



## SDG-Education 2030 Webinar Series for Latin America and the Caribbean: Leaving no one behind in times of the COVID-19 pandemic

### The Caribbean Webinar Series n° 2: Safe return to schools: challenges and perspectives for the continuity of teaching and learning in the Caribbean - Tuesday 19 May 2020

On 17 April 2020, UNESCO, in collaboration with the Regional Education Group for Latin America and the Caribbean, launched the biweekly series of webinars “SDG-Education 2030 Webinar Series for Latin America and the Caribbean: Leaving no one behind in times of the COVID-19 pandemic”. Subsequently, in order to address and respond to the sub-regional challenges for the Caribbean, UNESCO, with the support of the CARICOM Secretariat, initiated a webinar series in English, with a focus on the Caribbean experiences and practices. The second webinar in this series looks at the challenges and perspectives in guaranteeing a safe return to schools across the Caribbean.

The webinar attracted over 300 participants, the majority of which from the Caribbean region. Dr. Faryal Khan, Programme Specialist at UNESCO Sub-regional Office for the Caribbean, facilitated the webinar. She opened the webinar by stressing the importance of safeguarding the wellbeing of learners and education personal through a cooperative approach across different sectors.

Sharing a global perspective on the safe return to school, Ms. Margarete Sachs-Israel, Regional Education Advisor at UNICEF Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, presented the Global Framework for Reopening Schools, which was recently published by UNESCO, UNICEF, WFP and World Bank. She gave an overview on why, when and how to return to schools, according to the global framework and WHO recommendations.

Ms. Latoya Swaby-Anderson, National Programme Officer at UNESCO Education Cluster Office for the Caribbean, coordinated the following session, where promising return to school practices from both the Caribbean and the rest of the globe are presented and discussed.

From Curacao, Mrs. Susan Larmonie Van Heydoorn, Policy Director at the Ministry of Education, shared the preparation and detailed timeline for a national school reopening strategy. In Curacao, specific measures include ensuring hygiene supplies, gradual reopenings, as well as adjusting examination and school terms. Meanwhile, she pointed out that more attention needs to be paid to the social-emotional and pedagogical support, besides logistic and hygiene considerations; the stakeholder network also needs to be strengthened.

From St. Lucia, Dr. Fiona Mayer, Chief Education Officer at the Ministry of Education, shared the main characteristics, strengths and challenges of their reopening experience. Successful measures taken by St. Lucia include close cooperation with the health authorities and a smooth communication with all stakeholders; a data driven and contextualized strategy; and efforts for building future resilience, despite challenges such as anxiety and concerns on hygiene from students and teachers.

Ms. Langqi Zhao, from the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, shared promising reopening schools practices from four countries: Denmark, China, Mexico and Sierra Leone. Key learning points from their experiences are: planning together; preparing well; implementing and enforcing health, hygiene and sanitation measures; as well as resuming learning gradually and creatively.

Dr. Stephanie Fletcher-Lartey, from the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), introduced fundamental health and safety considerations for a safe return strategy. The considerations focus on the modality of reopening, the protocols on distancing and hygiene measures, and policies to protect those under high risks and against emergencies. Links to CARPHA resources are shared, while the importance of managing psycho-social and mental health of students is emphasized.

At the Q&A section, panelists addressed the following questions:

1. Q: In St. Lucia, what are the strategies to support teachers’ professional development?

A: Trainings have been provided to teachers regarding how to conduct online education, while more efforts are needed to help them with implementation. Relevant webinars have been designed.

2. Q: In Curacao, what measures are in place to cooperate with stakeholders such as teachers, parents and communities?

A: A training programme has been developed for teachers on providing social-emotional support to students, together with a survey aiming to obtain parents feedback during the confinement.

3. Q: How can we design the most suitable strategies to manage safety and hygiene?

A: Countries should consult their local health authorities, while referring to the global guidelines. Also, protocols for times when teachers get sick should adopt a surge capacity methodology.

4. Q: How to narrow the learning gaps and assess students' learning results after returning to school?

A: In the case of Curacao, school terms are adjusted and the next school year will begin earlier in order to have more time to evaluate students' performance. Meanwhile, summer catch-up programmes will be provided.

Dr. Laurette Bristol, from the CARICOM Secretariat, also contributed by mentioning that CARICOM is closely monitoring the school reopening situation in the Caribbean region and is preparing the corresponding guidelines, in order to ensure the quality and continuity of learning and assessment. Member states' involvement is considered significant in developing the guidelines.

Dr. Faryal Khan concluded the webinar with the following key messages:

- With the leadership of Ministries of Education, various stakeholders should be involved and plan together, including communities and parents.
- With sufficient hygiene measures in place, attention should also be paid to minimizing the learning gaps and ensuring equity in accessing distance education.
- Social-emotional support to both teachers and students needs to be emphasized, aiming at build future resilience.

Encouraging messages are shared by all panelists at the end of the webinar, advocating for solidarity and resilience across the Caribbean region.