

DECLARATION OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF EDUCATION OF THE CENTRAL AMERICAN EDUCATION AND CULTURE COORDINATION (CECC) OF THE CENTRAL AMERICAN INTEGRATION SYSTEM FACING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

April 16 of 2020

The Ministers of Education of the Central American Education and Culture Coordination (CECC) of the Central American Integration System (SICA), facing the critical situation in the Educational Systems of the region, generated by the COVID-19 Pandemic

DECLARE

That, it is of the highest convenience to act with a common vision and some common strategies to continue attending to the situation while the pandemic lasts and to prepare for the return to the classrooms, when deemed appropriate. Sharing and exchanging criteria, instruments, tools and resources with each of the Ministries of Education of the countries will allow promoting actions and saving energy on tasks that can be assumed collaboratively, within the framework of the spirit that encourages regional integration.

That, it is necessary to recognize the engagement of teachers in the region, who are developing various tasks both face-to-face and remotely, to the extent that their possibilities of action allow them.

That, in order to achieve the aforementioned objectives, the Council of Ministers agrees on the implementation of a **Contingency Plan** that has been prepared under the following principles:

1. The commitment to safeguard the **right to Life, to Health, to a Healthy Diet and to Education** of all the children and youngsters of the SICA region.
2. The political will, particularly to attend to the needs of those who live in conditions of vulnerability due to various factors with special attention to indigenous and disabled people, in such a way that the motto assumed by all becomes effective: "that no one be left behind."
3. Making the best use of the installed capacities of the Ministries of Education, to set up operational technical teams to coordinate and drive the implementation of the **Contingency Plan**, under the general coordination of the Executive Secretariat of the CECC.

That, the Council of Ministers instructs the Executive Secretariat of the CECC – within the framework of its own duties – to take the pertinent measures to implement the **Contingency Plan** with the following lines of work:

1. Permanent update and exchange of information, of good practices and of lessons learned among the Ministries of Education of the region:

- By establishing a systematic mechanism to share criteria and disclose initiatives, lessons learned in current circumstances.
- Offer continuity for the exchanges among the Ministries through online sessions.
- By carrying out an inventory of the actions that are being executed by the Ministries of Education that provide a rapid response capacity to teachers and students, to attend to the educational and learning needs, as well as those of adequate food and nutrition of students in order to continue learning under the circumstances of the COVID-19 emergency.
- Provide common tools to the countries to review many educational policies that need to be updated, which has been highlighted by the circumstances of the Pandemic. In particular i. those related to the modes and formats of distance education and those related to educational backgrounds and the strengthening of technologies and connectivity for education; ii. those related to the review of legal and regulatory frameworks that allow flexibility to have appropriate responses to critical situations, in the expectation of foreseeable intermitencies in the continuity of face-to-face schooling.

2. Strengthen the distance pedagogy resources of the Ministries of Education of the region to supplement face-to-face schooling:

- By designing a mechanism to share capabilities and enhance the use of virtual resources available in each country in the region, taking as a starting point the creation of a regional inventory of those resources. In the framework of the adjustment to the diversity of cultural views that are recognized in the region, including linguistic diversity.
- Through the training of teaching staff in methodologies associated with this type of resources, enhancing their capability in the use of technologies related to student learning.
- Through the design of a similar mechanism to share the capabilities and enhance the use of educational radio and television available in each country of the region, taking as starting point the creation of a regional inventory of those resources.
- Through the training of teaching personnel in these resources in order to prepare them and enhance their capability to interact in intermittent situations in the continuity of the face-to-face school system.
- Take steps before the competent international organizations to obtain the technical contributions they can offer for the situation that the Education Systems of the region are facing in this regard.
- Strengthen the processes initiated by the Ministries of Education to ensure the healthy diet of the students seeking to guarantee a wholesome state of health before the critical factors due to COVID-19

- Prepare an ample development Project of Online Learning Resources for the region with the sponsorship of international cooperation entities. Including continuing the conversations to extend connectivity and the endowment of technological equipment to the country school networks. As well as other types of printed materials that can be widely disseminated both for students as well as for teachers.

3. Share criteria and initiatives for preparing the return to classes, including reopening and the safe operation of education centers:

- By organizing activities of various kinds to share criteria and achieve, as far as possible, common criteria to face a school year with absolutely unique pointers. One aspect to highlight is the organization of activities for the analysis and options on the duration of the 2020 school year, by the Ministers of the region, as well as other aspects, such as curricular rethinking, evaluation of learning and promotion, among others.
- Through activities that - taking advantage of the situation - are aimed at agreeing on the design of a "Curriculum in the emergency" with some characteristics such as the following:
 - o Regional agreement and collective construction of an interdisciplinary learning model by projects, taking as reference aspects of the COVID-19 Pandemic. In this way, the basic competences in the different areas of the curriculum could be strengthened at each corresponding level.
 - o Regional agreement and joint action for the adoption of special strategies in the return to classes, under the concept of "Dosed Curriculum", considering as a priority: i. the socio-emotional containment of the students; ii. the reinforcement at all levels of the "basic skills" for learning, which will have deteriorated during the recent period; iii. Training in Citizenship aimed at articulating actions of all sectors and actors to face situations derived from critical moments, with the elements provided by the concept of "Live Culture"; iv. In the general framework of cultural relevance, that requires the inclusion of all the students and the respect for the diversity of cultures and languages in the countries.
 - o Analyze and implement special criteria in the methodological aspects required for a year with the present characteristics.
 - o Strengthening the educational community, for the relations among teachers, students and families, as well a closer relationship with higher education institutions to strengthen the teachers' capabilities and research.
 - o Develop early warning mechanisms to pay special attention to preventing school exclusion, which could have special characteristics as a consequence of the ongoing crisis.
- Define together special technical criteria for the comprehensive evaluation of students, taking into account the conditions of the school year due to COVID -19, above all, respecting their right to continue learning and to be affected as little as possible in an irregular year by the conditions already known. Promoting experiences that some countries have already developed.

- Define the criteria, also, to properly articulate the end of the current school year with the following year, which involves issues such as the dosage of the curriculum and promotion procedures. We must pay particular attention to the exit profiles, which will demand particular attention to the moments of transition from level to level, including the end, which could require a better link with higher education institutions.
 - For the systematization of lessons learned in the implementation of school nutrition programs during the crisis, an important supplementary aspect in education.

4. Explore together possible cooperation relations with the international organizations

- Try to obtain technical and financial cooperation from international organizations for supporting the actions to be performed in the framework of the lines of the Contingency Plan, from the perspective of regional integration.
- In the context of this crisis, explore with the cooperation organizations and with private enterprise, the possibilities of improving the technological infrastructure and connectivity both of the Ministries of Education as well as of the education system, urgently in the short term and for the future.

5. Pool some of the technical capacities of the Ministries of Education

- Set up, under the coordination of the SE-CECC/SICA, technical teams for the implementation of each one of the agreed points. These teams will be made up of two or three competent professionals from the Ministries of Education of the Region.

6. Authorize the temporary moratorium (for the year 2020) for complying with paragraph 7 of article 25 of the Central American Agreement on the Basic Unification of Education, after consulting with the Foreign Affairs Ministries of each country, as corresponds.

- Given that the health need to maintain social distance will prevent concentrating the students in their classrooms for a considerable time, it is impossible to fulfill during the present year 2020 with an annual course of 200 face-to-face days, as established by the Central American Agreement on the Basic Unification of Education (Article 25 paragraph 7). Therefore, the Central American Education and Culture Coordination (CECC) of the Central American Integration System (SICA), authorizes for the member states an exemption for this one time (academic year 2020) from compliance with said provision. Thus, we can make prevail the right to life and health of the students, rights threatened by the COVID 19 pandemic, and the best interests of the minors belonging to the national educational communities.

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