



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

**Tuesday 19 May 2020**

**11:00 (-4 UCT)**

### Background

The global pandemic of COVID-19 has brought about an unprecedented crisis on all fronts. In the area of education, this resulted in massive closures of educational institutions in more than 190 countries around the world in order to prevent the spread of virus and mitigate its impact. According to UNESCO<sup>1</sup>, as at early April 2020, over 1,576,021,818 students worldwide were out of school. Of these, more than 160,000,000 were students from Latin America and the Caribbean<sup>2</sup>.

This situation has provoked an acute emergency for national education systems. The governments of the region, led by the Ministries of Education, have rapidly implemented distance learning modalities, supporting educational staff and mobilizing parents, caregivers and communities, with a view to ensuring the continuity of learning as an immediate response.

At the regional level, multiple instances of technical and political dialogue have been convened, which clearly demonstrated strong commitment and corresponding action by Governments with the support of international, regional and national organizations. The various dialogues held during the first month of pandemic then highlighted three common central themes that require immediate and longer-term political and programmatic support:

- (1) Important advances and innovation in the area of distance education have been made through the use of technologies in recent weeks more than at any other time. However, there are still important challenges to guarantee equity and inclusion, considering the most vulnerable and marginalized population groups;
- (2) There is need to move towards flexible educational systems, with a focus on preparedness; and
- (3) A new mentality and paradigm shift towards interdisciplinarity and intersectorality is required beyond education sector-focused planning and implementation. Cooperation and collaboration across different sectors and actors is paramount.

In other words, this crisis presents itself an unprecedented opportunity to transform national education systems into one of resilience, making the SDG-Education 2030 Agenda more relevant and necessary than ever.

### Regional Webinar Series

It is against this background that in collaboration with the Regional Education Group for Latin America and the Caribbean, UNESCO launched on 17 April, a biweekly series of knowledge and information exchange, and of policy dialogue, in order to respond to the pandemic, focusing on the four pillars of SDG-Education 2030: *equity, inclusion, quality and lifelong learning*.

<sup>1</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-emergencies/coronavirus-school-closures>

<sup>2</sup> <https://es.unesco.org/fieldoffice/santiago/covid-19-education-alc>

The objective of this initiative is to support the Ministries of Education and the different educational actors for the development, management and dissemination of relevant evidence and to inform the immediate response as well as the medium and long-term actions towards the 2030 goal. In addition, considering the need for interdisciplinary response, the dimension of culture, health and other areas will also be touched upon during the series.

Considering the specific contexts of each sub-region, Latin America and the Caribbean, two parallel schedules will be implemented.

Each webinar will be recorded and made available with presentations and reference materials on UNESCO's portal dedicated to COVID-19 (<https://es.unesco.org/fieldoffice/santiago/covid-19-education-alc>). At the same time, for each webinar, in-depth country experiences will be further explored and documented both in Spanish and English with a view to promoting sustainable knowledge exchange and policy dialogue with regional public goods across the region and to contributing to the same at the global level.

The Caribbean webinar series will be organized in partnership with CARICOM Secretariat and the Regional Education Group Latin America and the Caribbean.

## The Caribbean Webinar Series n° 2. Safe return to schools: challenges and perspectives for the continuity of teaching and learning in the Caribbean

As a preventive measure to curb the further spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, most countries have closed their schools, universities and other education institutions since February and March, resulting some 1.58 billion learners temporarily out of school. However, as of 11 May 2020, the number of affected learners worldwide has dropped to 1,235,602,579<sup>3</sup>, which might imply gradual opening of learning institutions. Developing a strategy for reopening schools is thus an imperative for many governments across the globe.

In the Caribbean region, while schools in most countries remain closed and efforts are being made to ensure the continuity of learning through alternative modalities, it is necessary for countries to start anticipating and preparing for school reopening.

Planning for school reopening needs to prioritize the safety, protection and well-being of learners, teachers and education personnel, in consultation with health experts and other concerned actors. It is also significant to assess the readiness of the education system, to ensure the continuity of learning, and to build system resilience to anticipate and deal with future crises.

Till a vaccine is developed, to prevent the spread of the pandemic, measures to mitigate risks to educators and learners will rely on actions of public health and government officials through social distancing, thorough cleaning, avoiding large gatherings in education institutions, and assuring the wellbeing and safety of educators and learners.

It is also important to prepare countries for the challenges resulting from the direct and indirect consequences of COVID-19 and prolonged social isolation, on both the education system and on the school community. These include, *inter alia*, increased risk of dropout, the exacerbation of existing and new inequalities, and the loss of education personnel.

How informed and prepared education practitioners are will determine how well these challenges are managed. The second webinar of the SDG-Education 2030 series for the Caribbean will thus bring together education partners from key public and private institutions, to discuss the most acute issue for education today: the safe return to schools. The following questions will be addressed:

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<sup>3</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>

- How can the Global Framework for Reopening Schools be contextualized in the Caribbean context?
- What are the strategies, measures and challenges encountered on reopening schools in some Caribbean countries?
- What would a National Road Map to Reopen Schools include?

### Objectives:

- To discuss the main issues surrounding the reopening of schools, including strategies, frameworks, timing, conditions and processes.
- To share “return to school practices” in the Caribbean region, and to address the potential challenges relating to the preparation and planning of the reopening, with special consideration of the situation of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations.

### Expected Results:

- Dialogue fostered on the application of the Global Framework for Reopening Schools within the Caribbean context.
- A shared understanding achieved on return to school practices and its challenges.
- Guidelines provided to enable Caribbean education systems to be better prepared as education providers anticipating plans for reopening.

### Agenda:

Tuesday, 19 May 2020				
Facilitator: Dr. Faryal Khan, Programme Specialist, UNESCO Sub-regional Office for the Caribbean				
11:00 – 11:05	<p><b>Welcome and introduction:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Faryal Khan, Programme Specialist, UNESCO Sub-regional Office for the Caribbean</li> </ul>			
11:05 – 11:10	<p><b>Overview: Global Framework for Reopening Schools</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms. Margarete Sachs-Israel, Regional Education Advisor, UNICEF Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean</li> </ul>			
11:15 – 11:55	<p><b>Presentations</b> (5 minutes each)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Education Experts Panel on Plans for Re-opening of School in the Caribbean: <table border="0" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p><b>Curacao</b></p> <p>Mrs. Susan Larmonie-Van Heydoorn- Policy Director, Ministry of Education Science Culture and Sport</p> </td> <td style="width: 5%; vertical-align: middle; text-align: center;"> </td> <td style="width: 45%; vertical-align: top;"> <p><b>St. Lucia</b></p> <p>Dr. Fiona Mayer, Chief Education Officer, Ministry of Education, Human Resource Development and Labour</p> </td> </tr> </table> </li> <li>• Promising examples from Asia, Europe and Africa on safe return to schools, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Initial Reactions to country plans and promising practices (5 minutes)</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Health and Safety considerations for returning to schools, Dr. Stephanie Fletcher-Lartey,</li> </ul>	<p><b>Curacao</b></p> <p>Mrs. Susan Larmonie-Van Heydoorn- Policy Director, Ministry of Education Science Culture and Sport</p>		<p><b>St. Lucia</b></p> <p>Dr. Fiona Mayer, Chief Education Officer, Ministry of Education, Human Resource Development and Labour</p>
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	Consultant, Surveillance, Disease Prevention and Control, CARPHA
<b>11:55 – 12:25</b>	<b>Q&amp;A and discussion</b>
<b>12:25 – 12:40</b>	<b>Summary, key messages and closing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dr. Faryal Khan, UNESCO Sub-regional Office for the Caribbean</li></ul>