**Maat for peace’ submission on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the realization of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl**

* **Introduction:**

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world in early 2020, grave setbacks in women’s human rights have occurred. Early marriage and domestic violence cases have dramatically increased, in addition to lack of access to educational services during and after the spread of the pandemic, all of which would have disastrous consequences on the future of girls and our future. In this regard, the pandemic caused the largest disruption in education systems in history, which affected about 1.6 billion students in more than 190 countries of the world[[1]](#footnote-1). Therefore, many countries have resorted to digital means of providing educational services to students, as well as other technologies, such as radio and television programs. This has contributed to a terrible increase in gender equality in the delivery of educational services. Various human rights advocates across the world have pointed to the difficulties faced by girls in engaging in digital learning around the world, mainly the limited access to Internet services, especially in remote and rural areas, in addition to the lack of technology skills, as well as the cultural norms and community traditions that prevented many girls from using technology for fear of the stigma associated with it. On the other hand, domestic burdens have exacerbated girls’ ability to engage in e-education, but poverty has been among the key factors deprived them from having access to education, especially in underserved refugee camps.

In this regard, credible human rights estimates have warned that more than 11 million girls were unable to resume education after the emergence of the Covid-19 crisis[[2]](#footnote-2), despite the steps taken by many States to promote access to education for girls in areas where they have been unable to access education, widening gender inequality in accessing educational services. This intervention, which is submitted by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights refers to the challenges faced by women in accessing educational services during the Covid-19 pandemic, while mentioning the efforts made by States to contain this to reduce the gender gap in access to educational services. Finally, Maat refers to a set of recommendations that limit gender equality

* **Challenges and obstacles faced by girls in the context of the Covid-19 Pandemic:**

Gender equality in access to education services has become unattainable after the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. Hard evidence points to a number of obstacles faced by girls in engaging in distance learning that States have taken as a way of delivering educational services, topped by the limited access to Internet-enabled devices, as well as the inability of many girls to access the Internet itself, with the occasional lack of skills to handle distance learning, not to mention the preference of some families for the participation of girls in household chores rather than in e-education. In the same regard, human right estimates confirm that the gap in Internet access between girls and women as compared to men is about 26% in 2020[[3]](#footnote-3). Other statistics show that boys are 1.5% more likely to have a smartphone used in e-education than girls in low- and middle-income countries. 433 million women do not have mobile phones and 165 million women are fewer than men in low and middle-income countries[[4]](#footnote-4). At the same level, other human rights facts suggest that financial constraints have deepened gender inequality in access to educational services in many places.

Meanwhile, cultural norms, customs and traditions associated with society have posed challenges to girls' access to the technology that enables them to complete their studies. For example, in Pakistan, many girls have not had access to mobile phones to learn because of societal customs and traditions that prevent girls from carrying phones. Various human rights certificates from within Pakistan indicate that girls have reported their fear of requiring a mobile phone because of customs and traditions, which posed a common obstacle of learning[[5]](#footnote-5). This example confirms that in some societies, computers and technology enjoy male-dominated and a patriarchal view that boys are more suited to the use of these devices than women, which is a dominant stereotype that harms gender equality in access to technology and thus access to education.

On the other hand, girls' preoccupation with domestic chores in many regions has disrupted their access to online education compared to that of males, with many voices and rights assessments documented in Bangladesh, India, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Niger, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, and other low- and middle-income countries[[6]](#footnote-6). For example, in India, 56.1% of girls who took part in a study sample of the impact of Covid-19 on India's educational services showed that their responsibility for doing household chores increased during the epidemic, dedicating less time to focus on their education[[7]](#footnote-7). Another survey indicated that girls in India spent 67% more time caring for children than 38% of males, which contributed to their inequality in access to education, and 70% of girls spent more time doing household chores compared to only 26% of boys in Ethiopia.[[8]](#footnote-8) In Pakistan, girls were nine times more likely to spend time on household chores than on homework during the Covid-19 pandemic.[[9]](#footnote-9)

On the other hand, financial barriers have sometimes been a barrier to girls' access to education during Covid-19 epidemic, which has increased the gender gap in access to educational services. The best example of this is a major obstacle to refugee girls' access to education, especially in camps. Even if families had financial resources, boys were preferred to girls in education, where they were seen as ultimately a higher source of income. Not only was access to technology in refugee camps limited, girls were unlikely to receive such technology from boys because of perceptions that educating girls was not as important as educating boys because it brought no more money than boys.[[10]](#footnote-10)

* **Concrete measures to address the challenges and obstacles faced by girls in accessing education:**

Many States have initiated concrete actions and measures to support girls in accessing educational services and to reduce the gender gap in education during the Covid-19 pandemic. In Nigeria, technology companies collaborated with the Government to launch virtual learning platforms to support e-education for girls, in addition to training female teachers not only to use all the technology that supports distance learning, but also to distribute radios to female students throughout the States so that they can access radio learning[[11]](#footnote-11). In Tanzania, UNESCO works with the Government on an ongoing basis to improve girls' education. At the time of Covid-19’s spread, the state sponsored a government program to broadcast life skills education materials for girls' education.[[12]](#footnote-12)

However, the pilot gender program of the UNESCO Global Alliance for Education offers a variety of initiatives aimed at ultimately supporting girls during the Covid-19 pandemic. As such, the Alliance has implemented 223 projects in 112 countries to support 5 million girls during school closures[[13]](#footnote-13). In this framework, many activists and rights organizations have developed innovative solutions to ensure that girls continue to learn and return to school once they are safe. In Nigeria, they have produced educational radio programs so that students can continue even in rural areas. In Pakistan, several distance-learning applications had been produced, which confirmed that girls were heavily involved in the sterile process, and despite those measures, there was a serious risk that girls are not completing their education.[[14]](#footnote-14)

* **Recommendations:**

Overall, despite leading international efforts to reduce gender inequality in access to educational services, many obstacles have reinforced girls' lack of access to education during and after Covid-19. Despite the leading international efforts to reduce gender inequality in access to education services, the reality is that more girls continue to be absent from school. Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights, therefore, recommends that: -

* Providing access to technology to all communities without discrimination, with tools that ultimately contribute to the completion of distance learning.
* Correcting concepts of support for, or preference for, the use of technology by males rather than females, or of the societal stigma of the use of technology by girls.
* Taking advantage of past experiences in the context of various epidemics, particularly the Ibol epidemic, when dealing with the diversion of girls from education during various epidemics and crises, and develop appropriate measures to that end.
* Developing flexible curricula so that girls are not deterred from returning to school upon reopening, with financial resources available to those who are not able to complete their education.
* Prioritize interventions that address structural barriers and gender norms that prevent girls from accessing education.

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2. اليونسكو تحذر من عدم عودة 11 مليون فتاة إلى المدرسة، الغد ، أكتوبر 2020 ، <https://bit.ly/3oMSWck> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Global education monitoring report, 2020: Inclusion and education: all means all. Unesdoc. <https://bit.ly/3HPYvya> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. How Covid-19 pandemic disrupted female education. Indiatoday. November 2021 <https://bit.ly/3uKDnpr> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. When schools shut: gendered impacts of COVID-19 school closures. Unesdoc. <https://bit.ly/3rMT11x> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. عندما تغلق المدارس أبوابها دراسة جديدة لليونسكو تكشف عن الفشل في أخذ البعد الجنساني في الحسبان في تصدي قطاع التعليم لجائحة كوفيد-19، اليونسكو ، أكتوبر 2021 ، <https://bit.ly/33kvqMn> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. How Covid-19 pandemic disrupted female education. Indiatoday. November 2021https://bit.ly/3uKDnpr [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. SUPPORTING VULNERABLE ADOLESCENT GIRLS TO CONTINUE THEIR EDUCATION SHOULD BE PRIORITISED IN RECOVERY PLANS FOR COVID-19. Ukfiet. July 2021https://bit.ly/34GckAT [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Malala Yousafzai: The pandemic is endangering long-term education for millions of girls. Atlanticcouncil. March 2021. <https://bit.ly/3Bj6mBT> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Long-Term Effects of COVID-19 on Refugee Girls’ Education. Reliefweb. <https://bit.ly/3Byrmox> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. How Pressures from COVID-19 Pushed Girls Out of School in Search of Survival. Thisdaylive. December 2020https://bit.ly/3oJLvlZ [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Education Endures: How Room to Read is Benefiting Children During the COVID-19 Crisis. <https://bit.ly/3oNUraa> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. When schools shut: gendered impacts of COVID-19 school closures ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Malala Yousafzai: We must stop Covid shutting girls out of school forever. Financial Times. APRIL 2021https://on.ft.com/3HSOiko [↑](#footnote-ref-14)