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# LMUN 2026

A Background Guide for:

**UNESCO: Global Divide in Education**



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**UNESCO | Global Divide in Education**

**Chair: Valentina Barzuna**

**Co-Chair: Lucía Shum**



## Letter from Chairs

Dear delegates,

We would like to welcome you to the 2026 Lincoln Model United Nations. We, your chairs, Valentina Barzuna and Lucia Shum, are excited to serve you as you navigate through the issue of **Bridging the Global Digital Divide in Education**. Our goal is to construct an environment where research and creative solutions are able to be openly expressed.

Throughout the last few decades, technology has taken over education, yet progress has been unequal. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed inequalities in digital access. While technology often opens opportunities for innovation in education, millions of students stay disconnected due to their circumstances. As delegates, your responsibility is to propose policies for the improvement of education while keeping in mind privacy, cultural diversity, and human rights online.

We hope for debates that are informed, respectful, and oriented towards solutions. We ask delegates to prepare a clear national position, with a good understanding of their country's education strategy.

Lastly, as your directors, we are committed to maintaining an open communication and addressing any concerns or questions you may have through the conference.

We offer our best regards for a productive debate and a meaningful conference!

Sincerely,

Valentina Barzuna, Chair ([vbarzuna@lincoln.ed.cr](mailto:vbarzuna@lincoln.ed.cr))

Lucia Shum, Co-Chair ([lshum@lincoln.ed.cr](mailto:lshum@lincoln.ed.cr))



## **Topic Introduction**

Digital technology can amplify access to learning tools and improve overall quality education, contributing to the SDG #4 (Good Quality Education). However, the advancements of global connectivity remain uneven. According to UNESCO, while the majority gain access to the internet every year, many in low-income countries continue to require those advanced resources.

“5.4 billion people use the internet, while 2.6 billion still lack access, mostly in developing countries. This disadvantage negatively impacts students' growth, specifically those living in vulnerable areas.” (The International Telecommunication Union)

Historically, the digital divide began to emerge with the expansion of the internet in the 20th century, but became most visible during the COVID-19 pandemic, when billions of students were forced to learn remotely. Some countries found the transition to be smooth, while others lacked the basic technology to conduct such changes and support education. Therefore, this affected the progress towards achieving **Sustainable Development Goal 4**, which seeks inclusive education for all students around the world.

Furthermore, without technology and digital literacy, millions of learners risk having no access to teaching tools for better skills, affecting the development of students. This may lead to poverty cycles and limit social mobility. Paying more attention to this global issue strengthens education systems and their incentive for a change, and ensures that learning resources are accessible, especially during times of need or crises. In order to conduct effective solutions, actions must be coordinated on infrastructure development, affordable technology, inclusive digital policies, and strengthening the support of teachers.

### **This topic opens many questions for delegates to consider:**

- How can UNESCO support member states in expanding equitable access to technological tools and connectivity?
- What policies can guarantee that digital learning continues to be inclusive in the future, including cultural relevance and accessibility to all learners regardless of location or socio-economic status?
- Internationally, how should the community approach long-term educational and social consequences of digital inequality?



## **Topic Summary**

The global digital divide in education refers to unequal access to technology, digital literacy, reliable connectivity, and the skills required to use technology effectively, creating significant disadvantages for those who cannot actively participate in online learning and other digital educational activities. The rapid and widespread shift to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic further revealed and worsened the gap between connected and disconnected learners. The issue shows unequal access to a pillar of development: quality education in an ever-evolving digital era. Furthermore, organizations such as UNICEF and UNESCO highlighted how many regions are unable to prioritize digital infrastructure, technological training, or affordability, which hinders academic performance. Although governments have tried to hand out access, responses often weren't enough. Therefore, reinforcing the need for universal and equitable digital resources is vital for students to not have to face technological, social, cultural, and economic disparities, as a consequence for lack of connectivity.

## **Key Terms**

- **Internet Accessibility:** Availability, quality, and affordability of connection necessary for online education. This takes into account mobile broadband speed, data availability, and rural internet coverage.
- **Information and communication technologies (ICT):** Technology tools to create, store, and inform. In the educational sector, ICT includes laptops, educational apps, broadband, online learning resources, and tablets.
- **Technological Infrastructure:** Physical networks such as Wi-Fi, mobile towers, school computer labs, servers, etc. To improve education.
- **Digital Content:** Open educational resources, in local languages and culturally relevant contexts
- **Digital Divide:** The disparities between individuals, communities, etc, with access to technology, such as the internet, computers, and educational resources, in comparison to those who don't have access.



- **Global Digital Divide:** A broader form of digital divide referring to inequalities in technology accessibility between developed and developing nations, which impacts broader aspects such as education, economic opportunities, and development.
- **National Regulations:** Data protection, broadband policies, and education technology standards.
- **Devices:** Computers, tablets, smartphones, etc. availability for students and teachers.
- **Inequality:** Gaps in access between or within countries, typically involving income, gender, and geography.
- **Equity:** Ensuring all students, regardless of background, have access to technology, connectivity, etc., helping the community participate fully in their education.
- **Broadband connectivity:** Refers to the speed of internet access that allows students and teachers to have access to educational digital tools, such as downloading resources or attending online classes.
- **Online Education:** A method of teaching and learning that uses the internet and information and communication technologies to deliver courses to students remotely, rather than in a physical classroom.
- **Remote learning:** A method where students and teachers connect through digital platforms. It uses technology to deliver coursework in real-time or at the student's own pace.
- **Synchronous:** existing or occurring at the same time.
- **Asynchronous:** two or more objects or events do not exist or happen at the same time.
- **Digital literacy:** Refers to the ability to effectively and safely use, evaluate, and create information with digital technologies.
- **Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4):** "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."
- **Open Educational Resources (OER):** teaching, learning, and research materials in any format that are in the public domain or released under an open license, permitting their free use, reuse, adaptation, and redistribution.
- **Connectivity:** the ability of individuals, communities, or devices to access and use digital networks. Connectivity includes having a reliable, stable, and fast internet connection that



allows students and teachers to participate in online learning, access digital resources, and communicate effectively.

- **Affordable technology** refers to devices and services that are economically accessible, allowing more people to benefit from technological advancements without a high cost.

## **History and Context**

The foundational causes of the educational divide go back to the post-World War II era, and slowly progressed with decolonization and the subsequent emergence of numerous developing nations.

- **Colonial legacy:** Many colonized nations inherited educational systems designed to serve colonial power, not the diverse need of the local population.
- **Economic disparity:** The gap between the Global North and South directly shows a divide due to education. Poorer nations are having a hard time allocating sufficient funding for schools, teacher training, and necessary resources, leading to a decline in infrastructure. Poor education affects economic development, which in turn has an impact on better education investments/funding.
- **Conflict and crises:** War, natural disasters, etc, are very disruptive factors. They destroy school buildings, affect students and teachers' lives, and direct already scarce public funds towards emergency and security, eventually harming educational progress.
- **Gender inequality:** Many social norms and economic pressures show more importance towards boys education over girls education, introducing present gender inequality in enrollment and literacy.
- **Insufficient and uneven funding:** Low-income countries are not investing enough in education, therefore falling behind when it comes to introducing new skills to younger generations. On the other hand, wealthier districts often get more resources than rural areas, which creates greater disparities in the social ladder.
- **Discrimination and sociocultural barriers:** Due to biases in society, many people fall behind in their learning development, such as gender, ethnicity, language, disabilities, or even locations, causing systematic exclusion and worsening the global divide in education.



- **Lack of teachers and professional development:** There is a global need for millions more teachers who are qualified. This shortage is due to educators who lack training due to their insufficient professional development and even their limited knowledge on the use of technology, which is taking over the educational system day by day.
- **Crises and systematic disruptions:** Armed conflict, climate change, health crises, etc, can all be greater concerns that disrupt schooling, displace populations, and destroy infrastructure.
- **Lack of inclusive policies and data:** Many countries don't have legal and policy frameworks for inclusive education, including all students from any social class, which leads to uneven opportunities and limited access to recent changes in schooling.

#### **Solutions sought for the previous conflicts.**

- **Insufficient and uneven funding:** Breaking the education bubble through the use of debt for education swaps, where the international debt of a country is forgiven in exchange for investments to improve schooling. The UN Global Digital Compact is then paired, which incentivizes tech companies to contribute to the Digital Solidarity Fund to decrease internet costs for rural and low-income areas.
- **Sociocultural barriers:** In order to end exclusion, UNESCO utilizes the Human Centered Inclusion, where they try their best to implement differentiated instructions (in different languages) and prevent language barriers. UNESCO also utilizes their WIDE database to identify which groups of people (gender or ethnic groups) are falling behind to help them.
- **Teacher shortage:** UNESCO believes the best solution to this current concern includes the Global Teacher Campus, an online class that trains on the use of AI and includes digital training. Additionally, they also believe that increasing the teachers' salaries by 15% can help with ensuring that professors stay motivated.
- **Policy and data gaps:** UNESCO is using the PEER Tool, which maps national laws to see where inclusive policies are missing. By releasing this data to the public, UNESCO aims to create transparency in order to pressure governments to implement laws for the protection of students with disabilities or those who come from various social classes.



## Committee Background

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was founded on November 16, 1945, following the disasters of World War II. Its purpose is to help the world find peace and security by improving education, science, and culture.

- **Early focus:** UNESCO was initially focused on rebuilding educational systems in post-war Europe and fighting poor education in the developing world.
- **Key mandates:** “The organization’s role expanded with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which enshrined the right to education” (article 26). UNESCO has grown to be the leading UN agency for planning international efforts to promote this right.

The global leaders at the time imagined UNESCO as an organization that would use education, science, and peace to build long-lasting world peace and security. Since politics wasn’t going to be sufficient, it strives to be the connection to promote mutual understanding, eradicate poverty, and advocate for human rights by setting standards, sharing knowledge, and creating global networks. Currently, with 194 Members involved and 12 Associate Members, UNESCO is determined to respond to the biggest challenges of our time on an international level. It works as a pathway for dialogue and solutions to global challenges like preserving heritage, digital divides, etc.

As a specialized agency of the United Nations, UNESCO works with its own governance but is affiliated through an agreement in 1946 under the UN umbrella. The committee consists of three main bodies: the General Conference, the Secretariat, and the Executive Board, each with its own key role as part of the organization. The General Conference, alongside the representatives from all Member States, is responsible for determining its main line of work. The Secretariat is in charge of executing UNESCO’s programme under the authority of the Director-General, Khaled El-En, and the Executive Board monitors the implementation of the Organization’s programme.

Over the past decades, UNESCO has played a central role in promoting inclusive and equitable education, leading several global initiatives that address the widening digital divide. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the immediate adaptation to digital resources for some and the struggle for others became an obstacle for disconnected learners in their pathway to decent work



and social inclusion. The organization quickly noted this and established the Global Education Coalition (GEC) in March 2020. With the support of 175 institutional partners, UNESCO created a dynamic global platform in order to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 in times of crisis. Through this initiative, the GEC has “helped over 615,000 youth develop employability skills, trained 654,796 teachers and supported over 800,000 learners studying foundational subjects like science, technology, engineering and mathematics” (UNESCO). Through voluntary and assessed contributions, UNESCO can support its global initiatives to promote cooperation in education, science, culture, and communication to foster world peace.

UNESCO’s goal is to close the digital divide in education based on the fact that education is a right. The ever-evolving technological changes create a barrier in which disadvantaged students tend to fall behind due to a lack of access to digital tools, online resources, and reliable internet. Since “Today, 2.6 billion people - 32% of the global population - still lack internet access, with 1.8 billion of them living in rural areas” (UNESCO, “UNESCO Spotlights How Digital Learning Can Promote Equity in Low-Resource Contexts”). UNESCO looks to transform digital technology into a tool for inclusive, equitable education for all. This movement goes beyond access; it focuses on quality learning, skill development, and bridging gaps for disadvantaged groups. Through policy guidance, teacher training, digital platforms, and universal connectivity, UNESCO looks forward to using technology as a tool that leads to equal opportunities for all.

## **Current Situation**

### **Current Situation with Numerical Support:**

With AI and constant developments in digital tools, UNESCO is striving for inclusion with new advancements in connectivity, portability, open educational resources, and artificial intelligence to help with reaching marginalized learners. With technology, students now have more access to resources such as digital libraries and informative websites.

But it must be taken into account that **2.6 to 2.7 billion people still lack access to the internet**. Making digital learning very difficult for many students. As a result, this has caused huge gaps in access to connectivity and devices. Globally, many learners lack basic access to the internet at home. **According to the “teacher task force,” 50% of students have no household computer, and 43% have no internet at all.** In comparison to high-income countries, regions



such as South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and parts of Latin America have very low access. Students from wealthier families often have reliable devices, while low-income families struggle with connectivity rates and obtaining digital tools. Without access to tools that lead to the future, people are unable to participate in online classes, learning platforms, or sources for taking notes, which in the long run can jeopardize the development of essential digital skills.

Additionally, during the 2020 pandemic, many school closures relied on the use of technology, which caused disproportionate learning losses specifically for the students with no connectivity, creating an even greater gap with the connected peers. **Furthermore, in many places, people rely on schools to provide those sources, yet 56% of schools around the world lack internet.** Other factors have to also be taken into account, such as teacher training, or the integration of digital curriculum, since without those factors, improvements in technology are of no use for the improvement of education.

On the other hand, social gaps are currently also affecting digital access. **Around 244 million fewer women than men are able to use the internet, which excludes them from learning opportunities.** This is due to social norms, safety concerns, etc, making it difficult for those girls to actually obtain the same skills. This can also be seen in people with disabilities, who are currently suffering due to a lack of accessibility features in digital education, which, as a result, excludes a big community within society from the same learning sources.

In the long run, this lack of technological innovations within certain developing countries can cause a loss of job opportunities for students further in their future and an overall downfall of the labor force within the country, widening the gaps. Therefore, this digital divide causes deterioration in equitable education for all, which is a key component in the establishment of the UN Sustainable Development Goal #4, “Quality Education”.

## **Bloc Positions**

### **Bloc A: Highly Digitized Education Systems**

Countries that may form part of this bloc are globally recognized for their widespread and established digital education systems. They have a mutual interest in innovation, quality education, standard setting, and global leadership. Nevertheless, they tend to face internal equity



issues. These nations may have a strategic interest in addressing the global digital divide in education due to their reliance on global trade, international labor markets, and stable partner economies. An imbalance in the mentioned may threaten global economic stability, which causes countries with strong education systems to be indirectly affected and fall behind as well.

### **Bloc B: Emerging Digital Education Systems**

Nations that form part of this bloc all face the issue of having moderate access but uneven quality and equity. They may be interested in closing the gaps within their education systems as a way to foster general development. The lack of consistent digital access means that many students miss classes, instruction time, and teacher interaction. Therefore, these inconsistencies may lead to persistent gaps in knowledge. Hence, they likely look forward to improving reliability and effectiveness and implementing more teacher training. Additionally, public education systems are a big part of these countries. Nevertheless, while private schools adapt quickly using digital tools, public schools lack reliable internet, devices, and teacher training, increasing the inequality between students in the presence of educational technology and opportunities.

### **Bloc C: Underconnected Education Systems**

This bloc may consist of countries that are underconnected in the educational realm. They tend to face major infrastructure, affordability, and access challenges. With a desire for basic connectivity, device access, and appropriate teacher training, these nations seek approachable solutions. Member States that would likely form part of this bloc may present the main goal of preventing the risk of exclusion from global education and labor markets.

### **Bloc D: Education & Development Partners**

Member States that form part of this bloc may pursue an interest in prioritizing international cooperation, funding, or program implementation. Therefore, they are considered vital because of their care for safety, global development, and UNESCO's mandate. From a geographical or interest standpoint, they are united by their involvement in upholding the Sustainable Development Goals and accomplishing the global agenda for quality education.



## **Possible Solutions**

While the previous information provided has consisted of outlining the realities of the global digital divide, this section will concentrate on solutions towards a more hopeful future. In 2026, the digital divide has now become a threat to infrastructure, literacy, and agency (referring to safety). By showing concern towards this issue, the matter becomes not only about technological accessibility and logistics but also a moral topic for the international community. Additionally, as AI continues to take over society's future, the solutions presented aim to make sure that a student's living circumstances do not prevent them from their digital development. This section will provide two options: the Top-Down Infrastructure Approach and the Bottom-Up localized AI literacy approach. By investigating these paths, delegates will hopefully be prepared to develop an argument for a future where technology serves as a bridge towards equity, rather than a reason for a greater gap.

### **Option 1: Top-Down Infrastructure Model**

This approach focuses on the massive global investment to build the pipes (fiber, satellites, and 5G signal). It mostly follows the belief that technological content is of no use without a plug or signal. This approach believes that the internet should be presented as a public utility, such as water or power, that must be legally authorized by the state.

- **Organizations:** UNICEF and ITU show a global incentive with Giga to connect every school to the internet, already making a difference for 2 million school institutions around the world. In 2026, Kenya was able to cut 60% of their internet costs due to the UNICEF Giga Model. By doing so, such organizations aim to introduce national platforms that are free and safe.
- **Challenges:** With such big projects, it is important to also make space for awareness on the costs of such implementations and the co-dependence that arises from developing countries towards foreign tech providers to improve their infrastructure.

### **Option 2: Bottom-Up Human Capital Model**

On the other hand, the Bottom-Up solution relies more on the idea that teachers and professionals in educational environments need to have access to training for AI competency and using basic technology or resources accessible offline that don't require expensive tools in order



to grant access. This side believes that teachers who don't have the appropriate skills to deal with technology are better off not using any, given that it can become an obstacle to the students' learning process, therefore prioritizing literacy and ethics over materialistic solutions to ensure the learning environments can use technology safely.

- **Organizations:** UNESCO Global Education Coalition (GEC) is a project that concentrates on the Global Skills Academy to teach professors about digital and AI skills. Likewise, the UNESCO AI Competency Framework is also a resource created for students and teachers to learn all about AI to prevent delays in acquiring future required skills/techniques.
- **Challenges:** This approach is very slow-paced and difficult to apply to 44 million additional teachers. There is also no way of measuring each of their personal skills and improvements.

**General overview:** Given these two approaches, delegates must evaluate if their corresponding country is going through a connectivity crisis or a skills crisis.

Furthermore, there must be a mutual agreement between vendor states and the recidivist states to make sure that the protection of culture and citizens is prioritized.

**Conclusion:** Based on these two models, both search for the public right to education and digital access. Delegates must debate on the best solution, show how both of them can be merged through debt for education, and fight for a just solution that provides a future where every child, regardless of their location, can be part of the digital development within the economy.

### **Questions a Resolution Must Answer:**

- What are the long-term educational, economic, and social consequences if the United Nations fails to address the digital divide in education?
- Based on the way that the digital divide in education has intensified or changed due to global disruptions (COVID-19 pandemic), what lessons can be drawn?
- What actions have already been taken by international bodies such as the United Nations, UNESCO, and UNICEF to address the digital gap in education? What limitations remain in these initiatives?



- How can nations balance national sovereignty and international cooperation when implementing digital education policies?
- How can policies help ensure that expanding digital education doesn't amplify existing inequalities?
- What are the key factors to be considered so policy implementations are apt for underconnected, emerging, and highly digitalized education systems?

### **Case Studies & Topics to Discuss:**

#### **Case Study #1: Sub-Saharan Africa – Infrastructure & Connectivity Barriers**

According to the 2024 Global System for Mobile Communications Association (GSMA) report, Sub-Saharan Africa is still considered the least connected region globally, with 65% of the population not using mobile Internet despite the fact that they live within a broadband network. Therefore, the barriers in the region originate from Africa's slow infrastructure development, but there has been a general shift to the lack of connectivity.

Considering that infrastructure is the base for any development, this gap in Africa has led to many issues, including the lack of digital connectivity. Due to the costly and unevenly distributed internet access, nearly 100 million children don't attend school in the Sub-Saharan Africa region. Additionally, these limitations result in just 64% of primary and 50% of secondary teachers having received minimum training that frequently don't include technology skills. That is essential to deliver distance and online education effectively in low-income regions (UNESCO, "Startling Digital Divides in Distance Learning Emerge"). Consequently, without teacher training, children lose learning opportunities.

Closing the global usage gap is essential for the region's development since it could add approximately \$3.5 trillion to the GDP by 2030. From which, more than 90% would benefit developing regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa. Right now, mobile Internet is more than access; it's about a lifeline for education, which leads to inclusion and participation in the modern world.

#### **Case Study #2: Latin America – The Middle-Ground Digital Divide**

Latin America is generally recognized as a region with moderate, but uneven, educational connectivity. Despite significant rural-urban divides and disparities between countries, the rapid shift to technology as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted existing inequalities.



While some nations, such as Chile and Costa Rica, flourished in access, others, including Nicaragua and Guatemala, lacked connectivity. Although there's been significant progress in the region to expand access to educational technology in vulnerable urban areas and rural areas, the closure of schools in crucial moments caused the connectivity agenda supported by the Committee for the Expansion of Connectivity of the Working Group of Technology and Innovation to expand and shift its focus towards providing accessible and stable internet connection to students and teachers in their homes.

The nature of the digital divide in the region mainly comes from unequal access rather than no access. It lies in the fact that although access exists, the quality, stability, and educational effectiveness vary widely between urban vs. rural connectivity gaps, public vs. private educational disparities, and other crucial aspects. Given that 3 out of 10 people lack internet access in Latin America and the Caribbean, around 40% of students in the region lacked access to digital or broadcast distance learning during the pandemic (World Bank). Whilst all countries in the region implemented distance learning, the progress came with significant challenges that underlined the digital divide in education. UNICEF has made a conscious effort to promote equitable approaches to educational technology and ensure that every child and adolescent has the opportunity to learn through world-class digital solutions. They look forward to “delivering quality content to children in the Latin America and Caribbean region, without leaving behind those in vulnerable situations such as children on the move in Honduras, as well as adolescents in disconnected areas in Mexico, thanks to offline modality” (UNICEF, 2024).

The global crisis demonstrated how educational platforms and digital resources are indispensable tools to ensure teaching and learning processes. Hence, “digital learning has the potential to level the playing field in education if we focus on bridging gaps...” (UNICEF, 2024).

### **Links to Guide/Help Delegates:**

- To find corresponding countries' digital laws: <https://education-profiles.org/>
- Rich compared to poor gaps in their country: <https://www.education-inequalities.org/>
- Meeting UN targets: <https://www.unesco.org/en/sdg4scorecard-dashboard>

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