



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
06 February 2023

English only

---

## Human Rights Council

**Fifty-second session**

27 February–31 March 2023

Agenda item 1

**Organizational and procedural matters**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Graduate Women International (GWI), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[6 February 2023]

---

\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

## **The promotion of gender equality through equitable access to lifelong learning opportunities submitted by Graduate Women International (GWI)**

Graduate Women International (GWI) is an international membership-based non-government organisation (NGO) based in Geneva, Switzerland, with Consultative Status to the Economic and Social Council since 1947 and a presence in some 70 countries. Founded in 1919 as the International Federation of University Women, GWI is the leading girls' and women's organisation of graduate women who advocate for women's and girls' rights, equality, and empowerment through access to quality education and lifelong training up to the highest levels.

GWI takes the opportunity of the 52nd Human Rights Council (HRC52) to express continued concern about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the right to equal education for all. In doing so, GWI reaffirms its HRC49 statement (March 2022), "Reimagining a way forward in digital learning that offers safe access to quality and equitable education for women and girls"[1]; its HRC46 statement (March 2021), "GWI calls for the increase in domestic funding for education"[2]; and its HRC45 statement (September 2021), "Distance learning and digital technologies as a strategical turn towards inclusive access to education for women and girls"[3]. Among other critical messaging, each statement reinforces that, despite the tremendous efforts made by States and other stakeholders, the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged education in the most marginalized situations and continues to require the Councils immediate and long-term attention. In its attention to education recovery, the Council cannot ignore that prioritising gender equality is critical to the sector's upturn.

In this HRC52 statement, GWI reminds States that education and gender equality are recognised at the highest international levels as crucial to progress towards the achievement of the United Nations (UN) 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); with GWI calling particular attention to SDG 4 on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all and further recalling the importance of education to achieving each of the 17 SDGs.

GWI reaffirms that gender and education rights of everyone are enshrined in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention against Discrimination in Education of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and other relevant international instruments. GWI emphasizes that achieving the ambitious 17 SDGs by 2030 and further accomplishing the aforementioned Declarations and Conventions is only possible if women and girls fully realize their right to equal opportunities, especially the full realisation of the right to education in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era.

The realisation of the right to education contributes to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, human rights, sustainable development, and economic fulfilment. GWI reminds the Council that gender equality in education is also enshrined in many Council resolutions. Recalling that the HRC resolution A/HRC/RES/32/20, “Realisation of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl” [4] of which GWI was a research contributor. The Incheon Declaration: Education 2030 [5] towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all aims to mobilize all countries and partners and provide guidance on achieving the effective implementation of SDG 4; the UN General Assembly resolution 64/290 upholds “the right to education in emergency situations [6]; CEDAW General Recommendation 36 recognizes that education for gender equality and empowerment of women and girls is the most sustainable way to ultimately achieve the objectives of non-discrimination and equality of women and men [7]; and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 65 March 2021 agreed conclusions that further reiterated Commission’s commitments to gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls [8] are also recognised herein.

Gender-based discrimination in education is both a cause and a consequence of deep-rooted societal disparities. There are currently 129 million girls out of school, including 30 million out of lower secondary school and 67 million out of upper-secondary school age.[9] Poverty, geographical isolation, ethnic background, disability, and traditionally limiting attitudes toward the status and role of girls and women all undermine their ability to exercise their rights. Discriminatory policy and practice still prevent millions of girls from enrolling, completing, and benefitting from education each year. Barriers to education for secondary school-age girls include harmful practices such as early marriage and pregnancy, gender-based violence, a lack of safe access to schools, and missing infrastructure such as WIFI and sanitation. Gender equality must be integrated at all levels of education, from early childhood to higher education, and beyond that to continuing education and vocational training, whether in formal and non-formal settings. It must also be integrated early in planning infrastructure and throughout the training of teachers, pre-service and in-service.

Educating girls and women provides economic empowerment and foster greater social justice and gender equality. Education gives women the tools to overcome discrimination - girls and young women who are educated have a greater awareness of their rights and greater confidence and freedom to make decisions that affect their lives, improve their health, and boost their work prospects. Older women who missed out on these education benefits have a right to access them later in life through continuing education programs.

GWI’s position and recommendations:

GWI emphasises the need for gender mainstreaming. Measurable, enforceable legislation and transformative actions to promote gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment must be implemented and monitored at all levels. Gender mainstreaming in international mechanisms

and national institutions should be conducted whether private or public, as well as in government and international organisations that have a stake in education.

GWI strongly supports the CSW65 agreed conclusions that reaffirm the right to education for all women and girls and stresses that equal access to inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education significantly contributes to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. It confirms the gender-specific barriers to girls' equal enjoyment of their right to education.[10]

GWI also strongly supports the CSW60 agreed conclusions to promote and respect women's and girls' right to education throughout their life cycle at all levels by ensuring inclusive, equal, and non-discriminatory quality education, eliminating gender disparities in access to all areas of secondary and tertiary education, equal access to career development, training, scholarship, and leadership skills.[11]

To strengthen gender equality in education combined with the right to education, GWI makes the following eight recommends to the Council:

1. Gender-responsive budgeting - financing for education should include adequate provision for gender-disaggregated data collection and analysis as an essential component of measuring existing inequality and progress towards gender equality and education targets of the SDGs.
2. Finance education to cover significant progress towards gender parity in teaching staff recruitment, training and deployment in countries and areas where women are inadequately represented in the teaching profession, including science and technology.
3. Mainstream a gender perspective into curricula from the earliest stages, actively promoting the training and career opportunities available to women in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and maths (STEM).
4. Ensuring teacher-training, both pre-and in-service, is context-relevant and gender-conscious so that teachers are equipped with the skills and knowledge to employ gender-sensitive teaching methods appropriate to different age groups and the existing degree of formal education.
5. Ensure that safe access to education for girls and women includes unhindered passage to reach schools and a violence and harassment-free environment. This safety must extend to all girls and women, including the disabled, refugees, and vulnerable groups.
6. Provide non-formal education to reach out-of-school, marginalized, over-aged girls, youth, and older women previously denied educational opportunities.
7. Recognise and prioritise education as a core component of first-phase response in emergencies, and the inclusivity of education and educational

opportunity regardless of age or ability, including the provision of literacy and skills training for working-age adult women.

8. Provide sufficient funding for infrastructure, WIFI access and hardware.

- 
1. GWI written statement to the HRC49, [https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Graduate-Women-International-HRC49-written-statement-FINAL-\\_reimagining-digital-learning-as-equitable\\_UN.pdf](https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Graduate-Women-International-HRC49-written-statement-FINAL-_reimagining-digital-learning-as-equitable_UN.pdf)
  2. GWI written statement to the HRC46, [https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/GWI-HRC-46\\_written-statement\\_GWI-calls-for-the-increase-in-domestic-funding-for-education\\_FINAL-UN.pdf](https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/GWI-HRC-46_written-statement_GWI-calls-for-the-increase-in-domestic-funding-for-education_FINAL-UN.pdf)
  3. GWI written statement to the HRC45, [https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/UN-Official\\_Graduate-Women-International-HRC45\\_Distance-learning-and-digital-technologies-as-a-strategical-turn-towards-inclusive-access-to-education-for-women-and-girls.pdf](https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/UN-Official_Graduate-Women-International-HRC45_Distance-learning-and-digital-technologies-as-a-strategical-turn-towards-inclusive-access-to-education-for-women-and-girls.pdf)
  4. HRC resolution A/HRC/RES/32/20, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/156/18/PDF/G1615618.pdf?OpenElement>, July 2016
  5. Incheon Declaration, [https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/education-2030-incheon-framework-for-action-implementation-of-sdg4-2016-en\\_2.pdf](https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/education-2030-incheon-framework-for-action-implementation-of-sdg4-2016-en_2.pdf), May 2015
  6. UN General Assembly resolution 64/290, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/479/23/PDF/N0947923.pdf?OpenElement>, July 2010
  7. CEDAW General Recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of girls and women to education, November 2017
  8. Agreed conclusions CSW65, March 2021, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/079/07/PDF/N2107907.pdf?OpenElement>
  9. UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/education/girls-education>
  10. Agreed conclusions from CSW65, March 2021 <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/079/07/PDF/N2107907.pdf?OpenElement>
  11. Agreed conclusions from CSW60, March 2016 [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=E/2016/27&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/2016/27&Lang=E)