

FACT SHEET

Unequal access to remote schooling amid COVID-19 threatens to deepen global learning crisis—UNICEF

NEW YORK, 5 June 2020 – As nearly 1.2 billion¹ schoolchildren remain affected by school closures and as they grapple with the realities of remote learning in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF warns inherent inequalities in access to tools and technology threaten to deepen the global learning crisis.

“Access to the technology and materials needed to continue learning while schools are closed is desperately unequal. Likewise, children with limited learning support at home have almost no means to support their education. Providing a range of learning tools and accelerating access to the internet for every school and every child is critical,” said UNICEF Chief of Education Robert Jenkins. “A learning crisis already existed before COVID-19 hit. We are now looking at an even more divisive and deepening education crisis.”

Latest data on access to remote learning:

Internet

- In 71 countries worldwide, less than half the population has access to the internet. Despite this disparity, 73 per cent of governments out of 127 reporting countries are using online platforms to deliver education while schools remain closed². In reporting countries across Latin America and the Caribbean region 90 per cent of government continuity learning responses include online platforms.³
- In the majority of countries across Africa less than a quarter of the population has internet access⁴.
- UNICEF data from 14 countries revealed that schoolchildren with internet access at home have higher foundational reading skills than children who do not have access.

Television

- Despite disparities in ownership, television is the main channel used by governments to deliver remote learning, with 3 in 4 governments out of 127 reporting countries using television as a source of education for children⁵. More than 90 per cent of countries in Europe and Central Asia use television as a means of delivering remote learning, and 100 per cent of countries in South Asia⁶. In Latin America and the Caribbean, 77 per cent of countries are delivering education programmes through national TV channels⁷.
- In 40 out of the 88 countries with data, children living in urban households are at least twice as likely to have a TV than children in rural households. The largest disparities are

¹ <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>

² <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRB%202020-10.pdf> P5

³ [Access to MoE Online learning platforms](#)

⁴ <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRB%202020-10.pdf> P2

⁵ <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRB%202020-10.pdf> P5

⁶ UNICEF Global Tracker on the Education Response, May 2020

⁷ [LACRO Education COVID-19 Response Update #9](#)

in sub-Saharan Africa⁸. In rural Chad, only 1 in 100 households has a television, compared to 1 in 3 households in urban areas. In rural Guinea and rural Mauritania, 8 per cent and 7 per cent of households has a television, compared to 76 per cent of households in urban areas in both countries⁹.

Radio

- Radio is the third most-used platform by governments to deliver education while schools are closed, with 60 per cent of 127 reporting countries using this method¹⁰. Radio ownership across and within regions varies widely. Only 1 in 5 households in South Asia own a radio, compared to 3 in 4 households in Latin America and the Caribbean¹¹.

SMS/Mobile/Social Media

- More than half of countries are using SMS, mobile or social media as an alternate education delivery system, with 74 per cent of reporting countries in Europe and Central Asia using these methods¹². Around half of 127 reporting countries are offering printed, take-home resources; and only 11 per cent are offering home visits¹³.

Electricity

- Vast inequities exist between the richest and the poorest households. Almost all technologies used to deliver education while schools remain closed require electricity. Yet, in the 28 countries with data, only 65 per cent of households from the poorest quintile have electricity, compared to 98 per cent of households from the wealthiest quintile.
- In seven countries including Côte d'Ivoire, Lesotho, Kiribati, Sudan, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Mauritania less than 10 per cent of the poorest households have electricity¹⁴.

Global progress on access to remote learning:

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit, education systems in many countries have rapidly transformed to support children with remote learning including:

- In countries across West and Central Africa including Cote d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria, governments are working with local service providers to deliver education for primary and lower secondary age children online or through radio, TV, and paper-based approaches.
- In Timor-Leste, the distance learning programme "Eskola ba Uma" or "School Goes Home" allows children to continue learning through TV, radio and online platforms. For those without access to any of these options, UNICEF partnered with Telenor in rural areas to give 600,000 mobile phone users free access to learning materials.

⁸ <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRB%202020-10.pdf> P3

⁹ <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRB%202020-10.pdf> P3

¹⁰ UNICEF Global Tracker on the Education Response, May 2020

¹¹ <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRB%202020-10.pdf> P4

¹² UNICEF Global Tracker on the Education Response, May 2020

¹³ UNICEF Global Tracker on the Education Response, May 2020

¹⁴ <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRB%202020-10.pdf> P4

- In Somalia, offline recorded lessons are being uploaded onto solar-powered tablets and made available to children. Video lessons are also shared through social media channels such as WhatsApp and Facebook and broadcast through radio and TV.
- In Mongolia, TV has been the main medium for distance learning. UNICEF has worked with the Government to produce TV lessons for pre-primary and primary education in Tuvan and Kazakh languages to reach children from ethnic minorities. UNICEF also worked with local government to produce offline learning materials to support the learning of primary school children in remote areas who have limited access to TV and/or internet.
- In Kyrgyzstan, children can access remote learning through online platforms, three national TV channels and two mobile network applications free of charge. UNICEF also supported the development and dissemination of content for children with special education needs by ensuring all remote learning lessons are also provided through sign language. Subtitles for all lessons are also provided in Uzbek and Tajik minority languages to ensure no child is left behind.
- In Uruguay, the partnership between Plan CEIBAL and the telecommunications company ANTEL has given access to all government learning content without any data consumption.
- In Jamaica, the Ministry of Education is providing lessons at all levels through national public television, radio, online platforms, and WhatsApp. Work is also underway to organize access for 210 of most vulnerable students to tablets equipped with connectivity and content to facilitate ongoing schooling.
- In Mexico, the Government strategy *Learning at home* is providing long-distance education services through national television, radio and digital channels. Broadcast is based on the national curricula.
- In Bangladesh, UNICEF, the Government and Access to Information (a2i), children in primary and secondary levels are accessing lessons through televised recorded classes.
- In Viet Nam, certain tests and modules have dropped from the curriculum while others are postponed to the next school year to allow students to catch up on missed learning over the whole of next year and to reduce academic pressure and psycho-social stress.

###

Notes to editors

Download multimedia content [here](#).

About UNICEF

UNICEF works in some of the world's toughest places, to reach the world's most disadvantaged children. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone.

Follow UNICEF on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)

For more information please contact:

Georgina Thompson, UNICEF New York, Tel: +1 917 238 1559, gthompson@unicef.org