



Graduate Women International (GWI)
Submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
For the report of the Secretary-General on progress towards
ending child, early and forced marriage worldwide
Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 79/158

Date: 27 April 2026

I. Overview

Graduate Women International (GWI) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General on progress towards ending child, early and forced marriage (CEFM), pursuant to General Assembly resolution 79/158.

Founded in 1919, Graduate Women International (GWI) is a global membership-based organisation headquartered in Geneva and has held Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council since 1947. GWI represents graduate women in over 60 countries and advocates for the advancement of girls' and women's education, human rights, and gender equality. Through active engagement at national, regional, and international levels across its global network, and through consistent participation in United Nations processes, GWI contributes to policy dialogue and advocacy aimed at eliminating harmful practices, in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, and advancing gender equality and SDG 4, Quality Education.

GWI recognizes CEFM as a violation of human rights that undermines the rights of girls and women, including the rights to education, a right enshrined in SDG 4 (Quality Education), health, bodily autonomy, and participation in public life. It remains both a manifestation and a driver of structural gender inequality, sustained by discriminatory social norms, poverty, lack of access to education, and gaps in legal and institutional frameworks.

GWI's position is grounded in a comprehensive body of policy resolutions adopted by its General Assembly between 1995 and 2025, aligned with the twelve critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals. This includes specific GWI policy resolutions on child marriage under the "Girl Child" framework, notably resolution 2013/01, proposed by the Turkish Federation of University Women and seconded by the then Finnish Federation of University Women, and resolution 2016/08, proposed by the Mexican Federation of University Women and seconded by the Canadian Federation of University Women. These are complemented by sustained policy commitments across education and training, violence against women, and the human rights of women, reflecting a coherent, multi-decade approach to addressing the structural drivers of CEFM. .

GWI recalls for the OHCHR its 2018 Human Rights Council written and oral statements on the elimination of CEFM that recognized secondary school as a means to eliminate CEFM and which



also demonstrates GWI's history of engagement and consistent advocacy within United Nations mechanisms. <https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/HRC38-GWI-Written-Statement-Official-Child-Marriage.pdf>

GWI emphasizes that ensuring access to safe, inclusive, equitable, and quality education, particularly at secondary and tertiary levels, constitutes one of the most effective and sustainable strategies to prevent child marriage and advance gender equality.

This submission responds directly to the request for inputs on progress, best practices and recommendations to accelerate efforts to end CEFM, including measures to support girls already affected by such practices, particularly in contexts of poverty, humanitarian crises, and structural inequality.

II. Progress in addressing the recommendations of the Secretary-General (Q1)

a) Addressing root causes

GWI recognizes that Member States have taken steps to develop legislative and policy frameworks aimed at eliminating CEFM. However, implementation remains uneven and insufficient to address underlying structural drivers.

Child marriage is sustained by deeply entrenched gender inequality, discriminatory social norms, and economic vulnerability. In many contexts, girls continue to be perceived as economic dependents, with early marriage viewed as a means of securing financial or social stability.

This position is consistent with GWI's long-standing policy framework and international awareness-raising efforts, which situate CEFM within the broader context of gender inequality, violence against women and girls, and barriers to education, as reflected in successive resolutions across these thematic areas. GWI further draws the OHCHR's attention to materials issued through its annual participation in the United Nations UNiTE 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (GBV) campaign which consistently identifies CEFM as a form of GBV and harmful practice, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 5, targets 5.2 and 5.3.

16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (2025)

English: <https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/2025-16-Days-ENGLISH-V2.pdf>

Spanish: <https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/2025-16-Days-Spanish.pdf>

16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (2024)



English: https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/16-Days-of-activism-Graphic_compressed.pdf

Spanish: <https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Spanish-Culture-Bridge-16-Days-of-activism-compressed.pdf>

16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (2021)

English: <https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/GWI-2021-16-Days-of-Activism-Against-GBV-TOOLKIT-.pdf>

16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (2019) toolkit

English: <https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/2019-16-Days-of-Activism-Against-Gender-Based-Violence-Toolkit-FINAL.pdf>

Evidence indicates that reductions in child marriage prevalence are most strongly associated with sustained investments in girls' education, social protection measures, and community-based norm change interventions. However, progress and accountability remain fragile where these investments are not institutionalized within national or local systems. Structural inequalities linked to poverty, geographic marginalisation, and limited access to services, continue to intersect, reinforcing vulnerability to early marriage, contrary to the objectives of SDG 10 on reducing inequalities.

GWl underscores the importance of comprehensive, multi-sectoral approaches that address structural gender inequality, poverty, and economic vulnerability, limited access to education and essential services, and weak legal enforcement mechanisms.

b) Access to education, decent work, social protection and health services

GWl recognizes education as a central pillar in preventing CEFM and enabling girls and women to exercise their rights.

Despite progress in primary education, significant barriers remain in access to secondary and tertiary education, including cost, safety concerns, inadequate infrastructure, and discriminatory social norms, alongside the need for qualified teachers.

GWl emphasizes the importance of a life-course approach, ensuring continuity from primary through tertiary education and access to lifelong learning opportunities.

GWl's resolutions on education and training, adopted consistently since 1995, emphasize the centrality of safe, equitable, and lifelong access to education as a prerequisite for gender equality and the prevention of harmful practices, including child marriage.



Education systems that are inclusive, gender-responsive, and adequately resourced serve not only as protective environments but also as platforms for empowerment. Where girls are able to transition successfully to secondary and tertiary education, the likelihood of early marriage decreases significantly, while opportunities for economic participation and leadership increase.

GWI further underscores the importance of access to sexual and reproductive health services, mental health and psychosocial support, and social protection systems. Integrated approaches linking education, health, and social protection are essential to addressing the multiple drivers of child marriage.

c) Gender-responsive budgeting

GWI recognizes the importance of gender-responsive budgeting while noting that fund allocation and implementation remain inconsistent.

GWI calls upon Member States to increase investment in public education systems, prioritize funding for girls' secondary and tertiary education, and strengthen accountability and transparency in budget allocation.

Investment in girls' education is essential to achieving sustainable development, gender equality, and long-term economic resilience.

III. Effective prevention measures (Q2)

GWI emphasizes that effective prevention requires integrated, multi-sectoral strategies addressing both root causes and immediate risks.

Community-based approaches engaging families, religious leaders, and community stakeholders have demonstrated effectiveness in shifting social norms and reducing acceptance of child marriage.

Education systems are central to prevention. GWI calls for measures to eliminate financial barriers to education, ensure safe and inclusive learning environments, address school-related gender-based violence, and support girls' transition to secondary and tertiary education.

Additional measures include comprehensive sexuality education, life skills and leadership programmes, and mentorship and peer support initiatives. These interventions strengthen girls' agency and decision-making capacity.

IV. Protection measures, remedies and support services (Q3)

GWI notes that while legal frameworks exist in many contexts, enforcement remains a significant challenge.



GWI urges Member States to recall SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), including its commitment to access to justice for all, and to strengthen legal enforcement mechanisms, ensure access to justice, and improve coordination between statutory, customary, and religious legal systems.

GWI further emphasizes the importance of targeted measures to support girls who are already married or in informal unions, including access to education, health services, legal protection, and pathways to economic independence, in line with the focus of the present report.

Comprehensive support services should include safe shelters, health and psychosocial support, legal assistance, and education reintegration pathways.

Flexible and inclusive education systems are essential to ensuring that married girls and survivors are not excluded.

V. Humanitarian contexts, armed conflict and disasters (Q4)

GWI recognizes that humanitarian crises significantly increase the risk of child marriage.

In such contexts, early marriage is often used as a coping mechanism in response to insecurity and economic hardship. The heightened risks faced by girls in humanitarian settings require targeted and integrated responses.

GWI calls for continuity of education in emergencies, strengthened protection mechanisms, access to health and social services, and the inclusion of women and girls in decision-making processes.

VI. Gaps in funding, research and data (Q5)

GWI highlights persistent gaps in funding, research, and data collection.

Challenges include limited availability of disaggregated data, insufficient data on informal and unregistered unions, and a lack of longitudinal research on long-term outcomes.

GWI calls for strengthened data systems, improved disaggregation, and increased investment in research and monitoring to support evidence-based policymaking.

VII. Birth and marriage registration systems (Q6)

GWI underscores the importance of universal, accessible, and free birth and marriage registration systems in preventing child marriage and enforcing minimum age laws.

Challenges remain in accessibility, cost, and recognition of informal unions.



GWI encourages the use of digital solutions while ensuring inclusivity, accessibility, and data protection.

VIII. Innovative strategies (Q7)

GWI recognizes innovative approaches including digital education platforms, community-based learning models, and empowerment and leadership programmes for girls and young women.

Partnerships, as reflected in SDG 17, among governments, civil society, and international organisations are essential to scaling effective and sustainable interventions. In this regard, GWI values its longstanding partnership with Girls Not Brides organisation, which reflects the importance of coordinated civil society action and knowledge exchange in efforts to raise awareness about and to eliminate CEFM. GWI stands ready to contribute, within its mandate and capacities, as a civil society partner supporting implementation at national, regional, and global levels.

GWI further recalls co-organising a 2023 United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice side event entitled Ending harmful practices: preventing violence and ensuring access to justice – good practices, where child marriage was addressed alongside legal reform and community-level responses

IX. Recommendations from VP Advocacy GWI

In line with the request for practical recommendations to accelerate progress towards ending CEFM GWI proposes the following:

These recommendations are grounded in GWI's established policy framework, as reflected in member-led resolutions adopted between 1995 and 2025 across the twelve critical areas of concern, the SDGs:

1. Ensure universal access to safe, inclusive, and quality secondary and tertiary education.
2. Integrate education as a central pillar in national strategies to eliminate CEFM.
3. Strengthen legal frameworks and ensure effective enforcement.
4. Increase investment through gender-responsive budgeting.
5. Expand access to comprehensive support services for survivors.
6. Strengthen data collection systems and improve disaggregation.
7. Address risks in humanitarian and crisis contexts.
8. Promote multi-sectoral approaches addressing structural drivers.

X. Conclusion

GWI reaffirms that ending CEFM requires sustained, coordinated, and comprehensive global action with emphasis on access to education for all girls.



Education must remain central to all efforts to prevent child marriage and advance gender equality.

Finally, GWI places significant importance on the Pact for the Future adopted by the United Nations General Assembly at the 2024 Summit of the Future and its emphasis on accountability, measurable progress and strengthened international cooperation as a complementary political framework for GWI's future advocacy to eliminate CEFM. GWI remains committed to continued engagement with the United Nations, Member States, and partners to support effective, rights-based, and evidence-based solutions.

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