

Dear ASPnet Community,  
Dear National Coordinators,  
Dear teachers, students and parents,

During this unprecedented experience of lockdown due to COVID-19, digital connectivity has provided many of us with a crucial portal to access critical information, to maintain social communication, to work, and to continue our education. As a result of school closures to slow the spread of COVID-19, most of our members were struggling to assure education remotely and maintain the continuity of learning by using different technologies. Overnight, connectivity has transformed from "nice-to-have" to "need-to-have".

Yet, despite the enlarged importance of digital connectivity during the pandemic, close to half of the world's population (46%), or some three billion people, do not have access to the internet. Many people remain unconnected to online technologies and even to low technologies such as television or radio.

To bridge this digital divide, UNESCO launched the Covid-19 Global Education Coalition, which brings together an array of partners to develop equitable and inclusive solutions to support distance learning. Coalition partners work together to find ways to ensure that children everywhere can continue their education, with special attention to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities. One way to do this is to provide free distance learning solutions, connectivity, content and training challenges, while ensuring a mix of technologies to include low-tech solutions such as television and radio. However, there are serious risks for disengagement and dropping out of school due to these widening inequalities, potentially swelling the ranks of the 258 million children and youth currently out of school, excluded from education.

It is for this reason that we have dedicated this issue to highlighting the issue of the digital divide, and looking for ways to mitigate growing inequalities. It is my great pleasure to receive a message from the ICT Unit of UNESCO's Education sector. We would like to take you through some key findings on the digital divide and showcase good practices as well as the challenges yet to be resolved.

Stay safe. Stay CONNECTed!

[Julie Saito](#), *ASPnet International Coordinator*



## Special message from Fengchun Miao

Chief of the Unit for Technology and Artificial Intelligence in Education, UNESCO

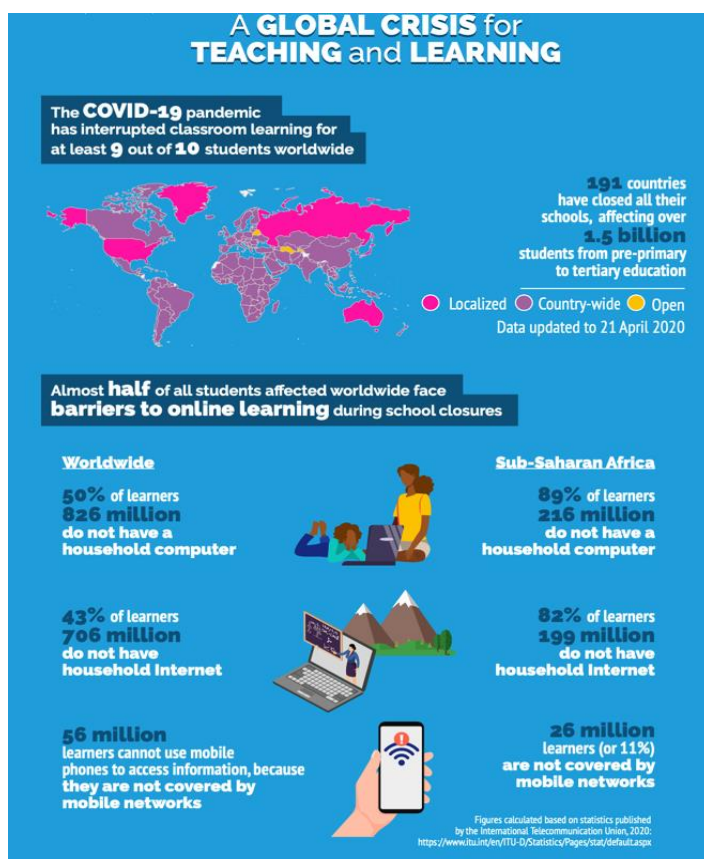


*“the human factor is more important than connectivity and technology”*

See the full message and biography [here](#).

## Key Findings on the Digital Divide -

UNESCO Report: “COVID-19: a global crisis for teaching and learning



Close to half of the world’s population (46%), or some three billion people, do not have access to the internet. These [figures](#) were compiled by the Teacher Task Force, an international alliance coordinated by UNESCO, on the basis of data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the International Telecommunication Union.

Not only does connectivity remain far from universal, but significant gaps exist across countries, as well as within them in terms of income, geography, age, and gender.

Click [here](#) to read more about this report.

*“While efforts to provide connectivity to all must be multiplied, we now know that continued teaching and learning cannot be limited to online means. To lessen already existing inequalities, we must also support other alternatives including the use of community radio and television broadcasts, and creativity in*

*all ways of learning. These are solutions we are addressing with our Global Coalition partners”.*

Audrey Azoulay, UNESCO Director-General

## Promoting Distance Learning During COVID-19 - Overview of UNESCO's Activities and Resources



The [Global Education Coalition](#) launched by UNESCO seeks to facilitate inclusive learning opportunities for children and youth during this period of sudden and unprecedented educational disruption.

The Coalition issued a [Call for Action](#) to support teachers affected by the pandemic. The International Commission on the [Futures of Education](#) issued a joint [statement](#) which called for common goods and public instruments like educational television and radio to be shared across national boundaries.

UNESCO has also published a selection of [free digital educational resources](#) that governments, schools, teachers, parents can use to open opportunities for learners. You can also access a repository of [national learning platforms](#) designed to support the continuity of curriculum-based study. Apart from these efforts, UNESCO is [monitoring country-wide and localized school closures globally](#) as well as the number of learners affected.

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, UNESCO has held a series of webinars addressing several aspects of the digital divide and inequalities, including:

- [“Connectivity for learning”](#);
- [“Distance learning strategies: what do we know about effectiveness?”](#);
- [“Ensuring equity in remote learning responses to school closures”](#);
- [“Supporting teachers to maintain continuity of learning during school closures”](#);
- [“Addressing the gender dimensions of school closures”](#);
- as well as a Joint UNESCO-UNICEF-World Bank [webinar series](#) on the reopening of schools

Click [here](#) for the latest news and results from the Coalition.

*These inequalities are a real threat to learning continuity at a time of unprecedented educational disruption. Addressing these gaps was the impetus for launching the COVID-19 Global Education Coalition, which brings together more than 90 public and private sector partners to develop universal and equitable solutions, and make the digital revolution inclusive.”*

Stephania Giannini, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education

## UNESCO Resources for Alternative Distance Learning Solutions

On 27 May 2020, UNESCO and the [European Broadcasting Union](#) (EBU) organised a [virtual workshop](#) inviting representatives from national broadcasters to present the programmes and innovations put in place as well as discuss the lessons learned on the use of radio and television-based distance learning.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the UNESCO Office in Beirut has been monitoring school closures, national responses, and government circulars. In close collaboration with field offices and cluster offices in the region, the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States published a [report](#) on alternative solutions to School Closure in Arab States.

UNESCO is also working with member states, through their ministries of education to strengthen capacities in alternative distance learning solutions. These efforts include providing support in development of content for the e-learning platform, mobile phones, TV and radio in [Cambodia](#) and [Palestine](#). UNESCO has also published [recommendations](#) on how to plan distance learning solutions and [resources](#) for parents and teachers to motivate and support learners during remote learning.

Working with partners under the Regional Education Working Group (REWG) for Latin America and the Caribbean, UNESCO has published an online repository of [National responses in Education in Latin America and the Caribbean](#)

## Focus on Inclusion for Resilient and Equal Societies as Schools Reopen - The UNESCO 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report

The 2020 UNESCO Global Education Report (GEM) shows that 40% of poorest countries failed to support learners at risk during COVID-19 crisis and urges inclusion in education. The report provides an in-depth analysis of key factors for exclusion of learners in education systems worldwide including background, identity and ability (i.e. gender, age, location, poverty, disability, ethnicity, indigeneity, language, religion, migration or displacement status, sexual orientation or gender identity expression, incarceration, beliefs and attitudes). The 2020 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report urges countries to focus on those left behind as schools reopen so as to foster more resilient and equal societies.

You can read the full report [here](#).

***COVID-19 has given us a real opportunity to think afresh about our education systems. But moving to a world that values and welcomes diversity won't happen overnight. There is an obvious tension between teaching all children under the same roof and creating an environment where students learn best. But, COVID-19 has showed us that there is scope to do things differently, if we put our minds to it.***

Manos Antoninis, Director of the Global Education Monitoring Report

## Hybrid and Blended Learning: Experiences from Japan

Interview with Mr H. Makanai and T. Hasegawa, ASPnet school “Fujiseishin School”



*“Younger students especially find it difficult to use the computer and make better use of the online class, so more assistance is often required,”*

For the Fujiseishin School in Japan, re-opening of schools has meant integrating a blended learning approach to learning, with students attending classes in shifts. This is because students come from about 16 different prefectures, which have varying levels of measures imposed to curb the spread of COVID-19. The school combines digital materials and paper printouts of assignments to cater for students who may find access to digital technologies a challenge. Mr Hiromichi Makanai and Ms. Takako Hasegawa from the school spoke to UNESCO. You can read the whole article [here](#).

### What our member schools say on the digital divide and inequality

- *“Our school has been closed, but our teacher created a channel on the Telegram app to send our homework and explain the lessons to us. It’s a good alternative, but I really miss going to school, our teachers and my friends. It is not the same experience as being in the classroom and getting your lessons in person. I’m now studying at home and it’s hard for my parents to help with homework. It’s not easy.” - Teeba, 14, Baghdad, Iraq*
- *“For me, I am collaborating with our Mongolian language teacher to give online assignments on the subject to my students. However, the rate of students reading the announcements and information online and responding is insufficient. Only 1/3 of the class is completing and submitting their homework.” - Ankhtuya, teacher, Mongolia*
- *“During this period of lockdown when I am out of school, I can learn remotely using technologies, but they could not replace the experience of being in school. Yet, there are millions of children around the world who remain excluded from education due to various factors”. - Aisha Bunu, Student, Nigeria*

We encourage you to send us your messages of solidarity and other contributions, in words, pictures, videos and art works in order to build and strengthen our network, encourage and take care of each other.

We would also like to hear from you about your experiences and innovative ways to learn, out of schools and within your families.

Please send your contributions to [aspnetinaction@unesco.org](mailto:aspnetinaction@unesco.org). Please attach the [consent form](#).

The ASPnet Team

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