



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
11 November 2024

English only

---

## Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-ninth session

10–21 March 2025

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

### **Statement submitted by Canadian Federation of University Women, Graduate Women International (GWI), and Women Graduates – USA, Inc., non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

---

\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Women Graduates-USA is a United State-based membership organization focusing on national issues having international implications with support for the United Nation's 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals 3, 4, 5, 8.7, 10.7, 16.1, 16.2 and 17 with special emphasis on Women's Health, Education, Human Trafficking in all its forms and Women, Peace and Security. The Women Graduates-USA Small Grants Initiative supports women-led projects furthering our Mission.

The 1995 Beijing Declaration marked a transformative moment for gender equality, explicitly affirming girls' rights for the first time in a UN declaration. The resulting Platform for Action identified 12 critical areas, including "The Girl Child," requiring urgent attention to ensure equality for all. Girls' rights, as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, include protections against sex-based discrimination, prenatal sex selection, female genital mutilation, and early or forced marriage.

The Sustainable Development Goals further underscore the need to protect girls' rights. Goals relating to poverty eradication, hunger, education, gender equality, health, sanitation, and peace, all bear significance for the girl child. Of the 169 targets in the Sustainable Development Goals, 20 specifically address children, including girls; 40 of the 230 indicators are directly or indirectly relevant to girls. Many of these indicators remain stronger on issues like gender and education, while weaker in other critical areas such as healthcare and protection from violence.

In 2024 many girls worldwide still face systemic denial of their human rights and basic needs. According to UNICEF, millions of girls are still deprived of adequate healthcare, nutrition, education, and protection from violence. Inequality for girls is further exacerbated by the rise of digital technology, environmental degradation, the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing conflicts, and mass migration. In extreme cases, girls are forced to lead households, earn incomes, and caring for younger siblings, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and violence that severely restricts their opportunities for development.

Empowering and investing in girls, while ensuring their full, equal, and meaningful participation in decisions affecting their lives, are essential steps to breaking this cycle of discrimination and violence.

### Health and Well-being

The health and well-being of girls are influenced not only by disease but also by social and economic determinants such as poverty, education, and environmental conditions. Climate change represents one of the most significant threats to global health, disproportionately affecting girls and women through air pollution, poor water quality, diseases, extreme weather events, food insecurity, and pressures on mental health. These environmental impacts are worsened by social determinants like poor access to healthcare, exacerbating health issues for women and girls globally.

In particular, equal access to quality education, including education on sexual and reproductive health, health care, hygiene, and sanitation, can significantly reduce girls' vulnerability to preventable diseases and infections. It is crucial to recognize that these fundamental rights, when denied, create an environment where girls are more susceptible to HIV, other sexually transmitted infections, and overall poor health outcomes.

## **Education: A Path to Empowerment**

Women Graduates-USA believes that education is a basic human right for every child. Primary education should be free and accessible to all, with secondary and higher education available without barriers. Schools must foster environments that enable children to learn, develop talents, understand their rights, respect others, and protect the environment. However, girls still face significant obstacles in achieving these educational goals.

Gender inequality remains a pervasive barrier to girls' access to education. Issues such as child marriage, early pregnancy, sexual and gender-based violence, the disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic work, lack of safe sanitation facilities, and entrenched gender stereotypes continue to hinder girls' right to education. These inequalities have been exacerbated by the shift to digital platforms for learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with many girls unable to access the necessary technology and connectivity.

To bridge the digital divide, it is imperative that we ensure the availability of learning materials and remote learning platforms. This involves addressing barriers such as poor connectivity, affordability, digital skills, and the influence of harmful gender norms. Access to alternative distance learning tools like the internet, television, and radio must be a priority to ensure that girls, especially in rural and marginalized communities, are not left behind.

## **Ending Violence and Exploitation**

Discrimination against girls often leads to their exclusion from inclusive and equitable quality education, nutrition, healthcare services, and other basic rights. Girls are more vulnerable to unprotected sexual relations, early pregnancies, harmful practices like Female Genital Mutilation, child marriage, and forms of cultural, social, and economic exploitation. Girls are also subjected to violence, abuse, rape, incest, and crimes related to honor. Millions of girls worldwide are engaged in child labor in its most harmful forms, often victims of trafficking or forced into domestic servitude, depriving them of their childhood and right to education.

Women Graduates-USA calls for an end to all forms of violence, exploitation, and trafficking, particularly those that disproportionately affect girls. This includes combating child prostitution, child pornography, sexual abuse, domestic violence, trafficking, and the use of technology to perpetrate violence against girls. It is vital that member states enforce the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, focusing on the specific vulnerabilities of girls.

## **Girls and Climate Change**

Girls are among the most vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change, including droughts, extreme weather events, land degradation, sea level rise, and food insecurity. These environmental challenges are interlinked with issues of health, poverty, and displacement. Women and girls constitute 80% of people displaced by climate change and are 14 times more likely to suffer health consequences or die during climate-related disasters.

## **Call to Action**

Women Graduates-USA advocates for women's rights and the rights of the girl child as embodied in both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and urges all Member States to:

- Mainstream gender perspectives in educational programs, infrastructure development, and teacher training, ensuring an inclusive approach that reflects the needs of girls, especially those from marginalized and vulnerable communities.
- Invest adequately in quality education through financing mechanisms that guarantee every girl's right to education, particularly focusing on girls in marginalized and vulnerable situations.
- Address harmful social norms and stereotypes in education systems that perpetuate gender inequality and hinder girls' progress in learning and development.

Education must be a vehicle for the empowerment of girls and gender equality by:

- Challenging gender stereotypes in curricula, promoting access to leadership training, career development, and equal opportunities for young women in all fields.
- Supporting vocational and technical education for girls, and promoting their engagement in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, which can unlock higher-paying jobs and future leadership roles.

As part of global efforts to empower all girls, we call on nations to:

- Bridge the gender digital divide, ensuring that girls in rural and remote areas have access to distance learning opportunities, internet connectivity, and digital resources.
- Promote digital literacy and access to technology for girls, allowing them to compete on an equal footing in the global economy.

We emphasize the importance of:

- Protecting the rights of the girl child through human rights education, ensuring that girls can express their views freely and participate in decision-making processes that affect them.
- Strengthening legislation to protect girls from violence, exploitation, and harmful practices such as early marriage, female genital mutilation, and trafficking.
- Enforcing the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, especially as it pertains to girls.

It is imperative to take targeted measures to:

- Eradicate poverty in all its forms, especially for girl children, through coordinated, multi-dimensional approaches that address food insecurity, lack of education, and inadequate healthcare.
- Improve girls' access to health services, including menstrual hygiene, reproductive health education, and mental health support, especially for those in underserved communities.

Finally, we call on all Member States to:

- Enhance research and data collection on the challenges faced by girls, ensuring that the data collected is disaggregated by relevant factors such as age, location, gender, disability, and economic situation, to better inform policies and interventions.

To achieve the vision of equality, safety, and prosperity for every girl, we must take bold, coordinated action. We call on the international community to commit to these principles, making the necessary financial and policy investments to create an inclusive world where every girl can thrive.

---