since October 2019, Lebanon has experienced crises at the social, economic and political levels that have impacted its education system. They include:

- the Syrian crisis
- economic collapse and monetary devaluation
- political instability
- the global COVID-19 pandemic
- the Beirut Port blast.

These shocks have resulted in the damage of school and learning facilities for around 135,000 children. Further, the UNHCR estimates that Lebanon hosts at least 1.5 million Syrian refugees, in addition to some 15,800 refugees from Ethiopia, Iraq and Sudan. In response, UNICEF, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) and NGO partners launched the NFE Learning Passport (LP) to provide access to NFE programs to vulnerable Lebanese and refugee children and young people.

The LP was implemented as a 12-week pilot, ending in August 2021. It is a global partnership between UNICEF and Microsoft geared to help more than 30 million children and young people to access continuous, good quality education despite disruptions caused by crisis and displacement. Since its launch, the platform has undergone rapid expansion to facilitate country-level curriculums for children and young people whose schools have been closed due to COVID-19. The goal of the LP in Lebanon is to help children and young people enter or return into national education systems and acquire skills that will increase their employability and livelihood opportunities via innovative and stable learning pathways. The LP in Lebanon is a web-based digital platform that delivers an interactive and personalized NFE curriculum for students. It includes adaptive lessons/ supplementary learning and assessment material for teachers and it provides support to caregivers through a blended positive parenting program. The parenting program is used to raise awareness on mental health topics related to emergencies and COVID-19 responses, promote coping mechanisms and teach the wider community about how they could access MHPSS support.

As of August 2021, the NFE LP reached an estimated total of 4,362 children and young people (2,792 females, 1,570 males), with 541 teachers and 424 caregivers across six out of seven governorates surpassing the initial target of 4,000 participants. It is now planned to reach more users by scaling-up its approach across the following three strategic areas.

- 1) UNICEF, in partnership with MEHE and the TVET Directorate, will integrate the LP into the ministry's strategy to ensure a blended approach to digital learning for secondary and TVET formal education.
- 2) The UNICEF's School Bridging program and other NFE pathways are targeted to reach 70,000 out-of-school children and young people, including children on the move, with accelerated blended learning support. This will help ensure their transition back to formal schools or to age-appropriate jobs.
- 3) The LP program will use social media platforms to engage potential users who are interested in personalized and self-directed learning.



**ACCELERATED EDUCATION  
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