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EDUCATION OF GIRLS AND COVID-19

AT THE GROUP OF
FAVELAS OF MARÉ



Support

MALALA FUND

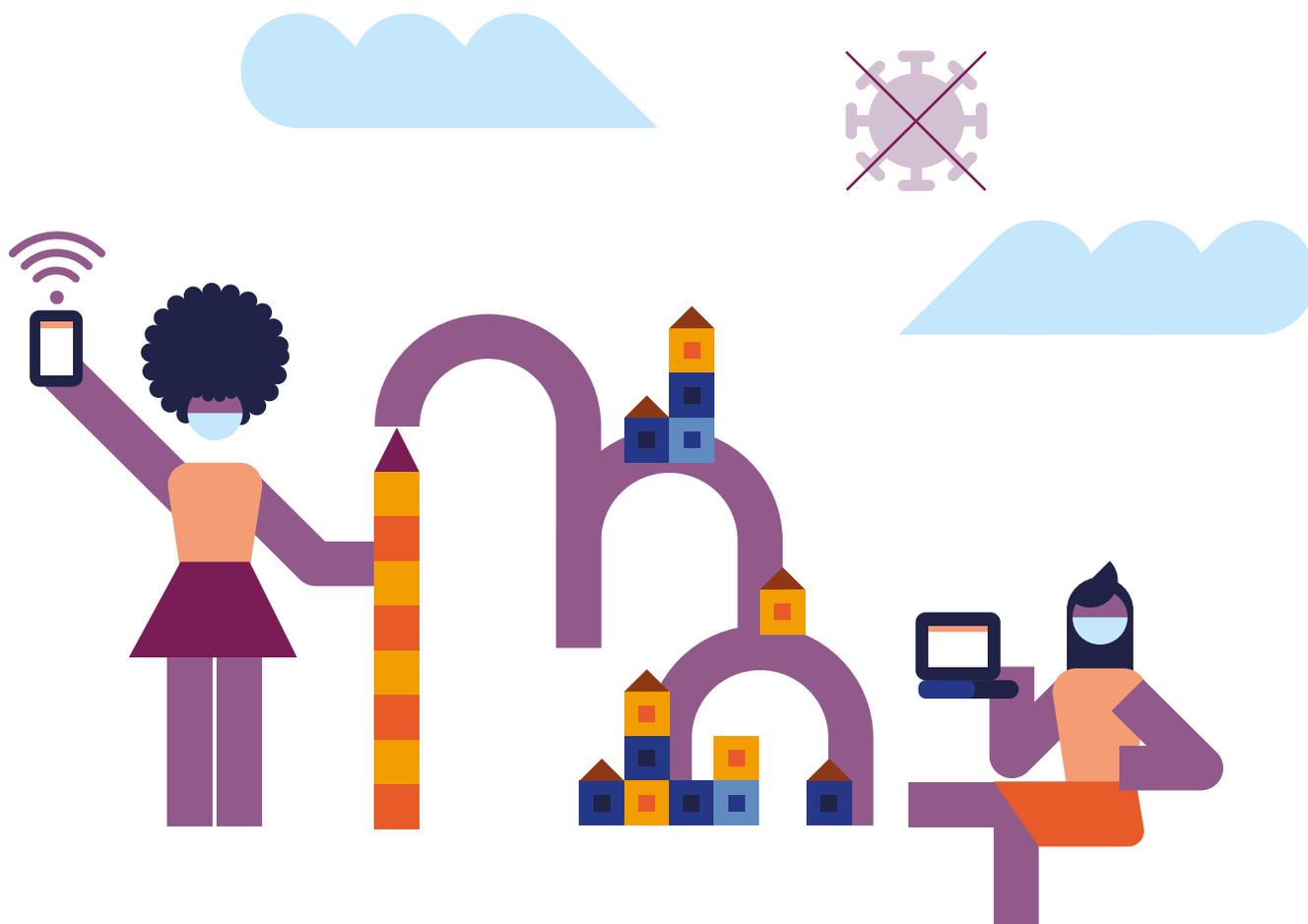


EDUCATION OF GIRLS AND COVID-19

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A close-up photograph of two young girls with dark hair, looking down at a book together. The girl on the left has straight hair and is wearing a purple and white striped shirt. The girl on the right has curly hair and is wearing a dark top. They are both focused on the book, which has a yellow cover. The background is a blurred green chalkboard.

Education of Girls and COVID-19 at the Group of Favelas of Maré

INTRODUCTION

“It is a feeling of being abandoned by education, a feeling that a year was lost (...). This was not thought for a child from the favela”, says the mother of a 12-year-old student, resident of the favelas of Maré. The outburst sums up the challenge that students, families, teachers, and schools located in the group of 16 communities in the Northern part of Rio de Janeiro faced in the school year of 2020, since the suspension of face-to-face classes because of the covid-19 pandemic. This testimony is part of the research **Education of Girls and COVID-19 at the Group of Favelas of Maré**, a survey with more than a thousand residents to identify the impacts of the pandemic on education.

It is expected that the data collected may support the planning of future actions of different institutions that operate in Maré and may also improve the dialog with the public authorities so that educational policies are established, in the region, from the local specificities and demands, always seeking the guarantee of the right to education.

The research was carried out by the non-governmental organization Redes da Maré in partnership with the Malala Fund, in the realm of a project that seeks to guarantee the access and permanence of girls and adolescents of Maré in school. This work combines the goals of both institutions. The Malala Fund was created in 2013, with the purpose of guaranteeing 12 years of free, safe, and quality education for girls. Since its creation, Redes da Maré has worked on carrying out structuring projects for the development of Maré, in several areas. Specifically related to the rights of girls and women, Redes da Maré created in 2009, Casa de Mulheres da Maré, a place of reference for socio-legal support and professional qualification. Besides, Redes da Maré is the curator of the Women of the World Festival – WoW, in Brazil. WoW happens, since 2010, in more than 20 countries.

A total of 1.009 female residents, who were at least 6 years old and enrolled in regular schools or in educational projects in the region, participated. The questionnaires were answered in the second half of 2020, in different favelas that make up the Maré Group of Favelas.



***“It is a feeling of being abandoned by education,
a feeling that a year was lost (...).
This was not thought for a child from the favela”***

“The school did not contact us at any time. (...) So, she has been studying on her own. (...) No one got in touch to give any feedback, or ask how she was doing.”





How the pandemic affected girls' education in Maré

The suspension of face-to-face classes in Rio de Janeiro started on March 16, 2020, as a measure of social isolation due to the covid-19 pandemic. Taken by surprise and without infrastructure or experience with distance learning, schools in Brazil and in the world have gradually developed distance education strategies.

Principals and teachers have started to seek alternatives to offer educational activities, considering the students' possibilities of participation. Although not immediately, public education networks made digital platforms available, but they could not reach most students, mainly because of the difficulties of connecting students and teachers to the Internet.

The effort of educators, students, and their families to suddenly adapt to the new reality was commendable, but the pandemic has brought serious consequences. In the Brazilian context, it also further highlighted the perverse effects of social inequality. In August 2020, a research by FGV Social using PNAD-Covid data showed that young people from classes A and B spent, on average, 3h20min a day in school activities during the pandemic. In classes D and E, this average time falls to 2h09min.

The low-income population, therefore, was the most penalized. And within it there are even more vulnerable groups, since they also have to face discrimination based on gender, race, or place of residence. The study **Education of Girls and COVID-19 at the Group of Favelas of Maré** brings evidence on this.

The research shows how Covid-19 affected the education of girls and women in Maré. More than a third of them – 34.7% – said they had no Internet connection at home, while 26.6% reported that their schools were not offering distance learning activities. Even those who had a mobile phone or computer with Internet access had to face the poor-quality connection, not to mention the lack of financial resources to pay for data plans that could last until the end of each month. Not by chance, only 66.5% of girls and women enrolled in school were able to maintain a routine of studies at home, and only 27.7% of them stated that they were studying five days or more a week.

The mother, whose testimony was quoted in the introduction of this report¹, complained of the lack of educational follow-up. "A curious fact that was highlighted to me by my own daughter, was that the school did not contact us at any time. She is in the 7th year, the school has no WhatsApp group and at no time did they get in touch with us: no one from the direction, no teacher made contact. So, she has been studying on her own. She takes the subjects that are being posted on Facebook weekly, and she has been studying on her own. No one got in touch to give any feedback, or ask how she was doing."

Among the platforms adopted by schools to offer remote activities, the most cited was the WhatsApp messaging application (26.7%), followed by online classes via meeting applications such as Google Meet, Zoom or Microsoft Teams (25.9%), and the Google Classroom/ Google Classroom educational platform (18.9%).

The percentage of girls and women who said they did not have access to the Internet at home – 34.7% – is almost the same as that ascertained by the Maré population Census, survey performed by Redes da Maré, published in 2019. The census had as its target audience the entire population of the Maré Group of Favelas, and not just girls and women, and showed that 36.7% of the residents had no Internet connection at home.



34,7%

had no Internet connection at home

26,6%

schools were not offering distance learning activities

66,5%

maintain a routine of studies at home

27,7%

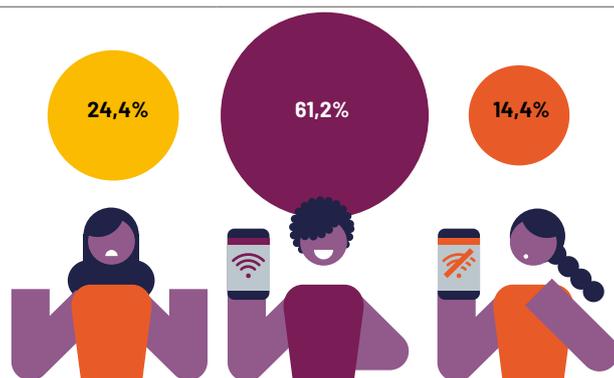
were studying five days or more a week

1. The names were not disclosed for reasons of research confidentiality.

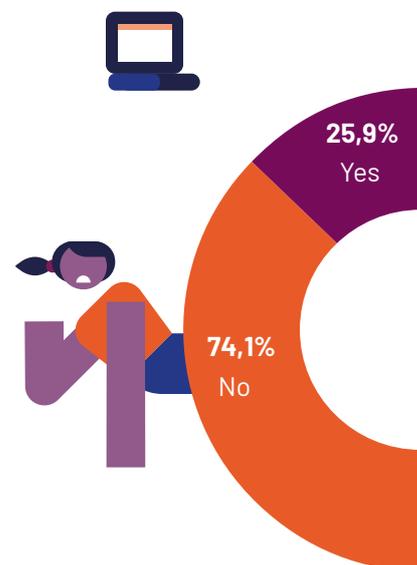
POSSESSION OF CELL PHONE, by age group

Age group	There is no cell phone	Yes, cellphone with internet	Yes, cell phone without Internet
06 - 10 years	53,1%	37,1%	9,8%
11 - 14 years	25,0%	57,8%	17,2%
15 - 17 years	12,3%	71,2%	16,6%
18 - 24 years	6,8%	76,9%	16,3%
25 or more	3,3%	85,6%	11,1%

Total

**POSSESSION OF COMPUTER OR NOTEBOOK**

% of respondents



Internet via mobile phone

The research on the impact of the pandemic on girls' education at Maré indicates that the main form of access to the Internet is via mobile phones. Still, a large number of students do not have the device, which obviously limits the provision of remote activities by Maré schools, harming or even making it impossible to guarantee the right to education of these girls and women.

Almost a quarter of the interviewees – 24.4% – said they did not have a cell phone. Another 14.4% said they have the device, but with no Internet. The sum of these two groups totals 38.8% of students without a cell phone or without the conditions to use the device to connect to the worldwide computer network. That is, almost four out of ten girls and women.

On the other hand, 61.2% of the interviewees reported having cell phones with Internet access, which could even give the impression that there is a good Internet access in Maré. Such conclusion, however, needs to consider other factors. One first factor is that the Internet service offered by the phone carriers in the region is poor, because there is no investment for signal improvement. In addition, most residents have limited data plans that often do not last until the end of the month, when the plan is then renewed.

The analysis of responses by age group shows that the situation is less favorable among children, a group that concentrates the highest number of students in Maré. According to the survey, 53.1% of girls aged 6 to 10 years had no cell phone, and 9.8% of those who had cell phones had no Internet access. All in all, 62.9% of girls were unable or faced more difficulties to follow school activities via mobile phone, since they depended on the existence and availability of devices of other residents in the house.

It is also important to remember that the range from 6 to 10 years old corresponds to the initial years of primary school (1st to 5th school year), a stage when literacy occurs. In Maré, only 37.1% of girls in this age group had mobile phones with Internet access.



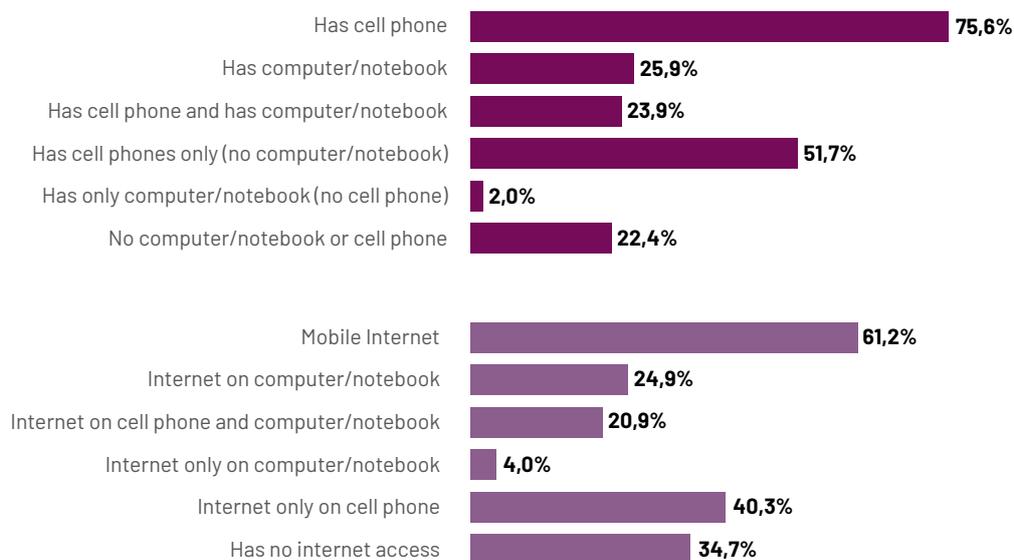
24,4%

did not have
a cell phone

14,4%

have the device,
but with no Internet

POSSESSION OF CELL PHONE, COMPUTER/NOTEBOOK AND INTERNET CONNECTION, in %



74,1%

do not have
a computer

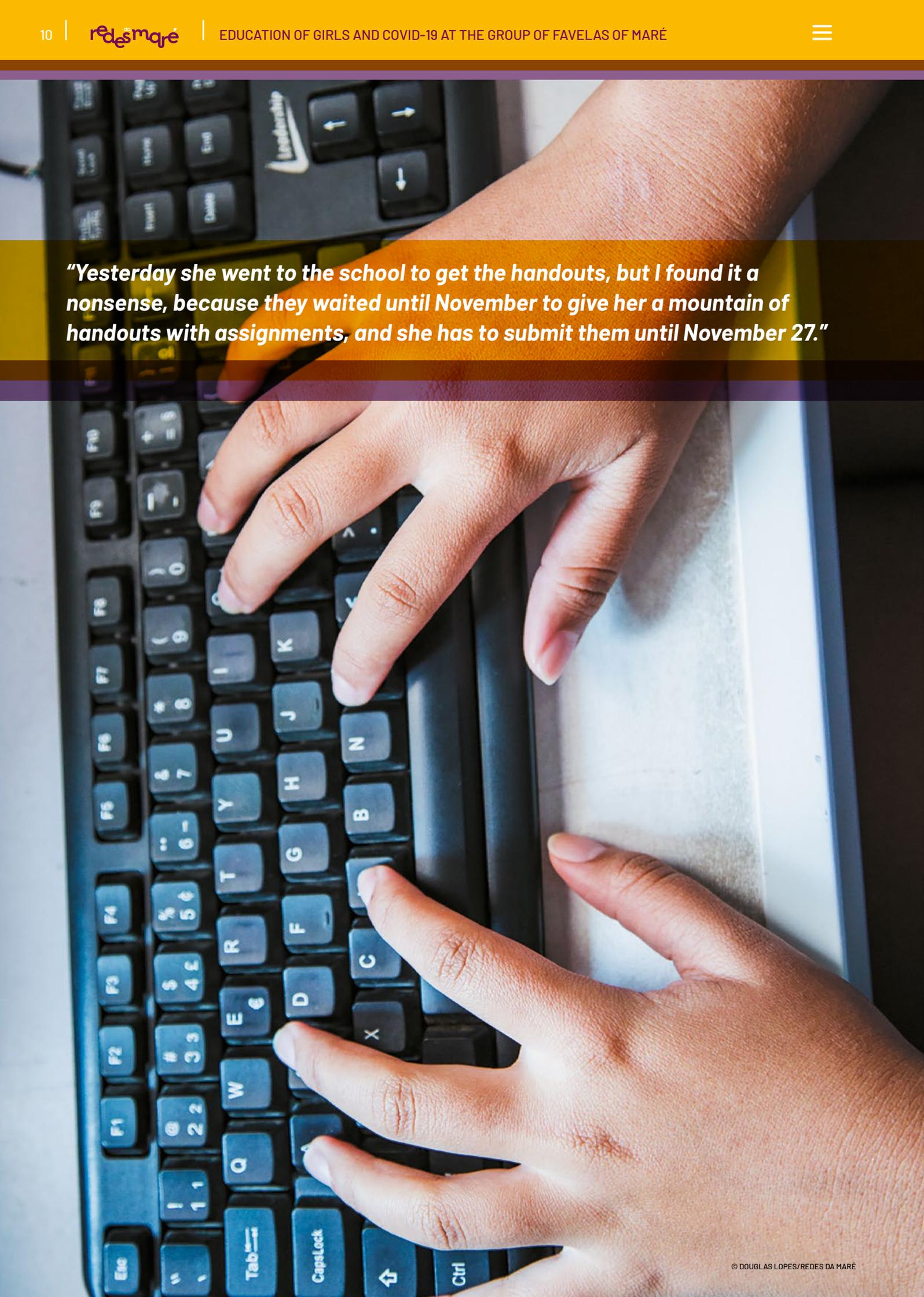
Considering that around 80% of students enrolled in public schools in Maré are up to 14 years old, it can be noticed that most certainly there are difficulties in accessing content made available by schools via cell phones. Another way to connect and keep up with remote activities is via computer, either desktop or laptop. The research shows, however, that only 25.9% of the interviewees have a computer, compared to 74.1% who do not have this type of device.

The mother of a 10-year-old girl who is a fifth-year primary school student told the interviewer that her daughter ended up leaving remote school: "It was hard, really hard for my daughter to keep up with online studies. In the beginning, she was even able to keep up with some subjects, but then she was no longer able to cope, because we don't have a good Internet connection in the communities, and her phone is not good enough, it's a broken, old phone. She even said to me: 'Mother, I try to study, but I simply can't.' And she was straining her eyes because her nose was buried in her phone. And we didn't find it right to be so strict on her, trying to get the most out of her, because she tried. Then she gave up because it was hard, I saw how frustrated she was."

This mother reported that the family's solution was to pay private lessons to a tutor, so that the daughter would learn something. "as mothers, we are outraged, appalled, because it is so sad that you demand things for your children, and you have no further learning for them. We need to invest in this future of tomorrow, which are these children. My daughter wants to keep up and sometimes she even goes to the house of her cousin who has a computer, but the Internet doesn't help."

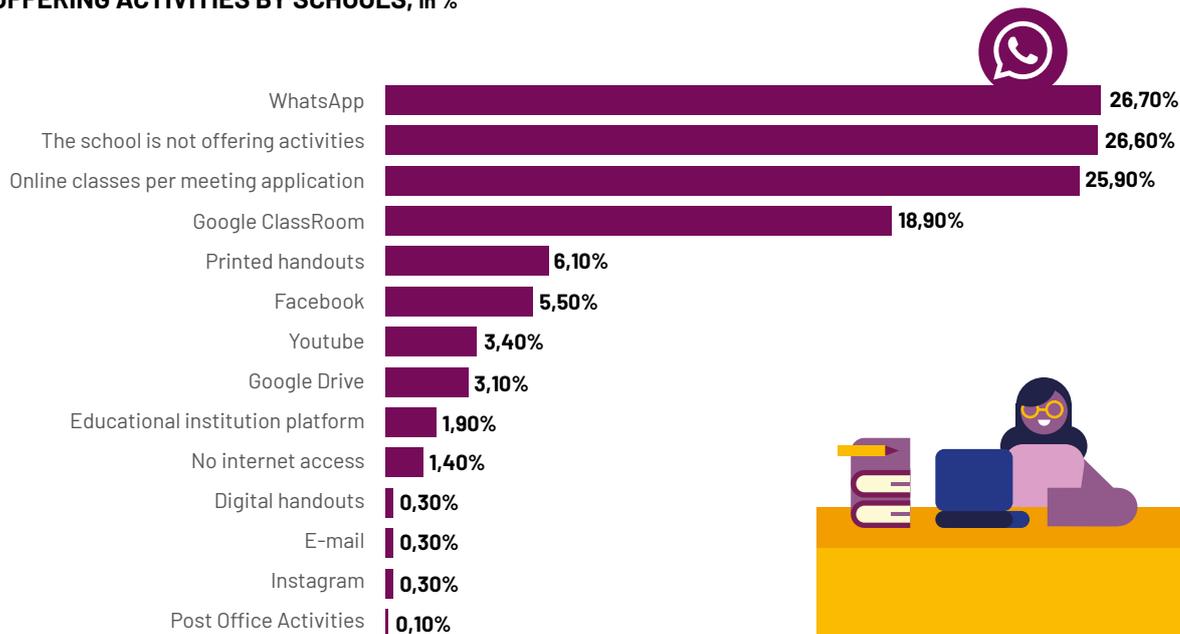


"It was hard, really hard for my daughter to keep up with online studies. In the beginning, she was even able to keep up with some subjects, but then she was no longer able to cope, because we don't have a good Internet connection"



“Yesterday she went to the school to get the handouts, but I found it a nonsense, because they waited until November to give her a mountain of handouts with assignments, and she has to submit them until November 27.”

MEANS FOR OFFERING ACTIVITIES BY SCHOOLS, in %



Remote education

It is worth remembering that, in Maré, Internet connection problems are a reflection not only of the poor service offered by the companies that dominate the market, but also of the lack of financial resources to pay for data plans capable of providing students' access to digital activities, when offered by schools.

In this sense, it is not surprising that WhatsApp, a digital platform that requires moderate Internet quality, is the most mentioned platform in the survey, even ahead of meeting applications, which depend on more powerful and stable connections.

As a result of connectivity problems and the absence of an effective public policy to minimize the negative impacts of digital exclusion, schools and educational networks had to draw on different means for maintaining the students' schooling process. It is worth highlighting the low mention of printed handouts (6.1%), especially when it is known that the Ministry of Education periodically distributes textbooks to schools.

The mother of a 17-year-old adolescent, a first-year secondary school student, highlighted the positive impact of printed handouts for her daughter to participate in school activities: "The children in my house are not doing well with this pandemic, because they just want to go out to play and I keep scolding them. The schools are sending online material and they are also not willing to do the homework, because they said that this way, they won't learn anything too. They only became interested now, after the handouts from school arrived, in doing their assignments, they think they have to do the assignments, have to do them on paper or in the classroom, then they were interested."

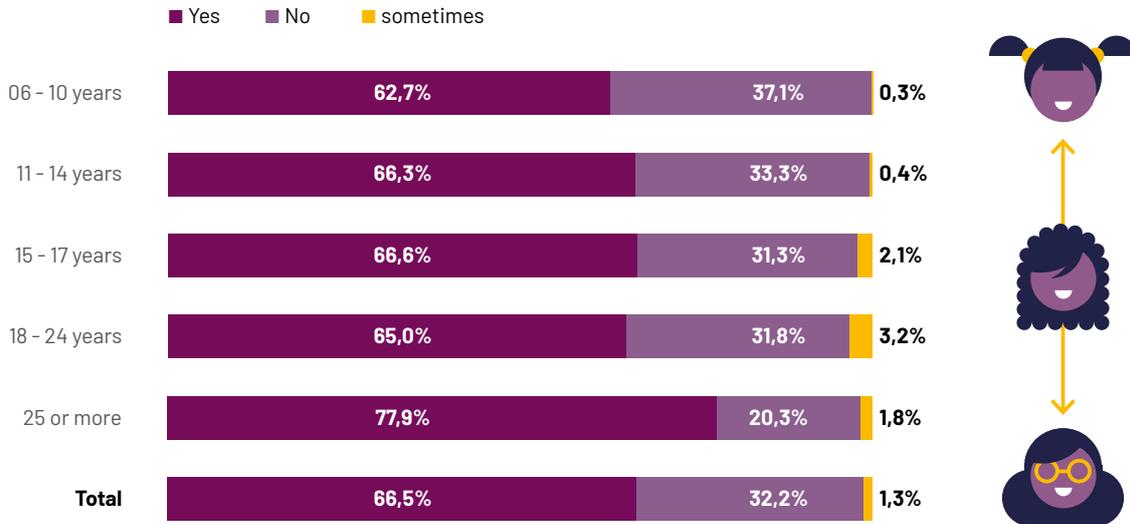
This mother criticized, however, the excess of content sent at once, at the end of the year: "Yesterday she went to the school to get the handouts, but I found it a nonsense, because they waited until November to give her a mountain of handouts with assignments, and she has to submit them until November 27, otherwise she will fail. Then she no longer accepted it, but I told her that she will have to do it."



6,1%

mention of printed handouts

HOME STUDY ROUTINE, by age group



Study routine

Maintaining the routine of children's studies at home is a challenge for most families, regardless of the social class. But the challenge increases when a suitable location is lacking, since the neighborhood is noisy; when parents need to work outside the home; or when it is hard to connect to the Internet, either due to weak signal or lack of equipment, such as cell phone and computer.

In Maré, the research indicated that, on average, 66.5% of students enrolled in school were managing to maintain a routine of studies at home, while 32.2% were not. The option "sometimes" was marked by 1.3% of respondents.

The percentage of girls with a study routine drops to 62.7% in the range of 6 to 10 years – as previously mentioned, the literacy phase – and goes up to 77.9% among women aged 25 years or older. In the other age groups, the percentages were 66.3% (11 to 14 years), 66.6% (15 to 17 years) and 65% (18 to 24 years).

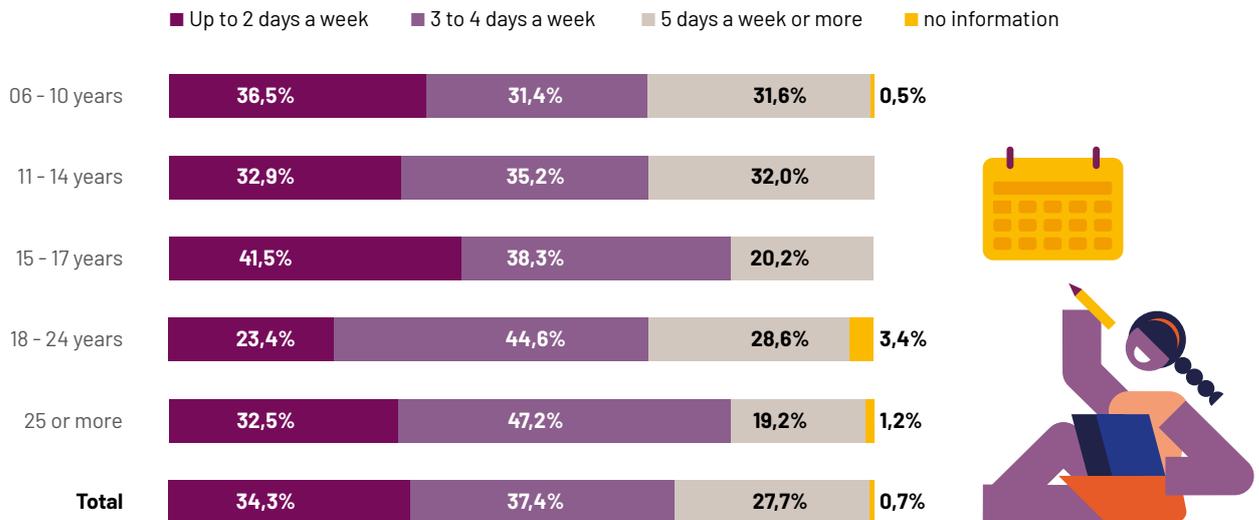
The survey also identified the weekly frequency of students' studies at home. Only 27.7% of them stated that they study five days a week or more, while 37.4% said they study three to four days a week and the other 34.4% revealed they study up to two days a week.

The sum of the responses "three to four days a week" and "up to two days a week" totals 71.7%. So, it is clear that the weekly frequency of studies was lower for most of the students during the period of remote teaching than the expectations for the period of face-to-face classes, before the pandemic.



"It was extremely complicated in the beginning to make her understand the new way of studying and the large demand of things to do at home while no longer having the support of her teacher, but now depending solely on her family members."

NUMBER OF DAYS PER WEEK STUDYING AT HOME, by age group



The age group analysis shows that 32% of the students from 11 to 14 years old state that they are studying five days a week or more – the highest percentage recorded. On the extreme opposite, only 19.2% of the women with 25 years old or older chose this option. Whereas the percentage of students who reported they are studying the maximum of two days a week was recorded among adolescents from 15 to 17 years old: 41.5%.

The mother of a 9-year-old girl, a 3rd year Primary School student, wrote a report about some of the challenges of distance education: “The adaptation to remote teaching, that initially happened through videos submitted by the teacher and, afterwards, evolved to daily live classes. It was extremely complicated in the beginning to make her understand the new way of studying and the large demand of things to do at home while no longer having the support of her teacher, but now depending solely on her family members.”

This same mother also highlighted the need to be present during the remote classes to avoid that her child slept: “There is the lack of motivation to watch classes on the computer, because her classes started at 7:30 A.M. In the beginning, she would lie down on the couch and sleep in the middle of the class. My strategy was to stay in the room with her throughout the whole class or to constantly check if everything was okay.”

Lastly, this mother commented on how the physical education classes were missed by her daughter, since she spent most of her time at home, and she mentioned the need to “adapt the house, so we could guarantee a quiet room, with comfort and a good quality Internet”.

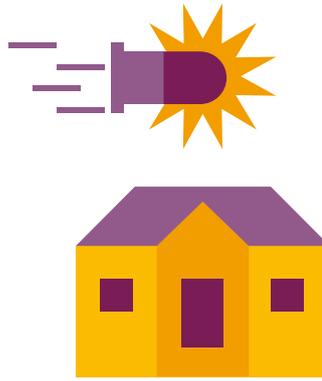
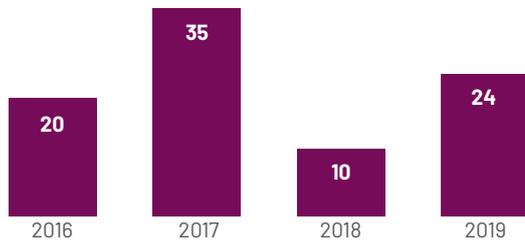


“There is the lack of motivation to watch classes on the computer, because her classes started at 7:30 A.M. In the beginning, she would lie down on the couch and sleep in the middle of the class. My strategy was to stay in the room with her throughout the whole class or to constantly check if everything was okay.”

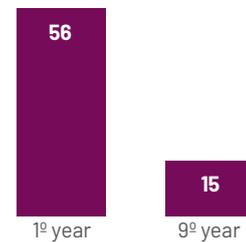
The Maré Group of Favelas is made up of 16 favelas, where 139 thousand people live. It is the most populous favela in the capital of Rio de Janeiro, with over 47 thousand households.



NUMBER OF DAYS THAT AT LEAST ONE SCHOOL IN MARÉ WAS LEFT WITHOUT CLASSES DUE TO CLASHES



NUMBER OF CLASSES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN THE MUNICIPAL SYSTEM, in jul/2019



The context of Maré

The pandemic made clear the absence of the State and public policies in different areas, especially for the population of the favelas and peripheral areas. Social isolation, even though legitimate and necessary, brought direct consequences for the sector of services and left most of the population who works in precarious conditions, with no formal work bonds, with reduced or no income. Overnight, many people lost the possibility of feeding their families and tried to register for the emergency assistance program of the federal government.

In the first weeks of the pandemic, when the sanitary authorities advocated for frequent handwashing with water and soap, almost all the favelas in Maré had their water supply interrupted due to a flaw in the system. When the problem was solved, the population witnessed a shortage of soaps, alcohol, masks, medicine, and food.

The Maré Group of Favelas is made up of 16 favelas, where 139 thousand people live, according to the Populational Census of Maré. It is the most populous favela in the capital of Rio de Janeiro, with over 47 thousand households. The Census also showed that 52% of the population was under 30 years old.

Urban violence, established through armed conflicts, has become part of the lives of residents of the 16 favelas of Maré. They have to live with the violation of rights derived from the actions of armed criminal groups, but also with the militarization of police operations which, historically, have disrespected the population and their most basic rights, such as the inviolability of households. Thus, we have extremely severe consequences for the lives of the population, considering their needs for the full development of the region and the guarantee of rights, among them, the right to education.

Starting with the functioning of schools. Bulletins on the right to public safety edited by Redes da Maré recorded the number of days, every school year, in which at least one school of Maré had their classes interrupted due to confrontations. In 2016, there were 20 days; in 2017, 35; in 2018, 10; and, in 2019, 24.

Data from the municipal school network from July 2019 reveal that there were 56 groups in the 1st year of primary school and only 15 groups in the 9th year. That is, a difference of 41 groups between the beginning and the end of primary school, which indicates how school failure and dropout rates seem to affect the education of children and adolescents in Maré.

It is consensus that the quality of the education offered to children and adolescents derives both from external and internal factors to the schools. In this sense, children and adolescents of Maré are, on one hand, subject to the adversities present in the Brazilian public education and, on the other hand, subject to certain local specificities, such as the violence that results in the suspension of classes, with the reduction of school days. It is also known that low performance is the main generator of school dropout and age-grade distortion.



52%

of the population
was under
30 years old



Domestic care

It is common for older siblings to be responsible for taking care of younger siblings while the adults are working. Considering that such situation could hamper the follow-up of school activities by part of the girls, we researched if this was happening in each family and, if so, what was the relation between the respondent and person for whom they care.

The result was that 80.7% of the participants declared they were not responsible for taking care of someone else, a rate that could be associated to the young age of most of the sample, formed by girls and female adolescents from 6 to 17 years old. In this sense, two thirds (67%) of the interviewees who were caring for someone were women who are 25 years old or older. They especially took care of their children or mother.



67%

**who were caring
for someone
were women
who are 25 years
old or older**

Almost two thirds of the participants (66.1%) lived in households with the maximum of four people. This percentage was distributed as follows: 1% (one person); 11.1% (two people); 22.6% (three people); and 31.4% (four people). Only 15% of the girls and women answered that they lived in houses with six or more residents.

Even when they did not have the responsibility of taking care of a minor, it is important to highlight that the existence of more than one child in the same household makes it even more challenging to find the time to study in precarious conditions. One of the mothers interviewed on the survey told us how this affected the family's routine: "If you have more than one child, and one child takes a long time to get the video, receive the content, receive the subjects, the other child will take a long time too, they will have to wait until the first child is finished to start studying. Then, there is the issue of little privacy and the noise inside the house, which hampers the child's concentration."

Despite this testimonial, it is necessary to record that, as per common sense, there is still the belief that families in favelas are numerous, living in small, unhealthy spaces. Despite the variations between each favela, the average of residents per household in Maré follows the average of the city. The 2010 Demographic Census by IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) measured the average of 2.92 residents per household in the city of Rio de Janeiro and 3.11 in Maré. Whereas the Populational Census of Maré recorded the average of 2.91, varying between 2.60, in Parque Rubens Vaz, and 3.77, in Conjunto Bento Ribeiro Dantas.

Regarding family composition, we identify a predominance of traditional patterns, in which the participant of the survey stated they live with their mother, father and sibling (30.9%); mother and sibling (15.7%); father and mother (9.2%); or only their mother (9%). When added the different compositions, 78.3% of the respondents declared they live with their mother, the most present figure in the households of Maré.



"If you have more than one child, and one child takes a long time to get the video, receive the content, receive the subjects, the other child will take a long time too, they will have to wait until the first child is finished to start studying."



Recommendations to the public administration

With the beginning of the pandemic and the need for social distancing, among other measures, the historical inequalities that jeopardize the population in the favelas and peripheral areas were heightened.

The limited access to the Internet and the lack of equipment hampered remote teaching, making the schools of the public network seek alternatives, such as the submission of activities via WhatsApp. Such strategy demands the weekly printing of school activities by the families, generating expenses that they cannot always afford.

The risk of an increase in dropout rates is also worrying. The loss of a connection with the school, either due to the impossibility of participating in remote classes or the lack of motivation for the online activities, as well as the fear of contamination during the return of face-to-face classes could lead students to not enroll in 2021.

FACING THIS SCENARIO, THE SURVEY EDUCATION OF GIRLS AND COVID-19 IN THE GROUP OF FAVELAS OF MARÉ MAKES THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION:

- ✓ **Demanding from the telecommunications concessionaires more quality of access to the Internet, considering the specificities of the territory.**
- ✓ **Creating pedagogical alternatives** for the students who do not have access to the Internet, in order for them to maintain their connection with the school and receive pedagogical support from the teachers.
- ✓ **Guaranteeing that the content related to the school year of 2020 is taught and/or recapitulated in 2021.**
- ✓ **Defining a clear educational policy that supports teachers and administrators in the guarantee of the right to education.**
- ✓ **Investing in teacher training** for these professionals to be able to work in the best way possible during the pandemic.
- ✓ **Creating a dialog between the municipal and state school networks, since many students who were in the last year of primary school, under the responsibility of the municipal network, will start studying in the state secondary schools.**
- ✓ **Promoting the active search of students who are out of school, identifying and solving the problems that prevent their participation in remote, hybrid or face-to-face activities; the effort must involve other departments of the government, in an intersectoral policy capable of guaranteeing the right to education.**
- ✓ **Building in Maré an office of the 4th Regional Coordination of Education (CRE), a structure of the Municipal Secretariat of Education responsible for the administration of schools in different neighborhoods of the city, including in Maré. Currently, the 4th CRE is located in Olaria, which hampers the assistance to families of students in Maré.**



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Survey methodology

The study was carried out in the context of the partnership between **Redes da Maré** and the **Malala Fund**, initiated in April 2020. The objective is to strengthen public policies that help reducing the number of out of school girls from 11 to 17 years old, promoting the access to education, attendance and struggling against school dropout.

The survey was carried out through a questionnaire with 28 questions, answered mostly by mothers or women from the students' families. This does not apply, of course, to the adult interviewees. Several mothers also gave their testimonials about how they perceived the education of their daughters during the pandemic.

For purposes of sample definition, the Group of Favelas of Maré was divided into four areas, covering 16 communities: Conjunto Esperança, Conjunto Pinheiros, Salsa e Merengue, Vila do Pinheiros, Vila do João, Baixa do Sapateiro, Morro do Timbau, Conjunto Bento Ribeiro Dantas, Nova Maré, Nova Holanda, Parque Maré, Parque Rubens Vaz, Parque União, Roquete Pinto, Praia de Ramos, and Marcílio Ramos.

Redes da Maré is a civil society institution with the mission of guaranteeing the effective rights of the population who lives in the group of 16 favelas of Maré. To do this, we carry out 14 educational projects that assist around one thousand residents every year: from preparation courses for university application exams or preparation courses for secondary school and for the 6th year of primary school to education of youth and adults (EJA), passing through the reintegration of children in school, foreign language courses and professional qualification.

The **Malala Fund** is a non-for-profit international organization that supports initiatives for all girls to have access to 12 years of free, safe, and quality education. It was founded in 2013 by Malala Yousafzai, activist in the education of girls and the youngest Nobel Prize Laureate (she won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014), and by her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai. The fund is currently present in eight countries: Afghanistan, Brazil, Ethiopia, India, Lebanon, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Turkey. In Brazil, it supports seven institutions in the states of Pernambuco, Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo.

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