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PRACTICAL GUIDE TO BLENDED/REMOTE LEARNING AND CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
EMIS	Education Monitoring Information System
GC4	General Comment 4 (CRPD)
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IEP	Individualized Education Plan
ODL	Open and Distance Learning
OPD	Organization of persons with disabilities
TV	Television
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDE

This guide was created by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in response to the situation created by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in 2020. However, it is applicable as well to other circumstances when blended or remote learning might be necessary, including during emergencies. It focuses on providing **support to ALL children, particularly children with disabilities within inclusive settings.**

In this guide, two terms will be used frequently:

1. Blended learning is an approach to education that combines (i.e., blends) traditional face-to-face classroom practices with online materials and interactions. Blended learning requires the teacher and student(s) to be present simultaneously, and it is a planned/controlled event. The term "hybrid learning" can also be used to describe this approach.

2. Remote learning occurs when the teacher and students are separated by time and distance and there is no interface between the two, but the teacher is still in control of the learning. Remote learning typically occurs during emergency situations.

These two terms differ from **distance learning**, which is a highly planned and controlled approach to education in which the student is in control of the learning process. In

distance learning, there is no expectation that the student and teacher will interact; content can be delivered via paper packets, radio, television (TV) or online. **Distance learning is not a focus of this guide.**

This practical guide to delivering blended or remote learning and support services was created to support school directors, teachers and other professionals in making decisions that ensure children from vulnerable populations – particularly children with disabilities – continue to receive education and associated services even when schools are physically closed. Therefore, in the sections below this guide will discuss:

1. The assumptions about inclusive education that are at the core of this guide.

2. What should happen before remote or blended education is implemented.

3. The basic concepts behind remote or blended education.

4. What education and school leaders/decision-makers should know and do in the event that remote or blended education becomes necessary.

5. What a teacher or service provider should know and do if their school is implementing remote or blended learning.

6. Suggestions on how to create more inclusive and equitable school systems upon return to school.

Across the world, children have asked us to reflect on the future of education and how we might take advantage of the mandatory pauses created by the pandemic to plan for more inclusive and equitable education everywhere. This practical guide does not promote an education system where children with disabilities are separated from their siblings and friends, but rather envisions education systems in which ALL children – without exception – have the same opportunities to participate in inclusive education.*

TO KNOW MORE ABOUT UNICEF AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

✔ Read the booklet 'Conceptualizing Inclusive Education and Contextualizing it within the UNICEF Mission' (available in Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian and Spanish) and watch the companion webinar.

✔ Read the booklet 'Legislation and Policies for Inclusive Education' (available in Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian and Spanish) and watch the companion webinar.

✔ Read the UNICEF Regional Teacher Training Package for the Europe and Central Asia Region (Introductory Module 'Linking Theory to Practice', Module 1 'Inclusive Education: Vision, Theory and Concepts', Module 2 'Working Together to Create Inclusive Schools' and Module 3 'Enabling Environments for Personalized Learning').

✔ Stay up to date with the work UNICEF does on inclusive education.

✔ Get involved in the Inclusive Education Initiative.

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* In this guide, inclusive education is defined as per the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities General Comment No. 4 (para. 10).

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ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

To ensure all children – especially children with disabilities, as well as children from other vulnerable populations – are able to access and participate in essential education and education-related services regardless of modality (in person, blended, or remote), governments must commit to equitable provision of services.

The following assumptions are essential to equitable, inclusive solutions:

1. Education systems have the responsibility to provide quality learning opportunities equitably to **all** students, particularly the most marginalized, such as learners with disabilities.

2. Regardless of the specific contexts and circumstances within which education systems operate, they will prioritize the development of conditions (such as capacity, resources, equipment, technology, curricula and others) that enable access and participation in mainstream, inclusive education for all students, particularly the **most vulnerable students.**

3. Findings from research indicate that **parents cannot and should not replace teachers** while children are accessing blended/remote learning. Ministries, municipal officials, school administrators and teachers remain responsible for providing adequate responses to **all** learners and tailoring instruction to each student, although parents/caregivers are critical partners in education.

4. **If governments determine it necessary to make provisions in a blended or remote modality, assumptions 1, 2 and 3 will guide planning.**

5. At the first available opportunity, ministries of education will **work in close collaboration with other relevant line ministries, government officials and civil society (including organizations of persons with disabilities [OPDs]) to establish coordination mechanisms at various levels.** This may include: national multisectoral coordination to address policy, referral pathways, capacity development, Internet connectivity and provision of devices, etc.; district-/municipal-/community-level multidisciplinary teams of professionals who can assess, plan for, implement and monitor education programmes that target the most vulnerable populations; and school-level teams comprising teachers, specialists and families to assess, plan and support individual students.

WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN BEFORE BLENDED/ REMOTE LEARNING IS IMPLEMENTED

All education systems are responsible for providing education to all school-aged children. This is true whether education is being provided through traditional or non-traditional modalities. However, many difficulties that may be encountered while planning for blended or remote learning can be avoided by implementing a **few simple steps** well ahead of time.

2.1 Develop an inclusive education (or service) community

Inclusive education is an obligation of all governments that have signed/ratified the Convention on the

Governments must commit sufficient financial and human resources towards this goal.

According to the GC4, the core features of inclusive education are:

1. A '**whole systems**' approach: All resources are invested in advancing inclusive education, and toward introducing and embedding the necessary changes in institutional culture, policies and practices.

2. A '**whole educational environment**': Culture, policies and practices are introduced and embedded in the educational environment at all levels.

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