

Topic: Education Response to COVID-19

Over 1.5 billion learners in 165 countries have been affected by school closure as a result of COVID-19.¹ This has forced countries to shift their resources towards online learning in order for students to continue their education.² Unfortunately, this is not the first natural disaster that has caused millions of students to not be able to attend school. For example, in Syria, 2.8 million students have been out of school due to the current ongoing civil war.^{3,4} The difficulties of making education accessible to all during times when children are unable to attend school, while not necessarily a new problem, has become more universal than ever before.

Some countries across the world are succeeding more than others when it comes to adapting to new and necessary methods of learning at this time. Since the COVID-19 pandemic became rampant in the United States this past February,⁵ the United States education system took to the virtual world with over 124,000 schools shut down for in person learning across the country.⁶ Sadly, other poorer countries do not have the technology or the infrastructure to “shift” to online learning, causing millions of children to not have access to any form of education during these difficult times. According to UNICEF Data, at least 463 million – or 31% of schoolchildren worldwide have no forum for digital and broadcast remote learning programs to counter school closures.⁷ This is therefore resulting in millions of children potentially losing some of their most critical education years.

UNESCO serves to support countries to help mitigate the immediate impact of school closures, especially considering the most vulnerable communities, during these trying times.⁸ Additionally, it has become clear that it is crucial for UNESCO to facilitate the continuity of education for all through remote learning. This past March, UNESCO launched weekly webinars to cover a range of timely topics including gender equity education, distance learning strategies, connectivity, health issues, and reopening of schools.⁹

¹<https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-rallies-international-organizations-civil-society-and-private-sector-partners-broad>

²<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/edutech/brief/how-countries-are-using-edtech-to-support-remote-learning-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>

³ <https://www.unicefusa.org/infographic-education-crisis-syria>

⁴<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/04/14/syrias-war-explained-from-the-beginning/>

⁵<https://abcnews.go.com/Health/timeline-coronavirus-started/story?id=69435165>

⁶<https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/how-education-system-can-adapt-covid-19>

⁷<https://data.unicef.org/resources/remote-learning-reachability-factsheet/>

⁸<https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>

⁹ <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/webinars>

Recently, UNESCO had its 8th annual *Mobile Learning Week* from October 12-14, with this year's theme being *Beyond Disruption: Technology Enabled Learning Futures*.¹⁰ The COVID-19 pandemic has forced school systems across the globe to adapt to remote learning and rethink how to best educate their students. UNESCO acknowledges that as difficult as this pandemic has been, it also gives us an unprecedented opportunity to revise our framework of education on a global scale. Recently, UNESCO has formed the Global Education Coalition which aims to help countries in mobilizing resources and provide education remotely, offer universal digitized educational resources, and facilitate the return of students to school when they reopen to avoid an upsurge in dropout rates.¹¹

While these are the first steps to a world where everyone has access to remote education during these times, there are still significant strides to be made. At the conference, we will discuss how to improve educational learning, not just to adapt for the COVID-19 pandemic, but beyond. You as delegates will share your insights into your country's strategies for education and work together to come up with concrete solutions for the embetterment of future learning for all students no matter their geographical location.

Some questions to consider:

- How should UNESCO better allocate their resources to help impoverished countries adapt to COVID-19 and implement remote learning worldwide?
- This pandemic has only heightened the already great educational disparity between wealthier and poorer countries. How can UNESCO help these poorer countries to offer higher quality education?
- For countries where it's difficult for children to get to school, how can remote learning be implemented to last beyond the pandemic?
- How can UNESCO ensure that countries are financed properly to offer education to their children?
- What ways can UNESCO help increase gender sensitivity through online learning?
- How has your country adapted to teaching students online (or not) during COVID-19?
- Are there any practical methods which your country implemented that you can use for the future when this pandemic is over?

¹⁰ <https://en.unesco.org/mlw>

¹¹ <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-rallies-international-organizations-civil-society-and-private-sector-partners-broad>

I am so excited to meet you all and have some incredible discussions. Please do not limit your research and position papers to these questions. I urge you to look further into your country's educational history and how it has developed over the years. Remember that you can not plagiarise and everything should be clearly cited and only offer opinions based on your country's stance. If you have any questions do not hesitate to reach out to me at zygreenb@mail.yu.edu.

Good luck delegates,

Zachary Greenberg

Chair, UNESCO