



## **Economic and Social Council**

Distr.: General  
14 December 2022

Original: English

---

### **Commission on the Status of Women**

**Sixty-seventh session**

6–17 March 2023

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and  
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly  
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and  
peace for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by The American Pakistan Foundation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

---

\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The priority theme of the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women – innovation, and technological change, and education for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls – carries significant meaning for civil society. As the international community rebuilds from COVID-19, one of the most taxing public health crises in modern history, we recognize that the human rights of women and girls have increasingly been challenged. Human rights transgressions often manifest in women and girls' access to education. Pakistan provides a key comparative case for developing economies on educating women and girls in an increasingly digitized world. As a stakeholder organization in the United States, the American Pakistan Foundation aims to highlight intersecting challenges and policy opportunities in educating and empowering Pakistani women and girls, with implications not only for Pakistan, but for the entire Global South. The organization fosters collaboration among institutions and professional leaders in the United States and Pakistan in order to build bridges between the two countries. Leveraging the experiences of the organization's leaders and members, this statement aims to highlight concerns, share insights, and provide guidance on educating and empowering women and girls in the digital age.

We recognize that according to the United Nations, 147 million children in South Asia cannot be reached by either digital broadcast or remote learning, and that girls are disproportionately impacted by this technology gap. This inequity in access to education and skills training begins at an early age. Compared to 21 per cent of boys, 32 per cent of primary school age girls are out of school in Pakistan. However, technology can serve as a great equalizer in this age of digitalization, and provide opportunities for more women and girls to seek education and enter the workforce.

We reaffirm that despite the promising nature of technology as a means to address disparities in economic development, current socioeconomic inequalities in Pakistan increase a digital divide between people who have access to communications technology and those who don't. A 2021 study in the journal Telecommunications Policy reports that 80 per cent of Pakistan's poor reside in its rural areas. These communities also face limitations in digital access, digital knowledge, and online learning opportunities. Remote and rural areas lack the resources to expand technological infrastructure, which disproportionately impacts marginalized communities living in these regions.

We acknowledge that in Pakistan, gender further compounds the digital divide. The 2020 Mobile Gender Gap Report estimates that women in Pakistan were 38 per cent less likely to own a mobile phone, 49 per cent less likely to use mobile internet, and 94 per cent less likely to own a mobile money account compared with Pakistani men. This digital divide continues to grow due to the intersection of socioeconomic, sociocultural, and sociopolitical factors that often manifest as gender and cultural norms. Increased digital access and flexibility in methods of communication are necessary to encourage women's participation in digital outlets. One meaningful illustration of this is the digital platform Soul Sisters Pakistan. Started in 2013 to discuss socio-cultural issues faced by Pakistani women, the online platform on Facebook has over 300,000 members to discuss topics pertaining to the personal and professional lives of women.

We affirm that women in Pakistan face specific barriers that not only limit their access to the rapidly evolving digital world but also to their education. For example, young girls encounter barriers to their schooling particularly during their menstrual cycles; cultural myths regarding periods, coupled with a lack of menstrual hygiene products and awareness, worsen access to education for marginalized girls living in

areas with limited school infrastructure. Cultural practices of delegating household responsibilities primarily to women contribute an additional barrier to education. These household responsibilities can include childcare, cooking, cleaning, and caring for elders, as noted in the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey in 2019. A key finding of this survey is that only 57 per cent of women enrolled in paid specialization and professional certificates completed their courses, as compared to 64 per cent of men. Further, the survey reported that more women are likely to cite a lack of time and family obligations as reasons for dropping out. Ultimately, the gender and cultural norms imposed on women limit their ability to access education, increase economic opportunity gaps, and limit their entry into the workforce.

We underscore a comprehensive approach that emphasizes digital inclusion to empower the women and girls of Pakistan. Cross-sectoral partnerships and coordination must occur at national and provincial levels along with the establishment of public-private partnerships. A reexamination of current collaborations between educational institutions and technology providers is essential. If determined that the correct public-private alignments or partnerships do not exist, they must be created. Interventions must occur to promote digital literacy and safety among women and girls such that they are aware of their digital rights and of key resources that enable them to report abuse. We must also change how we speak about women and girls and their rights to education. We must dismantle the passive positioning of women and girls as key beneficiaries of digital inclusion initiatives, and instead reframe them as key agents of change and knowledge generation in online spaces.

We urge more accessible, inclusive, and culturally sensitive technology and digital media partnerships. Formal initiatives must be established with educational institutions and community organizations that utilize social mobilization frameworks. Pakistan's Rural Support Programs and capacity building organizations such as the Sughar Foundation can provide community driven partnership approaches, ultimately fostering consistent participation in educational training and mentorship programs for women.

We emphasize the creation of recorded material that students can access and learn from independently and asynchronously. Online programmes and educational content should provide flexibility in attendance and completion to enable greater participation. With the International Labor Organization estimating that Pakistan has more than 8.5 million domestic workers, mostly women and children, it is important to provide avenues for educational mobility while acknowledging the need of these individuals to participate in labor to support both themselves and their families.

We understand that challenges to the rights of women and girls go beyond Pakistan's borders. South Asia as a region must draw sharper focus to the rights of women and girls. In South Asia, as in much of the developing world, patriarchal values and social norms perpetuate gender inequities in the health, education, and digital sectors. Further, it is nations of the developing world who experience the uneven impact of climate catastrophes and public health emergencies. And in these times of compounding crises, it is women and girls who continue to bear disproportionate social and economic burdens.

We call for the international community to close the economic opportunity gap for women and girls and critically increase funding, policy attention and access to education and technological resources. Indeed, it is only by reexamining current partnerships and forging new collaborations that gender equality can be achieved and that we can facilitate the betterment of human societies as a whole.