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

**NEW YORK, 9 June 2020** – As nearly 1.2 billion[[1]](#footnote-2) 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 closed[[2]](#footnote-3).
* In the majority of countries across Africa less than a quarter of the population has internet access[[3]](#footnote-4).
* 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 children[[4]](#footnote-5). 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 Asia[[5]](#footnote-6).
* 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 in sub-Saharan Africa[[6]](#footnote-7).

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 method[[7]](#footnote-8). 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 Caribbean[[8]](#footnote-9).

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 methods[[9]](#footnote-10). Around half of 127 reporting countries are offering printed, take-home resources; and only 11 per cent are offering home visits[[10]](#footnote-11).

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.

**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 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 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.

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1. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRB%202020-10.pdf> P5 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRB%202020-10.pdf> P2 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRB%202020-10.pdf> P5 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. UNICEF Global Tracker on the Education Response, May 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRB%202020-10.pdf> P3 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. UNICEF Global Tracker on the Education Response, May 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRB%202020-10.pdf> P4 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. UNICEF Global Tracker on the Education Response, May 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. UNICEF Global Tracker on the Education Response, May 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)