

## Teacher Task Force

### Regional Virtual Meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean Region

#### COVID-19 education crisis - Supporting teachers in distance learning and on school reopening

6 and 15 May 2020, 15:00 (Paris /GMT+2 hrs.)

#### Final Report

Under the auspices of the Teacher Task Force (TTF), a regional meeting for members from the Latin America and the Caribbean region was held to discuss countries' challenges and national responses in relation to teachers in the use of distance education and for the return to school (Annex 1). The meeting brought together a combination of country level perspectives and those from international organizations operating in the region. The speakers represented Teacher Task Force members and non-members from Barbados, Colombia, Guyana, Jamaica, Paraguay and Peru. Representatives from the Regional Committee of the International Education in Latin America, the School of Education at the University of West Indies, and from Regional UNESCO offices and the TTF also participated to provide a regional and civil society perspective (Annexes 2 and 3).

Across the presentations and during the question and answer session, the following emerged as important considerations for COVID-19 related education responses specific to supporting teachers and teaching during closures and the return to school.

#### Challenges raised by COVID-19 school closures

1. Unequal access to internet and devices required for online and distance education;
2. Need for innovation and alternative methods to deliver distance education;
3. Teachers' lack of training for delivery of distance education;
4. Added pressure on teachers resulting in increased anxiety, coupled with a lack of psychological and socio-emotional support;
5. Lack of clarity and coordination among COVID-19 responses including poor communication between teachers, their representatives and decision-makers.

#### COVID-19 responses developed by countries and organisations

##### 1. Enhancing access to devices and connectivity:

- a. **Barbados**, in partnership with the corporate sector and internet providers has been providing laptops, devices and free internet to access e-learning platforms for all students.

##### 2. Innovative and alternative methods and materials to enhance reach of distance learning and ensure continuity of education.

Several strategies have been implemented by governments to overcome the absence of computers and internet and the need for online learning. **Radio and television** have connected teachers and students in rural and vulnerable areas and are widely used across Barbados, Brazil Chile, Colombia, and Jamaica at low or no cost.

- a. **Barbados** has used television as a rapid response to transmit lessons while the digitalisation of more content was being undertaken;
- b. In **Chile**, the Ministry of Education is also delivering pedagogical content by television through the public broadcaster;

- c. **In Colombia**, the public broadcaster delivers pedagogical content weekdays during the morning between 7h00 and 13h00, alternating sections for each grade. Similarly, the public radio broadcaster provides additional lessons for children. This has been an effective strategy given the widespread access and use of radio in Colombia households given past initiatives to improve national literacy rates. In addition, printed materials are being delivered in remote areas where no ICT platform is available. These materials are delivered by teachers who also deliver food to the most vulnerable children to ensure the continuity of the meal programmes in schools as most of the students depend on the programme.
    - d. **Paraguay** has transferred education to mobile phones and social networks to ensure the continuity of teaching and learning. This is facilitated by the fact about 90 per cent of students in Paraguay have access. For its part, the education authorities upload content daily and thanks to an agreement with mobile phones companies, students have free access to education platforms through mobile broadband.
3. **Enhancing teacher training and support to deliver online and distance education:** Online education means more than just access to internet and a computer. Education authorities must work with teachers to ensure the correct use of ICT to effectively engage their students. In fact, teaching remotely requires a new set of skills that many teachers previously and currently lack. Some country examples discussed include:
  - a. **Barbados** is promoting teacher education in ICT and digitizing all pedagogical material, as well as creating additional resources to fill identified gaps; and
  - b. **Colombia** is similarly creating new digital materials for teachers and students, which can be accessed through an online platform to download content for continued use including during Internet disruptions.
4. **Developing flexible educational systems while strengthening psychological and socio-emotional support for teachers.**

It is critical to recognise the human condition of teachers. They are also living the crisis and experiencing the same anxiety and uncertainty as the rest of the population. In LAC, 80% or more of teachers are women who may also be caring for their own families while continuing to work and adapt to the reality of teaching remotely. There is evidence that working hours have in fact increased as a result of school closures.

Since teachers are at the frontline of dealing with the anxiety of students and families in confinement, facing economic challenges, possible domestic violence, loss of employment and other concerns. They require training to support families and students as well as manage their own stress.

A representative from the *Universidad Antonio Ruiz de Montoya* in **Peru** presented the preliminary results of a survey distributed across teachers in the LAC region, which showed that 22% of teachers are experiencing high levels of anxiety and 36% recognised not having the tools to overcome the current situation. Presenters emphasised the need to provide socio-emotional support and training to teachers to address the distress of the pandemic. They also discussed how governments have increased communication with teachers, recognising their role and promoting sharing of experiences.

- a. In **Barbados**, the government activated a phone line to support teachers and families during the confinement.
  - b. In **Colombia**, the Ministry of Education created an advocacy campaign with ongoing communication with teachers, recognising their condition as people who are also suffering the anxiety of the pandemic. The key action was to send a message supporting teachers with information on managing stress and anxiety.
  - c. In **Guyana**, the president of the teachers' union played an active role highlighting the critical nature of the relationships between teachers and their management, and that governments need to recognise the crucial role of teachers during the pandemic.
  - d. In **Paraguay**, one of the strategies to support teachers was the creation of collaborative platforms exclusive for teachers where they can share materials and experiences. Similarly, the government opened a space for teachers to dialogue about their needs and feelings so they can feel supported by their peers.
- 5. Social dialogue, networking and collaborative responses are key measures implemented in the region.** Teachers need to have a clear idea what is expected from them during the COVID-19 response. This requires a coordinated effort and a collaborative approach by governments to avoid duplicated efforts and contradictory messaging. Moreover, government and school leaders can support teachers to share resources and experiences between themselves and other education actors.
- a. In **Barbados**, social dialogue has been an important element to ensure a coordinated effort including teachers, headteachers and their unions who have participated in developing the response plan to COVID-19 including the use of distance education.
  - b. In **Chile**, the government is promoting the importance of collaborative work and the need to create networks between teachers and colleagues; this is also important as a means to remain in constant communication to share information and help ensure no child is left behind.
  - c. In **Guyana** efforts are being made to support school leaders recruit new teachers and to support continuous professional development to ensure teachers able to meet the digital challenges of distance and online learning.
  - d. In **Paraguay** there is a new platform created for teachers to create and share knowledge and enhance mutual support. Additionally, while 85% of teachers depend on the ministry and their work for their incomes, through social dialogue, the 15% of teachers in the private sector are now receiving economic support from the central government to meet their needs.

## Conclusion

To conclude, all participants agreed that every crisis brings new opportunities. However, it also reveals existing inequalities and vulnerabilities, which gives an opportunity to reflect on current methodologies. COVID-19 has emphasised unequal access to distance education, the need to improve learning spaces, and to recognise the critical role teachers play. It is the time to improve distance education, to strengthen socio-emotional support for teachers, to rethink the existing education systems, and to collaborate between different partners. Countries also need to enhance social dialogue, develop a comprehensive system to support teachers and add value to their

profession as the frontline workers in education, particularly during crises and emergency situations.

The presentations discussed a number of distance and online technological solutions implemented at country-level. However, details are limited on the scope and depth of teacher training, preparation and support. As mentioned in the [seven dimensions discussed in the TTF guidance note on reopening schools](#), teachers will require significant assistance in the transition to online learning and using other distance education methodologies. Responses that take into consideration these seven dimensions will be instrumental to ensure teachers have the tools, knowledge and support to ensure the continuation of learning and deliver quality teaching.

The meeting also discussed aspects of the return to school including safety and health of teachers, psychological support and working conditions and rights as professionals. It also covered the issue of teachers' centrality in equity-backed strategies as underlined in the [Teacher Task Force Call for Action on teachers](#). Countries can consider the [TTF Guidance Note on the Return to School](#) as well as the [TTF Toolkit for School Leaders](#) on the return to school for guidance, tips and resources.

The TTF aims to play an important role in supporting teachers in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and the return to school process. This includes its coordination efforts between various UNESCO teacher initiatives and those by external partners. Moreover, the new [Teacher Task Force Knowledge Hub](#) provides country members and the wider education community with a central repository of quality resources on teachers and teaching for policy-makers, decisions-makers and teacher educators to remain knowledgeable of better practices and evidence-based research around teachers and teaching.

## **Annex 1: Concept Note**

### **Background and Introduction**

The COVID-19 crisis has disrupted education in an unprecedented way with, at its height, some 194 countries closing their schools affecting 1.58 billion learners from all levels and over 63 million primary and secondary teachers. Governments have had to act rapidly to continue providing quality education in a new environment, where face-to-face pedagogy is no longer possible and where many teachers lack skills related to ICT, distance education and education in emergencies.

Throughout school closures, governments have adopted various measures to ensure learning continuity. In some cases, this has meant working with infrastructure constraints, such as a lack of connectivity or devices. As countries plan to reopen schools, teachers' role will shift significantly for a second time. Teachers' knowledge of learners' needs and their pedagogical expertise will be critical to develop school reopening plans and responses. Teachers themselves have also been impacted by the crisis professionally and personally. Therefore, the voices of teachers, teacher educators and their representatives need to be included when designing context-sensitive resilience strategies.

Acknowledging these challenges, the Teacher Task Force (TTF) launched a [Call to Action on Teachers](#) that emphasises the following six key messages for governments and education stakeholders:

- preserve employment and wages;
- prioritise teachers' and learners' health, safety and well-being;

- include teachers in developing COVID-19 education responses;
- provide adequate professional support and training;
- put equity at the heart of education responses; and
- include teachers in aid responses.

### Objectives of the regional meeting

The Regional Virtual meeting for the Latin America and Caribbean region was organised by the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 with the support of the UNESCO Office in Santiago and CARICOM on 3 June 2020. The objectives of the meeting were to:

- Understand the challenges faced by countries in addressing issues related to teachers and teaching while designing education responses to COVID-19;
- Share promising practices to support teachers, including training, psycho-social support, and others; and
- Highlight challenges and opportunities in the reopening of schools.

Some of the main questions to be covered included:

- How are governments ensuring adequate training and support for in-service teachers to deliver effective distance/online instruction? How prepared are education systems in deploying online platforms and supporting teachers in using digital technology?
- How are governments supporting teachers working in areas with poor or no internet connectivity?
- What are the challenges and opportunities for the reopening of schools and how to best include teachers in responses? How should governments support teachers to meet their professional and personal needs?
- What measures are in place or planned that consider vulnerable populations (e.g. girls, disabled learners, cultural and linguistic minorities, displaced persons) to ensure equity in teaching and learning and mitigate dropout?

### Annex 2: Caribbean Regional Meeting of Teacher Task Force Webinar Agenda and list of presenters

ITEM	TIME
Welcome, objectives and introduction of participants	5 mins <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Faryal Khan, Programme Specialist, UNESCO Sub-regional Office for the Caribbean.</li> </ul>
UNESCO overview of the crisis	5 mins <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean: <i>The global and regional perspectives</i>: Dr. Carlos Vargas Tamez, Chief, Unit of Teacher Development.</li> </ul>
Countries' perspective	35 mins <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barbados: <i>Policy implications for teaching during the health emergency</i>: Dr. Roderick Rudder, Deputy</li> </ul>

	<p>Chief Education Officer, Ministry of Education, Technical and Vocational Training.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guyana: <i>Safeguarding the teaching professional and the conditions of work</i>: Mr. Mark Lyte, President, Guyana Teachers Union.</li> <li>• Jamaica: <i>Supporting the preparation of teachers for distance education and reopening of schools</i>: Dr. Freddy James, Lecturer, Educational Leadership, School of Education, the University of West Indies, St Augustin Campus.</li> </ul>
TTF Presentation	<p>5 mins</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call to Action by the Teacher Task Force: Dr. Peter Wallet, TTF Secretariat</li> </ul>
Q&A and Discussion	30 mins
Summary, key messages and closing remarks	<p>10 mins</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Laurette Bristol, CARICOM Secretariat</li> </ul>

### Annex 3: Latin America Regional Meeting of Teacher Task Force Webinar Agenda and list of presenters

ITEM	TIME
Welcome, objectives and introduction of participants	<p>5 mins</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Claudia Uribe, Director, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean</li> </ul>
UNESCO overview of the crisis	<p>5 mins</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean: <i>The global and regional perspectives</i>: Dr. Carlos Vargas Tamez, Chief, Unit of Teacher Development.</li> </ul>
Countries' perspective	<p>45 mins</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Colombia: Ms. Constanza Alarcón, Vice minister of Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education.</li> <li>• Brazil: Ms. Fátima Silva, Representative of the Regional Committee of the International Education in Latin America.</li> <li>• Peru: Mr. Ricardo Gálvez, Universidad Antonio Ruiz de Montoya.</li> <li>• Paraguay: Ms. Celeste Mancuello, Vice minister of Higher Education and Sciences in Paraguay and Steering Committee member of the Teacher Task Force Education 2030</li> <li>• Chile: Ms. Nadia Valenzuela, Science teacher and winner of the Global Teacher Prize Chile 2019.</li> </ul>

TTF Presentation	5mins <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Call to Action by the Teacher Task Force: Ms. Celeste Mancuello, Vice minister of Higher Education and Sciences in Paraguay and Steering Committee member of the Teacher Task Force Education 2030</li></ul>
Q&A and Discussion	20mins
Summary, key messages and closing remarks	10mins <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mr Carlos Vargas Tamez, Chief, Unit of Teacher Development, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean.</li></ul>