



GRADUATE WOMEN
INTERNATIONAL (GWI)

Chemin du Grand-Montfleury, 48
CH-1290 Versoix, Geneva
Switzerland
www.graduatewomen.org

GWIMANIFESTO

Tertiary education for girls & women

Graduate Women International (GWI), founded in 1919, is a worldwide, non-governmental organisation of women graduates, advocating for women's rights, equality, and empowerment through access to quality secondary, tertiary, continuing and non-traditional education.

There are still many barriers for women and girls to access all tertiary education fields and modes. This is especially true in developing countries and in rural areas. In some countries, cultural and traditional attitudes towards higher education for women often deny them access to education. While tertiary education is generally equally available to men and women in most developed countries, there are still many millions of girls and women in developing nations who have little hope of progressing beyond the basic primary education level. Governments and education sectors must promote and facilitate substantive gender equality* in access to quality tertiary education, which directly and substantially impacts on increased economic development and inclusive social cohesion.

Barriers to accessing tertiary education for girls and women

- Gender stereotyping, arising from certain cultural, social and religious traditions, often does not foster an environment of supporting women in higher education. In many of these instances, access to education for girls and women is often capped at secondary level or even lower.
- Unskilled labour, which does not require long-term enrolment in tertiary education, appeals to women in need of more immediate financial return. Tertiary education is thus seen as a loss of potential income, despite the greater earning potential inherent in attaining a qualification.
- Primary responsibility for domestic work and care-giving as well as full-time home-making is still considered the standard life course for girls and women in many countries and regions.
- Costs and fees associated with enrolling in and attending university often discourage female participation, especially affecting women from weaker socio-economic backgrounds.
- Accessing childcare may incur additional expense, further adding to the financial burden of attending tertiary education.
- Enrolment in most universities and other higher education institutions tends to be a competitive process. This can make accessing tertiary education difficult in situations where girls' and women's education at primary and secondary level was not of sufficient quality to equip them with the necessary academic knowledge and skills. This is especially true for women from vulnerable groups including those with disabilities and those from indigenous or rural backgrounds.

▶ **RECOGNISING THAT** WOMEN HAVE EQUAL RIGHTS TO TERTIARY EDUCATION IN ALL FIELDS, ACROSS ALL COUNTRIES AND REGIONS

▶ **CALLING FOR THE** ADOPTION OF TERTIARY EDUCATION PROGRAMMES, WHICH INCLUDE PART-TIME OR EVENING STUDY, THAT ALLOW FOR FAMILY, WORK AND OTHER COMMITMENTS

▶ **ENCOURAGING WOMEN** TO STEP OUTSIDE THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, AND TO EMBARK ON EDUCATION IN SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING AND MATHEMATICS (STEM)

* Substantive equality is the standard adopted by the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which includes equality of opportunity, equality of access to opportunity and equality of results. See General recommendation No. 25, on article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, on temporary special measures, 2004, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/453882a7e0.html>



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Increasing access to tertiary education for girls and women

GWI, in cooperation with its national federations and associations, advocates for safe access to quality, multidisciplinary tertiary education for all girls and women. To achieve this aim, GWI calls on all **governments, education sectors, civil society and the private sector** to take collective responsibility to:

- **Develop secondary school curricula to a level and quality which reflect the academic requirements necessary and prepare students for enrolment into universities and other institutions, with particular emphasis on accessibility for girls and women.**
- **Introduce national programmes that communicate to society the importance of women to be able to access quality tertiary education, particularly targeted towards less developed and rural communities.**
- **Promote and ensure equal access for women to all forms of higher education across all disciplines, including within fields such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).**
- **Design tertiary education curricula to incorporate flexible timetables, for example part-time, evening or online classes, so women with families or work commitments can attend.**
- **Establish mature student programmes for women seeking to return to education, with emphasis on career guidance and counselling as well as other support services to ease the transition.**
- **Provide economically disadvantaged women with everything they need to enable them to complete and succeed in their chosen tertiary courses including financial, academic, social and personal support.**
- **Provide state-subsidised child care facilities and crèches within easy access to campuses and institutions.**
- **Support individuals and programmes that aim to increase the number of women in decision-making positions in tertiary education institutions and society.**



TO INCENTIVISE WOMEN TO ACCESS TERTIARY EDUCATION, GWI ACKNOWLEDGES THE ROLE OF STATE AND NON-STATE INSTITUTIONS, AND ENCOURAGES PARTNERSHIP FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR TO:

- Establish special loans, on favourable and equitable terms for poorer women and girls to enable them to enrol in tertiary institutions
- Develop sponsorship schemes and education trusts whereby individuals and businesses can contribute to the funding of tertiary education courses for disadvantaged women and girls
- Showcase best practices and role models to encourage all women to pursue tertiary education, especially in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).