

# School lessons for disadvantaged children in Brazil

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Brazil remains one of the most affected countries in the world by Covid-19, with nearly 20 million reported cases. In 2020, over 44 million boys and girls in Brazil were unable to attend school during the lockdown and more than 5.5 million were unable to access school activities. Marginalized children in Brazil's north and in poor neighborhoods are particularly at risk of dropping out of school early and falling through all the cracks. Thanks to Banque Heritage and other partners, UNICEF can help provide these children with a good education.



**Brazil:**

**Capital:** Brasilia  
**Official language:** Portuguese  
**Head of government:**  
 President Jair Bolsonaro  
**Area:** 8,515,770 square kilometres  
**Population:** 211,834,000  
**Population density:** 24 inhabitants/Km<sup>2</sup>  
**Literacy rate:** 93.4%  
**GDP/capita:** 1,491 USD (2021)  
**Unemployment rate:** 14.5% (2021)  
**Poverty rate (< 1.90 USD/day):** 4.6%



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### Brazil - a country of inequalities

Brazil is located in South America and has 205 million inhabitants. The population is still very young: about 23.3% are under 15 years old and only about 7.8% are over 64. In terms of area, Brazil is one of the largest countries in the world, with 8.5 million square kilometers. Most Brazilians (85%) live in cities on the Atlantic coast, above all in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. These are characterized by rapid growth. Poor neighborhoods have formed in previously undeveloped areas. The rest of Brazil, with the Amazon and the mountainous regions, has by far the most surface area, but only a very low population density of less than five to 20 inhabitants per square kilometer. People live widely dispersed and lack modern infrastructure. Even the capital of the region, Manaus, with two million inhabitants, is practically only accessible by plane or boat.

About a quarter of the population lives below the poverty line. More than 9.4 million people live on less than 1.90 US dollars a day. Most poor families live in the northeast of Brazil. In addition, rural families and an above-average number of Afro-Brazilian families are affected. The poverty in the country is particularly visible in the favelas. This is the name given to the slums in Brazil. People move from poor rural areas to the cities because they hope to find work there. But there is no housing for them, and so they settle on the outskirts. To make ends meet, many children work - often under dangerous and exploitative conditions - and stay away from school. These children are denied the chance of a protected and healthy childhood.

## School education – Next steps

In recent years, Brazil has made slow progress in ensuring access to education for all children and youth. The number of girls and boys aged 4 to 17 enrolled in school between 2016 and 2019 has increased slightly. However, inequality remains a problem in the country. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, in 2019, 2.1 million pupils had to repeat a grade; more than 620 000 learners had dropped out of school and more than 6 million were in a grade for which they are actually too old (age group bias).

The profile of the learners is very well known: The cases were concentrated in the north and northeast of Brazil and often involved indigenous and Afro-Brazilian children and youth or students with disabilities.



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### Then Covid-19 came into the mix

Although children and adolescents were not directly affected by the first waves of Covid-19, they are the ones who suffer most indirectly, as in all emergencies and humanitarian crises. Social isolation, overcrowding in health facilities, or the suspension of some services, in addition to the closure of schools, affect education, mental health, and access to basic health measures. In Brazil, more than 5.5 million children and adolescents did not have access to school activities in 2020, whether in print or digital form, in person, or remotely. Covid-19-related school closures are particularly difficult for vulnerable children. More than 50 percent of schools do not have adequate equipment for distance learning, and teaching staff often lack the necessary knowledge to deliver good online lessons. Food provision has also been discontinued in the schools. As a result, one-third of poorer children did not have access to food during the pandemic. More than half of the families noticed mental health symptoms among young people in their households. UNICEF is therefore working for the safe reopening of schools, most of which had remained closed since March.

### How UNICEF helps

With the support of Banque Heritage and partners, UNICEF Switzerland and Liechtenstein want to contribute to ensuring that children in the Amazon region and in the poor districts of Rio receive a good education and stay in school. This includes modern teaching materials that are adapted to the age of the children and work both directly in the classroom and for online teaching. Teachers should learn how to use laptops, smartphones, and the internet to deliver exciting lessons that children can also participate in from home.



Over 20 million reported Covid-19 cases (2020).



5.5 million children without access to schooling (2020)



Over 620,000 pupils drop out of school early (2019)



1/3 of children affected by poverty without secure access to meals (2020)



Over 50% of schools with inadequate infrastructure and skills for distance education



With the initiative, UNICEF aims to promote and expand connectivity in selected public schools in northern Brazil and in Rio's poor neighborhoods, and to contribute to the development of solutions for hybrid education and digital activities.

The project aims to provide inclusive access to quality education and connectivity in selected schools in northern Brazil and in a poor neighborhood in Rio for at least 2,000 marginalized school children aged 7 to 12.

#### Planned activities

I. As a first step, UNICEF will work with the schools to develop documents that support the mentoring and monitoring of schools and teachers.

II. 20 selected schools will then be supported and accompanied in developing high-quality projects for hybrid education.

III. Four of these projects will be fully developed and implemented. They will focus on strengthening digital and communication skills.

IV. The results of the project will finally be presented at a national event with the aim of reaching more schools for the use of good quality learning materials in the future.

Schools, teachers, and learners will be encouraged to develop projects to promote digital culture and hybrid education in public schools.



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UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, has over 75 years of experience in development cooperation and emergency aid. UNICEF is committed to ensuring that children survive and have a safe childhood. The central tasks include health, nutrition, education, water, and hygiene, as well as the protection of children from abuse, exploitation, violence, and violence, and HIV/AIDS. UNICEF is financed exclusively through voluntary contributions.