



GA2: Social and Humanitarian Committee

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Issue: Establishing quality education in a post-pandemic world

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## I. Introduction

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), adopted in 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), proclaims in its 26th Article: “Everyone has the right to education.” After acknowledging education as a fundamental right, the organization has worked towards providing the necessary tuition for the mass public. Firstly, additions and further elaborations to the UDHR have also been made. Such instances include the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (CADE) (“Understanding”).

Another course of action to establish quality education was the coordinated efforts by the UN Specialized Agencies. Throughout the last couple of decades, many organizations around the world such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and The World Bank took upon themselves to further the message of accessible, quality, and equal education on a global scale. In the past two years, the ongoing global pandemic has aggravated the inequality in education. The necessities of an online education require both infrastructural capabilities that should be developed by the country and personal expenses that are a burden on an individual's budget. Therefore, it could be stated that the COVID-19 pandemic acts as a decisive incident in education.

A joint report by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) published in November 2020 stated that “ $\frac{2}{3}$  of the world's school-age children -or 1.3 billion children aged 3 to 17 years old- do not have internet connection in their homes.” (“Two”). The problem of access to the internet remains as an issue that is still unresolved. Aside from its detrimental effects, great harm occurs, not only in terms of health and societal wellbeing, but also in terms of educating the disadvantaged youth. In many parts of the world, due to the aforementioned lack of resources -still- nearly a quarter of a billion students are affected by school closures related to the pandemic (“Two”).

The decision to open and close schools causes citizens to act swiftly, during times of great uncertainty. Such sudden changes require great adaptation from the students. During these uncertainties, resilience must be shown by all parties. Governments should be making the appropriate decision to keep



the number of cases as few as possible and students/schools should demonstrate resilience in order to continue the academic process efficiently as if nothing has happened.

Regarding the region of the conference, which is the Americas, The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has argued that even before the pandemic hit, the social situation in the region was deteriorating, owing to rising rates of poverty and extreme poverty, the persistence of inequalities and growing social discontent.

Therefore, concisely, the major effect of the pandemic on education is augmenting the already existing inequality between different socioeconomic classes of the world. The duty of the governing authorities and the international community is to develop an adequate response to this critical problem.

## II. Involved Countries and Organizations

### United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

UNESCO was established in 1945 as the United Nations (UN) main body to build peace through international cooperation in education, the sciences, and culture. In 2019, UNESCO established the International Commission on the Futures of Education. The Commission published a 26-page report on how the pandemic has affected the global youth in terms of education and proposed 9 possible solutions as to how the global community can reshape their approach towards education which delegates may find useful as their starting point (see useful links). The report details the importance of providing equal access to the youth with special emphasis on the privatization that occurs as a result of education shifting from schools to homes. It also details how schools are not only important because of the education they provide, but also because of their role as a form of sanctuary. Many schoolchildren who battle with poverty are able to access proper and nutritious meals in school, thanks to free lunches provided by most public schools around the world. Thus, it would surely be beneficial for delegates to not treat the issue at hand solely as an issue of education, but also as an issue of societal development and access to bare minimum resources, such as nutrition and protection from abuse.

### The World Bank / World Bank Group

The World Bank is an international organization that aims to tackle global poverty and promote shared prosperity. They are self-described as: “Five Institutions, One Group”, referring to their sub-organizations focusing on different global issues with the common aforementioned goal. The two main sub-organizations of focus are The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and The International Development Association (IDA).



In March 2021, The World Bank published a brief that outlined their mission for education recovery in 2021 (see useful links for full brief). The mission, with the primary objective of “enabling all children to return to school and to a supportive learning environment, which also addresses their health and psychosocial well-being and other needs” (“Education Response”), aims to fulfill this objective by the end of 2021. The World Bank, for this mission, partnered with UNESCO and UNICEF. They seek to keep schools around the world open and ensure that students receive effective remedial learning and comprehensive services most needed as a result of a long-term lack of in-person education. Delegates should definitely read or at least skim the detailed mission brief to get a good grasp of how such an undertaking was planned and hopefully get a broad understanding thanks to the challenges and goals stated during every step of the brief.

## The United States of America

The United States has always been a country with its fair share of controversy when it comes to education and public school education in particular. The US, despite having a Department of Education, does not have a federal education program. It leaves the business of determining curricula and lending out permits of operations to its individual states. As a result of this phenomenon, private schools and schools in affluent districts have contributed immensely to the disparity in access to education. This was an issue that was pervasive even before the pandemic, but has now clearly worsened.

Politico reports that US schools have a crucial role in a child’s development in areas other than education. They report that schools provide crucial services such as mental health counseling, medical and dental care, and identifying cases of child abuse. In addition to these services, free or reduced-price school food is also really important for millions of children.

US schools provide free or reduced-price breakfasts and lunches to about more than 30 million children (“Children”). Due to school closures, a large number of children who are in the poorer demographics have also lost this crucial access, leading to large numbers of children who are facing hunger. Although it might sound absurd to some, the fact that the lack of free or reduced-price food causes hunger is a phenomenon that needs to be addressed on its own.

## Mexico

Similar to many other countries around the world, Mexico had difficulties dealing with education during the pandemic. However, what makes Mexico a unique case is that a large majority of Mexico’s schools are public; about 89% to be exact (Reimers). A big issue that the Mexican decision-makers had to face was high dropout rates. In his book, Reimers reports: “The pre-COVID analysis estimated that for the



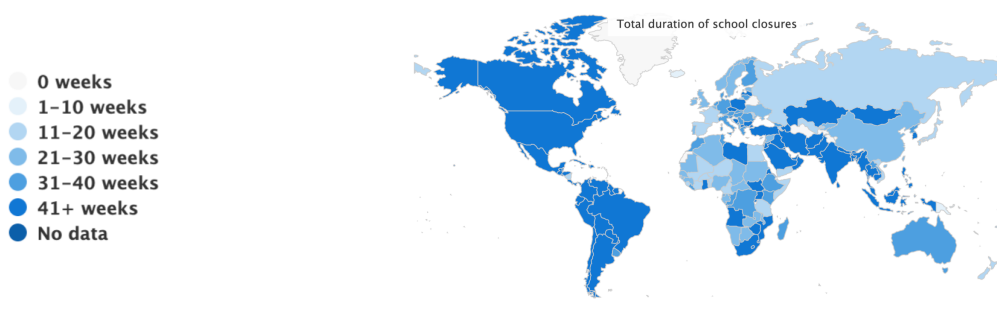
2020–2021 school, yearly dropout rates would be 1.1% in primary school level, 5.3% in secondary schools, and 15.2% in high school (INEE, 2019), under normal operating conditions. Similar to other measurements, there are significant differences in this indicator across regions (rural vs. urban) and associated with ethnicity, suggesting additional challenges regarding the distribution of institutional capacities to support students at risk across the country.

Data from the national school census (Formato 911) corresponding to the most recent school year are not public. However, the Ministry of Education estimated a dropout rate of around 10% for basic education due to the pandemic in 2020, representing nearly 2.5 million students out of school (SEP, press briefing, August 8th, 2020). This figure highlights some of the future challenges for educational authorities regarding the population's size that will require flexible pathways for students to graduate from compulsory education.” (Reimers). Thus, presenting a new obstacle worth looking into when addressing the issue of post-pandemic education. Delegates may access the relevant chapter of the said book through the useful links and skim over it to reach a better understanding of the Mexican educational question.

### III. Focused Overview of the Issue

#### 1. Closure of Schools

COVID-19 caused abrupt changes in the world. Undoubtedly, the education system was directly affected by this. Schools have endured long closures and this hampered global development goals that focused on education around the world. More than 180 nations imposed temporary school closures in light of the pandemic, affecting about 1.6 billion children and youth at its peak in early April. By the end of May 2020, 20 school systems had partially reopened. Yet still, approximately 1.2 billion students were out of school. Remote education created even more inequalities because everyone does not have access to technological devices and the internet. Schools also carry a big role in providing students with essential healthcare services, protection, meals and supporting their psychosocial state. The disruption to education caused by the pandemic increased learning inequalities and jeopardized children's overall well-being.



Picture 1: Total duration of school closures

## 2. Losses in Education

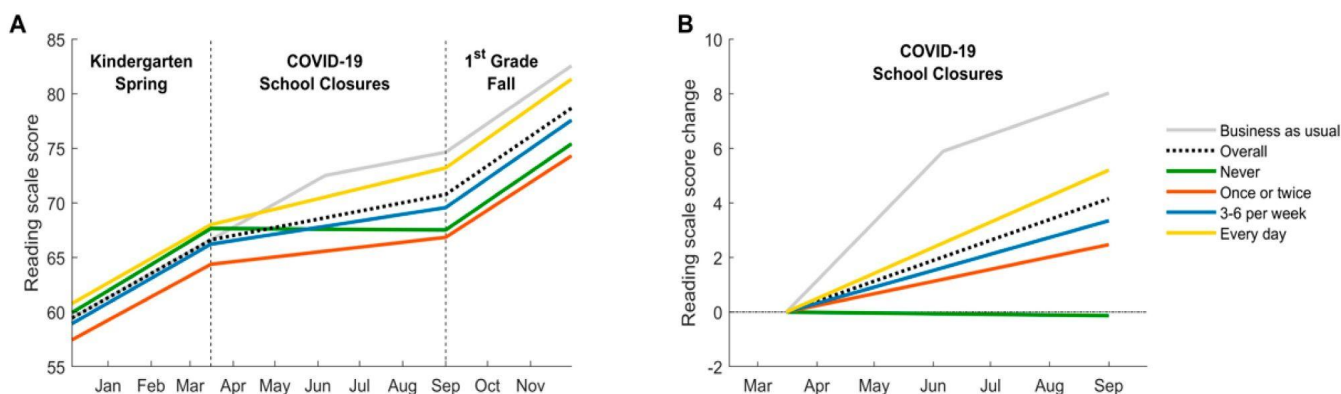
Many cases of long-term school closures are unknown in history prior to the Covid Pandemic, and hence few studies have been conducted to investigate the economic and educational consequences of school closures. However, Michèle Belot and Dinand Webbink published an interesting study in 2010 titled “Do Teacher Strikes Harm Educational Attainment of Students?”. Where the effects of long-term school closures due to a teachers' strike in Wallonia, Belgium's French-speaking southern area were researched. According to the study, there was an increase in grade repetition caused by low academic achievement and overall low educational attainment in this region of Belgium compared to other parts of the country where schools had not been closed. In higher education institutions, the rate of continuing education was equally low. It's worth noting that school closures not only result in the loss of knowledge, but also in the reduction of current knowledge and skills that should have served as the foundation for future knowledge and abilities.

It's taken a long time for data on learning loss during lockdown to become available. School systems, unlike other social sectors such as the market or the healthcare system, do not often release data at high-frequency intervals. Schools and instructors have had a difficult time implementing online-based solutions for instruction, let alone evaluation and accountability. Early data from online learning platforms indicates a decrease in coursework completion and higher test score dispersion. Children spend significantly less time learning during the lockdown, according to survey evidence, some studies show variances based on home background. Data from students who have recently returned to school has lately surfaced.

A prominent example of learning losses during the pandemic is the literacy rate. During school closures, students learn literacy at a slower rate than during a regular school year. It is projected that during school closures in the United States, the pace of reading ability gain in kindergarten pupils drops by 66 percent compared to active schooling. According to a recent assessment of the impact of the 2005 Kashmir



earthquake, children afflicted by the tragedy and its accompanying school closures were 1.5 to 2 years behind their peers who were not affected by the disaster and its resulting school closures. In practice, impacted youngsters may earn 15% less in each adult year of their lives due to this learning loss.



“Picture 2: The predicted reading ability gain before, during, and after COVID-19 related school closure”

### 3. Obstacles of Online Learning

The lack of technological and digital resources amongst teachers, students, and parents was one of the major disadvantages to distance learning. Teachers struggled to adapt to the new platforms and manage them on a technical level. Nowadays people rely heavily on the Internet and digital technologies. It has taken on even greater relevance as a result of the epidemic because a major portion of the population's educational and job procedures are carried out remotely over the Internet for those with limited mobility. People are understandably irritated by the lack of Internet connectivity in such circumstances because they cannot continue their jobs or receive an education.

In accordance with the data collected by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in 2018, the citizens of Ukraine and Georgia had the lowest Internet access among the neighboring and Eastern Partnership countries - 63%, while this number was 81% in Russia, 79% in Belarus, 76% in Moldova, 71% in Turkey and in neighboring Azerbaijan and Armenia it was 80% and 65%, respectively (IDFI, 2020). Although improvements could have been made until 2020, it is clearly seen that there is a large majority that does not even have access to the internet. It is unreasonable to expect these students to attend online education.

There are also detriments caused by the gap between people with privileged and disadvantaged backgrounds. In the United States, there is a considerable divide between those from affluent and poor homes: although nearly all rich 15-year-olds indicated they had access to a computer, nearly 25% of those from underprivileged families did not. While some schools and governments, like those in New South Wales,



Australia, have provided digital devices to pupils in need, many people are still concerned that the pandemic will exacerbate the digital gap.

The educating bodies should be aiming to augment the engagement of students. One of the greatest detriments of online education is the disconnection of schools and students. This disconnection highly decreases the motivation of students, which is a huge detriment in quality education. Therefore, the Member States should be looking forward to finding methods to augment engagement. Also, the utilization of technology becomes even more important during the pandemic. Ergo, both students and teachers should be given the necessary training to use technology efficiently. The proficiency in technology is a significant determinant.

#### 4. Education and the Economy

The educational system has a critical role in supplying high-quality labor resources that contribute to economic growth and development. The economy is a precondition for boosting educational quality. Even if schools immediately return to their regular work environment, the closure of schools in early 2020 has resulted in learning losses around the world that would be difficult to compensate for. If prompt and effective efforts are not made to remedy these losses, they will have a long-term economic impact on both students and schoolchildren, as well as society as a whole.

Children who do not receive an education, miss out on future prospects such as increased incomes. According to some models, the loss of learning during World War II had a negative consequence on former students' lives even 40 years later. COVID-19 also increased the youth employment crisis. More than 267 million of the world's 1.2 billion young people lacked jobs, education, or training even before the pandemic. One out of every six young people has ceased working since the pandemic began, and working hours have been cut by 23% for those who remain employed. All in all, it is insufficient for schools to merely reopen following COVID-19. Students will require individualized and ongoing support to help them adjust and catch up following the pandemic. Schools must be assisted in preparing to give that support and meet the immense challenges that lie ahead in the coming months.

## IV. Key Vocabulary

**United Nations Specialized Agencies:** UN specialized agencies are international organizations working with the UN, in accordance with relationship agreements between each organization and the UN.

**Pandemic:** Occurring over a wide geographic area (such as multiple countries or continents) and typically affecting a significant proportion of the population.





**Lockdown:** A temporary condition imposed by governmental authorities (as during the outbreak of an epidemic disease) in which people are required to stay in their homes and refrain from or limit activities outside the home involving public contact.

**Remote Education:** Remote learning occurs when the instructor or teacher is separated by distance or time. Therefore, cannot meet in the classroom. It is also referred to as online education.

**Gini coefficient:** The Gini index, or Gini coefficient, is a measure of the distribution of income across a population. A commonly utilized tool among economists, the efficient is often used as a gauge of economic inequality, measuring income distribution or, less commonly, wealth distribution among a population.

## V. Important Events & Chronology

Date (Day/Month/Year)	Event
30 January 2020	COVID was declared a major health concern outbreak.
27 February - 18 March 2020	The majority of schools around the world close and go online.
1 June 2020	Schools open for the first time after lockdown in the UK.
7 July 2020	The US government supports the reopening of schools.
December 2020	Vaccines from Pfizer-BioNTech and Sinovac startle in their mass distribution.

## VI. Past Resolutions and Treaties

On account of it being so recent, no resolutions have been passed regarding this situation. However, despite its not being in the format of an official resolution released by the UN, there has been a significant UN-affiliated document about enhancing education circumstances in a post-pandemic world.

- [The Secretary Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond](#)

The document touches on the causes of the pandemic and essentially the aftermath it had on the education of hundreds and millions of students. Moreover, the current learning state during COVID-19 is also depicted in detail in contrast to the potential of the education systems. Last but not least, policy



recommendations for possible UN conferences on this topic are mentioned in a global awareness manner. The brief could be a fundamental

## VII. Failed Solution Attempts

There has not been a failed solution attempt from the UN in terms of a resolution or a treaty. With that being said, the efforts of the UN Specialized Agencies have yet to yield the desired beneficial effects. Despite acknowledging the problem and developing a frame of possible solutions to tackle the problem, these necessary actions can't be completed without the utmost cooperation from the Member States. However, the solution attempts however, e problem, there have been countless solution attempts in many regions around the world. Most nations were conflicted about the quality of education delivered during the pandemic and some of their ideologies have failed tremendously. Nations who were rather too eager to reopen their education institutions physically ,generally faced the consequences of increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases and casualties. Additionally, underdeveloped or developing countries had major problems via online education as well with considerable segments of the population either having no or poor internet connection capabilities. In brief, a general solution attempt that has succeeded in the long term during the pandemic conditions has yet to be seen.

## VIII. Possible Solutions

As aforementioned, there has not been an official UN legislation or resolution regarding the issue of education in a post-pandemic world; however, there have been attempts to tackle this significant issue by the majority of the countries. An attempt to find solution ideas should start with the evaluation of three methods in education: online education, hybrid education models, and physical (face-to-face) education.

The benefit of online education is that of not augmenting the number of casualties during the existence of a deadly virus. As an obligation of the global pandemic, online education enables social distancing to be achieved. However, online education is highly difficult to adopt by countries with inadequately developed infrastructure. Moreover, aside from the capabilities determined by government spending and its budget, online education has a personal cost. In LEDCs, the rates of such people are even more alarming in comparison to the rest of the world. Nonetheless, during the past two years, online education served as a temporary substitute until the pandemic casualty statistics, or the economic status, is suitable for the return to physical education.

The second education model is hybrid systems. This solution suggests a section of the student body attend online via collaborative teaching platforms and the rest physically attend school at a logical





frequency. The problem surrounding hybrid teaching is, possibly, the excessive demand for physical education. Evidently, the quality of education decreases online, which may pose a dilemma for students. Thirdly, the final choice is physical education. Despite being effective in the understanding of learning, it may threaten the health of the students. An increase in the number of infected students will cause exponential detriments to a large group of people.

With this mini analysis, we can see that all three of these methods have their strengths and shortcomings. Therefore, a different, more long-term approach should be adopted: which is to tackle the disparity in opportunities provided to citizens. During this process, governments should be seeking to support households with less income. Economically, there are numerous methods to achieve that. A few examples could be: providing transfer payments, increasing the minimum wage, or attempting to establish a level of basic income for all citizens.

Per contra, the governments may directly seek to invest in the infrastructure that will allow online education to run smoothly, especially in rural environments. This investment may require a budget that most countries don't have. Therefore, financial institutions that have cooperated with the UN before may be a potential source of funds. Some of these establishments are, namely, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank. However, the delegates should bear in mind some of the criticism directed at these organizations.

The interest rates of the loans provided by the IMF may be too high for the countries that need them the most, to repay, on account of the rationale of "opportunity cost". After these required high interests, such countries fail to repay these loans. Thus, they take even more loans with even higher interest rates. This situation is named the "debt trap" and has been a prominent criticism of the institution. Therefore, the delegates should be looking at how to make these loans easier to repay in order to avoid a debt trap when requesting any loans to create circumstances for efficient education in a post-pandemic world.

## IX. Useful Links

- Education in the Time of COVID -19

([https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45905/1/S2000509\\_en.pdf](https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45905/1/S2000509_en.pdf))

The document provides insightful analysis on the pandemic, its effects on education with an informative approach. Moreover, the report focuses



- Education in a post-COVID world: Nine ideas for public action:  
[https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/education\\_in\\_a\\_post-covid\\_world-nine\\_ideas\\_for\\_public\\_action.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/education_in_a_post-covid_world-nine_ideas_for_public_action.pdf)
- Mission: Recovering Education in 2021:  
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/brief/mission-recovering-education-in-2021>
- COVID-19 and Post-pandemic Educational Policies in Mexico. What is at Stake?:  
[https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-81500-4\\_6](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-81500-4_6)
- Simulating the Possible Effects of COVID-19 School Closures on Schooling and Learning Outcomes:  
<https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/798061592482682799-0090022020/original/covidandeducationJune17r6.pdf>

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[www.right-to-education.org/page/understanding-education-right#:~:text=International%20human%20rights%20law%20guarantees,has%20the%20right%20to%20education'](http://www.right-to-education.org/page/understanding-education-right#:~:text=International%20human%20rights%20law%20guarantees,has%20the%20right%20to%20education').