**Promoting Digital Education for young people**

**Submitted by:** Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights

**Submitted to:** The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights is submitting this contribution to OHCHR on solutions to promote digital education for young people and to ensure their protection from online threats. The report focuses on civil society organizations, and OHCHR has requested information on challenges, initiatives, positive steps, policies and legislation taken by Governments to protect young people from online threats. This report is of added importance as 75% of people aged 15 to 24 were online in 2022. Maat was unable to answer all the key questions due to adherence to the number of words and pages specified in the call for input.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Firstly, what are the main challenges young people face in accessing digital education? Please consider the specific situation of marginalized youth and those living in vulnerable situations.**

Maat has assessed the challenges that young people face in accessing digital education in different countries and regions. There are remained fundamental challenges for young people in accessing digital education in these countries, perhaps the most important of which is the weakness of internet infrastructure in countries such as Ethiopia and Yemen. In addition to this, electricity outages in other areas such as northern Syria and limited internet access for young people in rural areas.

In Ethiopia, for example, research shows that one of the fundamental challenges facing digital education for young people is that faculties lack adequate training in information and communication technology and that the digital skills of the faculty members in schools are limited and this applies to high school faculty members as well[[2]](#footnote-2). In rural and minority areas, these challenges are growing in Ethiopia due to the lack of adequate digital education infrastructure and limited time allocated for vocational development courses, as well as electricity outages in rural areas[[3]](#footnote-3). In many conflicts between the Ethiopian government and ethnic groups, the internet is severely imposed, limiting access to digital education platforms in areas inhabited by these minorities, especially in Amhara and Tigray[[4]](#footnote-4).

Restricted internet access is another major challenge in some regions, especially in areas of armed conflict in northern Syria, for example, where non-State actors rule, a number of teachers launched a digital education initiative in July 2023. The initiative includes the education of young people who have dropped out of teaching for language skills. However, the main obstacle to the implementation of this initiative, which targeted nearly 400 Syrian youths, remained the weakness and interruption of the internet, as well as power outages[[5]](#footnote-5). In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, there were no alternatives to motivating young people to digital education in the light of the repeated internet outages and the occupying Power's military attacks in the Palestinian territories. Among the challenges facing youth digital education, Maat also noted the challenge of language barriers.

In most Arab States, challenges remain regarding the difficulty of ensuring equal access to digital education, and despite the courageous steps taken by most Arab States to widely adopt digitization in education, there remains a wide gap between people with access to the internet compared to other most vulnerable groups and youth in rural areas[[6]](#footnote-6). This has created a clear discrepancy in digital infrastructure among young people living in cities compared to others in rural and remote areas[[7]](#footnote-7). Young people in areas controlled by armed groups without states face the additional challenges of banning platforms used for digital education. For example, in Yemen, where the Houthi group controls parts of territory in northern Yemen de facto, the Ministry of Communications in the unrecognized government in Houthi areas banned digital communication platforms such as Zoom and Google applications on September 25, 2023.[[8]](#footnote-8) In a connected context, the weakness of the legal framework governing the functioning of the internet has remained an obstacle in some countries such as Lebanon and Ethiopia. In Europe, the Roma minority, the continent's largest ethnic minority, faced obstacles in accessing digital education and led to limited digital skills[[9]](#footnote-9). In Yemen, a range of challenges have emerged for digital education in public education institutions, including weak digital infrastructure, the absence of a specific mechanism or clear plan to implement digital transformation in education in practice as well as limited material resources, and the lack of a legal framework for legislation supporting digital transformation.[[10]](#footnote-10)

**Secondly: What steps is the Government taking to ensure that digital education is accessible and promoted among young people?**

Maat noted various steps and measures taken by some Governments to ensure the availability of digital education to young individuals. Egypt launched a national project to promote the digitization of education, the Egyptian Knowledge Bank. This project provides educational resources to young people and other groups on a free and equal basis with all.[[11]](#footnote-11)

In Yemen, the recognized Government of Yemen has made attempts to promote digital education through its partnership with UNICEF, the World Bank and the Global Partnership for Education through the Education Management Information System project known as EMIS as part of the Education and Learning Restoration Project.[[12]](#footnote-12) In a related context, the French government established the initiative of the regions concerned with digital education, and despite the positive things that accompanied this initiative, there was criticism that faced this initiative because it did not meet all local needs.[[13]](#footnote-13) Despite these steps, there is still a need for updated and disaggregated data on young people’s access to digital education. There remains limited information regarding the total number of young people who have benefited from digital education.

**Thirdly: What steps are Governments taking to ensure that young people are protected from online threats? Please provide examples of specific laws, regulations, measures, policies and programs.**

Maat noted a range of steps, measures and legislation undertaken by some governments to ensure that young people are protected from online threats. Currently, for example, the UK is considering adopting an internet Safety Bill to prevent young people from accessing harmful content, but at the same time this legislation raises concerns of restrictions on freedom of expression on the internet, youth tracking and invasion of privacy. In particular, 80% of companies claim to have been hacked at least once.[[14]](#footnote-14) To counter the phenomenon of bullying against young people on the internet, Canada has imposed penalties that could amount to imprisonment, confiscation of computers and sometimes fines on internet bullies, including youth bullies[[15]](#footnote-15). Egypt is also considering adopting a bill to combat cyberbullying and sexual harassment[[16]](#footnote-16) against girls and young people. The alleged amendments include more deterrent penalties for perpetrators who engage in sexual or pornographic gestures, whether by reference, word or already through electronic communication or other technical means.[[17]](#footnote-17)

In general, governments need additional measures, legislation and laws that include deterrent penalties for the practice of bullying on the internet, as statistics indicate that a third of young people in about 30 countries have been exposed to bullying on the internet.[[18]](#footnote-18) In a related context, Maat noted the steps taken by some countries in order to promote digital transformation free of threats. For example, Greece established the National Cybersecurity Authority in order to protect digital transformation from current threats in cyberspace. In addition, the state approved a national strategy for cybersecurity, this strategy is dedicated to protecting and securing the public and private sectors and infrastructure from threats, but a large portion of young people are targeted for protection in this strategy.[[19]](#footnote-19)

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