United Nations of Goldberg 2025

The Commission on the Status of Women

PROMOTING EQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION WITH SPECIAL REGARD TO DIGITAL TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGIES

-Committee Guide-

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1. INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality, the rights and the empowerment of women. It was established as a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council by the ECOSOC resolution 11(II) on 21 June 1946.

The CSW is instrumental in promoting women’s and girls' rights, documenting the reality of their lives throughout the world, and shaping global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

In 1996, ECOSOC in resolution 1996/6 expanded the Commission’s mandate and decided that it should take a leading role in monitoring and reviewing progress and problems in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and in mainstreaming a gender perspective in UN activities.

During the Commission’s annual two-week session, representatives of UN Member States, civil society organizations and UN entities gather at UN headquarters in New York. They discuss progress and gaps in the implementation of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the key global policy document on gender equality and the 23rd special session of the General Assembly held in 2000 (Beijing+5), as well as emerging issues that affect gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls . Member States agree on further actions to accelerate progress and promote women’s and girls' enjoyment of their rights in political, economic, and social fields. The outcomes and recommendations of each session are forwarded to ECOSOC for follow-up.

2. INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

In the fast-paced digital era of the present, education is a backbone of empowerment and economic potential. The use of digital technologies can potentially unleash vast benefits in reorganizing traditional educational environments. Nonetheless, deeply established inequalities of access to these technologies are continuing to undermine possibilities for having an inclusive education system. This is a deeply entrenched problem among girls and women, who, due to socio-cultural as well as infrastructure limitations, are relegated to the periphery of digital innovation.

To equate education with equal access in the form of digital technology is a human rights and gender empowerment matter rather than a technology issue. The majority of poor women and girls from most poor communities are denied online learning because they lack effective internet access, inadequate digital literacy programs as well as the necessary financial means. Among the latest reports by UNESCO, there is one that mentions bridging the digital divide as fundamental in ensuring quality education and empowering vulnerable groups, thereby contributing to general society development. Closing the gaps will aid us in creating education spaces that are social

catalysts for change and working towards the fulfillment of the mandate of the Commission on the Status of Women to empower women and girls across the world.

II. FACTS AND CURRENT SITUATION

1. FACTS
   - **Global Education Digital Divide:** Fewer than 30% of schools across most poor and developing nations possess access to dependable broadband internet and contemporary digital technologies. This huge imbalance excludes most of our globe's student base from benefiting from technology-facilitated education.

   - **Gender Disparities:** Socio-cultural conditions and economic factors render girls 10–20% less likely than boys to be positioned to utilize ICTs (information and communications technologies). Gender imbalances reinforce deep-seated gender inequalities in education and limit women's empowerment.

   - **Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic:** The pandemic accelerated the shift to online learning. However, abrupt changes exposed deeply ingrained resource inequalities: many under-resourced societies and schools were not equipped to make quick adaptations, hence exacerbating learning losses, especially for vulnerable groups.

   - **Teacher Training and Infrastructure:** There are not enough trained teachers in poor communities to teach using technology. Even if infrastructure is available, not having a sufficient number of trained instructors to implement it makes such an investment futile.

   - **Economic and social implications:** It has been demonstrated through research that countries which invest in digital learning infrastructure realize improved learning outcomes, but there is a persisting investment gap. Fair access to digital technologies is not only a technological problem, but an economic and social one.

2. CURRENT SITUATION

The condition of contemporary digital education is reflected through extreme inequalities that occur both globally and locally. Classrooms in wealthy city centers are becoming progressively equipped with tablets and highly developed internet-based learning spaces and interactive whiteboards. Those from poor or rural communities are often fighting to maintain regular internet access and out-of-date hardware. Most students around the world still do not have access to the benefits of digital education.

Gender-specific obstacles further add to these barriers. The overall expectations of societies keep girls from accessing technology even where there are existing digital technologies. The rapid adoption of online education during the COVID-19 crisis highlighted these inequities. When remote learning became the norm, girls and women in marginalized communities were disproportionately affected by the digital divide.

This situation calls for a comprehensive strategy that not only upgrades technological infrastructure but also addresses cultural, economic, and policy barriers. Aligning efforts to improve digital education with the mandates of the Commission on the Status of Women would help ensure that both gender equality and educational equity are prioritized simultaneously.

III. DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

- **Equal Access:** The principle that every individual, regardless of their background, should have fair and unrestricted access to educational resources.

- **Digital Tools:** Technological devices and software, including computers, tablets, internet applications, and digital platforms, used to enhance learning experiences.

- **Digital Divide:** The gap that exists between those who have unrestricted access to modern digital technologies and those who do not.

- **Gender Parity in Education:** The state in which all genders enjoy equal opportunities and access to quality education regardless of socio-cultural or economic disparities.

IV. MAJOR PARTIES INVOLVED

North America: The **United States of America** is a global leader when it comes to innovation in the digital space. The U.S. has invested in infrastructure adaptation for urban and rural communities through several government-backed initiatives and government-private collaborations where the government works together with private companies. The investments often take the shape of enhanced digital access to disadvantaged communities and offer female teachers and female students access to modern learning platforms.

Canada has equally positioned itself by adopting cutting-edge education policies that ensure inclusive learning through digitization. Canadian initiatives entail extending access to remote and indigenous communities while, conversely, enhancing gender equality initiatives such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

Europe: There has been an early move by most European nations towards adopting digital technology in their educational frameworks. France has initiated nationwide digitization projects from primary to university levels. France's policies tend to emphasize the even opportunity by incorporating special projects for girls' encouragement towards technology courses. **Germany** has progressed as well, and investments have been put into developing digitized classrooms, teachers' training, and infrastructure. The policies of Germany have objectives to ensure that benefits of modern technology are widely available, especially to rural areas where access has historically lagged behind urban areas. **Norway** and **Sweden** have been renowned for their equitable education system. Furthermore, their embracing of green digital innovation helps them push their overall social welfare program further, so that girls and boys have access to state-of-art learning facilities.

Asia's huge populations and rapid economic growth pose distinct challenges and opportunities. **The People's Republic of China** has invested heavily into reforming its education system by adopting new technologies. State-led initiatives intend to reduce differences between urban and rural communities, and a to bring digital classrooms to rural towns, an important step towards empowering female pupils from poor regions. **India** confronts huge demographic issues by initiating digital education programs that reach out to large segments of the nation's population. Plans of the government of India attempt to facilitate improved levels of digital knowledge and making sure that girls, particularly from rural communities, are afforded quality education through digital interventions. Indonesia has launched projects to expand broadband and add digital learning in many islands. **Iran** and **Pakistan** are also trying to enhance their education systems; however, social and cultural factors make it harder for women to use digital technology there. . All these Asian countries, while at different levels of progress, are a part of an overall regional plan aimed at bringing about equal education for all.

Africa: South Africa and Kenya are driving change with digital education. South Africa is focused on integrating investments in technology and mass teachers' training programs, while Kenya seeks to expand the availability of digital learning to disadvantaged groups through new public–private partnership deals. Even amid major socio-political unrest, like in Sudan, efforts are being made to use digital technology to improve the educational opportunities of girls who have long faced disadvantages.

Latin America: **Mexico** is actively contributing to Latin America's digital reforms intended to modernize education systems and contribute towards reducing inequalities. The reforms include measures for facilitating internet access and

particular initiatives to ensure that women student groups have a benefit from such technological advancements.

Middle East: There has been a strong focus given by various Middle East countries towards digitization of education. **Saudi Arabia** has invested heavily in strengthening educational infrastructure. This includes integration of digital technology into classrooms and electronic learning spaces, and initiatives to enhance women's access to technology and education-related activities.

Influential non-governmental organizations, such as Amnesty International, play a key role in highlighting the human rights aspects of digital learning. Amnesty International seeks to bring to light inequalities of access and call upon governments to make digital learning spaces available to everyone, especially women and girls. Their efforts ensure global accountability and promote international cooperation on policy reforms that support equal access to education.

Each of these major parties helps reduce the digital divide in education through policymaking, technology, funding, advocacy, and skill-development. Their collaborative efforts are essential to creating an educational ecosystem where digital tools serve as bridges rather than barriers, providing equal opportunities for all, with particular attention given to empowering women and girls.

V. EVALUATION OF PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS

Over the past decade, numerous initiatives have aimed to bridge the digital divide in education by introducing digital tools and platforms into classrooms around the world. In high-income countries like the United States, Canada, and several European states, rapid responses to the COVID-19 pandemic showed that digital learning could be deployed swiftly through public–private partnerships and substantial infrastructural support. These measures have kept learning going during crises, showing the potential of educational technology, but most efforts have been temporary and reactive rather than long-term.

Most developing nations have had their previous efforts greatly compromised by chronic shortages of infrastructure and poor general teacher training. More importantly, evaluations reveal that many initiatives did not adequately address the gender-specific barriers that prevent girls and women from accessing digital educational resources. Despite the existence of information and communication technologies, socio-cultural norms, scarce economic resources, and absence of localized support mechanisms, women and girls are at a distinct disadvantage. Such failure contrasts starkly with the Commission on the Status of Women’s (CSW) vision of gender equality and women's empowerment. Without proactive steps to remove these long-standing barriers, achievements in ICT education continue to favor certain groups over others.

In short, the two main lessons from past experiences are:

First, sustainable digital education is systemic and involves infrastructure investment over years, continuous teachers training, and community acceptance.

Second, any such program must have accurate gender-sensitive measures to avoid women and girls from getting left behind once again. Future initiatives therefore need to draw lessons from such experiences by integrating digital solutions into existing countries' education systems and focusing on policies and programs empowering female students and making digital tools drivers of gender equality and education equality.

IV. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Enhance Digital Infrastructure: Invest in reliable broadband and community Wi-Fi networks, especially in rural and underserved areas, to ensure that every school has the connectivity needed for digital learning.

Ensure Affordable Access: Provide low-cost or subsidized digital devices (computers, tablets, and smartphones) through public-private partnerships, with a special focus on making these resources accessible to girls and women.

Strengthen teacher training and digital literacy programs: Roll out a well-rounded teacher training and community-based digital literacy campaign, with an emphasis on programs that help to empower women educators and promote local champions of technology.

Implement Gender-Aware Policies: Establish gender-specific initiatives like scholarships for girls in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education and mentoring to break social-cultural barriers and reduce the specific challenges girls face.

Build Sustainability: Unite governments, organizations, and the private sector to expand effective digital education practices and secure sustainable funding.

VII. USEFUL LINKS

UNESCO – Education
https://en.unesco.org/themes/education
(Global educational policies and digital transformation)

UN Women – Education
https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/education
(CSW-related initiatives on education and gender equality)

CSW67 EGM Draft Concept Note
https://unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/CSW67%20EGM%20Draft%20Concept%20Note.pdf
(Draft concept note for the Commission on the Status of Women)

United Nations SDG Goal 4: Quality Education
https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4
(International framework for quality education)

UNICEF – Education
https://www.unicef.org/education
(UNICEF's educational projects and research)

World Bank – Education
https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education
(Reports and initiatives on education development)

OECD – Digital Equity and Inclusion in Education
https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/digital-equity-and-inclusion-in-education_7cb15030-en.html
(Analysis of digital inclusion strategies)