



GRADUATE WOMEN INTERNATIONAL TOOLKIT

International Day of the Girl

11 OCTOBER 2026





A CLOSER LOOK AT THIS TOOLKIT

Graduate Women International (GWI) has developed this International Day of the Girl toolkit as an educational and advocacy resource examining the relationship between girls' education, child marriage, and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). Through an examination of SDG 4's seven substantive targets, the publication considers how educational access, equality, and lifelong learning contribute to protecting girls' rights and expanding their opportunities.

Drawing on GWI's international advocacy experiences, the toolkit provides information and practical advocacy ideas that can be adapted to different national and local contexts. It encourages readers to address educational barriers and advocate for measurable commitments to girls' education and ending child marriage.

ABOUT GWI

GWI is a membership-based international non-governmental organization located in Geneva, Switzerland, with presence in some 60 countries with our National Federations and Associations (NFAs) and independent members. Founded in 1919, GWI is the leading girls' and women's global organization comprised of graduate women advocating for women's and girls' rights, equality, and safe access to quality education and lifelong training up to the highest levels. GWI has maintained Special Consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 1947 and holds official partnership status with the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as well as International Labour Organization (ILO).





WHAT IS INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL (IDOG)?

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The IDOG, celebrated annually on 11 October, is a powerful reminder of the unique challenges girls face around the world and the importance of promoting their rights. Established by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 66/170 in 2011, the day emphasizes addressing the challenges faced by girls, promoting their empowerment, and fulfilling their human rights. The day's roots trace back to the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted as the most progressive blueprint for advancing women's and girls' rights, specifically addressing girls' rights for the first time (1).

Central to this day is the recognition of adolescent girls' rights, entitling them to a safe, educated, and healthy life. By supporting girls during their formative years and investing in their education, health, and leadership potential, we enable them to shape the future and contribute significantly to society.

The theme for IDOG 2026 is "End child marriage and invest in girls' rights," inspired by the United Nations Children's Fund's (UNICEF) 2026 estimate that one in five girls is married before the age of 18 globally. This indicates that about 650 million women and girls living today experienced child marriage. This places them at high risk of intimate partner violence (IPV), with one in four girls partnered or married between 15-19 experiencing IPV at least once in their lives (2). The IDOG 2026 theme stands as a reminder that this is not an inevitable reality. With UNICEF's defined solutions — prioritizing girls' education, increasing access to health and social resources, changing social norms within families and communities, and investing in girls' rights and leadership — protecting the childhoods and futures of girls around the globe becomes possible.

For International Day of the Girl 2026, GWI emphasizes the importance of sustained investment in girls' education as part of broader efforts to end child marriage.





WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4 (SDG 4)?



The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by United Nations Member States in 2015, established 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets to address global economic, social, and environmental challenges. Guided by the commitment to leave no one behind, the Agenda recognizes education as essential to sustainable development.

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Its seven substantive targets address primary and secondary education, early childhood development, technical and higher education, skills for employment, gender equality and equitable access, literacy and numeracy, and education for sustainable development and human rights. Three additional means-of-implementation targets address educational facilities, scholarships, and qualified teachers.

SDG 4 is particularly relevant to efforts to end child marriage. Educational access, quality, and continuity influence girls' opportunities throughout childhood and adolescence, while child marriage can interrupt schooling and limit access to further education. The targets provide a framework for examining these interconnected challenges and the policies needed to address them.

Through its international advocacy, publications, and locally led projects, GWI contributes to advancing SDG 4. This toolkit examines each of the seven substantive targets, connecting them to girls' educational rights, the prevention of child marriage, and opportunities for informed advocacy.

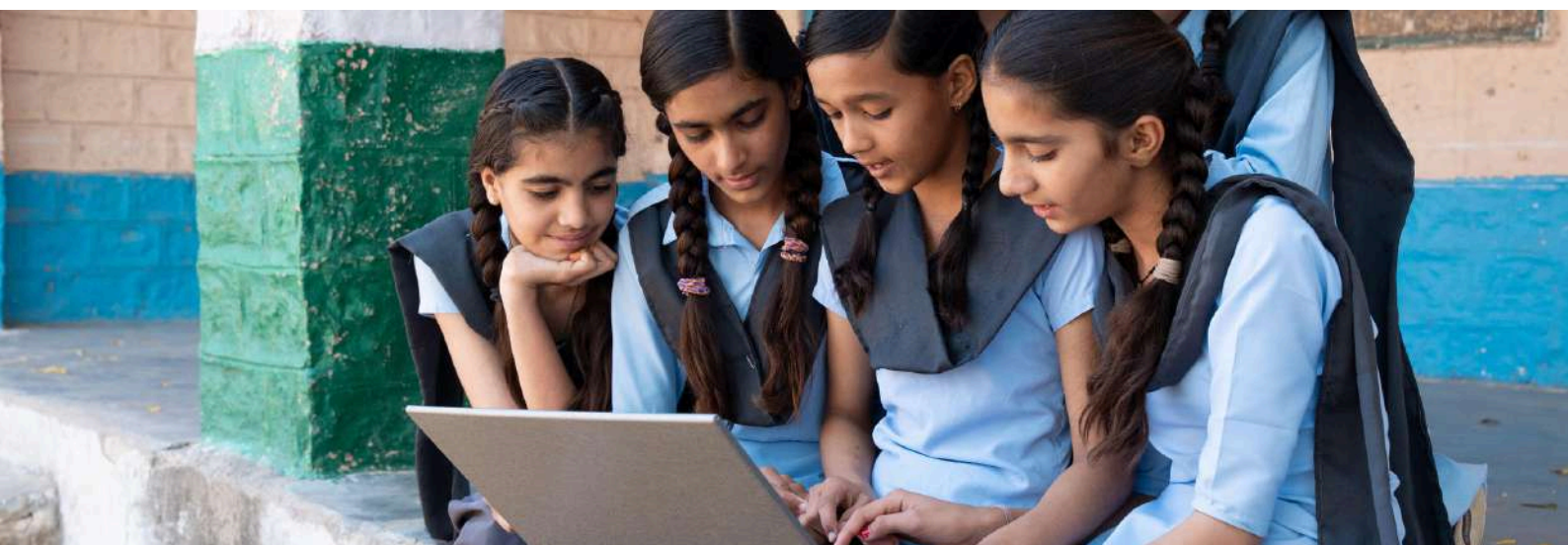




GIRLS' EDUCATION AND ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE

According to 2022 UNICEF data, global child marriage rates could decrease by 66 percent if all girls completed secondary school. The projected decrease exceeds 80 percent if all girls continue to tertiary education (3). Based on this data, education is often viewed as the leading factor in delaying marriage until adulthood and preserving a girl's childhood.

In many communities, child marriage interrupts girls' education, with only 13 percent of child brides aged 13–15 continuing their schooling (3). The transition from lower to upper secondary education is particularly significant, as financial constraints, safety concerns, and inadequate menstrual hygiene management facilities contribute to school dropout among adolescent girls. Access to quality education through secondary and tertiary levels is associated with lower rates of child marriage and improved economic prospects. Early marriage, conversely, is associated with a nine percent reduction in women's earnings during adulthood (4).



GWI has consistently recognized secondary education as a significant factor in reducing child marriage. Research indicates that each additional year of secondary schooling reduces a girl's likelihood of child marriage by 5 percent or more in many countries (4). Government budget allocations to accessible, quality secondary education are therefore particularly relevant to efforts to reduce child marriage. Beyond its association with delayed marriage, secondary education contributes to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and qualifications that support continued learning and future economic participation.



TARGET 4.1

FREE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Target 4.1 aims to provide free, equitable, and quality education of the primary and secondary levels to children globally. This target also emphasizes the importance of children completing these levels of education, resulting in effective and relevant learning outcomes (6). Girls are disproportionately affected by educational barriers, particularly in low-income countries and rural areas (7). Gender-based violence (including sexual violence), childhood marriage, childhood pregnancy, and cultural attitudes about the social roles of girls/women often stand in the way of girls' access to primary and secondary education.



A Closer Look: Bina Roy Partners in Development (BRPID) - Reducing School Dropout

Through its BRPID program, GWI supports locally led initiatives addressing barriers to girls' education. In Uganda, the Association of University Women Uganda developed a project in Luuka District to improve girls' school attendance and retention through menstrual health education and practical training in producing reusable sanitary pads. The initiative engaged adolescents, teachers, and parents, recognizing the relationship between menstrual health, household poverty, and educational participation. Reducing school dropout and child marriage were among the project's stated objectives. The initiative illustrates how addressing specific barriers to girls' regular school attendance can contribute to their continued participation in education. Read more about GWI's [BRPID Uganda project](#).



TARGET 4.2

EQUAL ACCESS TO QUALITY PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

The second SDG 4 target strives to secure early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education for all children. According to UNESCO data, when pre-primary education is neither free nor mandatory, the rate of out-of-school girls of primary school age is higher than the rate of out-of-school boys of primary age (8). Due to patriarchal social norms tasking girls with early domestic responsibilities, families are often more likely to send boy children to pre-primary schooling than girl children in countries where families must pay for education.



A Closer Look: GWI and Early Childhood Education Human Rights Council 59th session (HRC59) Support

In June 2025, GWI supported two HRC59 side events addressing pre-primary education and early childhood development. The first, “Children’s Voices on Free Pre-Primary and Secondary Education,” examined pre-primary education within the framework of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The second, “Tools and Guidance for the Implementation of the Right to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE),” explored the role of ECCE in establishing foundations for lifelong learning and addressing educational inequalities from early childhood. Both discussions highlighted the significance of equitable access to early education in reducing disparities that can persist throughout subsequent stages of schooling. This participation represents one example of GWI’s broader advocacy for children’s educational rights and equitable access to quality education. Click [HERE](#) to read the GWI Update HRC Special Edition.





TARGET 4.3

EQUAL ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE TECHNICAL, VOCATIONAL, AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Target 4.3 ensures that all women and men have access to technical, vocational, and higher education opportunities, including university. This target also emphasizes that these trainings should be affordable and of high quality, promoting equitable access to education while increasing employability and transferable skills. Girls and women around the globe cite expected homemaking duties, childcare responsibilities, early adolescent pregnancy, and social stigma associated within certain fields as deterrents from certain vocational training and higher education (9).



A Closer Look: Affordable Vocational Education to Reduce Child Marriage

At the Human Rights Council 40th session (HRC40) in 2019, GWI submitted a joint written statement examining the role of higher education institutions in advancing the SDGs. The statement specifically addressed SDG Target 4.3, emphasizing equitable access to affordable, quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education. GWI highlighted universities' contributions to academic and professional training, research, and sustainable development, particularly their role in expanding educational opportunities for young women. The statement also examined institutional partnerships and alternative learning pathways, including distance and online education, as opportunities to broaden participation in higher education. Click [HERE](#) to read GWI's HRC40 written statement.



Delve Deeper

Access to technical, vocational, and higher education depends in part on adequate public investment. In its 2021 HRC46 written statement, GWI called for increased domestic financing for education. The statement complements GWI's advocacy on Target 4.3 by examining the financial commitments needed to make continued education accessible and affordable. [Read GWI's HRC46 statement.](#)



Target 4.4

Increase The Number Of People With Relevant Skills For Financial Success

This target strives to increase the number of adults and youth with technical and vocational skills relevant for employment and entrepreneurship. According to UNESCO data, women and girls are often discouraged from learning modern information and communication technology (ICT), which is particularly relevant to careers in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) field (10). Additionally, women only make up 35 percent of STEM graduates globally (11). By investing in girls' access to technological knowledge from an early age, states increase girls' employability and proximity to financial freedom.



A Closer Look: GWI on Education and Women's Entrepreneurship

At the Human Rights Council's 53rd session (HRC53) in 2023, GWI submitted a written statement examining the role of education in women's entrepreneurship. The statement highlighted gender disparities in labor market participation and access to financial services, identifying education and skills development as important factors in expanding entrepreneurial opportunities. GWI also examined the contribution of financial literacy, technical competencies, and professional networks to women's economic participation. Of particular relevance to Target 4.4, the statement addressed entrepreneurship education within school and university curricula, linking the acquisition of practical skills to future employment and economic opportunities for girls and women. Read GWI's [HRC53 written statement on women's entrepreneurship](#).

Delve Deeper



GWI's BRPID program supports locally led education and skills initiatives. In El Salvador, women received training in artificial intelligence applications relevant to employment. In Nepal, non-formal education combined literacy, accounting, and marketing instruction with seed funding for small enterprises. Both projects demonstrate how practical skills development and lifelong learning can expand women's economic opportunities beyond formal schooling. Click [HERE](#) to access the 2024 BRPID projects.



TARGET 4.5

Eliminate All Discrimination In Education

This target aims to establish equal access to education and vocational training at every level. Achieving this requires addressing systemic barriers that prevent certain populations from accessing educational resources, including women and girls globally. This target also prioritizes vulnerable populations' access to equitable and safe education, including Indigenous peoples, individuals with disabilities, and children in vulnerable circumstances.



A Closer Look: GWI on Indigenous Women and Girls' Right to Education

In its September 2026 statement to the Human Rights Council 63rd session (HRC63), GWI examined discrimination and intersecting barriers to Indigenous women and girls' right to education, including child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, gender-based violence, and linguistic and cultural exclusion. GWI called for adequate education financing, measurable national commitments, and accountability for enrollment, retention, and completion. Its recommendations emphasized culturally appropriate education and Indigenous women and girls' participation in educational decision-making, consistent with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Read GWI's [HRC63 written statement HERE](#).

Delve Deeper



For the 2025 International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, GWI published an infographic spotlighting linguistic, discrimination, and cultural barriers, and the importance of education that respects Indigenous languages and identities. The publication examines how culturally appropriate education supports Indigenous girls' educational participation and rights. Click [HERE](#) to read GWI 2025 International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples infographic. (See GWI References and Advocacy Resources for additional infographics.)



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TARGET 4.6

Universal Literacy And Numeracy

Target 4.6 works toward all youth and a substantial proportion of adults attaining educational foundations of numeracy and literacy. According to data from UN Women, more than two-thirds of the world's 796 million illiterate individuals are women (7). This disparity exemplifies the result of educational barriers girls face globally, especially in rural and low-income communities, where access to safe, quality education is often limited.



A Closer Look: GWI Teachers For Rural Futures

Launched in 2015, GWI's Teachers for Rural Futures program supports women from rural Northern and Eastern Uganda pursuing secondary school teaching qualifications at Makerere University. The program addresses teacher shortages in underserved communities while providing educated female role models for girls. Two participants graduated in January 2025. By supporting women educators, GWI contributes to improving access to qualified teachers and educational opportunities in rural communities. Click [HERE](#) to explore GWI's Teachers for Rural Futures program. Click [HERE](#) to donate to the continued education of teachers in rural Uganda.



Target 4.7

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Education For Sustainable Development And Global Citizenship

Target 4.7 emphasizes the importance of education that centers learning about human rights, gender equality, non-violence, sustainable development, global citizenship, and a value for cultural diversity. Through teaching critical cognitive skills, primary and secondary education has the power to expand thinking beyond an understanding of social dynamics rooted in patriarchy. This opens a possibility for a generation of children who imagine their skillsets, purposes, and values outside of a strictly patriarchal society, increasing educational participation for both girl and boy children of the future.



A Closer Look: Sports And Girls' Education

At the Human Rights Council's 62nd session (HRC62) in 2026, GWI submitted a written statement examining the relationship between sport, girls' educational participation, leadership development, and gender equality. Building on its 2023 HRC54 statement and subsequent advocacy publications, GWI highlighted barriers to girls' participation in sport, including discriminatory social norms, inadequate facilities, and gender-based violence. GWI called for greater coordination between education and sport policies, equitable public investment, and measures to ensure safe participation. For adolescent girls, inclusive physical education and sport can provide opportunities to exercise leadership, challenge restrictive gender expectations, and participate more fully in school life. These experiences connect to Target 4.7 through education for gender equality, human rights, cooperation, and mutual respect. Click [HERE](#) to read GWI's HRC62 statement.





SDG 4 in Action - What You Can Do

The following **advocacy ideas** translate the seven substantive targets of SDG 4 into **practical considerations** for GWI members and other stakeholders. Organized by target, they encourage examination of education policies, public investment, and barriers affecting girls' educational participation and completion. Each can be **adapted to national and local contexts** to inform advocacy, engage policymakers, and promote accountability for commitments to girls' education, particularly for those at risk of or affected by child marriage.

4.1

Primary and Secondary Education

Examine whether national education policies and school budgets adequately address menstrual health needs, including access to appropriate sanitation facilities and menstrual products. Consider how these provisions affect girls' attendance and educational continuity, particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged communities.

4.2

Early Childhood Development and Pre-primary Education

Examine national policies on free and compulsory pre-primary education, including whether participation and access are monitored through sex-disaggregated data. Consider how disparities in early childhood education may influence subsequent educational participation, particularly among girls from disadvantaged communities.

4.3

Technical, Vocational, and Higher Education

Examine national policies and data on women's participation in technical, vocational, and higher education, including financial assistance, admission requirements, and opportunities for girls whose education has been interrupted by child marriage or adolescent pregnancy.

4.4

Skills for Employment, Decent Work, and Entrepreneurship

Examine whether national secondary education curricula provide girls with equitable access to digital literacy, technical education, financial literacy, and entrepreneurial skills. Consider sex-disaggregated participation data to identify disparities in skills development that may affect girls' future educational and employment opportunities.



SDG 4 in Action - What You Can Do

4.5

Gender Equality and Educational Access

Examine whether national education policies and budgets address barriers affecting Indigenous girls, including child marriage, language exclusion, and access to culturally appropriate education. Consider whether governments report measurable progress in Indigenous girls' enrollment, retention, and completion, with data collection that respects Indigenous peoples' rights.

4.6

Literacy and Numeracy

Examine disparities in literacy and numeracy proficiency between rural and urban students, particularly adolescent girls. Consider whether national teacher recruitment, training, and deployment policies adequately address shortages of qualified educators in rural communities, including opportunities for women from these communities to enter teaching.

4.7

Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship

Examine whether national education policies ensure adolescent girls' equitable access to school sports and physical education, including adequate facilities, qualified instructors, and safeguards against discrimination and harassment. Consider whether curricula and extracurricular programs use sport to address gender stereotypes, cooperation, and respect for human rights.





Conclusion: Education As A Protective Factor Against Child Marriage

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In addressing each target of SDG 4, GWI emphasizes the importance of increasing girls' access to safe, quality education at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. GWI amplifies this message on this year's IDOG, with education acting as a protective factor against child marriage globally. Non-traditional education, including adult literacy and numeracy education, vocational and life skills training, and community-based education, is also essential in continuing girls' education after child marriage occurs. Not to be excluded are child widows, who are a vulnerable group neglected by nation states and their governments.

GWI operates locally-led action, understanding GWI members and nonmembers as the experts and leaders of their own communities. This toolkit is a means to incite community-based change, offering readers an opportunity to apply the goals of the SDG 4 targets to local contexts. By drawing inspiration from GWI initiatives, as well as referencing the advocacy ideas offered in the toolkit, readers can take action for girls' education in their own communities. In areas notably impacted by child marriage, readers can leverage these resources to utilize education as a disruptor of normative practices.





GW I REFERENCES AND ADVOCACY RESOURCES BY SDG 4 TARGET

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2. [Graduate Women International \(2026\). Girls' Education for Brighter Futures, Progress Report.](#)

Target 4.2 - Early Childhood Development and Pre-primary Education

3. [Graduate Women International \(2025\). GWI Update, 30 July 2025.](#)

Target 4.3 - Technical, Vocational, and Higher Education

4. [Graduate Women International \(2019\). HRC40 Written Statement: From Knowledge to Action: Institutes of Higher Education as Key Drivers Towards the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.](#)
5. [Graduate Women International \(2021\). HRC46 Written Statement: Increasing Domestic Funding for Education.](#)

Target 4.4 - Skills for Employment, Decent Work, and Entrepreneurship

6. [Graduate Women International \(2019\). HRC42 Written Statement: Women and Trade.](#)
7. [Graduate Women International \(2023\). HRC53 Written Statement: The Significant Role Education Plays in the Success of Women's Entrepreneurship.](#)
8. [Graduate Women International \(2024\). Bina Roy Partners in Development \(BRPID\) Project Summary.](#)





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Target 4.6 - Literacy and Numeracy

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Target 4.7 - Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship

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GWI operates with a small yet dedicated staff consisting of an Executive Director, and a host of committed interns and volunteers. Additionally, our work is possible with the support of our tireless Board of Directors.



Stacy Dry Lara
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