EXPECT the UNEXPECTED

Using Scenario Planning for Reopening Schools in Romania

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How you can use scenario planning to help governments develop robust strategies for immediate responses or mid-term recovery in times of deep uncertainty?

How Ministries of Education can effectively co-create solutions with stakeholders across the delivery chain, including frontline staff, students and parents to safely reopen and operate schools?
In June 2020, the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research (MER) was facing a challenging task: **how to bring children back to schools safely in September?**

- Schools had already been closed for 3 months due to Covid-19
- Economy was hit, parents needed to return to work
- ... but, Covid-19 cases started to be on a rise again

**Would the situation improve? Would kids start getting sick? Was it worth investing into containers? What plan to go for?**
Decision-makers around the world: no right set of answers!

Trade-offs based on country situation

• 1 out of 4 teachers in Romania is not ICT literate
• More than 900,000 kids do not have access to a proper learning devices
• Kids and parents also suffer from lack of ICT literacy

• 30% of schools operate in 2-3 shifts. Many schools are overcrowded especially in Bucharest.
• Around 14% of school buildings do not have sanitary authorization, 22% do not have an adequate water source, and 30% do not have indoor toilets.
Role of the General Secretariat of the Government in responding to the health pandemic

- **GSG: strategic management role**
- **GSG’s Policy Lab – space for testing innovations**
- **Pro-active role in mobilizing cross-sectoral evidence into the decision-making of the Education Ministry**

GSG-mobilized multidisciplinary expert panel

1. GSG Policy Lab expert
2. Education Ministry expert
3. Public Health Institute expert
4. ICT experts and teachers
5. School Inspectorate officials
6. Local administration official
7. Student
8. Parent
9. School manager
10. World Bank education expert
What is scenario planning? How to use it to future-proof your policy?

What plan to put in place?

- you already have the plan/policy ready and you will be testing it in different scenarios
- you want to use the scenarios to generate ideas for policy options

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy options</th>
<th>Scenario 1</th>
<th>Scenario 2</th>
<th>Scenario 3</th>
<th>Scenario 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Option 1</td>
<td>Robust</td>
<td>Robust</td>
<td>Modify</td>
<td>Robust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option 2</td>
<td>Redundant</td>
<td>Modify</td>
<td>Redundant</td>
<td>Redundant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option 3</td>
<td>Robust</td>
<td>Modify</td>
<td>Redundant</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

YOUR END PRODUCT

PRIMARY STRATEGY
Composed mainly of the no-regret options

CONTINGENCY STRATEGY
Scenario-specific options that you activate when certain future starts to happen
How do you build the scenarios

1. Research and map the drivers of change
2. Select the two key uncertainties
3. Create the scenario matrix and develop scenarios of what the future may look like
4. Generate and test the policy options against scenarios
5. Write up the report with scenarios and policy options
We started the process: expectations were high...

We need a clear vision of what needs to be done and the budget. The procurement cannot happen overnight.” – local administration

“We want to benefit from the experience of those who work in schools and inspectorates... to start building on the alternatives that we deem feasible and useful, based on types of schools.” – Ministry of Education

“Students need concrete solutions, not only the superficial scenarios which were in the media.” – parents

“We need to feel safe. Many want to return to school. - students
Public pressure on the Education Ministry to have a plan was mounting.
The expert panel identified 27 trends impacting positively or negatively on school reopening.

The expert panel voted on the two key uncertainties, as the most significant and at the same time uncertain trends in terms of how they would play out.

1. We started with the assignment from the MEC, to imagine

“What would the start of the academic year look like in September 2020 for primary and secondary students in urban and rural areas?”

The expert panel identified 27 trends impacting positively or negatively on school reopening.

2. The expert panel voted on the two key uncertainties, as the most significant and at the same time uncertain trends in terms of how they would play out.

Will the authorities get the schools ready? (with sanitary and social distancing safeguards; also with the ability to deliver the classes online if needed?)
Scenario matrix: combinations of the alternatives of the two key uncertainties:

- schools are ready/not ready;
- the second wave of Covid-19 is marked by its presence/the second wave is strong and leads to school/city/region or whole-country lockdowns).
For each scenario, the experts created a catchy title, a picture, and a story depicting the future in fall 2020 if this scenario were to materialize.

Specific personas (a teacher, parent, student, and how their lives would be impacted in each of the scenarios) were included.

Maria, 50
Primary school teacher, Piatra Neamț
September 2020

I have 38 children in my class. It is not possible to bring them all to school, because the number of Covid-19 cases keeps rising here. I am trying to teach some classes online, but it is really hard with the small children. I feel that I am not giving them any skills, in particular in such an important time in their early development.

Even with some children staying at home, the school still feels overcrowded. There are no masks for teachers or students; there are no sanitary gels at the already poorly looking toilets.

I have a computer at home and can access digital materials, but preparing the online classes is such a burden. I am not very good with the computer or speaking on the camera. So I fear someone could record me and post it online.

I feel truly abandoned during this period. I try to talk to my colleagues to get some emotional support, but there are days when I am also thinking of quitting my job. Some colleagues my age got sick, so why take the risk.

Alina, 17
Highschool student, Iași
September 2020

I am a 11th grader in a central high school in Iași and I just stepped in this new learning journey: being a high school student in COVID-19 era. I have to tell you I was very scared at first, but now I see it as a challenge for me to rediscover the beauty of learning.

I wake up everyday at 7:00 - now I can sleep more because the municipality has put in place new means of transportation that are special for the school students. We now have free transportation and new buses that are clean. The buses are used only for our transportation to our schools. Everyone has its seat and the bus doors are covered with posters through which you can learn more about the measures for protection against COVID-19.

There are some downsides, of course. Our classes are now smaller, they became learning groups that are half the size they used to be. I miss having all my friends around, but at least we can all be together at the online lessons in the afternoon. In the morning, we are at school doing exercises and talking with the teacher about our needs and in the afternoon we learn what we were supposed to learn in springtime, when schools were closed. It is not boring at all because we use interactive videos and we debate a lot through media channels.

I love taking notes using my new laptop. Everyone in my class has one and we have new folders for every school subject. The teachers can review our homework and grade it directly through the platform.

ROMANIA IS LEARNING!

COVID-39 – SCHOOLS WITHOUT CHILDREN
The Plan...
Plan for reopening schools co-created in scenario workshops

**GUIDING PRINCIPALS**

1. Control of the infection spread in the community
2. Young children and children with special needs need face-to-face courses
3. Need to comply with Public Health institute recommendations
4. Compensate for learning loss and support vulnerable

**STRATEGIC OPTIONS for learning approach**

A. **IN-PERSON**
   - all children,
   - physical distancing (1.5 m)
   - one shift, staggered program
   - shorter time in school
   - 1 student group = 1 classroom

B. **HYBRID**
   - secondary level students rotate at 1 or 2 weeks,
   - webcam in the class

C. **ONLINE**
   - connectivity, devices,
   - affordability, education content, mode of delivery

**PLAN**

1. Immediate steps for reopening
2. Recommendations for mid-term plan (resilient, fair, high-quality education system)
One size does not fit all – flexibility of the approach

STANDARDS: IN-PERSON LEARNING

- Do your classrooms have a physical distance of 1.5m between students? (In classroom of 50 sqm up to 25 students; 2.25 sqm for each child to ensure 1.5m spacing)
- Are the classes taught in 1 shift? (1 class of students = 1 classroom)
- Is the triage at school performed mainly by specialized medical staff or qualified volunteer replacements?
- Does your school have adequate toilets and dispensers with hand sanitizer; sufficient washbasins inside and outside the school building?
- Is the school attendance limited to 6 hours, with delayed schedule for coming to and leaving?
- Is at least one of the hours held outdoors?
- Do you ensure the classrooms are regularly aired (by opening windows)?
- Do your staff and students (except for preschoolers) wear a mask and do you ensure the rule is observed?

STANDARDS: DIGITAL LEARNING

- Do all children have adequate digital devices for a quality online educational process (chromebooks or laptops), with special attention to the vulnerable groups?
- Did all your teachers attend a digital skills course of at least 2-3 weeks before the reopening of schools and have a suitable digital device for use at home and in the classroom?
- Is adequate communication infrastructure (minimum 4G LTE) installed in all classrooms?
- Are all classrooms equipped with interactive displays with webcam and the possibility of live streaming?
- Are e-learning platforms and tools Management System, Authoring tools and other digital tools used regularly?
- Is the digital content for all subjects (language of national minorities, medium term)?
- Is the digital content elaborated a curriculum and audited by the Ministry?
- Are all teachers and students trained and devices? Are parents instructed?

“My school does not meet the hygienic standards to open. What should I do?”
## Plan for reopening schools co-created in scenario workshops

### SHORT-TERM MEASURES (in-person/hybrid/digital)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>In-person</th>
<th>Hybrid</th>
<th>Online</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assess school readiness to reopen using the updated SIIIR data (next school year) on enrollments, school infrastructure, utilities and facilities (school capacity, room area, sanitary conditions, etc.)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapt the school program for one shift only</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize corridors, signal and mark spaces for physical distancing</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize the space to ensure triage and hygienic-sanitary measures</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrange the furniture, determine the place of each student</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inform parents about the new rules and ask for agreement to bring children to school</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Purchase temporary solutions located in the school yard or rent spaces in appropriate buildings with adequate furniture to accommodate additional classrooms</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide each school with specialized staff and equipped medical offices, adequate triage spaces and sanitary and additional spaces where appropriate, including for children with disabilities;</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruit additional teaching staff (fixed-term employment) to ensure traditional and online teaching, and support and administrative staff (cleaning, maintenance, mediators, counselors, caregivers)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor teaching activities in the classroom, student and teacher attendance</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor, through SIIIR, all COVID cases for both students and teachers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

### MEDIUM-TERM MEASURES

- Increase education budget
- Greater autonomy to principals in the use of resources
- Retrofit school buildings at seismic risk
- Use modular space where needed
- Modernize school buildings
- Foster positive school climate
GSG and Education Ministry experts got certified in running a scenario planning exercise

Online course and experiential learning

Examples of trends:

**Trends driving change of future in reopening schools (selected examples):**
- Virus fatigue is greater than expected and a score not fixed yet.
- Parents who return to work face increasing difficulties in keeping their children at home while schools are closed, especially the younger ones.
- The cost of all packages increases daily, as requests are mounting from all sectors of the economy, including for education purposes (large cost of moving to digital learning and building capacity for teachers, children, and parents).
- The solution to the pandemic forces some parents to stay at home, leading to a loss of well-paid (difficult for getting back commuting and determination of labor market).
- The technology drive is increasing as all households, and children can access the basic technology for learning school material.

**Trends driving change of future in healthcare service provision (selected examples):**
- More health services provided virtually.
- Patients take greater responsibility for their health and treatments.
- More access to medical care in the community.
- More specialized diagnostic and treatment facilities.
- Hospitals provide only for the richest or those with most complicated needs.
- Health and social care provides assistance to patients, providers, and family.
- Increased use of technology for health care monitoring and communication.
- Continual government involvement in regulating health care markets.

**Example of expert panel composition:**
- What is the topic of your event?
- Reopening schools?
- Teaching equality?
- Healthcare provision?

**Question 8:**
Which of the following is a no-regret move, robust across all scenarios?
Select the correct option(s) and then select SUBMIT.

- A. What would be the first of the scenarios (September 2020, students look the in both urban and rural areas)?
- B. Which of the three issues look like to humans in 2020 in different social settings?
- C. Which of the health care sessions be provided in humans in 2020?
So, which of the futures took place?

Were the authorities ready?
Education and health authorities issued guidelines for reopening

- The recommendations of the scenario panel were taken into consideration, further expanded with details for operationalization at different levels of schools (few exceptions, e.g. social distancing for 1m vs. the 1.5 recommended; or using plexiglass vs. reducing the number of shifts or pupils per class).

### Epidemiological triggers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk level</th>
<th>Number of new Covid-19 cases in locality</th>
<th>Learning approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **GREEN** | Less than 1 case per 1000 inhabitants in 14 days | **IN-PERSON** for all students  
- physical distancing (1 m between desks)  
- splitting classes, staggered program,  
- shorter time at schools  
- assigned seats |
| **YELLOW** | 1-3 cases per 1000 inhabitants in 14 days | **HYBRID**  
- kindergarten/primary: open  
- 8th and 12th grade will go to school  
- Secondary students rotate 1-3 weeks  
- Webcam in class |
| **RED** | More than 3 cases per 1000 inhabitants in 14 days | **ONLINE** only. Schools will be closed. |
Governance of application of the guidelines

**Ministry of Education and Research (MER) and Ministry of Health (MH) guidelines**

- School Boards in consultation with Association of Parents propose the learning approach
- MER endorses
- County Committee for Emergencies approves

**ASSESSMENT CRITERIA**

- Number of shifts at school
- Number of students in class
- Hygiene and sanitary conditions
- School transportation
- Number of Covid-19 cases in community
- Medical cabinet at school
- Students’ access to IT equipment, connectivity
- Teachers’ access to IT equipment, connectivity
- Additional spaces provided by local authorities and others
- IT specialist at school
- Online teaching resources

**Other standards:**

- wearing masks (not for preschoolers)
- uniflow on halls
- staggered program
- assigned seats
- bubble groups
- 1 meter rule
- cleaning between shifts
- hand-sanitizers
- free testing is provided for teachers and students in Bucharest
While most school reopened with in-person attendance, the number of those closing is rising.
Conclusion: What this means moving forward?
Going forward: Recovery plans – using scenario planning to navigate future opportunities for reform in times of deep uncertainty

- Scenario planning typically used for planning 10+ years ahead

- Replicability in various sectors

- Scenario planning – short-term horizon: 1 month to produce

- Scenario planning – mid/long-term time horizon: 4 months to produce

- Doable fully online


Thank you for your attention!