



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° 1: Supporting teachers and education personnel to ensure continuity of learning in the Caribbean - Wednesday 6 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 of 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 first webinar in this series looks at supporting teachers and education personnel to ensure continuity of learning in the Caribbean.

The webinar attracted over 360 participants from all over the world, especially the Caribbean countries. Dr. Laurette Bristol, Programme Manager at the Human Resource Department of the CARICOM Secretariat, facilitated the webinar. She opened the discussion by identifying several acute challenges faced by education during COVID-19, including the use of technology and the sustainability of education. Later, Dr. Faryal Khan, Programme Specialist at UNESCO Kingston Office, shared key figures of affected learners and teachers from the global to the sub-regional level, providing the context for the subsequent thematic discussions.

Dr. Carlos Vargas Tamez, Chief of Unit of Teacher Development at UNESCO Santiago Regional Office, shared from a global perspective the challenges and responses observed worldwide. He emphasized that teachers need immediate support in ensuring teaching quality, social-emotional well-being and safeguarding working conditions.

Dr. Freddy James, Lecturer at the University of West Indies, began her presentation by reminding participants the definition and key components of learning and teaching. She elaborated key aspects (the 6 “Cs”) on where and how support can be provided to teachers, and the strategic phases for reopening schools.

Dr. Roderick Rudder, Deputy Chief Education Officer at the Barbadian Ministry of Education, shared the policy responses and actions adopted in Barbados for teachers during COVID-19 and their implications for the Caribbean region, from the perspective of pedagogical and technological capacity, curriculum, configuration of virtual classrooms, psycho-social support, monitoring and assessment of learning, and cyber security.

Mr. Mark Lyte, President of Guyana Teachers Union, introduced the international and national frameworks for safeguarding the teaching profession. He stressed the importance of managing recruitment and retention of teachers, where technology can be used to enhance profession development. He pointed out that the Teachers Union should support teachers by providing professional development sessions, psycho-social support, and push forward for policy change to safeguard working conditions.

Mr. Peter Wallet, Programme Specialist at Teacher Task Force Secretariat (UNESCO HQ), introduced TTF and the six areas where TTF advocates support for teachers, as well as TTF’s Teacher Policy Development Guide. He encourages stakeholders to retrieve knowledge from TTF’s website (www.teachertaskforce.org).

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

1. Measures to assist educators to keep their and their students’ well-being: networking with peers, clear communication and support from government to teachers, involvement of parents and self-empowerment.
2. Priority between teacher digital illiteracy and lack of connectivity: while pragmatic solutions such as using different technologies can be considered at the current stage, investing in connectivity will be beneficial for future readiness.
3. Implication of distance education during COVID-19 for future: this crisis provides an opportunity to address fundamental issues, such as equity and inclusion, strengthening of certain competencies and skills, the debate

on the concept of education, and reaching students with special needs thanks to the advancement in technology.

4. How to balance increased screen time and health: Barbados set a time limit for students' screen time (no more than 30 minutes for all levels).
5. How can we reset the systematic process to improve efficiency: we need to put learning activities at the center. It is important to consider learning as a slow and life-long process. Therefore, resetting the process provides a chance to rethink education and to incorporate other modalities of learning. A collaborative approach is important.

Dr. Laurette Bristol concluded the webinar with the following key messages for participants to take away:

Point 1: We need to ensure comprehensive, system-wide support to teachers and education personnel (policy provision, professional support, continued monitoring, status of teachers and conditions of their employment, etc.)

Point 2: The COVID-19 pandemic is an opportunity to rethink teaching and learning practices in particular, considering the fact that teachers and education personnel were not well prepared to tackle their work in the context of distance education.

Point 3: Teachers and education personnel are frontline workers. While designing the reopening of schools, we must ensure their health and their mental and emotional well-being, so that they are well-supported and confident to go back to teaching and managing schools, which in turn impacts on children and young people.