

COVID-19 is the Latest Barrier to Quality Education for All of Mesoamérica's Young People

Currently, schools are closed in almost all countries in Mesoamericaⁱ, due to COVID-19. As a result, it is estimated that **over 64 million** young people have been affected, representing more than **95%** of enrolled learners in the region.ⁱⁱ

School closures inevitably impact young people's wellbeing in multiple ways, with long-lasting effects:

- Learning losses caused by being out of school accelerate quickly and are more difficult to overcome the longer students are out of school.
- In addition to delivering education, schools offer an integrated platform for delivery of other key services to children, including food, health care, psychosocial support, hygiene supplies and subsidies.
- Experiences with previous health crises, such as Ebola, have shown that the most marginalized children often do not return to school at all.
- School closures increase school drop-out rates, which, for adolescent girls, also increase the risk of widening gender gaps in education, as well as sexual exploitation, early pregnancy and early and forced marriage. For adolescent boys, the economic impact on their families increases the pressure on them to try to find paid work, rather than to return to school.

Given the challenges that the Mesoamerican sub-region is currently facing in effectively undertaking mass distance learning, including online education in countries with internet penetration rates as low as 42%ⁱⁱⁱ ^{iv}, the learning losses that are likely to result from millions of young people being shut out of school for weeks or months could well be catastrophic.

Countries around the world are weighing when and how to re-open their schools. However, many will need help, including the countries of Mesoamerica:



Almost 40% of countries surveyed in Mesoamerica do not have emergency coordination mechanisms in place for their education system's response to COVID-19



Only 3 out of 8 countries have plans for recovering lost learning time, including strengthening remote learning practices



Only 2 countries out of those surveyed are monitoring re-enrollment - 3 are conducting outreach to children who do not return to school

Source: UNICEF, National Education Responses to COVID-19; Global Tracker Results as of 8 April 2020

But the COVID-19 crisis is only compounding to the barriers that many Mesoamerican young people already face in accessing quality secondary education.

Mesoamerica's Young People Already Face Great Challenges



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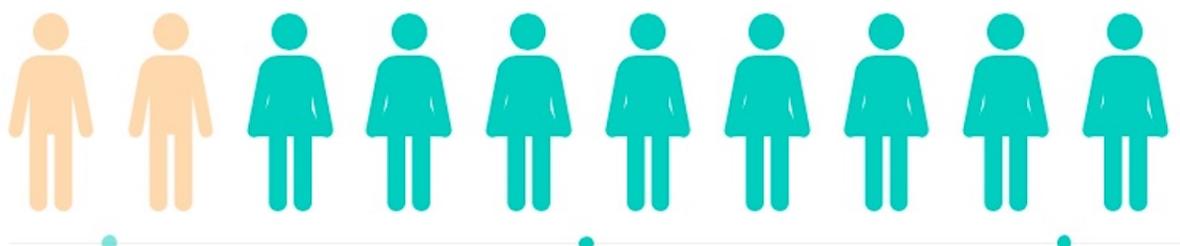
of all marginalized youth in Mesoamérica will never finish secondary school

95%

of those who do finish will not achieve the core skills they need for the job market

Without marketable skills, these young people cannot transition successfully into either higher education or the labor market, a prospect that will only be accelerated the longer they remain out of school and are unable to access quality education over the longer term.

The gravity of this regional problem becomes even more apparent when viewed through a **gender lens**, as **girls and young women are disproportionately affected**.^v



83%

of young people not studying or working in Mesoamerica are female



many of these girls & young women are subject to poverty, early pregnancy, gender-based violence and exclusion from school and work prospects



many are behind their male peers in key areas such as math & science

Bereft of options and unable to gain skills that would enable them to compete, young people in many Mesoamerican countries are also exposed to **highly violent contexts**. Recent global studies that include 90% of Mesoamerican countries have shown that inequality and conflict often operate as a **cyclical relationship**, with educational inequality exacerbating discontent and conflict having a disproportionately negative impact on education and job opportunities for many populations.^{vi}

To escape this bleak future, many young people decide to migrate from their countries of origin in search of a better future that should be available at home, resulting in a vast human mobility crisis situation within the region.

The reasons why education systems struggle to effectively use resources to correct these problems are many. Overall levels of spending and decisions on the use of funds may not be aligned with learning objectives; spending may not be allocated equitably^{vii}; and government agencies may also lack the capacity to use existing funds efficiently.

The effects of this situation are clear. Many of the region’s young people are out of school by age 15 and lack basic proficiency in reading and other key skills. In 5 Mesoamerican countries whose students’ proficiency in reading, math and science was assessed in 2018, 42% - 79% of secondary students demonstrated below average reading skills, in comparison to 23% for secondary students in OECD countries.^{viii}

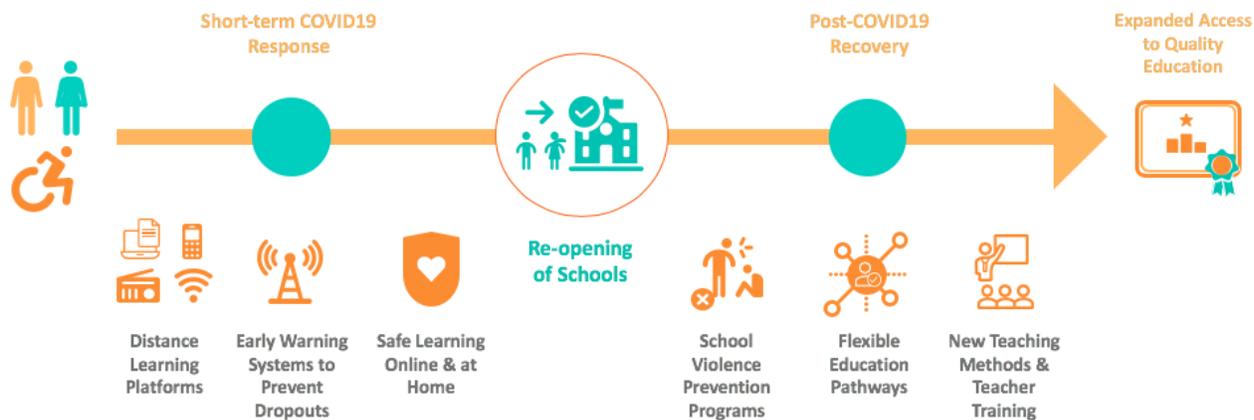
Against this backdrop, mobilizing additional investment and resources for accelerating young people’s re-entry to school in Mesoamerica is only part of the challenge: finding **new, innovative methods** of partnering with governments as well as public and private partners **to ensure quality results** is essential.

What is Needed Now

The short-term needs posed by the COVID-19 crisis and longer-term needs for education in the Mesoamerica region **overlap substantially**:

- A particular challenge is to reach the most marginalized, to ensure they benefit. Of the region’s 20 million young people, **more than 5 million** are excluded or fall behind due to gender, poverty, ethnicity, location, disability, and other factors.
- Young people across the region lack access to remote learning modalities that enable them to stay on track while out of school, preventing severe learning losses. Many adolescents live in remote rural areas with little or no access to the internet, and thus require effective alternative methods of distance education in order to maximize their learning and allow them to stay on track with their peers.
- They also lack content and services that are adapted to their specific needs, including adequate orientation, psycho-social support, and other key services such as school feeding and subsidies while they are out of school.

A comprehensive solution to providing quality secondary education in Mesoamerica can **prevent learning losses** caused by COVID-19 school closures in the immediate term and **serve as a platform for continued expanded access** to quality secondary education over the longer term.

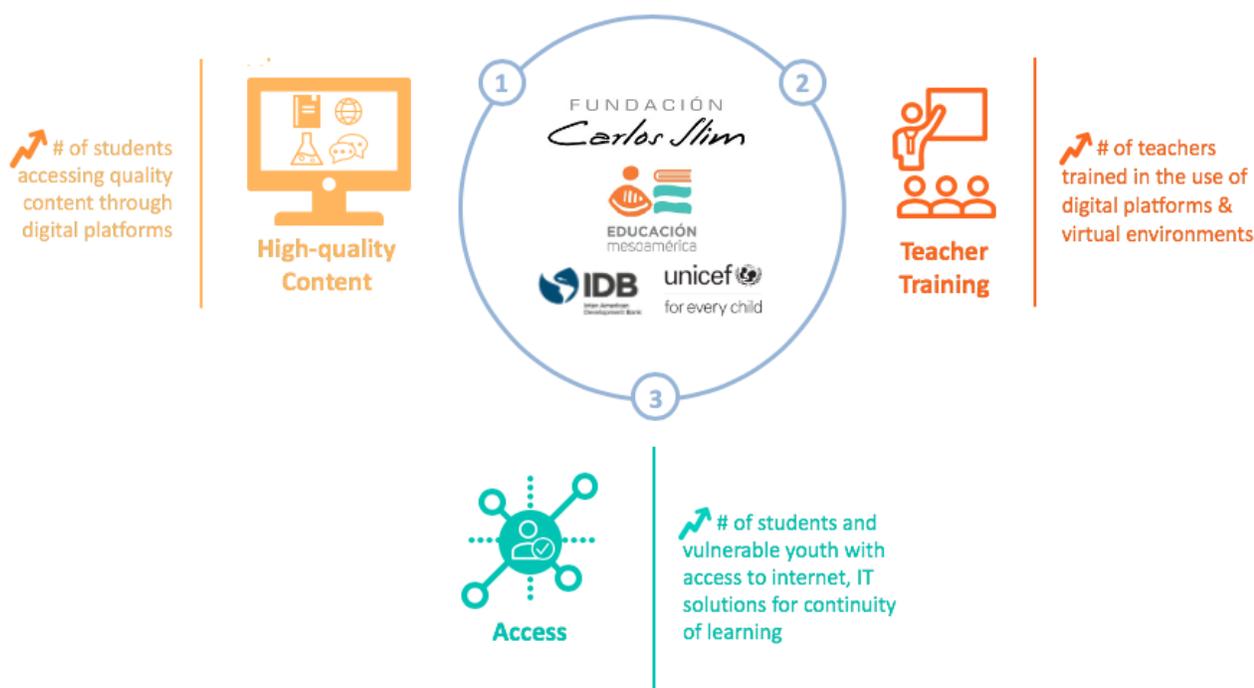


Educación Mesoamérica: Transforming Secondary Education in the COVID-19 Era and Empowering Young People to Succeed

If we are to avoid a **lost generation of learners** in Mesoamerica, the path towards and investment in longer-term solutions must begin now, with additional financing and resources for education mobilized, implemented and used swiftly and effectively.

Educación Mesoamérica seeks to build an innovative regional partnership between the 10 governments of Mesoamerica, the Inter-American Development Bank, UNICEF, the Carlos Slim Foundation and public and private partners to **transform education during and after the COVID-19 era**, and to **empower a generation of young people to actively contribute to the economic and social development of Mesoamerican countries**.

SPOTLIGHT ON DISTANCE LEARNING THROUGH DIGITAL PLATFORMS



The initiative aims to achieve these goals by implementing a package of **country-adapted interventions**, featuring flexible and distance-based learning modalities (e.g. distance learning through digital platforms, mobile phones, radio, TV broadcasts), life and job skill-building, and the prevention of violence in all learning environments, from online and at home to the classroom.

Pillar 1: Increased number of young people developing critical life and job skills, via:

- **Digital learning platforms**, offering e-learning and blended learning programs at no cost to students through private platforms like the Carlos Slim Foundation's *PruebaT* and *Capacitate para el Empleo*, or public platforms, such as the official platforms of national education ministries in Mesoamerica, *Enlaces* in Chile and Brazil's *Núcleos Avanzados em Educação*.
- **New teaching methods and teacher education**, using a Socio-Emotional Learning approach in the classroom to support the development of students' foundational, transferable, and digital skills as well as their emotional development. Life skills programming includes help and support for adolescents to live healthy lives, delay motherhood/fatherhood, etc.
- **Gender-responsive mentoring programs** proven to boost school completion rates and improve young people's outcomes in social, emotional and academic domains, especially in disadvantaged communities with limited role models of empowered women and positive masculinities.

Pillar 2: Increased number of secondary school graduates, via:

- **Early warning systems** to prevent dropout focused on monitoring attendance, student behavior and academic performance, including remote teacher-student communication and feedback.
- **Parental engagement programs** to improve academic achievement and support parental involvement during and after the COVID-19 crisis, particularly for disadvantaged communities; cost-effective interventions that focus on helping parents support their children's completion of secondary education reduces absenteeism by 15%.
- **Flexible secondary education pathways** that allow young people who are excluded from the system to continue their education through quality programs certified by Ministries of Education, such as the successful example of *Edúcame* in El Salvador which has helped to re-insert more than 600,000 excluded youth into the labor market. A particular focus for these programs is to ensure their compatibility with the needs and responsibilities of adolescents who are parents, as well as those of working youth.

Pillar 3: Increased number of students who are learning in safe and engaging environments, via:

- **Protocols to prevent, report and mitigate violence** in the school community, including gender-based violence, bullying and cyberbullying.
- **Psychosocial services** to reduce trauma and help young people thrive in low-resource settings and overcome challenges such as domestic violence, gender-based violence, trauma, anxiety and displacement caused by the current COVID-19 crisis and other factors, etc.
- **'Safe school' operations**, including providing hygiene supplies and sharing information on handwashing and other hygiene measures, etc.

Benefits of Implementing Educación Mesoamérica

The benefits for the whole sub-region of this additional investment in education will be **exponential**. Studies show that every additional year of schooling:

- Reduces property and violent crimes by **12%**^{ix}
- Increases GDP growth rate by **0.4 percentage points**^x
- Increases average individual earnings by **10%**^{xi}

Educación Mesoamérica: A Strategic Investment Opportunity

What most sets this initiative apart, however, is how it seeks to achieve results.

Educación Mesoamérica's unique approach features 5 key elements:



...that deliver results for children in countries not covered by other large global education initiatives



This model includes 5 innovative elements to trigger results:

- 1. Results-based financing:** Educación Mesoamérica leverages public and private donor investment to promote more effective and equitable allocation of government education resources.
 - Country operations will be financed through a mix of donor funding and domestic government resources.
 - Countries will be eligible to recover up to 50% of their upfront investment on achieving agreed-upon results.
- 2. Cost-effective interventions:** Educación Mesoamérica will offer countries a menu of cost-effective interventions to achieve the expected results.

3. **Technical support:** IDB and UNICEF, in partnership with the Carlos Slim Foundation and others, will leverage their extensive experience in education, combined technical know-how and strong relationships with Ministries of Education, Ministries of Finance and local governments to provide customized technical support for each country in tackling the bottlenecks they face in achieving their agreed-upon goals.
4. **Target verification:** Educación Mesoamérica will provide independent third-party target verification to promote accountability and high-quality, evidence-based decision-making in the education sector.
 - A regional results framework will be created that includes process, outcome and impact-level indicators.
 - On the basis of the regional results framework, each country will prepare a Performance Framework with key indicators.
5. **Continuous regional learning:** Educación Mesoamérica will encourage governments to test and implement innovative solutions and learn from the successes and failures of their regional counterparts.

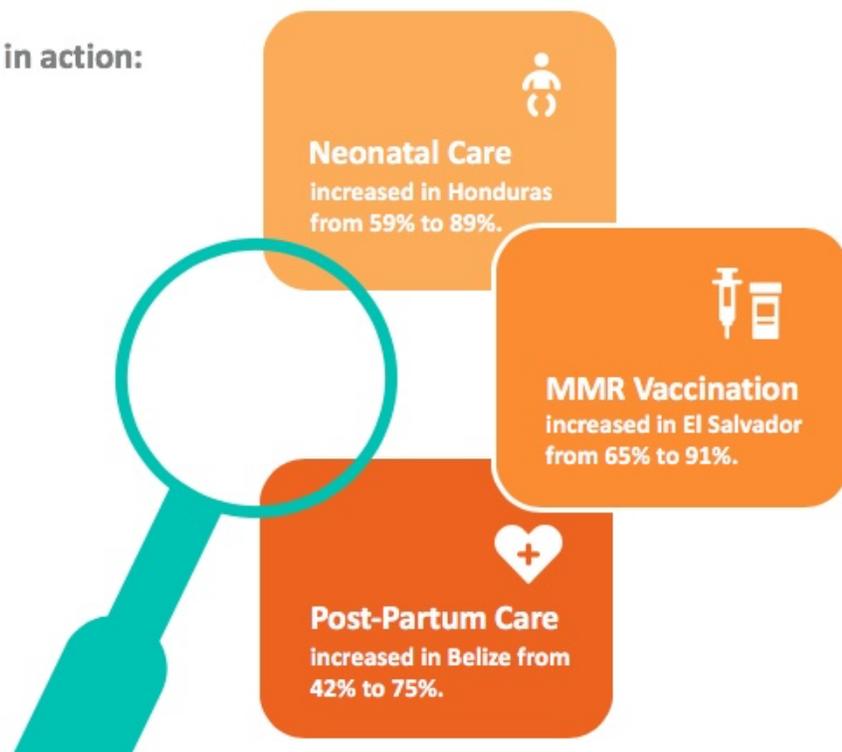
Why Results-Based Financing?

Results-based financing is an innovative financial model with a proven record of driving change and achieving scalable improvements in country health and education systems.^{xii}

Results-based financing in action: Salud Mesoamerica

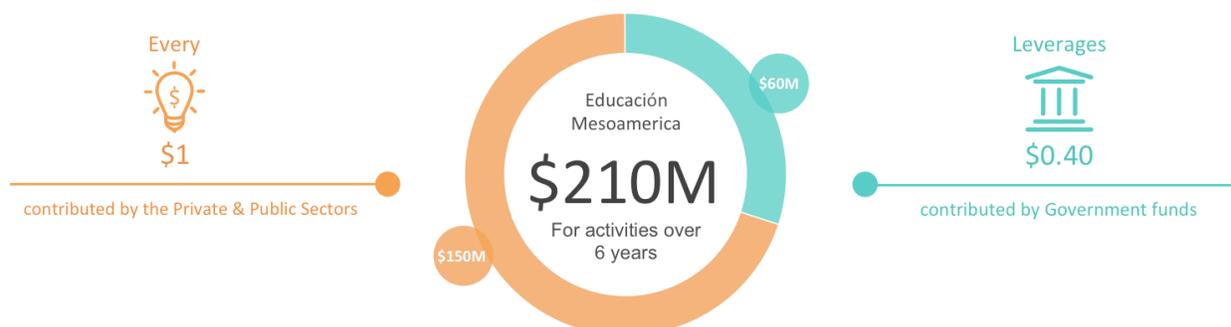
Launched in 2010, Salud Mesoamerica was a **5-year, results-based** multi-country partnership to improve the coverage and quality of health services for the poorest 20%.

By 2017, **90%** of countries achieved **80%** of their targets, unlocking additional discretionary funds for their health sectors:



How Educación Mesoamérica Leverages Donor Investments

For every dollar raised, donors will leverage more than 40 cents from partner countries.



ESTIMATED BREAKDOWN BASED ON CURRENT CALCULATIONS

Contributions from participating countries will finance in-country operations. Donors will fund in-country operations as well as technical assistance, monitoring and evaluation and the coordination of the initiative.

EDUCACIÓN MESOAMÉRICA'S UNIQUE VALUE-ADD



The initial funding target for public/private donor investment is **\$150M dollars over 6 years**, or **\$25M annually**, with an additional annual **\$10M contributed** at a \$0.40/\$1 ratio by participating governments leveraging their own resources, either through new/redirectioned IDB loans or their national budget capacity.

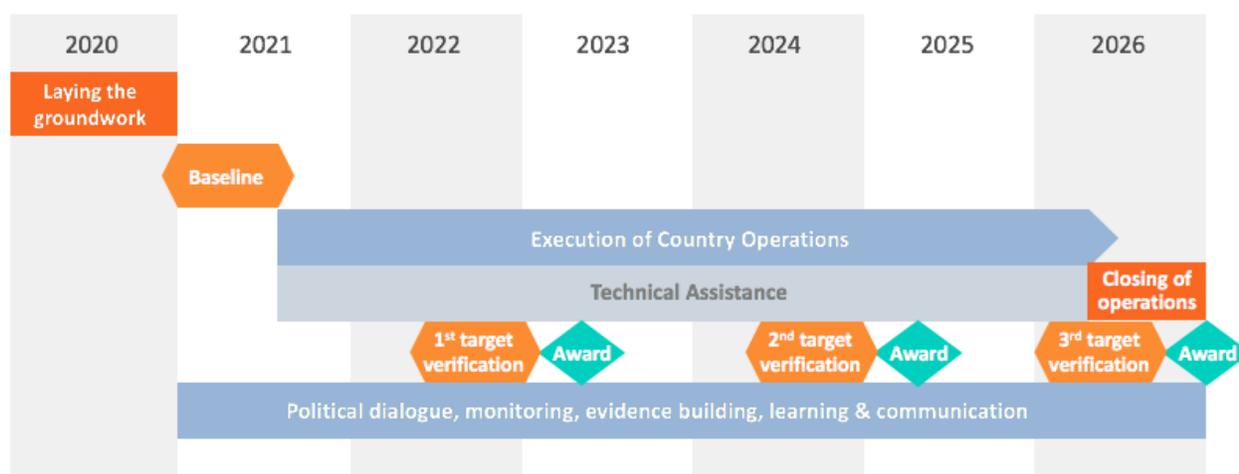
This initial funding target is based on an analysis of the financing gap in the region and initial costing of potential interventions.

Partners

In order to achieve system-wide changes in the education sector, Educación Mesoamérica brings together country governments, IDB, UNICEF, the Carlos Slim Foundation, existing regional alliances (e.g. the Mesoamerica Integration and Development Project and the Central American Integration System), and other public and private partners. Through strong regional cooperation, shared objectives, and effective leveraging of partners' strengths and expertise, Educación Mesoamérica will bring highly impactful change at scale, improving the lives of millions of young people and empowering them to succeed.

Project Timeline

The initiative will meet the following milestones between 2020 and 2026:



Help Transform Secondary Education in Mesoamérica

UNICEF, IDB and their Educación Mesoamérica partners are seeking funding and support from public and private sector individuals and organizations that are committed to:

- Ending inequality in education
- Preventing a “lost generation” of learners in a vibrant, but often overlooked, area of the world:
 - where inequity and violence threaten the lives and futures of marginalized young people;
 - especially women and girls, the indigenous and those who struggle with poverty.

ⁱ The Mesoamerican region includes the countries of Belize, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, El Salvador and Nicaragua..

ⁱⁱ UNESCO, “COVID-19 Educational Disruption and Response”: <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>

ⁱⁱⁱ IDB/CIMA, “COVID-19: ¿Estamos Preparados Para el Aprendizaje en Línea?”
<https://publications.iadb.org/es/nota-cima-20-covid-19-estamos-preparados-para-el-aprendizaje-en-linea>

^{iv} UNICEF, “Latin America & the Caribbean COVID-19 Education Response (5 May 2020)

^v UK DFID, *Putting Girls’ Education at the Centre: Opening Up Better after COVID-19* (20 March 2020)

^{vi} FHI360/UNICEF, “Does horizontal education inequality lead to violent conflict? A global analysis” (2015):
<https://www.fhi360.org/projects/horizontal-inequality-education-and-violent-conflict-research>

^{vii} According to the World Inequality Database on Education: public education spending on the poorest households in the four Mesoamerican countries surveyed (Mexico, Costa Rica, El Salvador and Colombia) averages 15% - 18%, in comparison to the amount spent on wealthier households (≥25%).¹ UNICEF, *Addressing the learning crisis: An urgent need to better finance education for the poorest children* (2020)

^{viii} OECD (2019) PISA 2018 Results (Vol. I): What Students Know and Can Do, Annex B1, Table 1.B1.1;
<https://blogs.worldbank.org/latinamerica/what-are-the-main-results-pisa-2018-latin-america>

^{ix} Hjalmarsson, R. & Lochner, L. (2012). The Impact of Education on Crime: International Evidence, CESifo DICE Report, Institut - Leibniz-Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung an der Universität München, München, Vol. 10, Issue 2, pp. 49-55

^x Global Partnership for Education. Education data highlights. Available at: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/results/education-data-highlights>

^{xi} Ibid.

^{xii} For further details, please see: World Bank Group, “Results-based Financing in Education: Learning from What Works (2018)