

# What have we learned from the field about the successes and challenges of re-opening schools?

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Global Health  
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International Association for  
**Adolescent Health**

# Background to the survey

- In many countries, by the beginning of May 2020 **schools had closed in haste** as part of lockdown measures
- COVID-19 had spread through Asia, was particularly rife in Europe but only just penetrating Africa and the Americas
- The value of this survey was to collect perspectives from professionals in the field – **first-hand accounts** of whether/how schools were re-opening in different countries and the successes and challenges of making this happen



# Survey response



- Access to guidance (20)
- No access (22)
- Schools still open (1)

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# Three fundamental questions...

- How were health and education professionals in the field **cop**ing with the process of school reopening?
- How were health and education professionals in the field **making sense of the guidance that had been issued**, in the context of wider public education and public health measures implemented nationally?
- What were the **main concrete enablers, obstacles and solutions** for school reopening?



# How were health and education professionals coping with the situation?

- There was a **fear of infection** reported among staff and parents
- Within the prevailing language of **war against the virus**, there had not been national debate about risk and benefit of reopening schools
- **Mental health problems** were reported

*We should be very cautious before re opening of schools.  
Safety of students is the most important. [Jordan\*]*

*The language of the pandemic so far has been in terms of a war against the virus and the population in general is still in fear of personal risk as there is no vaccine and no treatment. [England]*

*Staff that are vulnerable stay at home, as well as students.  
Some schools have to deal with anxiety amongst parents,  
that are scared to send their children to school.  
[The Netherlands]*

*Recognize staff at their fair value, because they are exhausted and sometimes discouraged. [France]*



# Concern about widening inequalities

*“In most LAC countries, the economic crisis following lock-down will prevent many families that are already stressed from sending kids back to school, they will enter the informal market. Particularly secondary school age adolescents.”*  
*[Latin America & the Caribbean\*]*

*“Low economic standards and lack of funds for education for the past decade have resulted in vast social differences between families, or even schools. The majority of schools lack the necessary infrastructure to cope with such a crisis. Even more, children with special needs or educational disabilities of any type seem that are even more left behind now.”* [Greece]

*“Only about 50% of urban households have internet, and about a quarter have a computer at home. If there is no access to computer, online education is conducted through cell phones using WhatsApp. This has some limitations.”*  
*[India\*]*



# How were professionals making sense of the guidance that had been issued?

- Authorship: the majority showed **health advisers in a leading role** (10 joint health / education; 5 health-led; 3 not specified; 1 education-led; 1 security council-led)
- **Two-stage** translation process & creative communication
- **Variation in autonomy** to implement guidance according to context

*The central government have set up the guidelines, which were then modified/adapted and implemented by the Victorian Premier... Each school communicates with the parents of the students. [Australia]*

*It will be important to maintain flexibility and modify approaches as needed, and to ensure learning and sharing of good practices. [Republic of Moldova\*]*

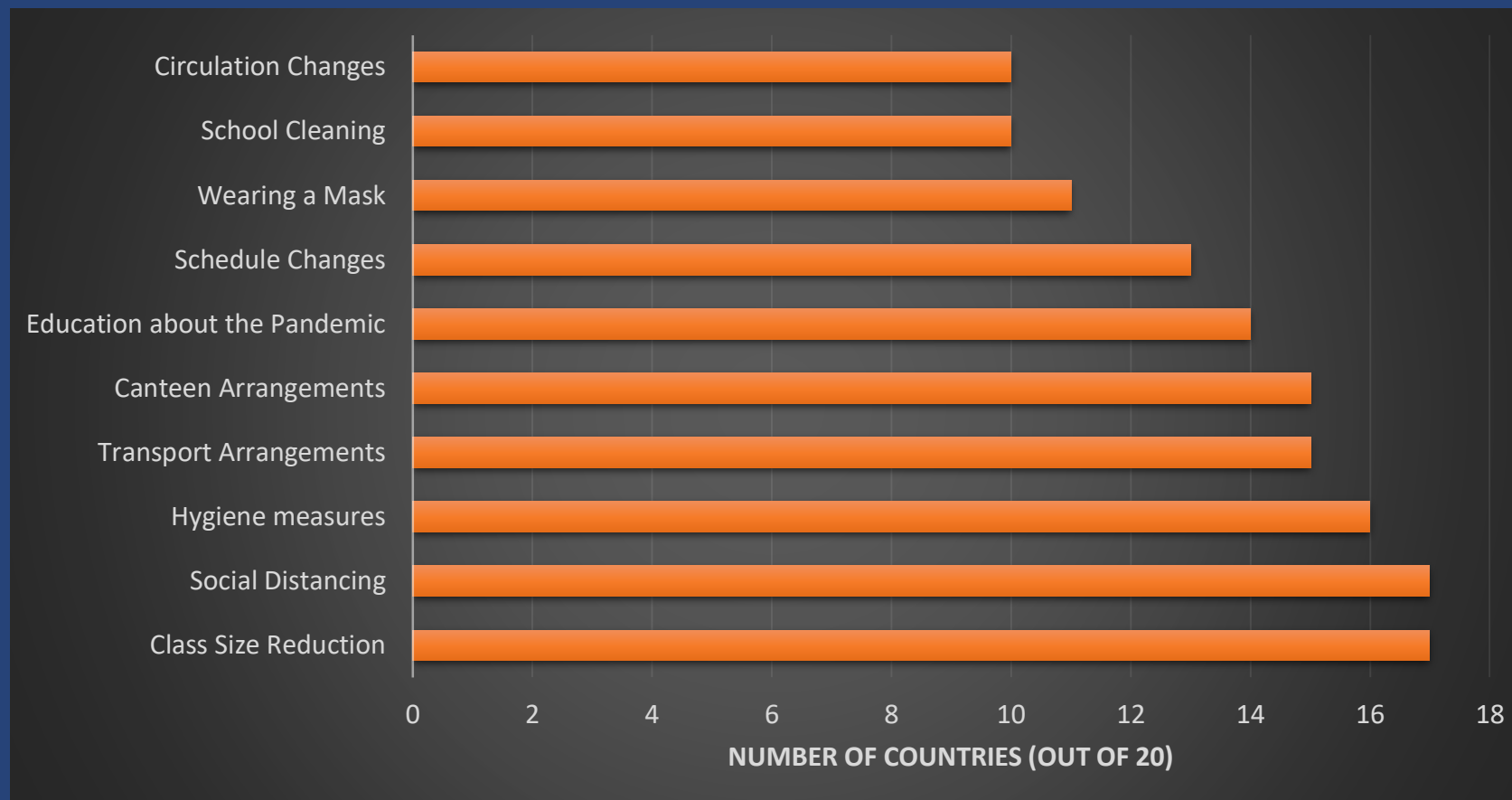
*Communication, meetings, training are conducted online and through the radio station of the DepEd regional and division offices. [The Philippines]*

*There is absolutely no freedom to deviate from the set guidelines. [Namibia]*





# Elements of the guidance



- Physical distancing strategies and hygiene measures most often cited
- External services e.g. school transport were included
- Education provided to students about the pandemic included hand washing, social distancing and the nature of the virus



# What were the enablers, obstacles and solutions for school reopening?

- **Co-operation** between school teams, local authorities and families
- **Consistent and timely information**, backed up by resources & equipment
- **Awareness** of the education system and school constraints

*“The political commitment of communities. The creative spirit of teachers and principals. The preparation and anticipation time granted beforehand. The partnership between families and teachers to reflect together on the conditions for recovery. The provision of inspiring and guiding resources. Times of exchange of practice between establishments.” [France]*

*“Increased disinfection procedures. Managing social distancing in a classroom context (some districts are considering rotating half or fewer students through classrooms on designated days so desks can be spread out). Communicating with parents. Managing school meal programs... Managing mental health issues for students and staff. Keeping staff safe with multiple opportunities for exposure. Finding personal protective equipment for staff.” [USA]*

# How can we adapt for the future?

- Time to consider new approaches to **create resilience**
- Time to introduce **wellbeing topics** that might have been overlooked
- A **new type of teaching professional** could emerge

*Develop a real program around executive and communication skills (not the use of the internet but knowing how to communicate with others) for the children of today so that the adults of tomorrow can better cope collectively with the crises of all orders that they will inevitably live through. [France]*

*We must take advantage of the circumstance to introduce other essential themes to pupils through non-formal education: meditation, death, mourning, the meaning of life, philosophy seen as a way of life, to be happy and useful to his community and to the world. These themes have been neglected for too long, in favour of other issues ... [Haiti\*]*

*We need more funds, better educated teachers with better working conditions... including distance teachers with full professional rights, guaranteed working hours and earnings and more research on how contemporary education with the use of ICT should be: less paper, new content, new curricula. [Greece]*



# Reflections

- Guidance available for re-opening schools prioritises health and hygiene measures
- Co-operation between local stakeholders is vital for success
- Scarce mention of local health providers
- Concern about widening inequalities, including availability of guidance
- Availability of resources is variable
- Sharing of good practice is needed about closing and re-opening



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