



Impact of Covid-19 on Children's Education in Africa

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Human Rights Watch respectfully submits this written presentation to contribute testimony from children to the discussion on the impact of Covid-19 on children at the 35th Ordinary Session of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Between April and August 2020, Human Rights Watch conducted 57 remote interviews with students, parents, teachers, and education officials across Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Madagascar, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa, and Zambia to learn about the effects of the pandemic on children's education. **Our research shows that school closures caused by the pandemic exacerbated previously existing inequalities, and that children who were already most at risk of being excluded from a quality education have been most affected.**

Children Receiving No Education

Many children received no education after schools closed across the continent in March 2020.¹

"My child is no longer learning, she is only waiting for the reopening to continue with her studies," said a mother of a 9-year-old girl in eastern Congo.² A mother of two preschool-aged children in North Kivu, Congo, said, "It does not make me happy that my children are no longer going to school. Years don't wait for them. They have already lost a lot... What will become of our uneducated children?"³ Lusenge K., 16, also from Congo, said in June she had no education after schools closed, and was concerned that she would not enter her final school year: "Lockdown is not good for me."⁴

The director of a nongovernmental organization (NGO) in Madagascar that provides education and alternative care services to children who were previously homeless and either orphaned or unable to live with their parents said that children accommodated with host families "did not have any education during the closure."⁵

Children Receiving No Teaching

Many children received no instruction, feedback, or interaction with their teachers.

"Children are not taught during this period," said an education official in Congo in June echoing the experiences of many children across the continent. Although some students had received printed assignments, she said, "We cannot say that this is normal education."⁶ One Congolese student told us, for example, "We were just told to regularly reread our notes while waiting for new instructions from the authorities... At first, I thought school would start again soon so I didn't read my notes and then when I saw that it was going to go on, I started to read them. I'd forgotten a lot."⁷ Chéckina M., 13, in Kinshasa, said she was given a study book by her school when it closed, but afterwards had no contact with her teachers. "I reread my old lessons... I find math difficult to study at home [alone]."⁸

In Zambia, just before 15-year-old Natalie L.'s school closed, "The headmistress came through the classes and told us to study on our own." Natalie uses books she already had. "Most topics are difficult to understand without the help of a teacher." She said, "It's been a little bit nerve-racking. Next year I have my [school leaving] examination and I think I will have to work harder for that."⁹

Parents and teachers in the Central African Republic said in June that there had been no teaching since school closed.¹⁰ A mother of a 6-year-old girl in Bangui said she tries to get her daughter to do revision exercises, and three times a week they listen to classes on the radio. "But it is a program which is not specific for each level of class. It's too complex... Our children have not had any support during this time of pandemic. I fear a drop in children's level after all this time lost."¹¹

Dekha A., 14, in Kenya, said her school sends revision papers to parents via WhatsApp twice a month. "A marking scheme is sent once the students have made an attempt and the papers are meant to be marked by the parents... The teachers do not communicate directly with us."¹²

Children Learning Less through Distance Education

Students frequently studied fewer topics or less content through distance learning.

Many students echoed 17-year-old South African Lwandle M. who said she struggled with online learning: “I do not think I have the discipline to sit down and have no one teach me.”¹³

Makena M., a 17-year-old girl from Nairobi, Kenya, said she prioritizes her limited internet data to download learning material for mathematics and science. “Subjects like Christian Religious Education, English, or Kiswahili language, I read from the textbooks that I have.”¹⁴

Although Nawal L.’s school in Morocco offered online classes, some teachers faced difficulties, she said: “Sometimes we don’t hear from a teacher for the whole day, then he’d show up at 6 saying he didn’t have enough internet credit.” She added, “The physics teacher... just disappeared... She just didn’t give any class.”¹⁵ Nawal estimated that about half of the students attended online classes.¹⁶

Mental Health Consequences

Many students shared feelings of stress, anxiety, isolation, and depression, which they linked to the lack of contact with their school community. “It’s stressful when I have to study all alone,” said Makena M., 17, in Kenya.¹⁷ “I tend to think a lot about school and my friends,” said 15-year-old Kioko Y. from Kenya. “It makes me sad. I know my school has a counsellor, but we were never given contacts after we closed and before this, I had never gone to him.”¹⁸

“No emotional and social support is provided by the school,” said a caregiver to four students not receiving any education in Congo at the time of the interview. “This aspect is too neglected.”¹⁹

A 16-year-old South African boy said, “That time to think about stuff and being alone kind of sucks, I guess. Especially as a teenager... I was completely struggling for a whole two weeks, like crying every day. Um, yeah, so that was like a big thing for me, starting to think life was meaningless.”²⁰

Education Not Free

Many parents are burdened by costs associated with trying to continue educating their children during school closures. A father of four in Cameroon said, “Primary school is supposed to be free in Cameroon, but it is not. There are always contributions.” He said his younger children’s school was already demanding payment for the year’s final quarter, when it was closed. “Are schools going to blackmail? That if you don’t pay for your [previous] year, we won’t re-enroll your child for the next year?”²¹ The father of a 17-year-old in Lubumbashi, Congo, said that his daughter’s school sold them a syllabus to help her study at home for 15,000 CDF (US\$8).²²

Girls Disproportionately Negatively Affected

Girls face unique barriers to continue to follow formal education from a distance.²³ Taisha S., 16, in Kenya, said her school offered no materials or guidance during school closures, so she got in touch with her science teacher. “He said he would not be able to go to anyone’s home, but they could come to his house. As girls we feared going to his house, but I hear the boys have been going.”²⁴ A primary school teacher in Nairobi, Kenya, said “With the lockdown, all family members are staying in the house morning to evening. I have had some of the girls call to inform me that they are harassed by their fathers or uncles.”²⁵

Girls are often expected to take on childcare responsibilities and household chores. Taisha also said, “My chores have increased of course because schools have closed.” She said that she sometimes missed distance learning classes on television because of her chores at home.²⁶ Zawadi N., 16, in Nairobi, said she spends almost five hours a day looking after her younger siblings: “There’s much more to do with siblings because I am also acting as a teacher to the younger ones.”²⁷

When children need to use technology to study, and access to devices or data is in short supply, boys often end up getting more access to these resources than girls.²⁸

Widespread school closures may also increase risks of child marriage, as research by Human Rights Watch in Malawi, South Sudan, and Tanzania shows a strong connection between girls leaving or being out of school and them being forced into marriage.²⁹ Child marriage—and pregnancy and parenthood—are also factors driving girls out of school, and some schools discourage or ban married, pregnant and parenting girls from attending.³⁰

Digital Divide: Limited Access to Technologies

Lack of access to radios, television, computers, internet, and data left many students unable to engage in remote learning. “There were lessons offered on Warsan Radio,” said a 16-year-old in Garissa, Kenya, “But I never tuned in because we don’t have a radio.”³¹ In Burkina Faso, a teacher in Boucle du Mouhoun region said that many students he knew “don’t have electricity—not even a lamp to study.”³² A teacher from Centre-Nord region said of remote learning: “Many [students] don’t even have access to radios, let alone TVs. So this is something that will not cover all the students. There will be discrimination. It will not take all children into account.”³³ A teacher in Congo’s Kasai region said the education ministry had organized television courses, but the city where he lived—with a population of more than 1 million people—is not fully electrified. “How can students follow these courses?”³⁴

Many children lack access to the internet, which is increasingly indispensable for education. A teacher in the Mathare informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya, said, “None of the students have access to internet-enabled smartphones. Only a handful have access to mobile phones that can support calling and texting functionalities. Digital learning is not an option.”³⁵ Kioko Y., 15, in Kenya said he uses his mother’s phone for the internet. His school does not offer online classes, but he uses YouTube and Google for research. “I tend to pick and choose which subjects to research because I cannot stay with my mother’s phone for too long because she runs a business.”³⁶

A father in Nigeria said, “[My three children] join in the school’s online classes on my phone because the family has no computer... Although the lessons are on video, the kids only listen to the audio. Sometimes they cannot connect because I do not always have enough data.”³⁷ A Nigerian mother said, “I had to upgrade [my daughter] to a smartphone so she can access online materials, but I am sometimes unable to pay for data from [my] civil servant salary.”³⁸ A mother in Lagos, who lost her income after the university where she cleaned shut down due to the pandemic, explained that she could not afford online studies for her two secondary school-aged children. “Their teacher called me to tell me to buy a big phone [smartphone] for online teaching... I don’t have money to feed my family and I am struggling to make ends meet, how can I afford a phone and internet?”³⁹

In Morocco, Hynd M.’s mother provides for the family by working as a cleaner. At home they have slow WiFi. Said Hynd: “There is a better plan for faster WiFi. I discussed it with my mom, but she said we can’t afford it. Since the connection is not great, I have to prioritize some lessons over others.”⁴⁰

Digital Literacy Education Needed

Digital literacy—for students and teachers—is increasingly recognized as an indispensable element of children’s right to education. After Nawal L.’s school in Marrakesh, Morocco, closed down, only her mathematics teacher reached out to collect students’ WhatsApp contacts, and circulate login credentials for online learning. “I tried them many times, but it didn’t work,” said Nawal. “Pretty much all other students were in the same situation... One of my classmates is a ‘geek,’ she’s very high tech. She did her thing, not sure what, but finally sent us new passwords. This time, it worked.”⁴¹

A teacher in Rabat, Morocco, said he learned from a televised interview with the education minister that teachers were expected to use Microsoft Teams to create remote classes. “I had no idea how that

Teams thing worked, I never received instructions on how to make it work... I tried four times to access it, I didn't succeed, I finally dropped it. At no time did the ministry do anything to facilitate access... Maybe it's my poor tech skills, but it never worked for me."⁴²

Inter-Generational Education Inequalities

Caregivers with no to low levels of formal education have greater difficulty supporting children with home learning. Taisha S., 16, lives with her two grandmothers in Garissa, Kenya. "I am the only person in this house that has attended school and therefore there is very little to no support."⁴³

A teacher in a low-income neighborhood of Rabat, Morocco, said that after a few weeks of distance learning, "Maybe 10 percent or less of the students are still following today. Those who do, most of the time have educated parents who tell them to keep following."⁴⁴ Khadija F. in Casablanca said "Neither me nor my husband can read or write, so we can't help our daughters with school." It was perhaps because he could not read that her husband did not realize that the WhatsApp messages he received on his phone—"from an unknown number, which annoyed him, so he deleted them," said Khadija—were in fact directions from her children's teachers. After a neighbor alerted Khadija that the teachers were reaching out this way, the children started doing distance learning.⁴⁵

Children Living in Rural Areas

Children living in rural areas are less likely to have resources to adapt and implement measures needed to continue education during school closures, including access to the internet and flexibility to shift school calendars, which have been adjusted to fit seasonal harvests. A teacher in Burkina Faso expressed concern that altering the school term to make up lost time would exclude children if it clashed with crop cultivation. "Some children will no longer return to school, because they'll prefer to ... help their parents cultivate so they can eat. So, many students won't even come."⁴⁶

A headteacher at a public school in a rural farming community in Zambia said teachers sent lessons through social media. However, "not every child is linked on a social platform," he said, noting that in particular, rural children have less access to mobile phones than children in urban areas.⁴⁷

Interviewees in Burkina Faso said they were concerned that many schools do not have boreholes or water points. "For handwashing, water is needed permanently," said one teacher in Est region.⁴⁸

Children with Disabilities

We are concerned that all the factors affecting children's education during the Covid-19 pandemic become magnified for children with disabilities. A teacher at a school for girls, including children with disabilities, in Bangui, Central African Republic, said that he had not been in touch with any of his students since schools closed on March 27, 2020. "Most children will lose knowledge acquired beforehand."⁴⁹

Children Living in Extreme Poverty

A teacher in the informal settlement of Mathare in Nairobi, Kenya, explained how the pandemic exacerbated the already dire living conditions for many of her students: "They live with siblings and extended family relatives in small houses and lack basic items like food. Most of the parents of these children have lost their sources of livelihoods due to the pandemic making their already strained living conditions much worse."⁵⁰ Elsewhere in Nairobi, in early May, authorities evicted more than 8,000 people in two informal settlements. They brought in excavators to demolish homes, churches, shops, and schools.⁵¹ Rehema N. said, "All my books and school uniform got lost in the chaos."⁵²

Children Living in Countries Affected by Armed Conflict and Insecurity

Armed conflict is a major cause for driving many children out of school, and it has only been exacerbated by pandemic school closures. Taisha S., 16, lives in Garissa, Kenya. "We have no access to

learning,” she said, adding “This situation did not start with Covid-19. Prior to this we had no lessons for three weeks because a lot of teachers were running away from North Eastern [Province] due to a rise in terrorist incidents.”⁵³

An education official in North Kivu, Congo, expressed concerns that without school to engage them, children were at increased risk of being recruited by armed groups operating in the area.⁵⁴ A caregiver to four students in the same province said, “Mine have not yet left, but there are children today in the bush with the armed groups.”⁵⁵ A parent of two secondary school students in Congo said, “The fear for me regarding my children is that they will get lost and join the armed groups in the region.”⁵⁶

An education NGO worker in one of Cameroon’s Anglophone regions, which have been engulfed in violence since late 2016, said, “With Covid, the government had to restrict children’s access to schools... But before the coronavirus crisis, few schools were already operating properly... Because of [this crisis], it’s difficult to talk about education here.”⁵⁷

In Kadugli, Southern Kordofan, Sudan, paramilitaries from Sudan’s Rapid Support Forces took over a girls’ primary school on June 14, 2020, and began using it as a training base. The school was closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic at the time. The school was supposed to reopen for students to sit secondary-school entrance exams, however, the armed forces did not allow the school to reopen.⁵⁸

In an example of good practice, Mali’s education ministry wrote to the then-defense minister, reminding him of Mali’s commitments under the Safe Schools Declaration to not use schools that were empty due to the pandemic for military purposes.⁵⁹

Children Who Work, and Child Labor

Repeating a concern of many educators across Africa, a teacher in Bangui, Central African Republic, said, “It’s certain that students will drop out of school. One of my students is already selling fish... She told me clearly that she cannot resume her studies next academic year.”⁶⁰ Research in the Central African Republic by the International Peace Information Service shows an increase in children under 15 working in artisanal gold and diamond mines since the pandemic’s outbreak. The median increased from 10 children under age 15 per site in 2019 to 15 children in 2020, likely due to schools’ closure in rural and mining areas.⁶¹

The director of an organization in Madagascar that incentivizes agricultural families to send their children to school rather than work, worried some will not return to school. “We have done everything ... to make children feel obliged to come to school, and here we are giving them an opportunity not to go... It’s been four months since we lost our relationship with the majority of children.”⁶²

A resident of a low-income fishing community in Lagos, Nigeria, said that most young children currently out-of-school because of the pandemic—including her three siblings aged 11 to 14—had begun helping their parents to fish or sell fish. “The schools did not give any type of assignments or work for them to continue,” she said. “Now my siblings are home not doing much, they help out by hawking fish which my father brings home from fishing after my mother has smoked them.”⁶³

Human Rights Watch Suggests the Committee Make the Following Recommendations:

- Governments should prepare to immediately get children back in school once Covid-19 is under control locally—with careful public health planning, in line with World Health Organization guidance, to prevent and control the spread of Covid-19—including by following up individually with children who do not show up for classes and try to re-engage them. This should include support to girls who married or became pregnant or parents during the school closure.
- Before schools physically re-open, those offering remote learning should track which students participate, reach out to those not participating, and try to help them re-engage.

- Any governmental and non-governmental efforts to encourage children to return to school when schools reopen should be over-inclusive—that is, should also be directed at children who were excluded from education due to other causes prior to the pandemic.
- When schools reopen, governments should ensure that all students have access to free primary education, and ensure secondary education is accessible and free. As part of their Covid-19 response packages, governments should provide financial support to offset school-related expenses for children whose families suffered economic hardship and would not be able to return to school otherwise. In countries where girls’ enrollment or completion of secondary school is lower than boys’, governments should consider launching or continuing financial incentives to ensure parents enable girls return to school as soon as it is safe.
- Governments should provide remedial education for children who were unable to follow distance education and for children who were out of school due to other causes prior to the pandemic. Governments should especially focus on children most excluded or at risk: including children with disabilities, children living in poverty, refugee and migrant children, children who work, children in rural areas, paying particular attention to girls within these groups.
- Governments should perform due diligence to ensure that any technology they recommend for online learning protects children’s privacy rights. Governments and schools should include data privacy clauses in any contracts they sign with technology or “Ed Tech” providers, in order to protect the data collected on children during this time from misuse. Over the longer term, governments should institute data protection laws for children.
- Governments should recognize that digital literacy and access to the internet are increasingly indispensable for children to realize their right to education, and should take all possible measures to provide affordable, reliable and accessible internet service for all students. They should take steps to mitigate disproportionate hardships for poor and marginalized populations, including finding ways to provide discounted and free access to data, services, and computers.
- Governments should ensure all children and adolescents can access accurate, rights-based, and age-appropriate information about their sexual and reproductive health, through mandatory comprehensive sexuality education, including by distance learning.
- All governments that have yet to do so should endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration to protect schools in times of armed conflict.⁶⁴
- Governments should protect their education budgets and ensure public education systems are adequately resourced, both to ensure they can adequately respond to existing and emerging needs, and to resource their vision for inclusive education. They should ensure that all schools have access to water and sanitation, sufficient numbers of adequately trained teachers, and appropriate, accessible school infrastructure to prevent overcrowding.
- Human Rights Watch encourages the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child to remind states of the strong presumption of impermissibility of any retrogressive measures taken in relation to the right to education.⁶⁵

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- ¹ Some parents began removing their children from school even prior to official closures because they were concerned about Covid-19. Human Rights Watch interview with father of five, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, June 10, 2020; and Gillian Saks, mother of two, Cape Town, South Africa, June 25, 2020.
- ² Human Rights Watch interview with mother of 9-year-old girl from Oicha, Democratic Republic of Congo, June 10, 2020.
- ³ Human Rights Watch interview with mother of a 3-year-old boy and a 5-year-old girl from Beni, Democratic Republic of Congo, June 12, 2020.
- ⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with 16-year-old girl, Democratic Republic of Congo, June 12, 2020.
- ⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Alex Herivelona, director of Centre Ankanifitahiana, Antananarivo, Madagascar, June 2, 2020.
- ⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with education official, Butembo, North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo, June 10, 2020.
- ⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with 16-year-old student, Democratic Republic of Congo, June 20, 2020.
- ⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with 13-year-old girl, Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, June 10, 2020.
- ⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Natalie, 15, Kabwe, Zambia, June 4, 2020.
- ¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with father of five children, Bangui, Central African Republic, June 16, 2020; with secondary school teacher, Bangui, Central African Republic, June 20, 2020; and with mathematics teacher, Bangui, Central African Republic, June 23, 2020.
- ¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with mother of three children, Bangui, Central African Republic, June 30, 2020.
- ¹² Human Rights Watch interview with Dekha Mohamed A. (not her real name), 14, Garissa, Kenya, June 20, 2020.
- ¹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Lwandle M., 17, Roodepoort, Gauteng, South Africa, June 6, 2020.
- ¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Makena M. (not her real name), 15, Nairobi, Kenya, June 2020.
- ¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Nawal L. (not her real name), 16, Marrakesh, Morocco, June 19, 2020.
- ¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Nawal L. (not her real name), 16, Marrakesh, Morocco, June 19, 2020.
- ¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Makena M. (not her real name), 15, Nairobi, Kenya, June 2020.
- ¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Kioko Y. (not his real name), 15, Garissa, Kenya, June 20, 2020.
- ¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with caregiver to four students, Beni, North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo, June 10, 2020.
- ²⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Joseph S. (not his real name), 16, Cape Town, South Africa, June 25, 2020.
- ²¹ Human Rights Watch interview with father of four from Douala, Cameroon, June 26, 2020.
- ²² Human Rights Watch interview with father, Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo, June 17, 2020.
- ²³ Agnes Odhiambo (Human Rights Watch), "How girls' education and safety will be harmed by the covid response," *African Arguments*, April 15, 2020, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/15/how-girls-education-and-safety-will-be-harmed-covid-response>.
- ²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Taisha S. (not her real name), 16, Garissa, Kenya, June 20, 2020.
- ²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with teacher, Nairobi, Kenya, June, 2020.
- ²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Taisha S. (not her real name), 16, Garissa, Kenya, June 20, 2020.
- ²⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Zawadi N. (not her real name), 16, Nairobi, Kenya, June 20, 2020.
- ²⁸ OECD, "Bridging the Gender Divide: Include, Upskill, Innovate," 2018.
- ²⁹ "No Way Out: Child Marriage and Human Rights Abuses in Tanzania," Human Rights Watch report, October 2014; "'I've Never Experienced Happiness,': Child Marriage in Malawi," Human Rights Watch report, March 2014; and "'This Old Man Can Feed Us, You Will Marry Him': Child and Forced Marriage in South Sudan," Human Rights Watch report, March 2013.
- ³⁰ "Leave No Girl Behind in Africa: Discrimination in Education against Pregnant Girls and Adolescent Mothers," Human Rights Watch report, June 14, 2018.
- ³¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Taisha S. (not her real name), 16, Garissa, Kenya, June 20, 2020.
- ³² Human Rights Watch interview with teacher, Sourou, Boucle du Mouhoun, Burkina Faso, April 29, 2020.
- ³³ Human Rights Watch interview with principal, Sanmatenga province, Centre-Nord region, April 30, 2020.
- ³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with teacher, Kananga, Democratic Republic of Congo, June 24, 2020.
- ³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with teacher, Nairobi, Kenya, June 2020.
- ³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Kioko Y. (not his real name), 15, Kenya, June 20, 2020.
- ³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Timothy B., parent, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria, June 26, 2020.
- ³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Olayinka O., parent, Nigeria, June 26, 2020.
- ³⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Margaret O., mother, 40, Bariga, Lagos, Nigeria, August 20, 2020.
- ⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Hynd M. (not her real name), 18, Casablanca, Morocco, June 18, 2020.
- ⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Nawal L. (not her real name), 16, Marrakesh, Morocco, June 19, 2020.
- ⁴² Human Rights Watch interview with Hassan Mahfoud, teacher, Rabat, Morocco, June 17, 2020.

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- ⁴³ Human Rights Watch interview with Taisha S. (not her real name), 16, Garissa, Kenya, June 20, 2020.
- ⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with teacher, Rabat, Morocco, June 14, 2020.
- ⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Khadija F. (not her real name), mother, Casablanca, Morocco, June 15, 2020.
- ⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with teacher, Sourou, Boucle du Mouhoun, Burkina Faso, April 29, 2020.
- ⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with headteacher, Zambia, June 5, 2020.
- ⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with teacher, Est Region, Burkina Faso, May 2, 2020; and education in emergencies specialist at Plan International, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, May 1, 2020.
- ⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with teacher, Bangui, Central African Republic, June 20, 2020.
- ⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with teacher, Nairobi, Kenya, June, 2020.
- ⁵¹ Juliana Nnoko-Mewanu and Najma Abdi (Human Rights Watch), “Nairobi Evicts 8,000 People Amidst a Pandemic and Curfew,” *African Arguments*, June 10, 2020, available at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/10/nairobi-evicts-8000-people-amidst-pandemic-and-curfew>.
- ⁵² Human Rights Watch interview with Rehema N. (not her real name), 19, Nairobi, Kenya, May, 2020.
- ⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview with Taisha S. (not her real name), 16, Garissa, Kenya, June 20, 2020.
- ⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with official in the bureau of secondary and vocational education, Butembo, North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo, June 10, 2020.
- ⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with caregiver to four students, Beni, Democratic Republic of Congo, June 10, 2020.
- ⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with parent, Beni, Democratic Republic of Congo, June 10, 2020.
- ⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with education NGO worker, North West region, Cameroon, July 2020.
- ⁵⁸ Alex Firth, “Sudanese School Closed by Pandemic, Kept Closed by Armed Forces,” Human Rights Watch dispatch, July 29, 2020, available at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/29/sudanese-school-closed-pandemic-kept-closed-armed-forces>.
- ⁵⁹ Letter from Kinane AG Gadede, Secretary General of ministry of education, to minister of defense, “Protection of education during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic,” May 29, 2020. On file with Human Rights Watch.
- ⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with mathematics teacher, Bangui, Central African Republic, June 23, 2020.
- ⁶¹ IPIS Insights, “The Impact of Covid-19 on Gold and Diamond Artisanal Mines in Western Central African Republic,” July 2020, available at <https://ipisresearch.be/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/200817-insights-The-impact-of-Covid-CAR.pdf>
- ⁶² Human Rights Watch interview with Alex Herivelona, director of Centre Ankanifitahiana, Antananarivo, Madagascar, June 2, 2020.
- ⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview with Temitope O., Isale Akoka Community Lagos, Nigeria May 5, 2020.
- ⁶⁴ The Safe Schools Declaration is an inter-governmental political commitment to take measures to protect students, teachers, schools and universities from the worst effects of armed conflict. As of August 2020, 104 governments have endorsed the declaration, including Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, and Zambia.
- ⁶⁵ The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states that “There is a strong presumption of impermissibility of any retrogressive measures taken in relation to the right to education, as well as other rights enunciated in the Covenant. If any deliberately retrogressive measures are taken, the State party has the burden of proving that they have been introduced after the most careful consideration of all alternatives and that they are fully justified by reference to the totality of the rights provided for in the Covenant and in the context of the full use of the State party’s maximum available resources,” Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, “Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – General Comment No. 13 (Twenty-first session, 1999),” UN Doc. No. E/C.12/1999.10, December 8, 1999, para. 45. The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights have stated that “measures that reduce the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights by individuals or peoples are *prima facie* in violation of the African Charter,” African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, “Principles and Guidelines on the Implementation of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights,” November 2010, para 20.