

HMDC Presents... UNESCO: Part 2 (The United Nations)

HMDC Presents... UNESCO: COVID-19 Education and Technology Gaps (Research Report, December 2026)

Prepared for HMDC Forensics delegates attending Harvard Model United Nations Online, December 5-6, 2026. Every fact below comes from a page that was opened and read in October 2026. Each evidence entry names its publication and date so you can always see where a fact came from. Entries E42 to E52 were added in a third research round on October 14, 2026; they are placed in the section they support, so their numbers do not run in order.

WHAT OUR CHAIRS WILL FOCUS ON

Harvard says this UNESCO committee is about helping science grow around the world and helping countries work together on education. The October session looks at research and new technology in general, but our December session is narrower. In December, we will look at the learning gaps and the technology gaps that COVID-19 left behind, and we will be asked to build plans for how governments can shrink those gaps "across countries." Our resolution should therefore show what governments can do now, together, so that the children who fell behind during the pandemic can catch up.

Harvard Model United Nations, HMUN Online Committee Page, Last Accessed: October 2026.
<https://www.harvardmun.org/unesco-online>

The parts of this report that match that focus most closely are Part 1A (the harms), Part 1B (connecting schools), Part 1C (low-tech remote learning), Part 1D (catch-up teaching), Part 1E (public learning platforms) and Part 2B (what is working and what is not).

How we use this report: Our first job is the COVID-19 learning loss and the digital divide, so we build our speeches and clauses mainly from Parts 1A to 1E, Part 2 and Part 3A. Part 1F (phone bans and rules for AI) and Part 1G (AI tutors) are about newer technology questions that Harvard does not name for December, so we treat them as background only and use them in one short clause at most. The newer out-of-school numbers caused by wars and aid cuts (E42 to E44, E51) are useful as proof that the gaps are still growing, but we always tie them back to the pandemic gaps. We do not delete any of this research; we simply spend most of our time on the parts Harvard named.

PART 2, THE UNITED NATIONS RECORD

2A. What the UN and Its Agencies Have Done

E28. ReliefWeb (UNESCO), Last Accessed October 2026: The Global Education Coalition

Tagline: Describing UNESCO's emergency coalition Source: According to... ReliefWeb (UNESCO), Last Accessed: October 2026 (re-checked October 14, 2026: the page shows no publication date; its content describes events of 2020) Link: <https://m.reliefweb.int/report/3672595/world/covid-19-how-unesco-global-education-coalition-tackling-biggest-learning-disruption> Fact: It states... UNESCO launched the Global Education Coalition in March 2020, bringing together more than 150 members from UN agencies, civil society, universities and companies. It worked with over 70 countries through three focus areas (connectivity, teachers and gender), for example community-radio lessons in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and distance learning for 500,000 learners in Senegal. It targeted 400 million learners and 12.7 million teachers. This means... UNESCO already has a working partnership network that delegates can strengthen or redirect toward recovery and preparedness, rather than creating a new body.

E29. World Bank, March 30, 2022: Fewer than half of countries ran recovery programs at scale

Tagline: Checking the global recovery effort Source: According to... World Bank, March 30, 2022 Link: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/03/30/less-than-half-of-countries-are-implementing-learning-recovery-strategies-at-scale-to-help-children-catch-up> Fact: It states... a joint World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF survey found that fewer than half of countries were running learning recovery programs at scale, and only half of low-income countries planned to test where returning students stood. Countries spent on average just 3 percent of COVID-19 stimulus money on education, and low- and lower-middle-income countries spent under 1 percent. This means... The UN system identified the problem early, but countries did not fund the response. Delegates can debate whether to set a target share of crisis spending for education.

E30. GCED Clearinghouse (UNESCO), 2023: UNESCO's "Ed-Tech Tragedy?" review

Tagline: Questioning technology-first responses Source: According to... GCED Clearinghouse (UNESCO), 2023 Link: <https://www.gcedclearinghouse.org/resources/ed-tech-tragedy-educational-technologies-and-school-closures-time-covid-19> Fact: It states... UNESCO's 652-page study "An Ed-Tech Tragedy?" concludes that heavy reliance on connected technology during school closures often led to exclusion, sharp inequality and unintended harm, and that some models placed machines and profit above people. It recommends more human-centred and inclusive uses of technology in future. This means... UNESCO has openly judged parts of the pandemic response as harmful. This gives delegates room to argue for a "people first" approach without opposing technology entirely.

E31. UNICEF, Last Accessed October 2026: Gateways to Public Digital Learning

Tagline: Building public learning platforms together Source: According to... UNICEF, Last Accessed: October 2026 (re-checked October 14, 2026: the page shows no publication date; it describes the community of practice "as of 2026") Link: <https://www.unicef.org/digitaleducation/gateways-public-digital-learning> Fact: It states... UNESCO and UNICEF launched "Gateways to Public Digital Learning" at the 2022 Transforming Education Summit to help governments build quality, free national learning platforms. Over 30 countries now share lessons in its community of practice, with China and Finland as champion countries. It is developing international standards for public digital learning platforms, but it reports activities rather than measured learning results. This means... A UN-led standard for learning platforms is being written now. Delegates can propose that it include offline access, disability access and child data protection.

E32. UNESCO, November 25, 2019: Recommendation on Open Educational Resources

Tagline: Promoting free shareable learning materials Source: According to... UNESCO, November 25, 2019 Link: <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/recommendation-open-educational-resources-oer> Fact: It states... UNESCO's General Conference adopted the Recommendation on Open Educational Resources, which asks member states to support learning materials released under open licences so anyone can use, adapt and share them for free. It stresses access for disadvantaged learners and people with disabilities, sustainable funding and international cooperation, and asks countries to report on progress. This means... This existing UNESCO instrument can be cited directly. Free, translatable content lowers the cost of closing the gap for poorer countries.

E33. UNESCO, Last Accessed October 2026: Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence

Tagline: Setting global AI ethics standards Source: According to... UNESCO, Last Accessed: October 2026 (re-checked October 14, 2026: the page shows no publication date for itself; it lists the Recommendation's publication as 2022 and a "key facts" summary as 2026) Link: <https://www.unesco.org/en/artificial-intelligence/recommendation-ethics> Fact: It states... in November 2021 all 193 UNESCO member states adopted the Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, the first global standard on AI ethics. Among its principles is promoting public awareness and AI literacy through open and accessible education. This means... Any resolution on AI in classrooms can build on a standard every UNESCO member already accepted, which makes agreement easier.

E34. ITU, June 25, 2025: Giga opens a Connectivity Centre in Geneva

Tagline: Expanding Giga's support for countries Source: According to... ITU, June 25, 2025 Link: <https://www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/Pages/PR-2025-06-25-Giga-Connectivity-Centre.aspx> Fact: It states... ITU and UNICEF opened the Giga Connectivity Centre in Geneva to help countries with buying and financing school internet, alongside a technology centre in Barcelona that builds open-source tools. Giga's goal is to connect every school by 2030, and its supporters include Switzerland, Spain and several technology companies. This means... The UN has built the machinery for school connectivity. The open question for delegates is funding: whether donors, companies or a new financing tool should pay.

E48. UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, September 7, 2026: Fewer than 1 in 10 countries fund education fairly

Tagline: Measuring fairness in education funding Source: According to... UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, September 7, 2026 Link: <https://www.unesco.org/gem-report/en/articles/what-does-2026-gem-report-say-about-access-and-equity-education> Fact: It states... the 2026 GEM Report introduces a new Equitable Financing in Education Index, which shows that fewer than 1 in 10 countries have funding systems with a strong focus on disadvantaged learners. One in three countries does not report gaps between urban and rural students, and one in two does not report gaps between rich and poor students. The report says that "progress is not possible without equitable approaches," and notes that 80 percent of countries have set at least some national education targets for 2030. This means... UNESCO now has a tool that shows which countries direct money to the students who need it most. Delegates can propose that countries use this index and report rural and income gaps, so help reaches the children the pandemic hurt most.

E49. United Nations Geneva, July 7, 2026: "We cannot allow the digital divide to harden into an AI divide"

Tagline: Reporting the first UN AI dialogue Source: According to... United Nations Geneva (UNOG Newsroom), July 7, 2026 Link: <https://www.unognewsroom.org/story/en/3190/global-dialogue-on-ai-governance-opening-session/9492> Fact: It states... at the opening of the first UN Global Dialogue on AI Governance in Geneva, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called on countries to adopt an "AI Child Safety Pledge." Under it, no company would release an AI system children can use without child-specific safety testing and independent oversight, and a system would stop and connect a child to human help if the child shows signs of distress. He warned, "We cannot allow the digital divide to harden into an AI divide," and said billions of people still cannot reach the technology. More than 20 countries backed a UN-supported network to build AI skills in developing countries. This means... The UN's top official now links child safety and the AI gap in one message. Delegates can tie a UNESCO resolution on AI in schools to this pledge, which makes their clauses part of a wider UN effort.

E50. UN News, August 10, 2026: The UN calls for urgent action to protect young people online

Tagline: Protecting young people's online lives Source: According to... UN News, August 10, 2026 Link: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/08/1168103> Fact: It states... more than 8 in 10 young people aged 15 to 24 are online, and a new UN brief warns that they carry a large share of risks such as false information, harassment, unfair algorithms and harmful uses of AI. The brief says these harms come from business models that "monetise attention and personal data" and names tricks such as hidden advertising and "dark patterns" that push children to keep scrolling or spending. It urges governments, technology companies and researchers to put protection and youth participation first, and says the chance to write children's rights into AI rules "is closing." This means... Connecting more students to the internet also exposes them to these risks. Delegates can pair every connectivity clause with a protection clause, and can include young people in designing the rules.

2B. What Is Working and What Is Not

Working, according to the evidence above:

1. **Low-tech, human-contact learning:** phone calls with teachers (E17) and broadcast lessons in local languages (E18) reached children the internet could not.
2. **Shared frameworks:** the RAPID plan (E5) and the "Smart Buys" ranking (E19) give countries clear, cheap, tested choices.
3. **Partnerships:** the Global Education Coalition (E28) and Giga (E14, E34) show the UN can bring governments and companies together quickly.
4. **Rising attention to student protection:** phone limits are spreading (E24) and UNESCO has issued AI guidance (E25). The UN Secretary-General has now proposed an AI Child Safety Pledge (E49).
5. **Teacher-centred technology:** tools that support a human tutor, rather than replace one, show measurable gains at very low cost (E47).

Not working, or not yet working:

1. **Funding:** education received about 3 percent of COVID-19 stimulus money (E29), and spending in poorer countries fell (E20).
2. **Recovery planning:** only 18 percent of poorer countries had a clear recovery plan (E20), and losses persist even in rich countries (E8).
3. **Platform survival:** one-third of national platforms stopped working (E22).
4. **Privacy:** most recommended apps tracked children (E13), and only 16 percent of countries guarantee education data privacy by law (E24).
5. **The divide itself:** 2.2 billion people remain offline (E12), and Giga's progress is far behind its 2030 goal (E15).

6. **Access itself:** the out-of-school count has risen for seven years in a row to 273 million (E42), crises disrupt schooling for 258 million children (E43), and aid to basic education may have fallen by as much as 26 percent in 2025 (E36), which could push 6 million more children out of school (E44).
7. **Fair funding:** fewer than 1 in 10 countries direct education money strongly toward disadvantaged learners (E48).
8. **Rules for AI:** student use of AI is rising fast (E45, E46), yet only about one-third of U.S. students report a schoolwide AI policy (E45).

2C. Table of UN Resolutions and Major UN Instruments

Every symbol below was confirmed on an official UN site (digitallibrary.un.org, un.org or unesco.org) in October 2026.

Symbol	Year	Body	What it does (one plain sentence)
A/RES/70/1	2015	General Assembly	Adopts the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 4 on quality education for all.
A/RES/73/25	2018	General Assembly	Creates the International Day of Education, held every January 24.
A/RES/74/270	2020	General Assembly	Calls for global solidarity and international cooperation to fight COVID-19 (adopted April 2, 2020).
A/RES/74/275	2020	General Assembly	Creates the International Day to Protect Education from Attack (adopted May 28, 2020).
A/RES/74/306	2020	General Assembly	Sets out a comprehensive, coordinated global response to the COVID-19 pandemic (adopted September 11, 2020, by 169 votes to 2).
A/HRC/RES/44/3	2020	Human Rights Council	Reaffirms the right to education during the year schools closed worldwide (adopted July 16, 2020, without a vote).
A/HRC/RES/47/6	2021	Human Rights Council	Reaffirms the right to education amid COVID-19 and recognises the Abidjan Principles on public education (adopted July 12, 2021, without a vote).
S/RES/2601 (2021)	2021	Security Council	Condemns attacks on schools and encourages states to keep education going during armed conflict, including through distance learning and digital technology, using lessons from the COVID-19 response (adopted October 29, 2021).
A/RES/78/265	2024	General Assembly	"Seizing the opportunities of safe, secure and trustworthy artificial intelligence systems for sustainable development," which recognises AI and other digital divides between and within countries (adopted March 21, 2024, without a vote).
A/RES/79/1	2024	General Assembly	Adopts the Pact for the Future, whose annex, the Global Digital Compact, commits states to close digital divides (adopted September 22, 2024).
A/RES/79/194	2024	General Assembly	Addresses information and communications technologies

			for sustainable development, including digital divides (adopted December 19, 2024, without a vote).
UNESCO Recommendation on Open Educational Resources (instrument, no A/RES symbol)	2019	UNESCO General Conference, 40th session	Asks member states to support free, openly licensed learning materials (adopted November 25, 2019).
UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (instrument, no A/RES symbol)	2021	UNESCO General Conference	Sets the first global ethical standard for artificial intelligence, adopted by all 193 member states.

Note: no Security Council resolution deals mainly with education technology gaps. S/RES/2601 (2021) is listed because it is the closest: it encourages distance learning and digital technology to protect education in conflict zones.

2D. Where the Major Blocs Stand

Countries do not debate alone; they often vote and speak in groups. The positions below come from each group's own documents or from respected reporting. Use them as a starting point, then check your own country's record.

1. **United States:** The United States is leaving UNESCO, with its exit taking effect in December 2026, and is also stepping back from other UN bodies. The White House said membership was not in the national interest (see E37), so expect its delegate to resist new spending commitments. Source: According to... CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies), January 15, 2026. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/opting-out-united-states-stop-engaging-more-un-entities>
2. **China:** China presents itself as a leader in "smart education" and, at its 2025 World Digital Education Conference, proposed the Wuhan Initiative: shared international standards for digital education, linked learning platforms, open-source models and shared computing power for developing countries, and ethical rules for AI in schools. Expect China to support global platforms and cooperation it can help lead. Source: According to... Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, May 2025. http://en.moe.gov.cn/features/2025WorldDigitalEducationConference/WuhanInitiative/202505/t20250516_1190886.html
3. **European Union:** The EU's Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) seeks "high-quality, inclusive and accessible digital education" and admits that the pandemic exposed gaps in access, school equipment, teacher training and skills. Its 2030 goal is to cut the share of 13-14-year-olds lacking basic digital skills to below 15 percent; today more than 40 percent fall short. Source: According to... European Commission, page updated June 5, 2026. <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/actions/plan>
4. **African Union:** The AU's Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2026-2035 lists digitalization, AI and education in emergencies as cross-cutting themes, and warns that education funding is "falling behind" because of high debt. It notes that low-income countries spend about US\$60 per student, compared with about US\$8,000 in high-income countries. Expect African delegates to demand funding and debt relief, not only technology. Source: According to... African Union, March 2025. https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/44940-doc-AU_CESA-2026-2035_Strategy_ENGLISH.pdf
5. **Group of 77 and China (developing countries):** This group of more than 130 developing countries calls for "greater access to innovation, technology transfer, capacity-building support, and sustained financing," and asks to "close the technological gap within and among countries." Expect it to argue that rich countries and companies must share technology and pay for infrastructure. Source: According to... Group of 77, October 10, 2025. <https://www.g77.org/statement/getstatement.php?id=251010>
6. **Small Island Developing States:** In the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda (2024-2034), small island states committed to "bridging digital divides," building digital infrastructure and strengthening preparedness for pandemics, and noted that COVID-19 "further exacerbated" their challenges. Expect them to stress that distance, storms and small budgets make connectivity harder and more expensive for them. Source: According to... United Nations (Office of the High Representative for Small Island Developing States), May 2024. <https://www.un.org/ohrrls/sites/www.un.org.ohrrls/files/abas-booklet.pdf>