



GWl UPDATE – 19 November 2025



Dr. Başak Ovacık, Turkish Association of University Women and UWE President

— Graduate Women International (GWI) News —

For International Students' Day GWI stands for Education as the Foundation for Equality

On 17 November 2025, GWI marked International Students' Day by emphasizing the essential role of education in building a more equal and inclusive world. Students across all regions face persistent barriers from economic inequality and gender bias to conflict and limited support systems that hinder their ability to reach their full potential. Education remains a fundamental human right and a vital pathway for developing skills, confidence, and opportunity, especially for girls and young women whose leadership is central to creating fairer societies. [GWI's social media](#) posts highlighted the evolving challenges confronting today's learners and underscores the importance of learning environments that encourage creativity, critical thinking, and resilience. Consistent with its long-standing commitment to equitable and lifelong education, GWI calls for concrete action to ensure that students everywhere have the tools and opportunities they need to grow, lead, and contribute to their communities.

World Toilet Day: Building Future-Ready Sanitation for All

Celebrated today, World Toilet Day draws attention to the 3.4 billion people still living without safely managed sanitation, a crisis that severely impacts the health, dignity, and opportunities of

women and girls around the world. This year's theme, "Sanitation in a Changing World," reinforces the urgency of designing toilets and sanitation systems that are accessible, climate-resilient, and sustainable, even in the face of global challenges. Safe sanitation is a human right and a foundational element for achieving SDG 6, especially Target 6.2, which calls for equitable sanitation and hygiene for all. [GWI supports efforts to ensure that every person](#), everywhere, can benefit from clean, safe sanitation that enables them to live, learn, and participate fully in society.

— GWI Member News —

Dr. Başak Ovacık Elected President of University Women of Europe (UWE)

On 8 November, the UWE General Assembly in Naples, Italy, elected Dr. Başak Ovacık as President for the 2025–2028 term. Her election marks a historic milestone, as she becomes the first Turkish person to serve as President in UWE's history.

Dr. Ovacık, an alumna of Bilkent University's Department of International Relations, holds a master's degree in European studies from LSE, and completed her Ph.D. in Political Science and International Relations at Yeditepe University. She has been teaching at Bahçeşehir University since 2019. Basak Ovacık has served the Turkish Association of University Women (TAUW) as a volunteer for 28 years, holding leadership positions such as General Headquarters Board membership, founding presidency of the Istanbul branch, GWI coordinator for young members, and two terms as Vice President of GWI. In her presidential address, Ovacık outlined her goals to increase membership, establish a young members group, initiate mentoring activities for women leaders, integrate technology and artificial intelligence into the association, and strengthening relations with the European Women's Lobby and the Council of Europe.

UWE, established in 1981 to contribute to the advancement of European society, is a regional group of GWI. Working in partnership with the Council of Europe and the European Women's Lobby, UWE cooperates with all governmental and non-governmental organizations concerned with European issues, particularly those affecting women's lives. The organization advocates for the advancement of the status of women and girls and encourages women to use their knowledge and skills in leadership and decision-making processes in all areas of public and private life.

GWI congratulates Dr. Ovacık on her historic election and wishes her every success in her new role as President of UWE. GWI also congratulates Secretary General elect, Leonie van den Tol from Graduate Women-Netherlands.

"Women in Politics" at the Swiss Pavilion – EXPO 2025 with the Japanese Association of University Women (JAUW) and GWI

What began as a discussion among members of the JAUW Kobe Branch about potential collaboration with the Swiss Consulate in Osaka led to the idea of presenting a programme showcasing the contributions of women in politics. This initial conversation grew into a fully

developed initiative that resulted in JAUW presenting at the Swiss Pavilion during EXPO 2025, linking JAUW, the Swiss Consulate in Osaka, and GWI headquarters in Geneva. This impactful two-part dialogue took place on 7 August 2025 during the Peace, Human Security & Dignity Week. The first session featured former Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa as keynote speaker, who shared insights into her political journey and emphasized the importance of creating strong support networks to inspire more women to pursue political careers. The panel included women leaders from national to municipal-level politics in Japan, along with a British diplomat, who engaged in thoughtful discussion on gender-related challenges in political spaces and the importance of inclusive policymaking. To bridge local and global perspectives, the program concluded with a live Zoom session between EXPO Osaka and GWI headquarters in Geneva. Representatives from GWI and JAUW reflected on previous achievements and shared their vision for advancing women's empowerment, peace, education, and human rights through international collaboration. To learn more about this inspiring event, please follow these two links: [Session 1: Women in Politics](#) and [Session 2 & 3: Global Connections and Dialogue](#).

GWI extends its heartfelt thanks to all the speakers, panelists, and participants who made this two-part event such an inspiring and meaningful exchange. In particular, we commend JAUW for their leadership in bringing this dialogue to life at such a symbolic and significant moment at EXPO 2025.

— GWI at the United Nations (UN) —

UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Issues Concluding Observations on 10 Countries, Including Four GWI NFAs

Recently, the UN CEDAW published its concluding observations after reviewing 10 countries, including four GWI NFAs: Ireland, Fiji, Mexico, and Thailand. In its report, CEDAW highlights both progress and persistent challenges in these countries.

In Ireland, the Committee welcomed improvements such as the 40 % quota for women in political life, but expressed regret over the defeat of a proposed constitutional amendment to enshrine gender-neutral language around care, urging renewed public consultations and possibly another referendum. It also raised serious concerns about women's access to legal aid, particularly for marginalized groups, calling for broader eligibility and better support for victims of discrimination and harassment.

In Fiji, CEDAW recognized the adoption of laws and policies to combat gender-based violence, but stressed that this violence remains at very high levels. The Committee was particularly troubled by continued judicial practices that refer to survivors' past sexual history in rape trials, and it urged the government to introduce concrete measures to increase women's representation in decision-making.

In Mexico, CEDAW applauded the elevation of the National Institute for Women to a ministerial secretariat, a sign of political commitment. At the same time, it warned about ongoing discrimination and violence against the *madres buscadoras* (“searching mothers” looking for disappeared children), recommending their formal recognition as human rights defenders and calling for sustained, long-term investment in women’s rights and gender equality programs.

In Thailand, the Committee expressed deep concern over the rise of online gender-based violence, urging the authorities to investigate and prosecute such abuse, and to adopt policies to counter misogyny both online and offline. CEDAW also emphasized the need for stronger gender equality in the private sector, especially in innovative industries, and for better access to services and power for marginalized groups, including trans and gender-diverse persons, refugees, and indigenous women.

These findings from CEDAW offer both a valuable recognition of what has been achieved, and a powerful roadmap for where efforts must be redoubled. For our networks, they represent a timely opportunity to reflect on how we can support, monitor, and amplify these critical recommendations.

— Give the Gift of Membership—

The GWI Independent Member network is growing, with many new members joining from around the world over the past few months. A thoughtful gift for the graduate woman in your life is a GWI membership. There are many benefits of being a member of GWI, including belonging to an influential international NGO composed of graduate women influencing policy and legislation on women’s issues at the international level and gaining an international perspective on women’s issues through networking activities. Click [HERE](#) to find out how to join GWI.

— Did you know? —

After 1953, GWI (the international Federation of University Women at the time (IFUW)) conducted an international study on Professional Women and Part-time work. IFUW, under contract to UNESCO conducted a special enquiry into the Access of Women to Higher Education. The report, ready in 1958, was the first of a series of reports submitted to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. The others included a report and analysis on the Minimum Pensionable Age for Women Workers (1958); a special report on Opportunities for Women as Jurists, Architects and Engineers (1959), a report on Part-time Work (1962), prepared at the request of the International Labour Office. Other reports underway included one on matrimonial

property, one on vocational information and counselling, and another on discrimination against women on the basis of marital status.

— Dates and Events —

19 November	World Toilet Day
24 Nov-10 Dec	16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence
9 December	Anti-Corruption Day
10 December	Human Rights Day
24 January	International Day of Education

Follow us on social media!



2025 Copyright. All Rights Reserved.

Empowering women and girls through lifelong education for leadership, decision-making and peace.

GWI, formerly IFUW, is in special consultative status with ECOSOC since 1947 and is an NGO maintaining official relations with UNESCO and ILO.

Graduate Women International

7-9, Chemin de Balexert, CH-1291, Châtelaine, Geneva, Switzerland

E-mail: gwi@graduatewomen.org Website: www.graduatewomen.org

