

HMDC Presents... UNESCO: Quick Guide

UNESCO: QUICK GUIDE

UNESCO, Harvard MUN Online, December 5-6, 2026: COVID-19 Education and Technology Gaps

WHAT WE ARE DEBATING

COVID-19 closed schools for most of the world's children in 2020 and 2021. Children with devices and internet kept learning, but many children without them stopped. Years later, many students have still not caught up, so our committee must decide how the world closes these gaps together.

WHAT OUR CHAIRS WILL FOCUS ON

The chairs want us to look at the learning gaps and the technology gaps that COVID-19 left behind. They will ask us to build plans for how governments can shrink those gaps "across countries." Our resolution should show what governments can do now, together. Phone bans and AI tutors are background only, so we give them one short clause at most.

FIVE NUMBERS TO REMEMBER

1. **463 million:** At least 463 million schoolchildren could not use any kind of remote learning. (UNICEF, August 26, 2020)
2. **1.3 billion:** About two-thirds of the world's school-age children had no internet at home. (UNICEF, November 30, 2020)
3. **70 percent:** In poorer countries, 70 percent of 10-year-olds cannot read and understand a simple text. (World Bank, June 23, 2022)
4. **18 percent:** Only 18 percent of 60 poorer countries had a clear plan to help students win back lost learning. (World Bank Blogs, June 28, 2023)
5. **273 million:** The out-of-school count has risen seven years in a row. (UNESCO, March 25, 2026)

WHAT THE UN HAS ALREADY DONE

1. **A/RES/70/1 (2015):** The General Assembly adopted the Sustainable Development Goals; Goal 4 promises quality education for all.
2. **A/RES/74/306 (2020):** The General Assembly set out one shared world plan to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. **A/HRC/RES/47/6 (2021):** The Human Rights Council said again that every child has a right to education, even during COVID-19.
4. **S/RES/2601 (2021):** The Security Council asked countries to keep schools going during wars, including through distance learning.
5. **A/RES/79/1 (2024):** The General Assembly adopted the Pact for the Future, which promises to close digital divides.

THE MAIN SOLUTIONS

1. **Connecting every school to the internet:** The UN program Giga maps and connects offline schools.
 - Help: We grow a program that already exists.
 - Harm: It costs about 428 billion US dollars, with little proof it raises learning.
2. **Using radio, TV and basic phones:** Teachers reach children with tools families already own.
 - Help: In Botswana, weekly texts plus short teacher phone calls raised maths learning for about 19 US dollars per child.
 - Harm: Texts alone did not work, because children need a real person guiding them.
3. **Teaching students at their real level:** Teachers group children by skill and teach what they missed.
 - Help: World Bank experts rated this a "Great Buy," because it is proven and cheap.
 - Harm: The world needs 44 million more teachers.
4. **Building free public learning websites:** Governments run their own free learning platforms.
 - Help: Governments control the lessons and protect children's data.
 - Harm: About one in three platforms built during the pandemic later stopped working.

WHERE THE MAJOR BLOCS STAND

1. **United States:** The United States is leaving UNESCO in December 2026, so its delegate will likely say no to new spending.
2. **China:** China wants the same rules for online learning in every country and learning websites that link together, with China helping to lead.
3. **European Union:** The EU wants online learning that includes every child, and it says the pandemic showed gaps in skills and school equipment.
4. **African Union:** African countries will ask for money and for help with their debts, because poorer countries spend about 60 US dollars per student while rich countries spend about 8,000.
5. **Group of 77 and China:** These developing countries want rich countries and companies to share technology and pay for internet building.

KEY WORDS IN OUR TOPIC

1. **digital divide:** When we say digital divide, we mean the gap between people with internet and devices and people without them.
2. **learning poverty:** When we say learning poverty, we mean 10-year-olds who cannot read and understand a simple text.
3. **learning loss:** When we say learning loss, we mean skills students missed because school stopped.
4. **homework gap:** When we say homework gap, we mean students who cannot do schoolwork at home because they have no computer or internet.
5. **remote learning:** When we say remote learning, we mean teaching students outside the classroom through internet, TV, radio or phone.
6. **connectivity:** When we say connectivity, we mean a working link to the internet.
7. **Teaching at the Right Level:** When we say Teaching at the Right Level, we mean grouping children by what they can do, not by age.
8. **bloc:** When we say bloc, we mean a group of countries that often speak and vote together.

QUESTIONS WE CAN ASK IN DEBATE

1. Who will pay the hundreds of billions of dollars needed to connect every school?
2. How will our plan reach children who have no internet at home today?
3. What will our plan do for girls and rural children who never came back to school?
4. If the United States leaves UNESCO, which countries or funds will fill the money gap?

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