



مُؤَسَّسَةُ الْعَالَمِ الْإِسْلَامِيِّ لِلْعِلْمِ وَالرِّسَالَةِ وَالرِّفْقَانِ  
ISLAMIC WORLD EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION  
ORGANISATION DU MONDE ISLAMIQUE POUR L'ÉDUCATION, LES SCIENCES ET LA CULTURE



# Guiding Principles for Reopening Education Institutions in ICESCO Member States

Thursday, 14 May 2020

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# Foreword

ICESCO defends the Right to Education and supports all Member States to ensure the effectiveness of this right for every citizen.

The basic postulate is the following: before covid-19, there were nearly one billion illiterates in the world, of which more than 250 million were young people and the majority of them were in ICESCO Member States. Because of COVID-19 quarantine measures, more than 1.5 billion learners worldwide were deprived of their right to learn of which more than 500 million are in ICESCO Member States.

During the crisis, ICESCO has supported Member States by providing strategic advice, consultation, policy support and material equipment especially to the disadvantaged ones, to continue learning through radio, TV, mobile phones and digital audio tools. ICESCO also encouraged the use of ICT and Digital learning tools to achieve the Right to Education while respecting social distancing measures. To show its solidarity with the countries, ICESCO decided to make available to decision-makers and all actors in the education system a Guiding Principles for the Reopening of Education Institutions. This guide is simple, flexible and adaptable to each context. It addresses the essential issues of non-discrimination, the consideration of over crowdedness in a context of social distancing, the issue of teacher training in the use of digital tools and ICTs, the involvement of key actors (teacher networks, parent associations), the interconnection between rights (health, hygiene, water, sanitation, food), the specificities of Quranic schools, and the challenges faced by women and girls.

A fundamental point addressed by the Guiding Principles is the situation of stress and trauma suffered by the whole chain of education actors: mental health is a crucial issue and ISLAM's values and the cultural foundations of countries must be used as a lever to stop this ticking time bomb and build resilient educational and co-educational societies. Education institutions need to go beyond their purely academic role to embrace and foster social and emotional wellbeing of learners.

ICESCO Director General  
**Dr Salim M. ALMALIK**



## COVID-19 pandemic and the problem of the right to education

ICESCO promotes inclusive and quality lifelong education as well as the right to education for all, with special attention to girls, boys and marginalized individuals. ICESCO's vision on education focuses on quality, comprehensive, and lifelong education. We build strong individuals and develop knowledge societies<sup>1</sup>.

Education must be of good quality, inclusive and in line with Goal 4 of SDGs. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a large number of school closures around the world (response to the COVID-19 pandemic) posing an unprecedented risk to the education, protection and well-being of children.

The Covid-19 pandemic is straining the right to education for all children and young people around the world, as well as for adults. As a reminder, the right to education is an integral part of universal human rights (Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989) and Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its general comment No 13 (1999) on the right to education, which all provide for education that is accessible to all, specially the most vulnerable groups, in law and fact, without discrimination on any basis, including race, color, sex, language, religion, politics, opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Article 28 of the convention on the Rights of the Child also recognizes the right of the child to education on an equal basis. ICESCO has already carried out important actions during the COVID-19 crisis and it is now a matter of helping to reopen the schools.

ICESCO proposes to make available to Member States a strategic and operational instrument for planning and managing the post COVID-19 in education systems.

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<sup>1</sup> ICESCO New Strategic Medium Term Plan 2020/ 2030

The reopening of schools must be carried out to ensure the right of learners to education, simultaneously with respecting their right to health, safety and food. Respect of these rights together makes the process of reopening schools particularly complex.

## Legal Framework

All ICESCO Member States recognize the international law on the Right to Education.

## Reopening of schools and the issue of the Right to Education

With regard to children and young people, the reopening of schools can be conceived within the context of the Right to Education, as it allows programming and monitoring of public policies to be implemented in terms of social justice and non-discrimination. Effective schools re-opening measures require a well-rounded communication plan. Indeed, timely and effective communication is paramount for States to reach all key actors and disseminate information clearly and accurately in a timely manner. Furthermore, ICESCO strongly encourages States to build and implement policies for ICT and Digital learning tools in order to achieve inclusive learning while respecting social distancing measures.

Reopening of schools based on the four criteria for implementation and evaluation: acceptability, accessibility, availability, and adaptability; and a fifth criterion- Mental Health.

The four A's criteria- Acceptability, Accessibility, Availability, Adaptability- guide the reopening of education institutions while taking into account the fight against educational inequalities and their ex ante, in itinere, intermediate and ex post evaluation.

**The criterion of acceptability** refers to standards of quality, safety, well-being, content and teaching methods. In the project to reopen the schools, it will be a question of ensuring collaboration between decentralized authorities and parents' associations of pupils to measure, monitor, and improve on the level of acceptability.

Consideration for the **criterion of accessibility** consists of eliminating all physical or financial obstacles to returning to school. For example, if the choice is made to force

the wearing of protective masks for school children and young people or teachers, it will be a question of checking the possibility for each child or each teacher to have access to it for free. In addition, States need to consider how best to manage crowded classes in a context of need for social distancing? How the media and ICT tools can be used to capitalize, invent evaluation and self-evaluation devices? Also, how can free access to internet and equipment be provided to students?

The **criterion of availability** corresponds to the obligations of States to set up a sufficient number of schools, to combat all forms of discrimination and to offer parents the possibility of choosing the type of education offered to their children. As part of the reopening of schools, it will be a matter for States to ensure that all schools in the country benefit from the same reopening conditions and that health and safety measures are implemented. For example, will teachers be at their posts, regardless of the regions of the country and the environments (urban or rural)? Will hygienic and sanitation conditions be ensured? Are the water points and toilet for girls and boys in schools insured? Will the soap supply be available? And for children, administration staff and teachers masks should be free.

Finally, the **criterion of adaptability** will also be used for a fair and secure reopening of schools, as adaptation of education systems allows the exercise of the Right to Education, whatever the conditions are. The implementation of this criterion allows a reflection on the Right to Education of marginal children (how to adapt the offered education to working children, nomadic children, and refugee children?) So as not to exclude any category of children or young people. Clearly, the adaptation of education must allow all children to find their way back to school, whatever the difficulties encountered are, or the specificities of the schools/regions, such as Quranic Schools.

Due to the exceptional situation during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the unprecedented challenges students, teachers and parents are going through, a fifth criterion is added, which is **Mental Health**. This criterion aims at supporting the educational community in its reconstruction to ensure the cognitive, behavioral and emotional well-being of all actors.

## Recommendations based on 4-A Conceptual Framework

### ACCEPTABILITY

(National regulations and laws, Policies, Establishment/closure of schools. Freedom to establish schools, Funding for public schools, Public funding for private schools, Criteria for recruitment, Fitness for teaching, Labor rights, Trade union freedoms, Professional responsibilities, Academic freedom)

We need to build a strong free public quality inclusive education. For this, adequate financing is required, which involves greater investments in social sectors and the suspension of policies and regulations that impose austerity and cuts to social spending, to investments in public schools without making room for the privatization of education.

In addition to the complex pedagogical infrastructure and socioeconomic issues involved in these remote education initiatives, it is necessary to consider the serious problem of security and privacy of teachers and students when accessing the internet and using digital technologies and online services. In this sense, if measures are taken to use digital or remote tools, it is necessary to ensure the inclusion of all, ensuring the provision of appropriate platforms, internet provision, training for education professionals, as well as adaptation of workloads and other teaching structures to a different format. It is also important to pay attention to all aspects that guarantee fair quality for all. The use of digital platforms must support data security standards, as well as free software and other types of mechanisms that guarantee an adequate, free, public and safe use for all students and school communities.

It is the obligation of the governments to formulate policies, strategies, plans and programs in the process of participation, while respecting the right to each citizen, in addition to revisiting the laws and regulations related to education to be more flexible and contextualized. For Example, in some countries, E-Learning courses are not certified by regulatory agencies.

It is also necessary to provide adequate investment of financial resources to educational policies and measures aimed at this re-adaptation and to raise the quality of schools. A reopening that mitigates the risks of contamination and guarantees the right to education for all requires funding. Thus, higher investments must not follow a policy of cuts and austerity in the medium term that affects the social sectors, as recovery of the economy also depends on investments in social sectors. UNICEF, WFP, World bank and UNESCO could be potential partners for member states.

To develop new policies for using ICT in education systems and strengthen distance learning to ensure equitable and inclusive education, partnership with the private sector must respect the Right to Education.



## ACCESSIBILITY

(All-encompassing, Free-of-charge, Ensure reaching the education institutions safely, Assured attendance, Parental freedom of choice, Discriminatory denials of access, Preferential access, Criteria for admission, Recognition of foreign diplomas)

The UN General Assembly recommends that Member States ensure access to education in emergency situations to all affected populations, in accordance with their obligations under international law and without discrimination of any kind.

In the forefront, it is necessary to place the now hidden and socially devalued pillar of teaching, with our teachers as subjects, so that they can have a solid cultural and pedagogical formation to be the central engine for socialization, creation of shared educational environments and cooperatives. In this sense, it is mandatory to guarantee job stability, salaries and security for these professionals.

It is also necessary to develop actions to combat discrimination and inequalities inside and outside schools, with anti-discrimination and protection policies, especially in relation to the poorest families, victims of violence and inequality, as is the case of black and indigenous families and also of women.

In order to ensure that this restructuring is carried out in a responsible manner that respects the quality of education and all basic rights, we also call for the involvement of the entire school community: families, students, education professionals, as well as regulatory bodies and education secretariats. Providing clear guidance on parameters for decision making on school openings (with what to do and also what not to do) is mandatory and must be done with democratic participation.

At this time, it is necessary to fight against discrimination, which may arise not only due to disparities in access to education that occurred during the pandemic process, but also due to social disparities and access to basic services.



## AVAILABILITY

(Minimum standards, Respect of diversity, Language of instruction, Orientation and contents, School discipline, Rights of learners)

How to manage the over-sized classes to keep safe distance and to maintain social distancing during the school day? To decentralize the education system and give power to local authorities.

In this situation of emergency and lockdown, we believe that the measures taken must be flexible. Thus, it is necessary to make the school calendar more flexible, to propose complementary activities that ensure the involvement of families and the school community.

Many systems are obsessed with grades and results, rather than education for a decent life. But now, it is time for pedagogy. The experience of the crisis invites us to rethink the time, spaces and resources that we have. Another lesson is that it is necessary to slow down. Schools need to accommodate teaching-learning processes to learners' needs. It is also necessary to re-adapt educational processes to take into account cultural specificities and the inter-connectivity of disciplines. Furthermore, school re-opening presents an opportunity to energize dialogue, conversation, critical thinking as basic pedagogical tools that will yield autonomous learners. Autonomous learners are learners equipped with the tools and knowledge that they can use to improve their own lives. It is time to improve the relational dimension of education by experimenting with democracy, where deliberative dialogues and joint-agreements are central. Thus, it is imperative to strengthen the community and the democratic sense of the school, giving families and students their space of collective responsibility in the common goods of education, making the current channels of participation more effective and creating others.

We know that one of the major problems we have been facing since the closure of schools is the fact that countless children depend on school feeding as a basic source of food. The education and social assistance authorities must create flexibility in the distribution of food, implementing as a preferred execution strategy the preparation of food kits to be distributed directly at the students' homes or collected at school units by one of the family members, on days and times to be defined in advance to avoid agglomerations and risks of contagion, ensuring universal service to all students enrolled at schools. These kits should preferably be composed of fresh and minimally processed foods, seeking to maintain the weekly supply of portions of fruits, vegetables, tubers and roots, with preference to those of greater durability. The acquisition of foodstuffs from

family farming should be prioritized and maintained, prioritizing local purchase and existing contracts with food suppliers, including those from family farming, which can be adapted to make the individualized distribution of food kits viable. It is also mandatory to follow recommendations of the Milan Pact.

School reopening must be safe and consistent with each country's overall COVID-19 health response, with all reasonable measures taken to protect students, staff, teachers and their families. One must consider epidemiological factors, public health and healthcare capacities, population density and adherence to social distancing in each region before opening schools. The school reopening may need to be progressive and staged, beginning in areas with the lowest rates of transmission and lowest localized risk. Those regions that do not comply with these adjustments need to invest in improvements before opening schools.

In order to ensure that this restructuring is carried out in a responsible manner that respects the quality of education and all basic rights, we also call for the involvement of the entire school community: families, students, education professionals, as well as regulatory bodies and education secretariats. Providing clear guidance on parameters for decision making on school openings (with what to do and also what not to do) is mandatory and must be done with democratic participation.

In each education and school network, it is important to elect standards of capacity of the school to maintain safe school operations to mitigate risks, such as social distancing (i.e. size of classroom compared to number of students); and water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and practices. For school networks that do not meet these standards, it is mandatory that authorities provide conditions before opening schools.

Still, it is necessary to guarantee a greater amount of school transport for children, in order to maintain the social distance between them and in relation to the professionals who work in this essential service. For transport services that do not meet these standards, it is mandatory that authorities provide conditions before opening schools.

It is also mandatory to resume school feeding policies, especially of fresh (in natura) and organic products, which may have been out of supply during the lockdown period, giving priority to buying from small producers of agro-ecological family farming.

We stress the possibility of organizing timetables that make it possible to compensate for school hours, as well as supervised activities that can be carried outside school hours, as has already been done for students who are experiencing situations in which their health conditions do not allow them to attend school, and for those who could not attend distance learning because of lack of means.

There is no «learning loss», considering that education is the appropriation of culture, and each subject does it in its own way. Thus, the implementation of large-scale assessments is not an adequate way to level students back to school, as it does not guarantee reliable results, in addition to deepening discrimination. It is necessary to return to the classes from where they were left, deepen the contents and establish a contextualized education, which strengthens a welcoming teacher-student relationship and addresses the experience that subjects involved in the educational process went through during the lockdown period.

It is also necessary to provide psychosocial, nutritional and medical care and reception services to students and education professionals.

## ADAPTABILITY

(Children with disabilities, Working children, Street children, Refugee children, Children deprived of their liberty, Quranic schools children)

School re-openings should take into consideration the needs of the most vulnerable groups. Their specific needs should be addressed by States policies, reforms and allocation of adequate funding.

Similarly, the guarantee of the right to life and health of girls and boys deprived of their liberty (in the socio-educational system) cannot be neglected. Due to the high transmissibility index of COVID-19, it will certainly lead to a significant increase in the risk of contagion in socio-educational units (prisons), taking into account factors such as not allowing overcrowding, ensuring the salubrity of these units and compliance with minimum hygiene and sanitation procedures, rapid isolation of symptomatic individuals and sufficient health teams. It is also recommended to apply preferentially the socio-educational measures in an open environment (Assisted Freedom and Community Service) and review the decisions that determined lockdown.

At first, it is also necessary to keep higher-risk groups away, such as the elderly and those with underlying medical conditions.

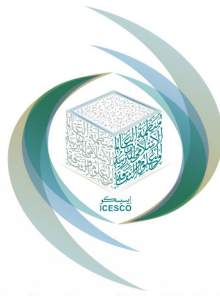
## WELL-BEING, MENTAL HEALTH

There is a need to provide psychosocial support to the chain of actors in education and build resilient systems in emergencies.

Consideration should be given to the need to planning measures that will take into account the long-term emotional and psychological repercussions of Covid-19 containment measures. It should be noted that health issues in the educational environment have been neglected in the past for reasons of austerity and budget cuts. During and after this pandemic, States will have to put mental health issues forward in their policies and provide services, tips and resources to support students and teachers' mental health during and post the COVID-19 due to the exceptional situation, stress and fear that they went through.

Islamic values focus heavily on human mental health and reassurance. Therefore, spreading the Islamic values among students and teachers is essential to enhancing the human capacity to face disasters and crises.





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