UNESCO’S Initiative against COVID-19

“NO TEACHER OR STUDENT SHOULD BE LEFT BEHIND”

Proposed by the Chairperson of the Executive Board of UNESCO

Background

1. The impact of the coronavirus pandemic has been devastating to the fabric of life as we know it, with a particularly negative impact on the school system in developing countries. Based on data published by UNESCO, some 107 countries had implemented nationwide closures of schools by 18 March 2020, in response to the pandemic. This affected over 861.7 million children and youth, representing close to 45 per cent of the global population of school-aged children and youth. The latest figures place the number of out-of-school students due to COVID-19 at approximately 1.5 billion.

2. If not dealt with on time, this unprecedented situation could lead to the collapse of school systems in many developing countries where clearly local governments cannot cope with the devastating consequences of the virus. Two of the most affected populations that are at the centre of UNESCO’s mandate are teachers and students.

Objective

3. The UNESCO initiative entitled “No teacher or student should be left behind” focuses specifically on providing a concrete, meaningful and timely response to the unprecedented crisis that the coronavirus is inflicting on the education system in the developing world. This implies:

   a. Generating extra-budgetary funds from the World Bank, IMF, regional banks, governments, NGOs, public and private donors. Among the target groups, UNESCO could seek voluntary support from staff members, former staff members and Member States of UNESCO before pursuing the campaign with external donors;
   b. Providing urgently needed funds to schools in developing nations in order to permit the payment of two to three months salaries to teachers;
   c. Assisting schools to adapt their working methods in order to permit enable students to pursue studies under confinement;
   d. Revaluing the teaching profession so that schools and local governments in the developing world could adjust teachers’ salaries as decently as possible.

Strategy

4. Create the Steering Committee of the initiative that will be led by the Director-General. The Steering Committee will include five representatives from the different regions who will be appointed by the Director-General, based on their internationally recognized intellectual or professional contributions in support of teachers and the
education system in the developing world. The Chairperson of the Executive Board will have an advisory role on the Steering Committee.

5. The Director General will have the authority to:

   a. Grant honorary or advisory responsibilities to additional members;
   b. Constitute a unit composed of UNESCO staff. The primary role of this unit is to assist the Steering Committee in meetings and to process information.

Functions

6. The functions of the Steering Committee are to:

   a. Ensure that Representatives of UNESCO Member States play a central role including in ensuring active participation of the countries they represent, the collection of data regarding number of schools, teachers and students, as well as the distribution of funds and follow up;
   b. Design the strategy and launch an active international campaign to generate extrabudgetary funds to support the initiative;
   c. Solicit support for materials and any other technical or financial assistance from potential donors;
   d. Take an active leadership role to ensure the visibility of UNESCO in the Member States;
   e. Collect and update existing data: number of accredited schools, teachers, students per country and other relevant data;
   f. Consolidate a report on the essential priority educational needs of schools directly linked to the impact of the corona virus: salary payment, access to technology, training, etc.
   g. Propose solutions, prepare reports, establish criteria for resource generation and allocation, and identify gaps.
   h. Undertake any other urgent action that may be necessary to help alleviate the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers, students and schools.

Expected results

7. Through this initiative, UNESCO should raise awareness in developing countries regarding the fundamental role of teachers and the need to adjust their salaries to reflect their important contribution to society.

8. To alleviate the negative impact of COVID-19, UNESCO will assist:

   a. As many countries as possible to help teachers in reducing the hardship caused by the COVID-19 pandemic;
   b. Schools to prevent the collapse of the education system;
   c. Member States in alleviating suffering among teachers and students due to the pandemic;
   d. Schools to ensure continuity of class, even under confinement;
   e. Revamp UNESCO’s intellectual role among UN agencies.
**Evaluation:**

9. Assess the impact of such a mechanism of crisis response at the end of the process and provide recommendations based on lessons learnt, for similar scenarios in the future.

**Roadmap**

10. This item was presented to the Bureau of the Executive Board as an information item at its virtual meeting on 21 April 2020. The next step is to call an urgent meeting of the Executive Board to approve this decision and permit the Director-General to take actions. The Director-General should take all necessary measures to ensure urgent implementation of this initiative.

**Final remarks**

11. Through education, not only can we help our populations to better cope with the devastating impact of the current COVID-19 pandemic, but we can also prevent such a situation being repeated in the future. What the world is going through today with the coronavirus pandemic is so unprecedented and devastating that we have to think out of the box if we want to continue being relevant in the Member States.

12. Just like the world has lived the “before” and the “after” regarding the world war, it is clear that with the coronavirus pandemic, the world will have a before and an after COVID-19. UNESCO cannot afford to be left behind in the post COVID-19 era.

**Draft Decision**

The Executive Board:

1. **Having examined** the document XXX
2. **Recognizes** the value added of the initiative “no teacher or student should be left behind” during and post COVID-19 to support teachers particularly in developing countries;
3. **Approves** the establishment of the governing mechanism and related strategies;
4. **Requests** the Director-General to report to its 209th session on progress made by the Secretariat to implement the initiative as laid down in this document;
5. **Encourages** Members states to participate actively including through voluntary contributions.