

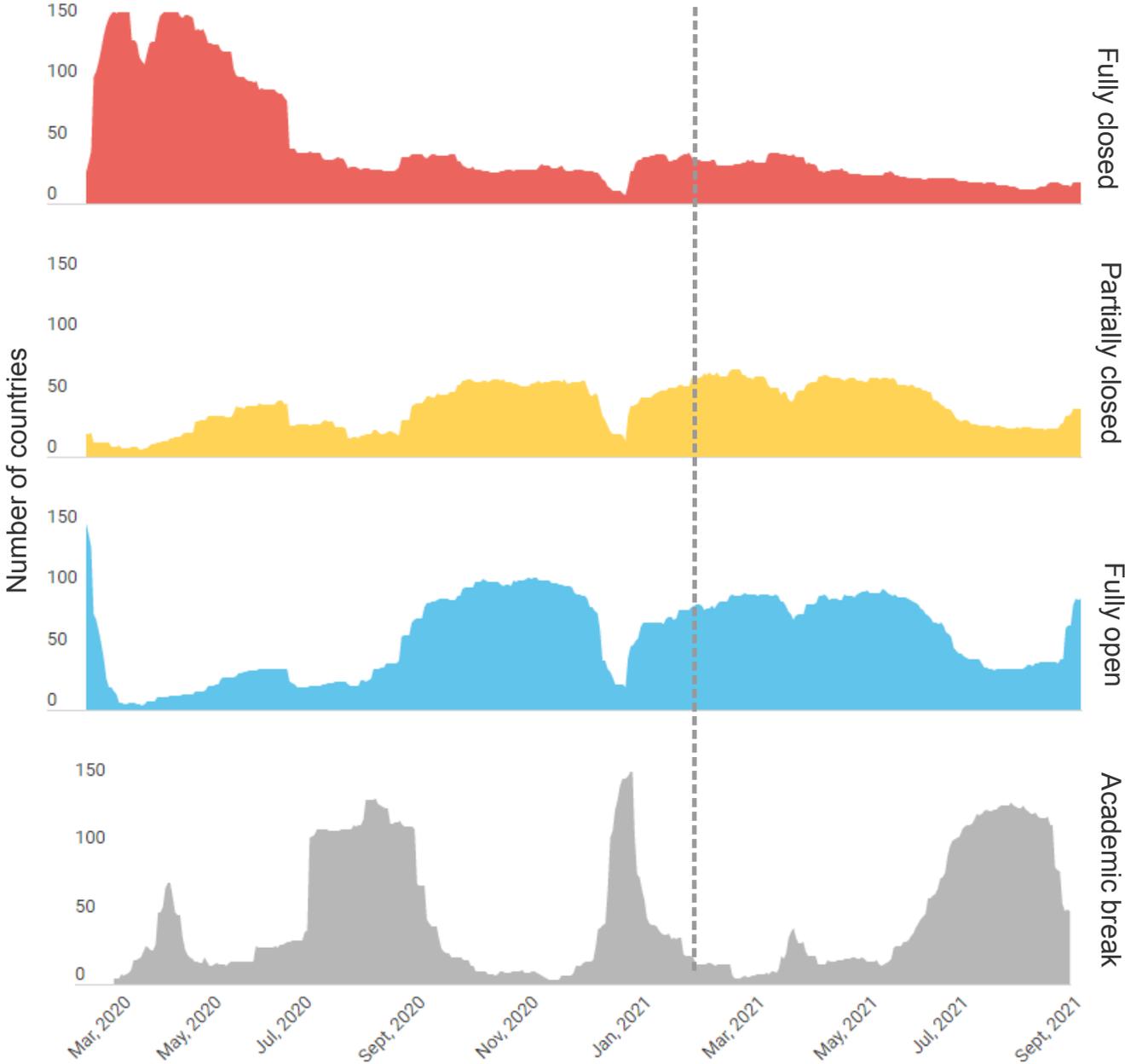
Education Disrupted

The second year of the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures

School closures have upended education across the world since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2021, [UNICEF released data and a report](#) to show the number of students impacted by these school closures to urge countries to prioritize school reopening. With the pandemic still raging on, it is important to update and analyze the status of school closures. While the earlier estimates covered the period from March 2020 to February 2021, this report covers the same set of countries, applying the same definitions of school closure status, over a longer period: March 2020 to September 2021. ¹

As Figure 1 shows, in the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, disruption to education continues: From February to May 2021, schools in around 30 countries remained fully closed and schools in 60 countries remained partially closed. In the period from June to August 2021, an increasing number of countries entered academic break. In September 2021, which marks the end of the academic break in many countries, schools in around 17 countries remain fully closed and schools in 39 countries remain partially closed.

Figure 1. Time series of school closure from March 2020 to September 2021



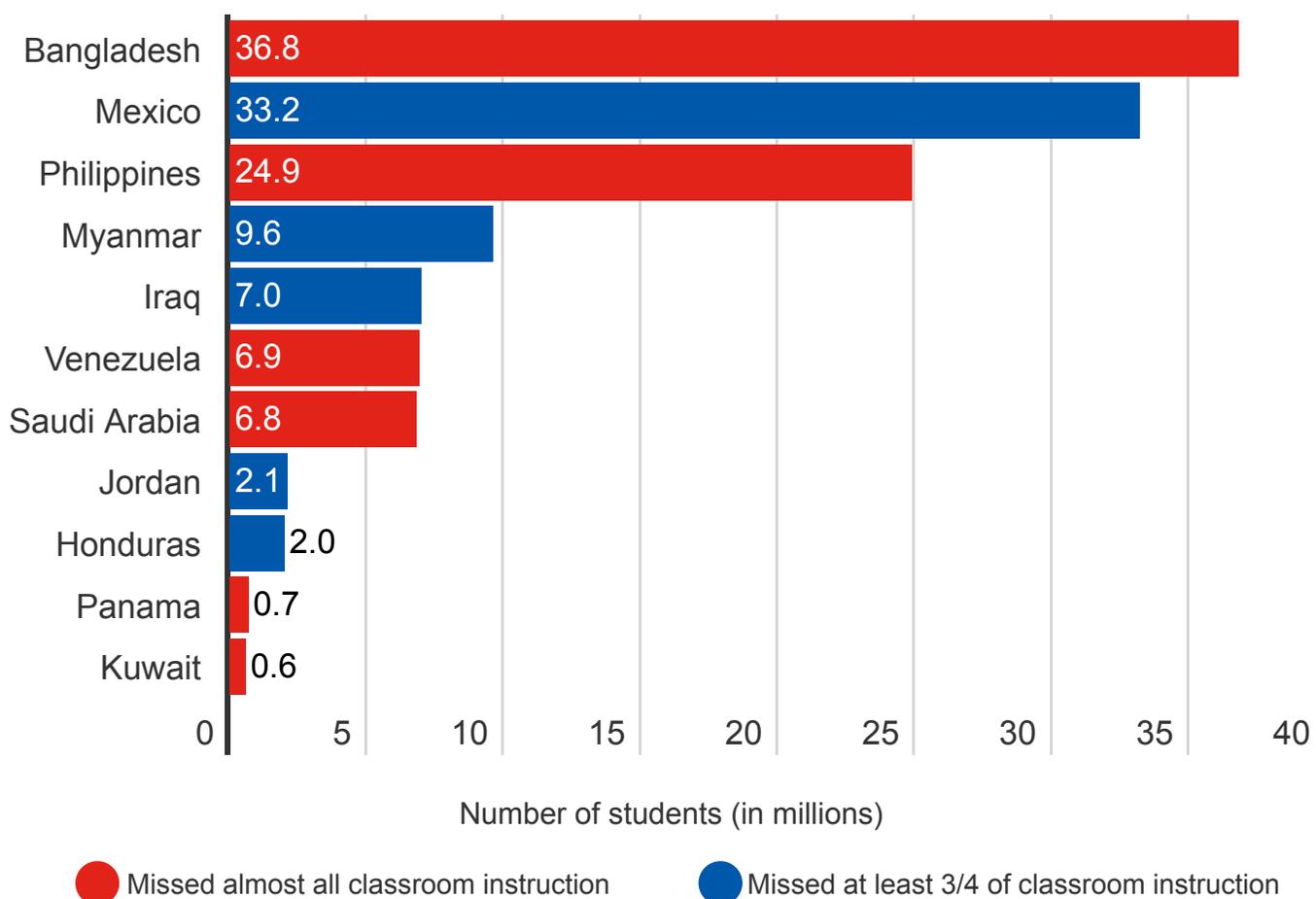
Note: The dotted line indicates the release of the previous report on school closures. Consequently, left of the dotted line is the period covered in the previous report and right of the dotted line is the new period covered from February 3, 2021 to September 9, 2021.

Source: UNESCO global monitoring of school closures caused by COVID-19

Number of students affected by prolonged school closures

Globally, 131 million students in pre-primary to upper secondary education in 11 countries fully missed at least three quarters of classroom instruction time from March 2020 to September 2021.² Compared to previous estimates, the data show a decline in the number of countries where children have fully missed three quarters of classroom instruction. This decline is because countries moved from full school closure to partial school closure since February 2021. It is important to note that partial school closures prevent students from fully benefiting from accessing in-person instruction, and with limited data available on the implementation of school closures at the subnational level, it is difficult to assess the loss caused by it.

Figure 2. Number of students (in millions) who have missed at least three quarters classroom instruction time from March 2020 to September 2021, by country



Note: The analysis covers students from pre-primary level to upper secondary level. The enrolment figures in 2020 are extrapolated using the latest number of students enrolled. Panama has gradually reopened schools since 31 May 2021, with schools for 0.7 million students remained closed by August 2021 according the Latin America and the Caribbean COVID-19 education response updates.

Source: UNESCO Global monitoring of school closures caused by COVID-19; UNESCO UIS database on student enrollment.

Among the 131 million students, 59 per cent (or 77 million students) missed almost all in-person classroom instruction time. In line with the definition used to report the previous estimates, a country is said to have missed “almost all” in-person instruction time if between March 11, 2020 and July 30, 2021 the country had (i) 10 or fewer fully open school days and (ii) 12 or fewer partially open days.

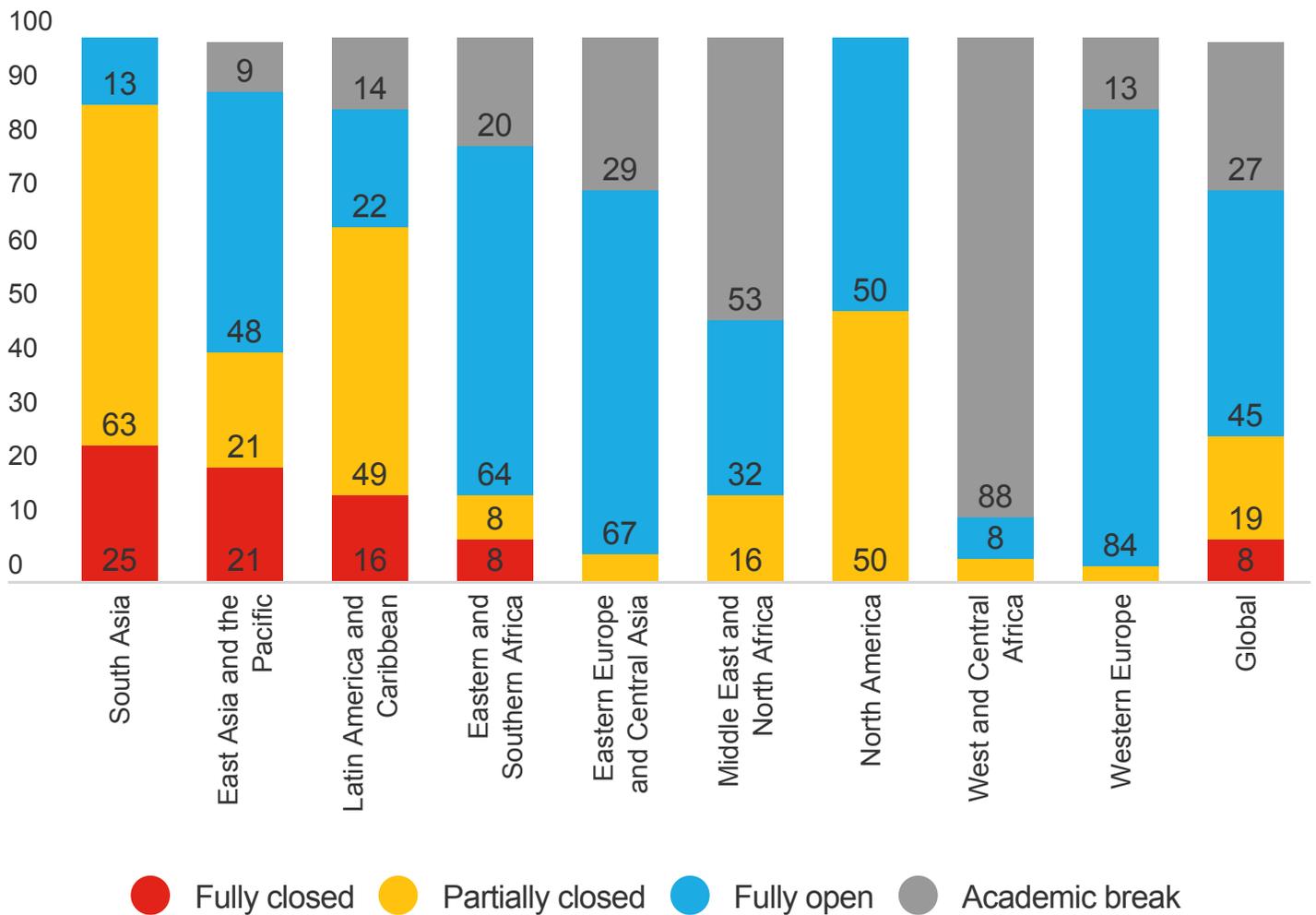
These 77 million students who have missed “almost all” in-person classroom instruction since March 2020 come from six countries (red circles in figure 2). Among these countries, Bangladesh, the Philippines and Venezuela have the largest number of students impacted by full school closures in the past year and a half.

School closures: Where do we stand today?

As of September 9, 2021, the data indicate school closures due to COVID-19 continue to be in place in many countries. Almost a year and a half since the pandemic was declared, 27 per cent of the countries continued to be fully or partially closed (Figure 3).

Moreover, regional differences persist with full school closures being observed in 4 of the 9 regions. In two regions, a higher share of countries are keeping their schools fully closed in September 2021 than in February 2021: South Asia (increased from 18 per cent to 25 per cent); and East Asia and the Pacific (increased from 6 per cent to 21 per cent). In Latin America and the Caribbean and Eastern and Southern Africa, however, the share of countries where schools are fully closed declined between February 2021 and September 2021. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, North America, West and Central Africa, and Western Europe, no countries were fully closed in September 2021. Overall, as of September 2021, there is no region where all countries have fully reopened schools.

Figure 3. Share of countries by school closure status, by region, as of September 9, 2021



Source: UNESCO global monitoring of school closures caused by COVID-19

The updated analysis shows that many millions of children still have not had the chance to return to school. In the second year of COVID-19, children are being denied the opportunity of in-person or remote instruction in many countries. Schoolchildren around the world have lost an estimated 1.8 trillion hours³ – and continuing – of in-person learning since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. As a result, young learners have been cut off from their education and the other vital benefits schools provide. Every hour in school is precious, and every child should be given the opportunity to go back to school. As countries return from academic break, no effort should be spared to reopen schools, as schools are critical for children’s learning, safety, health and well-being.

End notes

¹ The report uses UNESCO's definition of school closures. Schools are considered 'fully closed' when the closures affect most or all of the schoolchildren enrolled at pre-primary, primary, lower and upper secondary levels. 'Partial closures' refer to situations in which schools are either closed in some of a country's administrative units, for some grade levels, or are operating with limited capacity. 'Fully open' means that classes are held in-person for all schoolchildren and at all grade levels.

² Brazil, Uganda, Sudan, Ecuador, Guatemala, Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Azerbaijan, Paraguay, El Salvador, UAE and Costa Rica were the additional countries that were part of this list in February 2021. Since then, Sudan has fully reopened, while other countries have switched from schools being fully closed to being partially closed.

³ This is an estimate based on raw data for the UNESCO [Global Monitoring of School Closures Caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic](#), as of September 9, 2021. Referencing the length of the school day in OECD countries, China and India, we assume 5 hours lost for each full-closure day and 2.5 hours lost for each partially-closure day, for the average student enrolled (pre-primary to upper secondary).

Acknowledgments

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