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

Tuesday 16 June 2020
11:00 (-4 UCT)

Zoom link: https://zoom.us/j/97172008995
Password: 886047
Youtube: https://youtu.be/uC73IMLflpo

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\(^1\), as of late May 2020, 1,198,530,172 learners are affected worldwide by COVID-19 related school closure. Of these, more than 166,552,325 were students from Latin America and the Caribbean\(^2\).

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 intersectoriality 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.

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\(^1\) https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-emergencies/coronavirus-school-closures

\(^2\) 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 are 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 is organized in partnership with CARICOM Secretariat and the Regional Education Group Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Caribbean Webinar Series n° 4. Ensuring continuity of learning for children and adolescents with disabilities in the Caribbean: Rights-based strategies, good practices and prospects

Today, around 15% of the global population – over a billion people – lives with some form of disability, and 93 millions of them are children under the age of 14 with a ‘moderate or severe disability’. In the Latin America and Caribbean region, it is estimated that more than 8 million girls and boys under age 14 and 6.5 million adolescents between ages 14 and 19 are living with at least one type of disability. According to UNICEF, 7 out of 10 children and adolescents with disabilities are out of school in the LAC region, and approximately 50,000 of them live in institutions. Attendance gaps are larger for youth of secondary school age (12-17) than for children of primary school age (6-11) by 10%.

With such a large number of learners living with disabilities, their access to education and learning has always been a major concern even before the pandemic closed schools starting in March. As a response to the massive COVID-19 related school closures, establishing or scaling up distance learning using technology and non-technology solutions has been the strategy widely adopted by the Ministries of Education worldwide including in the Caribbean. However, this emergency responsive strategy has been faced with challenges including one of how best to ensure continuing of learning for children and adolescents with disabilities.

In this sense, distance learning strategies during COVID-19 must also be guided by the principle of equity and inclusion and need to ensure that the design and delivery of distance learning do not exacerbate existing educational and social inequalities. According to UNESCO guidelines, open and distance learning (ODL) may provide some solution to the difficulties faced by learners with disabilities in accessing information and education. The rapid development of distance education during COVID-19 might thus provide a window of opportunity to improve the accessibility to and quality of distance education resources for children and adolescents with disabilities. It is therefore significant to shed light

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3 https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab_1
5 UNICEF: Programmatic guidance notes for country offices on children and adolescents with disability 2018-2021
7 IDB: Education for All: Advancing Disability Inclusion in Latin America and the Caribbean
8 UNESCO: Learning for All: guidelines on the inclusion of learners with disabilities in open and distance learning.
on and address the special needs and challenges of children and adolescents with disabilities during the COVID-19 related school closure, to make sure that they continue to have access to education and that learning is of relevance to them during this particularly difficult time.

Therefore, the forth episode of the Caribbean webinar series aims to bring educational planners and practitioners together for discussion and exchange on the subject of inclusion of learners with disabilities. Addressing their needs in distance learning strategies is important not only for a more comprehensive immediate response, but also for the building of more inclusive and equitable education systems after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The following questions will be addressed:

- What are the educational needs and challenges of children and adolescents with disabilities?
- What measures are Caribbean countries taking to ensure the inclusion of children and adolescents with disabilities in the delivery of distance education during COVID-19 school closure?
- What are some of the inspirations and opportunities for developing distance education and strengthening national education system as a whole to enhance equity and inclusion with focus on children and adolescents with disabilities?

Objectives:

- To address the special needs and challenges of children and adolescents with disabilities during the COVID-19 related school closure.
- To share Caribbean experiences on how to ensure the inclusion of children and adolescents with disabilities in distance education.

Agenda:

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<th>Time</th>
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<td>11:00 – 11:05</td>
<td>Welcome and introduction:</td>
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<td>- Ms. Latoya Swaby-Anderson, National Programme Officer, UNESCO Education Cluster Office for the Caribbean</td>
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<td>11:05 – 11:10</td>
<td>Global overview from the rights based perspective:</td>
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<td>- Dr. Faryal Khan, Programme Specialist, UNESCO Sub-regional Office for the Caribbean</td>
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<td>11:10 – 11:42</td>
<td>Presentations (8 minutes each)</td>
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<td>- Dr. Joan Spencer-Ernandez, Head of the Joint Board of Teacher Education (JBTE) and Lecturer in Special Education in the School of Education, UWI</td>
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<td>- Dr. Annicia Gayle-Geddes, Social Analyst with an expertise in SEN, Caribbean Development Bank</td>
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<td>- Dale St Juste, Education Officer Special Education, St. Lucia</td>
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<td>- Senator Dr. Floyd Morris, CARICOM Rapporteur</td>
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<td>11:42 – 11:45</td>
<td>Youth Representative</td>
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<td>11:45 – 12:25</td>
<td>Q&amp;A and Discussion</td>
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<td>12:25 – 12:30</td>
<td>Summary, Key Messages and Closing</td>
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- Ms. Latoya Swaby-Anderson, UNESCO Sub-regional Office for the Caribbean