



General Assembly

Distr.: General
18 August 2025

English only

Human Rights Council

Sixtieth session

8 September–8 October 2025

Agenda item 5

Human rights bodies and mechanisms

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.

[18 August 2025]

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

From Digital Divide to Digital Equality

Graduate Women International (GWI) urges Member States to uphold their international obligations by ensuring equal access to digital education for women and girls and by addressing the structural causes of the gender digital divide. Recalling earlier written and oral interventions before the Human Rights Council 45th session [1], 49th session [2], 56th session [3], 57th session [4], and GWI reiterates that equal access to digital education is integral to the right to education in the digital era.

Current labour market data make clear the scale of the challenge in that women account for only 26% of workers in data and artificial intelligence (AI), 15% in engineering, and 12% in cloud computing.[5] Women make up only 30% of professionals in science and technology, and approximately 25% of students enrolled in computer science and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) programs are female.[6] These disparities are reinforced by persistent gender stereotypes that portray Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) careers as being more suitable for men, which negatively impacts girls' interest, aspirations, engagement, and achievement in science and technology fields. [7]

To address these inequities, education systems must move beyond rhetorical commitments and dismantle bias embedded in institutional structures. The right to education must be understood as encompassing the right to participate fully in, and to shape, technological innovation. Without this redefinition, the digital divide will continue to reproduce and deepen gender-based inequalities.

Globally, women and girls, particularly those in rural, conflict-affected, and low-income settings, encounter disproportionate barriers to digital tools, training, and infrastructure. This exclusion, widely recognised as the gender digital divide, reinforces gender inequalities, restricts access not only to education but also to economic participation, political representation, and civic engagement. As education systems increasingly digitise, the absence of foundational digital literacy risks leaving behind entire populations, thereby compounding pre-existing disadvantages. [8]

It is precisely in this context that the full implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) becomes critical. SDG 4 recognises inclusive, equitable, and quality education as both a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of sustainable development. [9] Target 4.4 specifically calls for the acquisition of ICT proficiency and digital literacy as skills essential for employment. [10] Achieving this target requires education systems to ensure that learners at all levels are equipped with the digital competencies necessary to thrive in a rapidly evolving economy.

Emerging technologies such as AI, when developed and deployed without bias, offer powerful tools to help realise this vision. AI can significantly expand access to lifelong learning through translation tools, adaptive learning platforms, and distance education. Applied responsibly, it has the capacity to reshape how education systems function, enhance institutional responsiveness, personalise learning and training, and strengthen both teaching and learning outcomes.

For GWI, these opportunities underscore rather than replace the broader principle put forth by our founding mothers 106 years ago that the right of women and girls to education remains fundamental and non-negotiable. Since 1919, GWI has consistently advanced this right, recognising education not only as a human right in itself but also as an essential condition for gender equality. Digital literacy, in this sense, is more than a technical competence; it is a foundation for autonomy, enabling women and girls to participate in the economy, access health and legal services, engage in civic processes, and advocate for their rights.

Building on this legacy, GWI urges Member States to reassert their dedication to key United Nations resolutions that affirm the central importance of bridging the digital divide and guaranteeing equal access to digital education. These include:

The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 78/213, [11] adopted in 2023, on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of digital technologies, which affirms the right to equitable access to digital tools and education, as well as the United Nations General Assembly 78/160 [12] which stresses the urgent need to bridge the gender digital divide, to promote digital literacy and integrate ICT skills into education systems.

Building on these global commitments, GWI advocates for the United Nations agencies to adopt AI in an ethical, inclusive and transparent manner, particularly when monitoring progress towards SDG 4 and SDG 5. Indeed, AI holds great potential to enhance the efficiency and responsiveness of efforts aimed at achieving gender equality and quality education.

In parallel, GWI also draws attention to the Agreed Conclusions of the 67th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67), [13] which emphasises the potential of gender-responsive digital education.

GWI urges the Human Rights Council and Member States to act in line with these commitments and to take the following actions:

1. Mandate the integration of digital skills and AI literacy into national curricula from primary through tertiary levels, embedding gender-sensitive pedagogy, and guarantee protected and increased domestic funding for education, with explicit allocations for digital learning.
2. Ensure universal access to digital infrastructure by providing affordable internet, expanding electricity provision in both rural and urban areas, and sustaining investment in broadband and network coverage.
3. Invest systematically in educator training and support, allocating resources for infrastructure and professional development so that teachers can effectively employ ICT tools and digital devices to enhance instruction.
4. Enforce the protection of digital rights and safety by adopting regulatory and institutional measures that promote the ethical use of technology and shield women and girls from online harassment, hate speech, and gender-based digital violence
5. Institutionalise inclusive e-learning opportunities by requiring education institutions to provide accessible, reliable, and safe online learning environments, thereby ensuring that all students can participate meaningfully in digital education.

To conclude, GWI stresses that bridging the gender digital divide is indispensable to meeting international human rights obligations and to building genuinely inclusive societies. Equal access to digital education equips every woman and girl with the tools to learn, to lead, and to thrive in the digital era.

[1] GWI HRC 45 written statement, 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

[2] GWI HRC 49 written statement, https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Gradaute-Women-International-HRC49-written-statement-FINAL-_reimagining-digital-learning-as-equitable_UN.pdf

- [3] GWI HRC 56 session written statement, https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/GWI-HRC56-Written-Statement-Final_official.pdf
- [4] GWI HRC 57 written statement, https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/GWI-HRC57-Education-as-Peacebuilder-and-Tolerance_FINAL-UN-.pdf
- [5] Advancing Girls' Education and Gender Equality through Digital Learning, <https://www.unicef.org/media/113221/file/Advancing%20Girls%20Education%20and%20Gender%20Equality%20through%20Digital%20Learning.pdf>
- [6] Ibid
- [7] Ibid
- [8] Peláez-Sánchez, Cristina & George-Reyes, Carlos & Glasserman-Morales, Leonardo. (2023). Gender digital divide in education 4.0: A systematic literature review of factors and strategies for inclusion. Future in Educational Research
- [9] United Nations, SDG 4 <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>
- [10] Ibid.
- [11] Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 2023, on the report of the Third Committee (A/78/481/Add.2, para. 139)
- [12] Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 2023, on the report of the Second Committee (A/78/462/Add.1, para. 7)
- [13] Agreed Conclusions of the 67th Commission on the Status of Women, https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/CSW67_Agreed%20Conclusions_Advance%20Unedited%20Version_20%20March%202023.pdf