**RE-OPENING OF SCHOOLS ACROSS EUROPE**

**(AS AT 21 APRIL 2020)**

***Countries responding: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, England, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, The Netherlands, Norway, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia***

**AUSTRIA**

Although small retail was allowed to open last week, schools will remained closed until mid-May.

The reasons given are that children act as multiplicators and that social distancing would be unrealistic. But of course more children will be brought to school anyway when parents working in retail will go back to work.

So schools and kindergartens are open for daycare if needed but they don’t continue with the curriculum. In practice children in school-daycare need to follow their (online-)learning programme, which creates a strange situation in my view as teachers present will need to do some kind of teaching/guidance anyway.

**BELGIUM**

Belgian schools remain closed until at least 3 May. Still a new phase in the confinement schools has taken place: that of pre-teaching, offering new contents that will later be repeated. Officially schools are not closed and remain offering a place for children whose parents are working (and don’t have a solution).

They remain closed because there has been no significant shift in the measures (lockdown light, although some shops can re-open : garden centres etc).

There has been a lot of talks of reopening gradually the schools after 3 May. But it is already clear that they will not re-open massively at the same time (universities and university colleges continue online teaching for the rest of the academic year and are searching for solutions for the exam period with social distancing measures). There has also been talks in prolonging the school year, abolishing the exams (and grade with permanent evaluations’ systems – apparently the Brussels’ school group already decided to do so for secondary schools).

It is a bit trickier in Flanders, as education is a regional competence, while the national measures are national. It is expected that the National Security Council will dictate new measures regarding schools this Friday. Schools are preparing themselves with new ways of teaching (teaching only half the class, only half the courses…)

**BULGARIA**

In Bulgaria schools are still closed. This will be the situation until the state of emergency is in force (for now 13 May). There is a plan for reopening the schools as of 14 May, if the epidemic situation permits that.

In Bulgaria schools are functioning under the discretion of the Ministry of Education and Science. According to the announcement of the Minister, there will be no "zero" year. Classes are conducted online. Annual exams (matriculation exams) for all students will be postponed by a week or so.

Students with difficulties in education and those not covered by the online education (11%) will be studying in June and July.

Kindergartens are expected to open also after the state of emergency is ended at national level.

**CZECH REPUBLIC**

So far in Czech Republic schools are closed. Re-opening is planned at the end of May, but just for primary school, and so far a lot of issues are not clear (because the attendance of the pupils seem to be voluntary).

**ENGLAND**

In England, schools are not expected to reopen until June at the earliest following concerns the country could face a second wave of the virus. This follows reports that plans had been drawn up with three dates for schools to reopen: 11 May, 1 June or the start of September.

Separately it is reported two-thirds of children have not taken part in online lessons during lockdown, amid concerns many are struggling to learn at home. The Government is now taking steps to help children in disadvantaged households to have access to laptops etc to help them participate in online learning.

**FINLAND**

The Government of Finland has decided 20.3. 2020 that all pupils in basic education of classes 1-3 can also be, if in need, in contact education at schools. Recommendation anyhow is, that in contact education at schools are only those pupils whose parents are not able to keep their child in distance education due to their occupation or some other reason. The decision and recommendation is nationwide. The classes from 4-9(10) on basic education are all on distance education.

Contact education in basic education is arranged also to pupils in special need of education and to those who have lenghted duty/obligation of education.

Kindergartens are officially kept open, but the recommendation for parents is to keep children at home if possible, and most parents have done that if their work allows to work from home in distance work.

Nearly half of municipalities have now arranged school meals to those who want to have it, but in practices of these arrangements differ hugely between municipalities. The amount of students in contact learning is very small. All schools have arranged distance learning for pupils and students.

In vocational education, upper secondary education and in universities of applied sciences distance education is arranged.

So far it is meaning to reopen the schools for two last weeks in May, which is raising discussions right now.

**GERMANY**

Summary

Reopening of schools is being phased by school age: those grades that have critical exams (final exams or exams before switching to secondary schools or to a higher-level of education (ie. GCSE, A-level equivalent)). This is nationwide in regards to the decision that schools will open up again, but specificities up to the states (in total 16 states in Germany who are responsible for education).

Reasons for re-opening given in the press statements were child education (focus on those in critical exam periods/ last class of respective school level) and welfare of children (abusive homes, special needs etc.) as well as relief of working single-parents

Regarding special precautions to be taken this is still up for discussion. Most states need to have these discussions this week with the respective LGAs because the infrastructure (school buildings, transport to school etc.) is a competence of the local authorities. So I cannot give any concrete examples yet. The Academy of Science in Germany (Leopoldina) have made suggestions in their recent position paper (13th April 2020):

“The gradual normalization must be started with significantly reduced group sizes in order to better comply with the distance requirement. We recommend concentrating on core subjects (German and mathematics in primary school), which are taught in divided smaller groups in one class at different times. Learning groups must remain constant in order to reduce the risk of infection. A maximum group size of 15 students would be possible if large classrooms are available. The re-opening done in this way must be reliable for the parents. A staggered break regulation for the individual groups is necessary. The school playground must not become a virus exchange site.”

Detailed comments

Germany is a federal state and not in an emergency situation, so the federal government is still in an advisory function while the states take the final decision on what is concretely done as the competences lie with them.

The agreement between the federal government (Bundesregierung/ Chancellor Merkel) and the heads of government of the federal states (Ministerpräsidenten der Bundesländer) from 14th April includes the following paragraph:

“*Before opening kindergartens, schools and universities, a preliminary run is necessary so that the necessary preparatory measures can be taken on site and, for example, school transport can be organised. The school authorities, the transport authorities and the school community will be informed as early as possible*.”

Emergency care will be continued and expanded to other professions and groups in need.

Examinations and exam preparations for the final classes of this school year should take place again after appropriate preparations.

From 4th May 2020, priority will also be given to schoolchildren in the final classes and qualification-related classes of general and vocational schools who will take their exams in the next school year and the last class of primary school. The Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs [Länder level] will be commissioned to present a concept for further steps by 29th April on how lessons can be resumed under special hygiene and protective measures, especially taking into account the distance requirement due to reduced learning group sizes. In addition to the lessons, the breaks and school bus operations should also be taken into account. Every school needs a hygiene plan. The school authorities are called upon to create and permanently ensure the hygienic conditions on site.

The Federal Chancellor advises the heads of government of the federal states on the background of the development of the number of infections regarding the respective time of starting the classes and the care in kindergartens.

In addition to taking examinations, practical events that require special laboratory or work rooms at universities can be resumed in university teaching under special hygiene and protective measures. Libraries and archives can be opened subject to hygiene, control of access and avoiding queues.”

Concrete Examples from States:

***North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW):***

* The state government of NRW plans to reopen the secondary schools on 20th April for teachers and headmasters only to have three days in advance to create the organisational and all other necessary conditions for teaching to resume. From 23rd April 2020, the first school students should be able to go back to school to prepare for their exams and degrees.
* However, we as LGA have already requested to postpone that date to 27th April in order to take the appropriate preparations (deep cleaning of schools after 5 weeks of closure etc.).
* If the development of infection rates permits, the schools should be opened gradually from 4th May 2020 - initially for the students of grade 4, in order to prepare these children as well as possible for the upcoming switch to secondary schools in the summer.

***Bavaria***

* The state government of Bavaria decided to open Bavarian schools to pupils in the final grades of secondary and vocational schools from 27th April
* It is essentially limited to those classes which have important finals. (You can find the detailed listing here: <https://www.km.bayern.de/allgemein/meldung/6946/so-geht-es-an-den-schulen-in-bayern-weiter.html>)
* For reasons of health protection special framework conditions will apply. For example, half-class tuition should be carried out with 10 to 15 students in order to ensure a distance of at least 1.5 m between the students in the classrooms. In certain schools, a delayed start of school or shift work may be necessary. Special regulations are also drawn up for behaviour in the school building.
* For all other grades, including primary school classes, “learning at home” will continue until further notice. A further expansion of teaching operations - e.g. to grade 4 of the elementary school (when the switch to secondary schools is done in Bavaria (same as in NRW, but for many other states it is grade 6) or to the classes that will graduate next year - is currently only conceivable from 11th May at the earliest. This will be decided separately in the coming weeks.
* Emergency care continues.

**HUNGARY**

In Hungary it has been not considered to reopen the schools yet (it is the competence of the government). This will not happen until mid-May at earliest. There is a new decision by the Government regarding the final exams in secondary schools: they will happen between 3-5 May with restrictions: max 10 students in a room, more days for the exams, involving the police to implement these rules.

When the schools were closed (from 16th of March 2020), there was a big pressure on the Government from many sides (parents, teachers, and even from their own parliamentary group-which does not happen too often nowadays). Hungarian official information can be reached here: <http://abouthungary.hu/news-in-brief/coronavirus-heres-the-latest/>

**ICELAND**

Municipal schools (age 6-15), as well as kindergartens have been open in Iceland during the Covid-crisis with precautionary measures in place to limit the number of children that are together in the classrooms and play together.

Extensive testing here in Iceland has shown that there is very little risk for children under 12 years of age to get infected or infect others. Therefore it has been decided that from 4 May all restrictions on municipal schools and kindergartens will be lifted.

**ITALY**

As in England.

**LATVIA**

Schools are not reopened in Latvia. All level educational institutions starting from primary schools to universities have remained closed since 13 March when the emergency situation was announced and confinement measures were introduced. The study process is organized remotely in all levels.

However, preschools (for children under 6 years old) are operating on a reduced scale throughout emergency situation, average attendance is 7%

**MALTA**

The situation in Malta is quite under control however schools were the first to be closed and shall re-open in September. Obviously this is creating problems for working parents in fact the government is constantly updating incentives for parents who have to take unpaid leave to stay with the kids.

Incentives measures can be found on <http://www.maltaenterprise.com/>

**THE NETHERLANDS**

The schools in The Netherlands are still closed. The national government will take a decision about the prolongation of the lockdown on Tuesday 21 April. Reopening of the schools is one of the most important topics: employers and the Ministry for Education want to reopen the schools, teachers and trade unions are protesting against reopening, school directors are doubting… Therefore, there is very much attention in the Dutch press for the situation in Denmark, where schools have be reopened last week.

**NORWAY**

Norway will follow a step-by-step strategy where kindergartens open 20-27 April. Municipalities have a lot of flexibility to decide how this is done, and many have for example decided to reduce opening hours this week. After 27 April all children in kindergarten should in principle have the same hours as before the crisis, but if kindergartens do not feel safe about the measures that hinder spreading of the virus, they can consider to continue with reduced service.

School children on 1-4th grade, as well as most students on their final year, will get back to school on 27 April. The government has developed guidelines on how to reduce spreading of the virus and to ensure safety of both children and the staff. There is for example restrictions on group sizes. Government has developed one guideline for kindergartens, one for school grades 1-7 and one for secondary/upper secondary school. The plan is to get all children back to physical school before the summer.

Child education and welfare was the most important reason for opening the schools. However, some resistance among the parents remain, and some have decided not to send their children back to kindergarten or school.

**SERBIA**

In Serbia, schools and kindergartens are still closed. A state of emergency has been in force since 15 March; although some of the general lockdown measures have started to be less strict, for now the national Government considers that it is not time to open schools and kindergartens and that mitigation of measures and further actions will depend on the analyses of the epidemiological situation.

However, as some of the companies will start to work, like cafes, restaurants, craft shops and other shops with the limit of receiving 800 people, there will be problems for the parents regarding care for children.

**SLOVAKIA**

In Slovakia, schools have not re-opened. There is no particular reason, it is under discussion and a government measure in this area is expected to be published in the coming days.

There are two measures in force in the school area (from 15 April) allowing re-opening for secondary schools (students of last years) and Medical Universities (students of last years) :

* Graduation Measure (for secondary schools): The Public Health Authority of the Slovak Republic allows admission examinations (matriculation), completion of education at secondary schools and graduation examinations, final examinations, final postgraduate examinations and graduation examinations for full-time and part-time, subject to the following conditions…etc.
* The Office of Public Health of the Slovak Republic allows the completion of studies according to the relevant study program and state examinations only at medical colleges and universities, in full-time and part-time form of study, subject to the following conditions…etc.

Guidelines on enrolment / registration of children for compulsory education at the time of extraordinary school interruption (valid from 9 April):

* Primary school: enrollment in compulsory education at primary schools in the 2020/2021 school year will take place from 15-30 April 2020. Specific dates for enrolment are set by the founder, with enrolment being organized by schools without the personal participation of children. Writing can be done in several ways, or a combination of both: via the form, in paper or electronic form.
* Kindergarten: Applications for admission to pre-primary education for the 2020-21 school year will be submitted from 30 April to 31 May 2020. Applications for the adoption of a child will be organized without the personal presence of children; communication is recommended by electronic means, if the technical conditions allow, or in some other way depending on the space available of a specific nursery school with an emphasis on compliance with sanitary-epidemiological measures.

**SLOVENIA**

In Slovenia, for now, schools are not yet scheduled to reopen. The Government is not talking about any possible date of reopening. So far they stated that when schools will reopen, they will reopen for all students at once, and that that will happen only when medical/safety conditions will allow it. Today the government made public the decision that for the first time in 20 years, the national exam at the end of elementary school won’t take place this year.

Some relaxation, although very limited, of measures is slowly taking place (soon some shops will be able to reopen, the strictest measure so far is the prohibition of movement outside the municipality of residence – this is going to be relaxed only minimally tomorrow when owners of property will be able to tend to their property in a different municipality).