

HMDC Presents... UNESCO: Part 3 (International Efforts)

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 3, INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS

This Part covers international organizations, partnerships and NGOs working on the topic. Single-country domestic policy is left out; each delegate should research their own country's record separately.

3A. Funding Partnerships

E35. Global Partnership for Education, June 1, 2020: More than US\$500 million for pandemic learning

Tagline: Funding emergency learning in poorer countries Source: According to... Global Partnership for Education, June 1, 2020 Link: <https://globalpartnership.org/news/gpe-increases-covid-19-coronavirus-emergency-fund-us500-million> Fact: It states... the Global Partnership for Education raised its COVID-19 response to more than US\$500 million, open to 67 countries, to fund distance learning that prioritises the most vulnerable children, including girls, children with disabilities and children without electricity or internet. It aimed to sustain learning for up to 355 million children; by the time of the announcement, 48 countries had applied for a combined US\$511 million. This means... Demand quickly exceeded the money available. Delegates can debate expanding pooled funds like this one as a ready "emergency education fund" for future crises.

E36. Center for Global Development, September 22, 2026: Aid to basic education is falling fast

Tagline: Measuring the drop in education aid Source: According to... Center for Global Development, September 22, 2026 Link: <https://www.cgdev.org/node/3136371> Fact: It states... total foreign aid from donor countries fell 23 percent in 2025, the largest one-year drop on record. Aid to education may have fallen about 15 percent, and aid to basic education (primary and lower secondary) by as much as 26 percent. The United States alone gave 46 percent of donor countries' direct aid to basic education in 2024, so its cuts hit especially hard. When African governments responded to the 2025 cuts, they focused mainly on health, and education "barely registered." The Global Partnership for Education moves about US\$1 billion a year and is seeking at least US\$5 billion for its next funding round. This means... The money that paid for pandemic recovery and school connectivity in poorer countries is shrinking right now. Delegates must explain how their plans will be paid for, for example by protecting funds for basic learning first or by asking more donors to join pooled funds.

E37. Associated Press (via PBS NewsHour), July 22, 2025: The United States will leave UNESCO

Tagline: Losing a major UNESCO member Source: According to... Associated Press, July 22, 2025 Link: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/u-s-to-leave-unesco-again-2-years-after-rejoining> Fact: It states... the United States announced it would withdraw from UNESCO, with the exit taking effect in December 2026, only two years after rejoining. The White House said membership was not in the national interest and criticised UNESCO's "divisive social and cultural causes" and its 2011 decision to admit the State of Palestine. United States contributions make up about 8 percent of UNESCO's total budget. Director-General Audrey Azoulay said she deeply regretted the decision, that UNESCO had prepared for it, and that no staff layoffs were planned at that stage, though resources would be reduced. This means... This committee meets in the same month the United States leaves UNESCO. Delegates should expect debate over who fills the funding gap and how UNESCO keeps its education programmes running with less money.

E51. Brookings Institution, April 17, 2026: What happened to Nigeria's schools when aid stopped

Tagline: Studying a country after aid cuts Source: According to... Brookings Institution, April 17, 2026 Link: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/nigeria-education-usaid-exit-responses/> Fact: It states... the cancellation of more than 80 percent of U.S. foreign aid commitments in 2025 forced Nigeria to close major reading programmes. By December 2025 only about 38 percent of the donor money needed for education in emergencies had arrived. Nigeria spent about 3 percent of GDP on education in 2024, below UNESCO's 4 to 6 percent benchmark. In response, Nigerian philanthropists pledged large new funds (one businessman committed about US\$688 million over 10 years), and the Global Partnership for Education invested US\$288 million in July 2025 in basic learning. Brookings urges that outside partners support national priorities and that local groups track how education money is spent. This means... When donors leave, countries must find money at home, from local philanthropy and from pooled funds. Delegates can use Nigeria as a real example of why a resolution needs both domestic funding targets and stable international funds.

E52. CSIS, January 15, 2026: The United States is stepping back from more UN bodies

Tagline: Tracking the U.S. retreat from the UN Source: According to... CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies), January 15, 2026 Link: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/opting-out-united-states-stop-engaging-more-un-entities> Fact: It states... a January 7, 2026 U.S. government memorandum named 35 intergovernmental groups and 31 UN entities the United States would stop engaging with. CSIS notes that the United States announced in July 2025 that it would leave UNESCO, in "a months-long process that will conclude in December 2026," and that the first Trump administration took the same step. This means... The U.S. exit from UNESCO is part of a wider pull-back from the UN, not a single decision. Delegates should not expect the United States to fund new UNESCO programmes, so other donors and new funding ideas must fill the gap.

3B. Research and Measurement Bodies

E38. OECD, December 5, 2023: What PISA 2022 says about phones and teacher support

Tagline: Linking phones and teachers to scores Source: According to... OECD, December 5, 2023 Link: <https://search.oecd.org/newsroom/decline-in-educational-performance-only-partly-attributable-to-the-covid-19-pandemic.htm> Fact: It states... 65 percent of students said digital devices distracted them in at least some maths lessons, and students distracted by classmates' devices scored 15 points lower. Students with strong access to teacher support scored 15 points higher and felt more confident learning remotely, yet only about one in five said they got extra help from teachers in some lessons. This means... The OECD's evidence supports investing in teacher support and managing device use, not simply adding more screens.

E39. Brookings Institution, January 14, 2026: AI's risks to students currently outweigh its benefits

Tagline: Weighing AI risks for children Source: According to... Brookings Institution, January 14, 2026
 Link: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/a-new-direction-for-students-in-an-ai-world-prosper-prepare-protect/> Fact: It states... the Brookings Global Task Force on AI in Education consulted more than 500 students, teachers, parents, experts and leaders across 50 countries and reviewed over 400 studies. It concluded that, at this point, "the risks of utilizing generative AI in children's education overshadow its benefits," because overreliance can weaken basic learning, well-being, trust and privacy, and careless rollout may widen social divides. It also says these risks are fixable. Its 12 recommendations include AI that guides thinking instead of giving answers, AI literacy for students, teachers and parents, teacher training, creative financing to close the AI access gap, strong regulation, and buying only technology that protects student privacy. This means... One of the world's leading think tanks warns against rushing AI into classrooms. Delegates can use its recommendations as a checklist for a clause on AI in education, balancing access for poorer countries with protection for every child.

3C. International NGOs and Watchdogs

E40. Human Rights Watch, May 25, 2022: Recommendations to governments and companies

Tagline: Proposing child data protections Source: According to... Human Rights Watch, May 25, 2022
 Link: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/05/25/how-dare-they-peep-my-private-life/childrens-rights-violations-governments> Fact: It states... Human Rights Watch urges governments to audit the learning apps they endorse, remove those that fail, require deletion of children's data, pass child-specific data protection laws, ban behavioural advertising aimed at children, and fund safe online education so that children's data is not the hidden price. This means... These recommendations can be copied almost directly into resolution clauses on student privacy.

E41. J-PAL, June 13, 2022: Low-tech learning evidence from Botswana

Tagline: Supporting evidence-based low-tech programs Source: According to... J-PAL (Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab), June 13, 2022 Link: <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/media/12096>
 Fact: It states... J-PAL, a global research network based at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, lists the Botswana study "Experimental evidence on learning using low-tech when school is out" in its Africa research collection, connecting it to the network of researchers who test programs with randomized trials (the results are reported in E17). This means... International research networks such as J-PAL help UNESCO tell which programs truly work. A resolution can ask that new education technology be tested before it is scaled up.

3D. Proposed and Emerging Efforts

1. **Global Digital Compact follow-up:** states agreed in A/RES/79/1 (2024) to close digital divides; delegates can propose education-specific targets under it.
2. **Gateways standards:** the UNESCO-UNICEF norms for public digital learning platforms (E31) are still being refined and could become a formal UNESCO recommendation.
3. **Giga financing ideas:** Giga is exploring "connectivity credit markets," loosely modelled on carbon credits, to pay for school connections (E14).
4. **AI in education rules:** UNESCO's 2023 guidance (E25) could grow into binding or reported national standards.

5. **Teacher workforce plans:** the 44-million-teacher gap (E21) has led to calls for international support for teacher recruitment and training.
6. **Replenishing education funds:** the Global Partnership for Education is seeking at least US\$5 billion for its next funding round (E36), while UNESCO prepares for the United States' exit in December 2026 (E37).
7. **AI guardrails for children:** the Brookings task force's 12 recommendations (E39) offer a ready list for clauses on AI literacy, teacher training, privacy and closing the AI access gap.
8. **Out-of-school targets:** countries have committed to national 2030 targets that would cut the out-of-school population by 165 million (E4).
9. **AI Child Safety Pledge:** the UN Secretary-General's proposed pledge (E49) would require child-specific safety testing before AI systems reach children; UNESCO could adapt it for schools.
10. **AI capacity network:** more than 20 countries backed a UN-supported network to build AI skills in developing countries (E49), which could help close the AI divide in education.
11. **Equitable financing index:** the new GEM Report index (E48) could become a reporting tool countries use to show their education money reaches the students who need it most.

KEY VOCABULARY

1. **Digital divide:** the gap between people who have internet, devices and digital skills and people who do not.
2. **Learning poverty:** the share of 10-year-old children who cannot read and understand a simple text.
3. **Learning loss (learning deficit):** the skills students would have gained in normal schooling but did not because of disruption.
4. **Homework gap:** students who cannot finish schoolwork at home because they lack a computer or internet.
5. **Remote learning:** teaching students who are not in the classroom, through internet, TV, radio or phone.
6. **Connectivity:** having a working link to the internet, for a home, a school or a whole country.
7. **Open Educational Resources (OER):** learning materials anyone may freely use, change and share under an open licence.
8. **Teaching at the Right Level:** grouping children by what they can actually do, rather than by age or grade, and teaching from there.
9. **Structured pedagogy:** giving teachers clear, step-by-step lesson guides and matching student materials.
10. **EdTech:** short for education technology; apps, devices and platforms used for learning.
11. **Standard deviation:** a statistics unit researchers use to compare how big an effect is; in education, 0.1 to 0.2 is a meaningful change.
12. **Data privacy:** a person's right to control who collects, uses and shares information about them.
13. **AI divide:** the gap between people and countries that can use artificial intelligence tools and those that cannot.
14. **Out-of-school children:** children of school age who are not enrolled in any school.
15. **Technology transfer:** sharing technology, and the know-how to use it, from richer countries or companies with poorer countries.
16. **Bloc:** a group of countries that often speak and vote together, such as the African Union or the Group of 77 and China.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Should UNESCO prioritise connecting every school to the internet, or first fund low-tech options and teachers that reach more children today? Defend your country's choice with evidence.
2. Who should pay the estimated hundreds of billions of dollars needed for school connectivity: wealthy governments, technology companies, development banks or the countries themselves?
3. Since education received only about 3 percent of COVID-19 stimulus money, should states agree on a minimum share of crisis spending for education?
4. How can UNESCO protect students' data and attention (phones, apps, artificial intelligence) without blocking technology that helps learning?
5. What specific steps would bring girls, rural children and children with disabilities back into school after a long closure?
6. Should new education technology be required to show test results before governments buy it at scale? Who should run those tests?
7. What should a national "emergency learning plan" include, so that the next pandemic, war or disaster does not repeat the losses of 2020-2022?
8. Is AI tutoring a realistic answer to the 44-million-teacher shortage, or a risk that widens the divide between connected and unconnected students?
9. With the United States leaving UNESCO in December 2026 and education aid falling, which countries or funds should fill the gap, and what should be protected first?
10. Should UNESCO adopt a version of the Secretary-General's AI Child Safety Pledge for every AI tool used in schools?