



ACCELERATED EDUCATION
WORKING GROUP

Catch-up Programmes: 10 Principles for Helping Learners Catch Up and Return to Learning

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This guidance was written by Kayla Boisvert with extensive support from a task team of members of the Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG): Rachel Cooper (UNICEF), Noemi Gerber (War Child Holland), Nicolas Herbecq (ECHO), Martha Hewison (UNHCR), Marta Schena (Norwegian Refugee Council), and Emilia Sorrentino (Plan International).

The AEWG aims to improve the quality of Accelerated Education (AE) through developing guidance and tools to support a more harmonised, standardised approach to AE provision. The AEWG is made up of the following education partners supporting and/or funding AE programming:

- European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations Department (ECHO)
- Education Development Center (EDC)
- International Rescue Committee (IRC)
- Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
- Plan International
- Save the Children
- UNESCO
- UNHCR
- UNICEF
- United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
- War Child Holland

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in which approximately 1.5 billion children and youth (nearly 85% of the world's learners) were affected by school closures,¹ the AEWG anticipates that catch-up programmes will be deployed extensively to meet the needs of learners who missed out on several months to approximately one year of education due to the disruption. Therefore, building on the [AEWG's programme definitions](#) and our expertise in AE and other non-formal or alternative education options that accelerate the acquisition of knowledge and skills, the AEWG developed this set of principles and action points for catch-up programmes.

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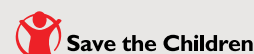
Accelerated Education Working Group (2021). Catch-up Programmes: 10 Principles to Help Learners Catch Up and Return to Learning

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¹ UNESCO (n.d.) Education Response. Retrieved November 13, 2020, from <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>



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Returning to Learning during Crises: The Role of Catch-up Programmes

Each year, millions of children miss weeks or months of education due to conflict, natural disaster, health epidemics, and forced displacement. After the 2005 Pakistan earthquake, for example, schools nearest the fault line were closed for 3 months.² During the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, schools were closed for 6 to 9 months in Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone. During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were closed around the world in 2020 and 2021 for periods of time ranging from several weeks to over a year, and intermittent closures are still expected.

When education is disrupted due to crisis, conflict, or displacement, learners miss out on new learning, and they lose knowledge and skills they had previously acquired. This learning loss accumulates over time, making learners fall further and further behind their peers. What's more, those who are most marginalised—such as learners in extreme poverty, girls, learners with disabilities, displaced learners, and learners in rural areas—face challenges to accessing and benefiting from distance learning during education disruptions, thus education inequities are exacerbated.

Therefore, when education resumes, it is essential to help learners catch up. Learners must be helped to recover lost learning, make up for content that was missed, and return to the appropriate place in the curriculum where they would be if the disruption had not occurred.

What are Catch-up Programmes?

The Accelerated Education Working Group (AEWG) defines a catch-up programme as:

A short-term transitional education programme 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.

Catch-up programmes are appropriate for learners who were in an education programme when a disruption occurred. Many of these learners were the right age for their grade, although some may be over-age, especially in countries where learners tend to start school late or where education disruptions are frequent. Due to the disruption—which may be caused by crisis, conflict, or displacement—learners may have missed a couple of months to approximately one year of school. Catch-up programmes help them to recover the knowledge and skills they lost while they were out of school, as well as to acquire the new competencies they would have learned had the disruption not occurred. The goal of catch-up programmes is to help learners return to where they would be in the curriculum if the disruption had not occurred so that they can resume their education.

2 Andrabi, T., Daniels, B., & Das, J. (2020). Human Capital Accumulation and Disasters: Evidence from the Pakistan Earthquake of 2005.

Catch-up programmes can be implemented and overseen by Ministries of Education (MOE), such as when a nationwide crisis interrupts all learners' education and a national catch-up programme is needed. They can also be implemented and overseen by non-governmental organizations (NGO), community- or faith-based organizations, and other stakeholders to target certain subgroups of learners, such as marginalised groups, refugees, internally displaced persons, or nomadic groups. Catch-up programmes can be implemented in a range of formal and non-formal education settings, in different levels and grades.³

How are catch-up programmes different from other education programmes?

Based on [definitions developed by the AEWG](#), Table 1 provides an overview of some education programmes that can help young people who are out of school or are struggling to keep up with their peers. It is critical that young people attend the right programme to suit their needs so that they have the best chance of successfully gaining essential learning competencies and returning to or remaining in education.

When are catch-up programmes the appropriate response?

The AEWG developed a decision tree to support stakeholders to identify what type of education programme is needed to help learners after an education disruption. As shown in Figure 1, catch-up programmes are the most appropriate response for learners who have missed out on several months to approximately one year of education, but other education options also exist, such as extending instructional time and providing remedial and accelerated education programmes.



Photo: © UNHCR/Vincent Tremeau

³ Note, however, that it would be difficult to implement a catch-up programme in an accelerated education programme because an accelerated programme can likely not be further accelerated.

EDUCATION PROGRAMMES TO SUPPORT MARGINALISED LEARNERS




	CATCH-UP PROGRAMMES	ACCELERATED EDUCATION PROGRAMMES	REMEDIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES	BRIDGING PROGRAMMES
 <p>LEARNERS</p> <p>Learners are/were...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Previously attending a formal or non-formal education programme at any stage/grade/level » Missed a couple of months to approximately one year of education due to an education disruption caused by crisis, conflict, or displacement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Over-age for their grade » Out-of-school (e.g., for 2 or more years) or never attended school » Did not complete primary school » Affected by poverty, crisis, conflict, or displacement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Currently enrolled/attending an education programme » Require additional support in a specific subject area(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Displaced learners of any age/grade » Previously attending school in their home country where the curriculum was significantly different than the host country curriculum or was taught in a different language
 <p>OBJECTIVES</p> <p>The programme helps learners...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Recover lost learning » Acquire skills they missed during the disruption » Resume education from the point they would be if the disruption had not occurred » Transition back into the same education programme they were in prior to the disruption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Gain basic literacy, numeracy, and life skills » Complete the primary curriculum and obtain a certificate » Transition into secondary school, vocational training, or livelihoods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Acquire knowledge and skills in a subject area(s) through additional targeted support » Succeed in the education programme they are currently enrolled in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Gain skills in the language of instruction or gain other knowledge and skills for success in the host country education system » Transition into the formal education system of the host country
 <p>COVERAGE</p> <p>The programme covers...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Knowledge and skills learners already had but lost when they were out of school » New knowledge and skills they missed during the disruption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » All of lower primary, the entire primary cycle, or the entire basic education cycle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Subject areas that an individual learner or group of learners are having difficulty with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » A new language of instruction or background knowledge learners need for success in the new education system

Table 1. Education Programmes to Support Marginalised Learners, Accelerated Education Working Group (2021).

AEWG COVID-19 DECISION TREE

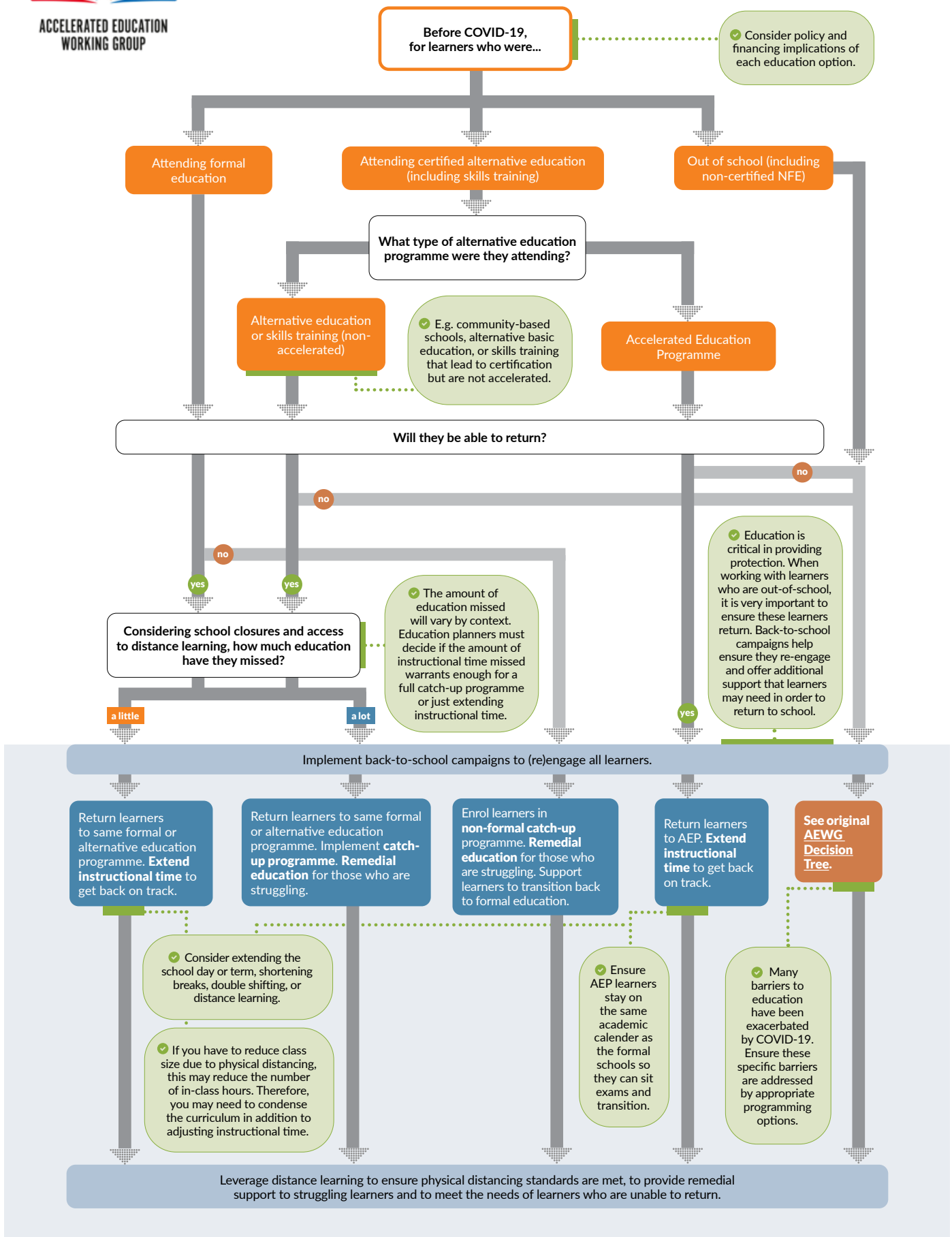


Figure 1. AEWG COVID-19 Education Decision Tree.

Purpose and Assumptions of the Principles

The purpose of the catch-up principles is to support MOEs, implementers, donors, and others in designing, implementing, and evaluating catch-up programmes in order to strengthen their quality, as well as the quality of the education system as a whole, and to help learners who have experienced an education disruption to catch up and continue their studies.

Catch-up programmes are often implemented within existing education systems or programmes, such as formal primary or secondary education or non-formal education programmes, to help learners who were already attending that school or programme to make up for lost time. Therefore:

These principles assume that systems for teacher recruitment, professional development, supervision, and remuneration; systems for monitoring and funding; and systems for management are all in place. Moreover, these principles assume that best practices for all education programmes, especially those in crisis- and conflict-affected environments, are being met, such as safety, equity, inclusion, and sustainability.

These principles only include what is unique about catch-up programmes (which does not apply to formal education or accelerated education) or what is especially important for catch-up programmes due to the crisis that caused the education disruption.



Additional information about the basic characteristics of effective education programming can be found in the [Guide to the Accelerated Education Principles](#) and the [INEE Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies](#).

Which principles for which programmes?

Note that not all of the principles and action points are relevant for all catch-up programmes.

For example, [Principle 2](#) on safety when reopening schools and education institutions and [Principle 6](#) on re-engaging teachers after disruptions are specific to catch-up programmes in contexts where all schools were closed. Those may include contexts that are/were affected by conflict, natural disaster, or health emergencies. These principles may not be relevant for catch-up programmes in contexts where schools were not closed but that have learners whose education was disrupted, for example in camps or host communities for displaced learners.

Additionally, while all catch-up programmes condense the curriculum by prioritising learning outcomes ([Principle 3](#)), not all catch-up programmes adapt instructional time and delivery modality by extending instruction over weekends and holidays or leveraging distance learning ([Principle 4](#)).

How are the Principles organised?

The principles are organised into four categories: Learners, Teachers, Programme Management, and Alignment with MOE and Policy Frameworks. These categories are based on the same categories as the [Accelerated Education 10 Principles for Effective Practice](#) and emphasise the main components of catch-up programmes.



LEARNERS

Principle 1: The catch-up programme meets the holistic needs of learners whose education was disrupted for several months to approximately a year.

Principle 2: The learning environment is physically and emotionally safe, and emergency prevention, preparedness, and response plans are in place.

Principle 3: The catch-up programme curriculum is condensed—prioritising, integrating, and reinforcing the most essential competencies.

Principle 4: Instructional time, delivery modality, and examinations are adapted.

Principle 5: The catch-up programme effectively uses learner-centred pedagogy.



TEACHERS

Principle 6: Teachers are (re)engaged and their well-being is supported after the education disruption.

Principle 7: Teachers have the capacity and resources to re-engage all learners and implement the catch-up programme.



PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

Principle 8: Learners, families, and communities are informed, consulted, engaged, and accountable.



ALIGNMENT WITH MOE AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Principle 9: The catch-up programme is recognised by and aligned with the national education system and has clear transition pathways.

Principle 10: The catch-up programme is integrated into the national education system and relevant humanitarian architecture.

Who needs a Catch-up Programme?

Ibrahim, now 10 years, was at the top of his 2nd grade class when he and his family had to flee Syria last year. Ibrahim wants to enrol in his local public school in Jordan and resume his education, but he lost many skills when he was out of school. Ibrahim needs to enrol in the catch-up programme overseen by the Ministry of Education. Then, once he catches up to his peers, he needs help to register and transition into third grade for the next school year.

Athieng, 12 years old, was forcibly displaced from her village in South Sudan due to the conflict. She settled with her family in a different part of the country, but she missed several months of fourth grade during the transition. Athieng would like to return to school, but she has fallen behind her peers whose education was not interrupted. Athieng needs a short-term catch-up programme which will support her to gain the skills she missed, relearn skills she forgot, and help her transition into the local government school.

Maria is a 16-year-old Brazilian high school student attending Colegio Sant'ana in a favela of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. She and her classmates were out of school during COVID-19. In their community, Maria and her classmates do not have regular access to internet, so they were not able to take advantage of distance learning options. What's more, Maria had to take care of her brothers Rodrigo and Felipe so that their parents could go to work and continue to provide for the family. When Colegio Sant'ana reopens, the school will need to help all learners catch up, especially those like Maria who were unable to continue learning during the education disruption.

Eight-year-old **Aziz** was out of school for 15 weeks as a result of the 2005 earthquake which deeply affected his village in Pakistan. Schools were closed in the area due to damage to buildings and roads, as well as continued risk of landslides and further tremors. When it was safe to attend classes, Aziz and some of his classmates benefited from a catch-up programme implemented by a local NGO that helped them acquire skills they missed and return to the right spot in the curriculum so that they could end the school year at the same time as their peers in other regions of the country.



PRINCIPLE 1

The catch-up programme meets the holistic needs of learners whose education was disrupted for several months to approximately a year.

Catch-up programme learners are those whose education was disrupted for a few months to approximately one year due to crisis, conflict, or displacement. To re-engage these learners and help them catch-up, it is essential to address their holistic wellbeing, meeting needs in all domains of their life, including economic, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual domains, as well as education. This is because emergencies that disrupt education—such as a health emergency, a natural disaster, or war—can also affect other areas of learners' lives, such as their household financial situation and their physical and mental health.



ACTION POINTS:

- a. **Target learners who were previously attending a formal or non-formal education programme and whose education was disrupted for approximately three to twelve months.** Learners who missed less than three months may not need a catch-up programme, but rather remedial education or support classes in the evenings or on weekends. Those who missed more than a year may need an alternative or accelerated education programme, especially if they are substantially over-age and want to gain certification in primary education.
- b. **Consult with communities and conduct a rapid assessment to identify barriers learners face to return to education.** This should include learners' economic, health, psychosocial, and safety needs that have been affected by the crisis.⁴
- c. **Revise national and school-level policies and practices that exclude or marginalise some learners adversely affected by the crisis and education disruption.** These may include school fees, hidden costs of education, and policies and practices that exclude pregnant teens, over-age learners, and refugees.
- d. **Roll out back-to-school campaigns.** These should provide learners, caregivers, and communities with information about when schools/education⁵ centres will reopen and how to register, and they should provide incentives and in-kind support for families and learners so learners can return to education.

ADAPTING POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Education disruptions and the emergencies that cause them can exacerbate poverty, increase teen pregnancy, and cause learners to drop out and become over-age. National policies and school-level practices will need to be adapted to allow all learners to return to education. Also, after some disruptions, not all learners will be able to return right away, so school-level practices must not punish learners who cannot attend immediately.

⁴ For learning assessments, see [Principle 5](#).

⁵ This document uses the terms "school" and "education centre" interchangeably when referring to the physical space a catch-up programme is implemented in. Since catch-up programmes can be for learners who were previously attending any type of education programme (e.g., formal or non-formal), the physical space may be a formal school, but it may also be an education centre, community learning centre, etc.

- e. **Meet learners' protection and psychosocial needs.** These needs can be addressed by integrating school-level interventions and by linking to community- and family-level interventions or services.^{6,7}
- f. **Support re-enrolment and attendance through monitoring, engagement of education personnel, and community engagement.** Focus on equity and inclusion and ensuring enrolment and attendance of the most marginalised who are at risk of not returning to school.⁸

MEETING LEARNERS' HOLISTIC NEEDS

Emergencies that cause an education disruption can exacerbate family poverty, leading to lack of adequate nutrition and shelter or displacement. They can also lead to an increase in child abuse and neglect and can increase stress and mental health conditions. Interventions to meet learners' basic needs may include school feeding programmes, WASH facilities, and services for learners with disabilities. Child protection interventions may include community sensitisation, educator training, and building linkages to child protection services. Psychosocial interventions may help to address stigma, build positive relationships, make time for learners to express their feelings, and build linkages with mental health services.



Photo: © UNHCR/Vincent Tremeau

6 See [Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies \(2020\). Briefing Note on Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Aspects of the COVID-19 Outbreak](#) and [Inter-agency Standing Committee \(2007\). Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings](#)

7 For safe learning environments, see [Principle 2](#).

8 For community engagement, see [Principle 8](#).

Integrating Social-Emotional Learning for Learners Affected by Conflict, Nigeria

In 2014, Creative Associates, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and Florida State University, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), began implementing the Education Crisis Response (ECR) project in response to increased insecurity and internal displacement in northeast Nigeria. Originally designed as a catch-up programme, ECR provided displaced and out-of-school host community children and youth ages 6 to 17 with 9 months of instruction in basic literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning. The programme helped learners catch-up and transition into the formal schools.

ECR provided for the needs of the whole child in developing their social-emotional skills based on IRC's Healing Classrooms approach. In ECR, children who had witnessed and experienced violent conflict built relational, emotional, and resilience skills to be able to succeed in school and life. ECR created safe spaces, nurtured supportive adult and peer relationships, and delivered explicit 30-minute scripted social-emotional learning (SEL) lessons and embedded SEL instruction into literacy and numeracy lessons.

To develop SEL learning materials, ECR undertook a design workshop to identify and write a local, contextually relevant SEL curriculum and lesson plans. The workshop began by mapping existing SEL skills taught in the Nigerian curriculum. In the workshop—which included representatives from the MOE, a national curriculum agency, professors at colleges of education, and international stakeholders—ECR validated five proposed SEL competencies: executive functioning, emotional regulation, positive social skills, conflict resolution, and perseverance. Conflict resolution was prioritised among those competencies, and SEL was embedded into literacy and numeracy lessons when workshop participants recognized the need for all children affected by conflict to heal and recover. The final curriculum incorporated local songs, dances, and stories into scripted SEL lesson plans.

(Note: ECR was initially developed as a catch-up programme, which was intended to meet the needs of learners whose education was disrupted or never began because of conflict in Northeast Nigeria. In its initial stages, it only offered the equivalent of grades 1 and 2. Since then, USAID and the European Union have supported the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council's development of a national Accelerated Basic Education Programme, helping learners obtain primary certification and transition into lower secondary school.)

Source: USAID (forthcoming). Education Crisis Response Case Study Report.



PRINCIPLE 2

The learning environment is physically and emotionally⁹ safe, and emergency prevention, preparedness, and response plans are in place.

In contexts affected by conflict, natural disaster, or health emergencies, it is necessary to ensure that crisis-specific health and safety plans and measures are in place. It is also essential to address the trauma that learners and educators have experienced as a result of the crisis. This is in addition to usual safety standards that should be in place in all education programmes.



ACTION POINTS:

- a. **Consult with learners, educators, caregivers, and communities about plans for reopening schools/education centres, and develop flexible school reopening plans.** These plans should be in line with (inter)national guidance and standard operating procedures, emphasising that reopening dates and processes may change to reflect changes in the crisis situation.¹⁰
- b. **Provide information to learners, educators, caregivers, and communities about school reopening plans.** This should include when/how schools will reopen, safety measures and protocols while schools are open, and triggers and processes if schools need to close again. **Develop and regularly update emergency prevention, preparedness, and response plans.** This also includes plans if schools need to close again for health or safety reasons. Ensure learners, educators, and caregivers are informed and able to carry out plans.¹¹
- c. **Allocate sufficient financing, time, and personnel to adapt learning environments.** Prioritise underfunded districts/schools to ensure they can meet a minimum standard for safe operations.

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITIES' PREFERENCES

In contexts where education was disrupted due to conflict, natural disaster, or a health epidemic, learners, educators, caregivers, and communities may be worried about returning to school. This is particularly true if schools were or are perceived as a site of risk, for example, if a disease can spread within schools, when schools are targeted for ideological attacks, or when learners are unsafe on their way to school. Catch-up programmes need to consult with learners, educators, caregivers, and communities to understand their preferences and concerns, to be able to address them, and to assure them that learners are safe when schools reopen.

⁹ For child protection and psychosocial well-being, see [Principle 1](#). For social-emotional learning, see [Principle 3](#).

¹⁰ See [UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, World Food Programme, and UNHCR \(2020\). Framework for Reopening Schools](#)

¹¹ Emergency prevention, preparedness, and response plans should address all types of emergencies that are a risk in a given context. For example, an emergency prevention, preparedness, and response plan may include a section on epidemics (e.g., for risk of future outbreaks of COVID-19 or other health emergencies), as well as a section on natural disasters (e.g., if a context is at risk of earthquakes).

- d. **Adapt learning environments to meet (inter)national guidance and standards for safety.** Ensure adaptations are inclusive, particularly for girls and learners with disabilities.¹²
- e. **Help learners get reacquainted, talk about their feelings, and relearn school expectations.** This will help learners feel safe, supported, and ready to learn when schools reopen.

SAFETY ADAPTATIONS FOR CATCH-UP PROGRAMMES

Adaptations to learning environments in contexts where schools were closed due to health emergencies may include physical distancing of learners and educators, reducing the number of pupils in a classroom by increasing the number of classes, adding handwashing facilities, screening for fever or other symptoms, and adding signage and posters to remind learners and educators about health precautions. For areas affected by conflict, adaptations may include building fences, hiring security personnel, accompaniment on the way to and from school, and teacher/student housing.



Photo: © UNHCR/BNB

12 See [United States Agency for International Development \(n.d.\). Safer Learning Environments Assessment Toolkit](#)



PRINCIPLE 3

The catch-up programme curriculum is condensed—prioritising, integrating, and reinforcing the most essential competencies.

In catch-up programmes, a key to helping learners catch-up is to reduce the amount of knowledge and skills covered. This requires prioritising what knowledge and skills learners need to know for success in the next grade level or the next level of education that they will transition to, and then integrating and reinforcing these competencies throughout the curriculum.



ACTION POINTS:

a. **Ensure learners remain on grade-level.**

“On grade-level” refers to ensuring students stay in the correct grade for their age, or the grade they would be in if the education disruption had not occurred. In some cases, this may require automatically promoting learners even though they did not finish the previous year’s curriculum. When keeping learners on grade-level, support the acquisition of necessary competencies that they missed due to the education disruption by teaching mini-lessons of essential prerequisite skills and integrating and reinforcing those knowledge and skills across grade-level content areas and lessons. The idea is not to go back and start over.

EVIDENCE FOR HELPING LEARNERS CATCH UP

Neither grade repetition nor automatic/social promotion alone are sufficient to help learners catch up. It may be tempting to have learners repeat the weeks or months they missed or cancel the academic year completely and call it a “dead year”. However, simply having learners repeat a year does not help them catch up and may make them more likely to drop out. Moreover, automatic/social promotion without needed support doesn’t help learners catch up. Instead, catch-up programmes help learners remain on the appropriate grade-level material while briefly teaching what was missed, building in and reinforcing lost or missed prerequisite skills, and providing additional targeted support as needed.

b. **Allocate sufficient time, personnel, and funding for condensing the curriculum.**

c. **Involve relevant stakeholders in the development of the condensed curriculum.** This may include the Ministry of Education, national curriculum development centre, and other relevant stakeholders, to ensure that the curriculum is approved and teaches content included on high-stakes examinations.

- d. **Condense the curriculum by developing priority learning outcomes from the nationally approved curriculum.** Then, develop schemes of work and teaching and learning materials,¹³ ensuring all materials promote equity, inclusion, and conflict sensitivity.¹⁴
- e. **Teach learners health and safety skills and knowledge that they need in the context of the crisis.**
- f. **Integrate social-emotional learning across content areas.** This can be done through quick activities and daily practices, and through experiential and project-based learning.¹⁵

CONDENSING A CURRICULUM

When a catch-up programme needs to be rapidly rolled out, e.g., in the case of national school closures and a national catch-up programme, a condensed curriculum can be developed in stages. Curriculum developers can condense the curriculum for the first month, trimester, or semester, and continue developing subsequent sections over time.

INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Emergencies that cause education disruptions often cause stress, trauma, and mental health conditions for learners (and educators). In addition, when schools are closed, learners often lack opportunities for social interaction and practicing positive social skills. Therefore, incorporating social-emotional learning (SEL) in catch-up programmes is particularly important. It may be difficult, however, to implement a full SEL curriculum into a condensed curriculum, so short daily practices may be more effective.

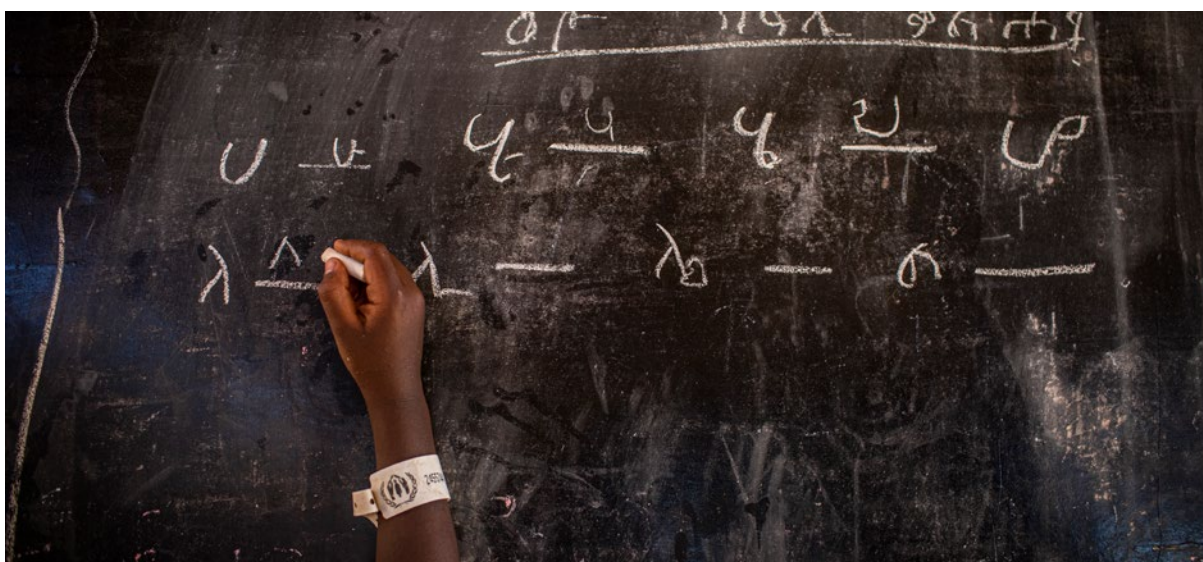


Photo: © UNHCR/Will Swanson

13 See [Accelerated Education Working Group \(2021\). Guidance for Condensing a Curriculum](#)

14 See [United States Agency for International Development \(2018\). Universal Design for Learning to Help All Children Read: Promoting Literacy for Learners with Disabilities](#)

15 See [Save the Children \(2020\). Social-Emotional Learning Distance Learning Pack](#)

Identifying the Most Essential Learning Competencies during COVID-19, Philippines

In the Philippines, schools closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic on 10 March 2020 with 52 recorded cases of the virus. The Department of Education (DepEd) had recently undergone a process to distil and synthesise the “Essential Learning Competencies” from the K-12 curriculum, paring it down to those skills all learners need when leaving school. The essential learning competencies were aligned with—but streamlined from—national curriculum frameworks. They are connected to higher concepts across content areas, are applicable to real life situations, are those that learners would not develop outside of the school setting, and are those that are the most important for learners to have if they leave school.

When schools closed due to COVID-19, schools were at the end of the academic year. Thus, DepEd set out to plan for how to ensure continuity and mitigate learning loss when schools were closed, as well as to help learners catch up when schools were able to reopen. Taking into consideration the resources available and the feasibility of administering education at a distance, DepEd revisited the essential learning competencies and further condensed them into the “Most Essential Learning Competencies” for use in distance learning while schools were closed and to help learners catch up when schools reopened. The most essential learning competencies are based on the criteria of:

- **Endurance:** They help learners develop competencies they need for success in the next grade level.
- **Subject Wholeness:** They help learners develop a range of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that help learners progress cognitively and socio-emotionally.
- **Measurable:** They are clear and comprehensive and can be measured.
- **Alignment:** They comply with content and performance standards and are aligned with national curriculum frameworks.

Involved in the process of condensing the curriculum was the DepEd Bureau of Curriculum Development and the Assessment, Curriculum, and Technology Research Centre at the University of Melbourne and the University of the Philippines. To roll out the new curriculum, DepEd used a cascade model of training teachers on the most essential learning competencies, as well as developed online training materials. They also revised assessment processes to focus on formative assessment—evaluating what students can do with what they know.

Source: Andaya, J. (10 September 2020). Condensing a Curriculum in Response to COVID-19 [Webinar]. INEE



PRINCIPLE 4

Instructional time, delivery modality, and examinations are adapted.

In addition to condensing the curriculum, some catch-up programmes may also adapt instructional time (i.e., the academic-year calendar and the school-day schedule/timetable) and the delivery modality in order to help learners catch up. For example, some catch-up programmes add instructional time by extending the school day or year to help learners gain the skills they missed in the extra time. To extend instructional time, learners may return from holiday early, study on weekends, or have shortened mid-semester breaks. Distance learning can also be used to supplement in-person instruction to help learners catch up. In some cases, class sizes may need to be reduced, for example when physical distancing is required during a health emergency. In this case, double shifts combined with distance learning may be implemented.¹⁶



ACTION POINTS:

- a. **Consult with learners, caregivers, and communities to ensure adaptations are inclusive of the range of learners who need to catch up.** The academic-year calendar, school-day schedule/timetable, delivery modality, and examinations must meet the needs of all learners, rather than further marginalising some learners.
- b. **Allocate sufficient time, financing, and personnel for making adaptations.** Changes to the calendar and schedule, integration of distance learning, and modifications to high-stakes examinations are resource intensive.
- c. **Adapt the academic-year calendar and school-day schedule/timetable.** Ensure adaptations reflect evidence about the appropriate rate of acceleration to acquire necessary competencies, and ensure learners access the minimum instructional time as required by education policy.

EQUITY IN ADAPTATIONS TO EDUCATION DELIVERY

If catch-up classes are established in government schools, it may be important to maintain the calendar/schedule of the typical school year and day to minimise children's risk of absenteeism and dropping out. Catch-up programmes that operate outside of the typical academic year/day should consider the time of day and time of year for adapted instructional time. Learners whose families work in agriculture may not be able to attend during harvest time; children who need to work or do household chores may not be able to attend in the morning, evening, or weekends; and learners may not be able to attend on religious holidays. Distance learning and online exams may not be accessed by rural learners or learners with disabilities.

¹⁶ See [United States Agency for International Development \(2020\). Return to Learning During Crises: Decision-Making and Planning Tools for Education Leaders](#)

- d. **Leverage distance learning to complement in-person instructional time.** Build learners' and teachers' skills to use the technologies needed to participate in distance learning. Ensure all learners and educators have consistent and reliable access to electricity, technology, and connectivity as required.¹⁷
- e. **Adapt high-stakes examination schedules.** This may mean postponing the administration dates, delivering examinations online, cancelling non-certification exams, and/or adapting content to meet the needs of all learners.¹⁸
- f. **Communicate with learners, educators, caregivers, and communities about adaptations to instructional time, delivery modality, and examinations.**

TAKE HOME PACKETS

Distance learning is often delivered by radio, text messaging/SMS/phone, television, and internet. When learners and educators do not have access to these technologies, paper-based distance education can be used by, for example, sending home take-home packets and reading materials.



Photo: © UNHCR/BNB

¹⁷ See [UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia \(2020\). Guidance on Distance Learning Modalities to Reach All Children and Youth during School Closures](#)

¹⁸ For formative assessment, see [Principle 5](#).



PRINCIPLE 5

The catch-up programme effectively uses learner-centred pedagogy.

In addition to condensing a curriculum, using learner-centred pedagogy can help accelerate the acquisition of skills, effectively helping learners catch up. Using learner-centred pedagogy can help address the inequities that are exacerbated by an education disruption. Moreover, teaching students skills to guide their own learning will be useful if distance learning is required due to the crisis that caused an education disruption. Differentiation and remedial education, as well, are particularly important in catch-up programming since marginalised learners are likely to fall even farther behind their peers.



ACTION POINTS:

- a. **Assess learning levels when learners return to school.** Pay particular attention to where educational gaps have widened due to the crisis.
- b. **Utilise best practices in learner-centred pedagogy to help accelerate the acquisition of knowledge and skills.** These evidence-based practices include:¹⁹
 - i. Balancing learner-directed and teacher-directed learning experiences in a way that allows learners to have ownership over their own learning processes
 - ii. Making learning opportunities relevant to learners by connecting to prior knowledge and using real-world content and activities
 - iii. Building learners' problem-solving and critical thinking skills so they "learn how to learn"
 - iv. Offering learners the opportunity to reflect on their own learning processes and self-assess where they are at and how they are progressing
 - v. Establishing a supportive and enabling environment that holds high expectations for all learners
 - vi. Grouping learners in small groups or pairs (sometimes based on level, sometimes in mixed ability groups) and frequently rearranging groupings to motivate students
- c. Differentiate instruction, providing extension activities for learners who are more advanced or quick to finish and providing additional support for learners who are struggling.

LEARNING ASSESSMENT

Even in contexts where all learners are out of school for a similar amount of time due to a crisis, learning loss is likely to be inequitable. Inequities in access to distance learning, if it was implemented, will likely increase educational gaps for the most marginalised. For example, poorer learners, girls, and learners in rural areas will likely have had less access to education delivered over SMS, radio, TV, or the internet, and thus have had less opportunity to maintain their studies during an education disruption. It is essential, therefore, to assess learners' levels in core competency areas when they return to school.

REMEDIAL EDUCATION MODALITIES

Using one-on-one tutoring, pull-out models, or intensive "learning camps" to supplement the catch-up programme can help learners who are struggling with the condensed curriculum.

19 See [United States Agency for International Development \(2020\). Reigniting Learning: Strategies for Accelerating Learning Post-Crisis](#)



PRINCIPLE 6

Teachers are (re)engaged and their well-being is supported after the education disruption.

For catch-up programmes in contexts where schools were closed, teachers have been out of work and need to be re-engaged into the workforce. In addition, new teachers may need to be recruited, for example, if teachers left the teaching workforce during the education disruption, if they moved, or if they were killed or disabled. Teachers in contexts affected by crisis or conflict where education is disrupted, like learners, have also experienced negative impacts to their economic, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Thus, like learners, educators' holistic well-being will need to be supported so they are able to return to teaching.



ACTION POINTS:

- a. **Collaborate with communities to mobilise the existing educator workforce and identify gaps in the workforce.** Workforce gaps may be caused by decreased supply of educators or increased demand for educators due to the crisis.
- b. **Recruit new educators—ensuring equitable representation of women, religious/ethnic minorities, and teachers with disabilities—to fill gaps.** Consider expediting teacher training and qualifications, leveraging student-teachers and retired teachers, and allowing refugee teachers to teach.
- c. **Establish boundaries on teachers' work schedule, paying explicit attention to women taking on additional (often unpaid) responsibilities.** Make sure that educators' jobs are feasible and that they are compensated for the time worked.
- d. **Consult with teachers and communities to identify teachers in need of additional support and help them meet their basic needs.** This may include providing support for housing, food, and transportation.

COMPENSATION FOR TEACHERS WORKING EXTRA HOURS

With all of the adaptations in a catch-up programme, especially if instructional hours are modified (e.g., double shifts or blended learning) or if teachers need to take on social work responsibilities, it is very likely that teachers will be overworked and required to do much more beyond the scope of their jobs. They need to be compensated for this, and their responsibilities should be reasonable and feasible.

IN-KIND SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS

Educators may be struggling financially due to the crisis that caused school closures or because of lack of salaries during school closures. For catch-up programmes for displaced learners, teachers themselves may be displaced, may have significant needs for income, housing, food, clothing, etc. Others may not be on government payrolls. Catch-up programmes can provide support to teachers in the form of housing and stipends.

- e. **Identify and address teachers' psychosocial needs.** This can be done by talking to teachers about secondary/vicarious trauma, fostering opportunities for regular check-ins and peer support, ensuring teachers have adequate time off, linking to counselling for mental health conditions, and destigmatising mental health conditions.²⁰
- f. **Ensure adequate time, personnel, and funding for hiring, training, and compensating new teachers and teachers who work overtime.**



Photo: © UNHCR/ Hasib Zuberi

20 See [Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies \(2019\). Landscape Review: Teacher Well-being in Low Resource, Crisis, and Conflict-affected Settings](#)



PRINCIPLE 7

Teachers have the capacity and resources to re-engage all learners and implement the catch-up programme.

Catch-up programmes require that teachers be able to identify and reach out to learners who are struggling to return and re-engage them in education. Teachers will also need to be able to teach a condensed curriculum, use learner-centred pedagogy, facilitate distance learning, and provide differentiation and remediation. Especially in contexts affected by conflict and crisis, teachers must also meet learners' safety, psychosocial, and protection needs, and they may need to carry out new health and safety protocols. For this, they will require training and ongoing support, and they may need access to new materials, resources, and technologies.



ACTION POINTS:

- a. **Conduct a rapid assessment and consult with teachers to identify teachers' professional development and material needs.** This assessment should include at least three components: instructional capacity, health/safety, and access to technology. Instructionally, understand teachers' knowledge of and ability to implement the condensed curriculum and learner-centred pedagogy and provide differentiation and remediation. Assess whether teachers know how to carry out new health/safety protocols and have the resources to do so. When distance learning is used, it should also assess teachers' ability to use and teach via the technologies used, as well as teachers consistent and reliable access to electricity, technology, and connectivity.
- b. **Identify time, personnel, and financial resources needed to train and support teachers and provide for material needs.**
- c. **Provide teachers with all necessary resources to implement the catch-up programme.** This will include the new condensed curriculum, and any new teaching and learning materials. This may also include computers for teachers, tablets for learners, mobile phones, SIM cards, or stipends/phone credit. Mobile phones, SIM cards, and stipends/phone credit can be used not only to teach in the catch-up programme, but also to reach out to learners who are struggling to return to learning.
- d. **Provide initial and continuous training and professional development opportunities to fill gaps in teachers' knowledge and skills.** Training and professional development should focus on re-engaging learners, teaching a condensed curriculum, using learner-centred pedagogy, facilitating distance learning (including how to use the required technology), and providing differentiation and remediation.²¹ It should help teachers meet learners' safety, psychosocial, and protection needs, and carrying out health and safety protocols.²²

LEVERAGING DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR TEACHER TRAINING

In some contexts, particularly those currently or recently affected by conflict or crisis where it is not safe to gather in person, teacher training or professional development may best be carried out via mobile phones or internet. However, it is essential to consider the equity implications of distance teacher professional development and ensure all teachers have access to the electricity, technologies, and connectivity needed to participate. All trainings must also be accessible to teachers with disabilities, as well.

21 See [Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies \(2016\). Teachers in Crisis Contexts Training for Primary School Teachers](#)

22 See [UNICEF MENA \(2020\). Ready to Come Back: A Teacher Preparedness Training Package](#)

Training Teachers to Help Learners Catch Up, Mozambique

In early 2021, in response to the COVID-19 school closures, the Ministry of Education and Human Development (MINEDH) in Mozambique and Save the Children are rolling out teacher training to provide teachers with the skills necessary to help learners catch up when schools reopen. In Mozambique, schools closed on 23 March 2020, just two months into the academic year, to prevent the spread of the virus. Examination classes (grades 7, 10, and 12) returned to the classroom in October/November to obtain the necessary competencies to pass the national exam. All other classes are expected to return in March 2021. When schools reopen in 2021, learners will be automatically promoted to the next grade level, and teachers will be expected to help them relearn what they lost during school closures, obtain the priority knowledge and skills they missed when schools were closed, and gain priority competencies from the current year. Learners are expected to catch up and return to the appropriate place in the curriculum by 2022.

In August 2020, MINEDH approached Save the Children for help with training trainers from all provinces on catch-up education. At present, MINEDH and Save the Children are beginning to explore partnerships to train trainers at the central level, who will then train provincial and district staff to support teachers in all schools of the country. Content of the training includes what catch-up education is and how to help learners catch-up, identifying students at risk of not returning/not progressing, how to assess students' current learning levels, implementing participatory/learner-centred learning strategies, adapting classroom practices to meet health/safety and learning needs, implementing hybrid learning strategies, and engaging with parents/caregivers to support learners to catch up. In addition, teachers will be taught how to build a supportive professional environment, such as through teacher learning circles and peer support.

Source: Save the Children UK/Save the Children Mozambique, personal communication, 20 January 2021



PRINCIPLE 8

Learners, families, and communities are informed, consulted, engaged, and accountable.

Catch-up programmes require the support of families and communities, particularly to re-engage learners who have been out of school due to an education disruption, to support learner re-enrolment and attendance, and to support learners to succeed academically and socio-emotionally. Learners, families, and communities must be informed about adaptations to education programmes in response to the education disruption so that all learners can return to education.



ACTION POINTS:

- a. **Consult, involve, and communicate with learners, caregivers, and communities in the design, implementation, and monitoring of the catch-up programme.**

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TO SUPPORT LEARNERS

Learners, caregivers, and communities must play an active role in catch-up programmes to ensure that all learners have the opportunity to re-enrol in education and catch up. Consultation, engagement, and communication should occur around identifying learners' needs, developing school reopening plans and emergency response plans, making adaptations to instructional time and delivery modality, and re-engaging and recruiting teachers. Communities should also have opportunities for providing feedback to improve programme implementation.

- b. **Leverage families' and communities' knowledge and relationships to help all learners re-engage and succeed academically, be protected and safe, and be supported psychosocially.**

ALLEVIATING COMMUNITY FEARS

After an education disruption due to crisis or conflict, families and communities may be afraid to send their children to school, and learners may be afraid to return. They may wonder—will my child be at risk of contracting the virus? How will my teacher protect me and my classmates if there is another disaster? Am I/Is my child safe when walking to school? Additionally, learners, families, and communities may not know when and how to re-register for school, what class they are in, or when and how to attend. Therefore, open communication is necessary for ensuring all children re-engage after an education disruption.

Involving Communities in the Second Chance Programme, Central African Republic

During the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 academic years, Plan International implemented a catch-up education programme in Boda town, Central African Republic (CAR), called Second Chance. In 2013, the Lobaye District was deeply affected by the conflict in CAR, and the Boda sub-district became split into two zones—one inhabited by Muslims and the other by non-Muslims—with a perceived demarcation called the “red line” separating the two communities. These two communities, which had formerly coexisted and complemented each other, now existed in a state of conflict. A main casualty of the disaster was children’s education. As a result of the conflict, many schools were destroyed or closed, and many parents preferred to keep their children at home to avoid violence on the way to school by the “opposing” community. At the beginning of the Second Chance programme, children had missed out on 1 to 2 years²³ of education and needed a catch-up programme to help them acquire missed competencies and transition back into the government school.

Because of the widespread inter-communal violence, the Second Chance programme required a high-level of community engagement and the mobilisation of multiple stakeholders. Community groups, children, youth, women, men, the elderly, community and religious leaders, and government representatives were engaged at all stages of the project. Muslim and Christian communities were consulted at the inception phase of the project and throughout the implementation. Community leaders and parents were regularly involved because they were particularly concerned of repercussions by the armed groups. School directors, parent-teacher associations, and teachers at the schools where the Muslim children were enrolled before they were enclaved were also consulted. Consultations were facilitated by the district’s education inspector in order to test their level of confidence to accept the Muslim children back in school. Boda education authorities worked with Plan to select community teachers. The UN Peacebuilding forces MINUSCA also played a role by ensuring that Muslim children were safe on their way to and from school.

Children ages 8 to 12 years old caught up on the 1 to 2 years they had missed in 6 to 12 months. Plan coordinated with the district education authorities in order to ensure that children enrolled in the catch-up programme could reintegrate back into the governmental schools once they had completed the programme cycle. Of the 266 children enrolled in Second Chance, 214 transitioned back into the local government schools.

Source: Plan International (n.d.). *The Pen is Heavier than the Shovel: Our Contribution to Social Cohesion in CAR: The Case of Boda*; Plan International, personal communication, 16 December 2020.

23 According to the AEWG, catch-up programmes are intended for learners who have missed out on up to approximately one year of education. However, in some cases, a catch-up programme may be appropriate for those who have missed slightly more but are not in need of a full accelerated education programme leading to certification.



PRINCIPLE 9

The catch-up programme is recognised by and aligned with the national education system and has clear transition pathways.

All catch-up programmes, both formal and non-formal, should be recognised by and aligned with the national education system. Alignment refers to aligning with the national curriculum and learning outcomes, national examinations, national teacher training and qualifications (or comparable processes), etc. Recognition refers to being seen as a legitimate, credible education option by national education authorities so that learners can return to the education programme they were in prior to the disruption. When catch-up programmes are implemented outside of formal education, learners need clear transition pathways to be able to reintegrate back into the formal system at the grade they would be in if the education disruption had not occurred.



ACTION POINTS:

- a. **Allow for flexible entry and exit points.** Learners should be able to engage in the catch-up programme when they feel are able to and transition back into the education programme they were in prior to the disruption when they have caught up.
- b. **Collaborate with ministries of education, curriculum development institutes, and other key stakeholders to design, implement, and monitor the catch-up programme.** This includes condensing the curriculum, modifying examinations, recruiting and training teachers, monitoring re-enrolment and learner progress, etc.
- c. **Advocate for the approval of the condensed curriculum by the MOE or curriculum certification body.** This will help ensure learners gain the necessary knowledge and skills to pass high-stakes exams and succeed in the next grade/level, and be able to transition back to formal education, if applicable.
- d. **Ensure all learners who are in candidate classes/at the end of a level can register for and sit national exams.** This will allow them to transition into the next education level.
- e. **Develop clear pathways that allow learners to transition into the programme they were in once they have caught up.** This includes transiting from non-formal to formal education or progressing in both non-formal and formal education.

FLEXIBLE ENTRY AND EXIT POINTS

Not all learners will be able to re-enrol in the catch-up programme immediately. This may be because caregivers and learners fear for the safety and wellbeing of learners, or because learners have taken on additional work or household responsibilities during the crisis. Additionally, in contexts of displacement, learners may be arriving at different times. For all types of catch-up programmes, flexible entry points are needed to allow learners to re-enrol as soon as they are able. In addition, some catch-up programmes, such as those implemented in non-formal education spaces, may require flexible exit points so that learners who catch-up can transition back into the formal education system as soon as they are ready.



PRINCIPLE 10

The catch-up programme is integrated into the national education system and relevant humanitarian architecture.

All catch-up programmes—regardless of whether they are implemented by the MOE or an NGO, in non-formal or formal spaces—should work towards progressive integration within national education strategy, policy, financing, management, and monitoring systems. Ideally, catch-up programmes are taken up by national education systems as a flexible, alternative education option to meet the needs of learners whose education is disrupted for several months to approximately one year. Integration into the national education system or humanitarian architecture will help to ensure sustainability of catch-up programming, and will strengthen the flexibility, responsiveness, and resilience of the national education system, so that all learners affected by an education disruption can catch up and transition back.



ACTION POINTS:

- a. **Integrate research on children and adolescents who are out of school due to an education disruption within education sector assessments.** This helps ensure supply and demand issues related to catch-up programmes are explored, analysed, and prioritised.
- b. **Conduct context, situation, or risk analyses.** This should help to understand how crisis and conflict impact education, how education influences risks, and how contextual risks influence each other so that catch-up programmes do no harm and potentially mitigate risk in areas affected by conflict or crisis.²⁴
- c. **In contexts with frequent education disruptions, build political will and develop strategies to integrate catch-up programming into the Education Sector Plan.** This allows education leaders to build more resilient education systems that meet the needs of learners who have temporarily had their education disrupted due to crisis.
- d. **In humanitarian contexts, work with the Education Cluster to ensure the catch-up programme is part of a coordinated response.**
- e. **At a national or subnational level, monitor the re-enrolment and learning outcomes by all learners.** Ensure data are disaggregated by sex, location, age, displacement status, and disability status, monitoring progress over time.²⁵
- f. **Seek provision for financial support for catch-up programmes within national or sub-national education budgets.**

24 See [USAID \(2018\). Rapid Education and Risk Analysis \(RERA\) Toolkit](#)

25 See [Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies \(2020\). INEE Technical Note on Measurement for Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

Partnering to Help Learners Catch Up after Ebola, Sierra Leone

In August 2014, the Government of Sierra Leone announced that schools would not open for the start of the school year due to the West Africa Ebola outbreak, which killed approximately 11,000 people in the region. In October 2014, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST), with support from partners, rolled out the Emergency Radio Education Program, which provided lessons five days per week in 30-minute increments in core academic subjects including math, English, and civic education. Radio lessons provided homework to prepare and allowed listeners to call in with questions at the end of each broadcast.

When schools reopened in April 2015—after 9 months of closure, nearly a full academic year—MEST implemented a nationwide catch-up programme to help all students gain essential competencies they missed when schools were closed. The catch-up programme included a condensed, simplified curriculum in which students learned prioritised knowledge and skills during the next two academic years. The nationwide catch-up programme was supplemented by a continuation of the radio broadcasts to further support learners to catch up, which provided learners with primary education in the morning and secondary education in the afternoon.

In preparation for the opening of the school year, MEST worked with partners to implement a mix of broad and targeted measures to encourage re-enrolment and to meet the range of needs affected by the epidemic. MEST announced measures to help ease the financial burden on families, waiving school fees and examination fees for the following two years. Some funders and implementing partners provided schoolbooks, uniforms, learning materials, and hygiene kits to individual learners. Others supported MEST to procure and distribute handwashing stations and to disinfect schools. Other partners initiated social mobilisation campaigns aimed at parents and communities to help disseminate information about returning to school, and still others supported MEST by providing school feeding to encourage the most vulnerable children to return.

During the outbreak, approximately 14,000 girls became pregnant, and due to a new policy passed just before schools reopened, they were not allowed to attend government schools. MEST and partners established a non-formal education programme in community learning centres to help pregnant girls and adolescent mothers continue their studies.

Finally, as a result of the outbreak, many students faced significant trauma due to losing loved ones, high levels of fear and stress, financial constraints, and abuse and neglect. To address students' psychosocial needs, MEST and partners developed a manual and trained teachers in psychosocial first aid, so they could recognise and deal with the signs of stress in children.

Sources: [World Bank Group \(2015\)](#), [World Bank Group \(2016\)](#), [World Vision International \(2015\)](#), [World Vision International \(2016\)](#), [Global Partnership for Education \(2020\)](#)



