

Research Report

Committee: UN Women

*Topic: The question of ensuring equal
access to education for woman
and girls*

I. Introduction

Equal access to education for women and girls remains a central issue in global development and human rights discussions. Although global enrollment rates for girls have improved significantly over the past two decades, deep structural, financial, and cultural barriers continue to prevent millions from accessing and completing quality education. These barriers are particularly pronounced in fragile states, conflict zones, and low-income regions. Ensuring equal access is not only a moral imperative but also essential for economic growth, public health, and political stability.

This report examines the situation in Afghanistan, India, and Kenya, three countries that represent different regional and political contexts but face significant gender-based educational challenges.

II. Key Barriers

Structural barriers include inadequate infrastructure, unsafe travel to schools, lack of sanitation facilities (particularly menstrual hygiene support), and shortages of trained female teachers. In many rural areas worldwide, schools are too far away or insufficiently resourced to provide safe learning environments for girls.

Financial barriers remain one of the most persistent obstacles. Even where tuition is officially free, indirect costs such as uniforms, textbooks, transport, and lost household labor income can prevent families from sending girls to school. In times of economic crisis, families often prioritize boys' education.

Cultural barriers are often the most difficult to address. In some communities, gender norms favor early marriage, domestic responsibilities, or restrict girls' mobility. Safety concerns, including harassment or violence on the way to school, further discourage attendance.

III. Country Case Studies

Afghanistan

Afghanistan represents one of the most severe contemporary crises in girls' education. Since the Taliban's return to power in 2021, secondary education for girls has been widely banned, and access to universities for women has been heavily restricted or suspended. These policies have effectively excluded millions of girls from formal education beyond primary level.

Structural barriers are compounded by explicit legal prohibitions. Female teachers face restrictions, and international funding for education programs has been reduced due to political tensions. The long-term consequences include economic stagnation, increased poverty, and further entrenchment of gender inequality. Afghanistan has become a focal point in international debates about whether access to education for girls should be enforced as a non-negotiable global standard.

India

India has made substantial progress in improving girls' enrollment rates at primary and secondary levels. Government initiatives such as Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter) have aimed to change cultural attitudes and increase female participation in education.

However, challenges remain. In rural areas, infrastructure gaps, safety concerns during travel to school, and socio-economic pressures contribute to dropout rates, particularly during adolescence. Child marriage and early pregnancy still affect educational continuity in certain regions. Additionally, digital inequality became more visible after the COVID-19 pandemic, as many girls lacked access to devices and internet connectivity for online learning.

India demonstrates that while legal access may be guaranteed, deeply rooted socio-economic and cultural factors can still limit equal educational outcomes.

Kenya

Kenya has implemented free primary education and policies to support girls' access to schooling. Enrollment rates have improved significantly. Nevertheless, financial pressures, teenage pregnancy, and early marriage remain major obstacles to retention.

In some rural and marginalized communities, girls are withdrawn from school to contribute to household labor or due to inability to afford uniforms and supplies. Efforts by civil society organizations to provide menstrual hygiene products and scholarships have shown positive impacts, illustrating how targeted interventions can reduce structural and financial barriers.

Kenya highlights the importance of combining legal frameworks with community-based solutions and economic support systems.

IV. Policy Considerations for the International Community

To ensure equal access to education for women and girls, member states may consider:

1. Strengthening legal protections that guarantee girls' right to education at all levels.
2. Increasing investment in safe infrastructure, including sanitation facilities and secure transport options.
3. Expanding financial support programs such as scholarships, conditional cash transfers, and free provision of essential materials.
4. Promoting community engagement initiatives that challenge harmful gender norms.
5. Supporting data collection and accountability mechanisms to monitor gender disparities.