

**Where We Stand Statement:
'Access to Education and Training'**

Where Things Stand

Access to high-quality education and training throughout the life course transforms lives and communities. The cross-cutting benefits of education on sustainable development, and the fundamental role it plays in the achievement of gender equality was globally recognised specifically by Sustainable Development Goal #4. Education is a basic human right as established by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ([CEDAW](#)) and the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#). Additionally the Human Rights Council reaffirmed the Human Right to Education: - [A/HRC/41/L.26](#) adopted July 11,2019.

It is now widely acknowledged that as well as benefitting women and girls as individuals, educating women and girls produces better health outcomes, fuels economic growth, and ensures stable and peaceful societies.

Mounting [data](#) (World Bank 2018) indicates that disparities in access to education and training are often driven by gaps in income, gender-based violence, social barriers, and conflict. Children from the poorest [20%](#) of the population are less likely to attend school, and the largest regional disparities are seen in West and Central Africa. In 2018, some 773 million adults—two-thirds of whom are women—remained illiterate in terms of reading and writing skills; Southern Asia is home to almost half of the global illiterate population and sub-Saharan is home to one quarter. Girls who experience early and child marriage leave school; girls with no education are three times more likely to marry before they are 18.

Conflict significantly affects access to education. Schools have been used by militaries and destroyed during conflict. During conflict, girls are [more than twice as likely](#) to be out of school than girls living in non-affected countries. Refugee children struggle to access education. Where conflicts are long-term, then children and adults lose a lifetime of education and training, necessary to help the rebuilding of their nation, giving rise to what has been called a 'lost-generation'.

During 2020 education and training for women and girls has become hardest hit by the impact of COVID-19 around the world. 'Out of the total population of students enrolled in education globally UNESCO estimates that over 89% are currently out of schools because of pandemic related closures. Over 111 million of those out of school or university it is estimated are girls living in the least developed countries, <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>.

Despite continuous acknowledgement of the value of education to girls, women, their families and communities, we are still struggling to reach those furthest behind, to maintain school and college or university attendance and to ensure that all education is of a high quality.

The COVID -19 pandemic has accentuated the gender digital divide thus impacting on access to on line education. Women and girls were already lagging behind as recent reports have shown. (OECD Bridging The Digital Gender Divide 2019) The Internet, digital platforms, mobile phones and digital financial services offer "leapfrog" opportunities for all and can help bridge the divide by giving women and girls the possibility to earn additional income, increase their employment opportunities, and access knowledge and general information, <http://www.oecd.org/internet/bridging-the-digital-gender-divide.pdf>.

OECD noted before the pandemic struck that “The road ahead is uphill: today worldwide some 327 million fewer women than men have a smartphone and can access the mobile Internet. Women are under-represented in ICT jobs, top management and academic careers and, as shown in this report, men are four times more likely than women to be ICT specialists”.

And Where Things Need to Go

Soroptimist International grassroots projects show education and training can transform individuals' lives and their communities.

Education in its broadest sense should be considered a global strategic priority. Increased efforts must be made to achieve gender equality within formal and non-formal education systems, including vocational training and apprenticeships, as a critical aspect of the 2030 Agenda. (See separate SI WWS on Life Long Learning)

Fundamental Action

- Education must be safe, inclusive, of a high quality and accessible to all. This requires renewed and increased efforts to reach older women and those who have never attended school, those who come from marginalised or rural communities, women and girls with caring responsibilities and those who are leaving prisons, state care and other institutions. Those who are furthest behind must be reached as a priority.
- The educational needs of migrating, refugee and displaced women and girls must be urgently addressed.
- Schools and education facilities must be safe places for students. Urgent steps must be taken to ensure that all education and training facilities are free from violence, including gender-based violence, and that journeys to and from schools and education facilities are safe.
- Legal and social action must be taken to prevent child and early marriage which removes girls from schools and is proved to have negative health, economic and social outcomes.
- All education costs, be they direct or hidden costs, must be reduced or removed to ensure accessibility as financial barriers to education remain one of the biggest obstacles to women's and girls' education.

Additional Action

- Increased awareness specifically about the importance of education for women and girls (SDG 4) is required.
- Scholarship and bursary provision should be improved.
- Stronger encouragement to women and girls to reduce the digital gender divide should be undertaken and further STEM education. Women and girls should have equal access to electricity, the Internet, mobile phones and computers.

- All schools and educational facilities must have safe water and sanitation facilities enabling women and girls to continue their education safely and with dignity past puberty.
- Transport routes to education facilities must be made safe for women and girls.
- Data collection capacities need to be continually developed to lead to greater understanding of impact on sustainable development.
- Efforts need to be made to improve the responsiveness of education systems to the changing needs of communities. Pandemics, climate change, migration, economic changes and other global impacts can change the requirements that education systems need to address.
- Social and cultural programmes involving men and boys are required to prevent continuing discrimination that devalues women, their abilities and their educational achievements and their economic contributions.

Where Soroptimist International Stands

These are the principles that Soroptimist International strongly supports and will advocate for on behalf of women and girls, ensuring that they are educated, empowered and enabled:

- States should commit to ratifying and upholding CEDAW and the Convention on Rights of the Child, and conform to ILO standards for vocational training.
- States, the private sector, NGOs and civil society should protect the human rights of women and girls and empower them to be leaders, experts and agents of change.
- States should embrace gender mainstreaming across all aspects of education and training. Gender mainstreaming should include the institutional measures of gender budgeting and financing for development, supporting and targeting women-specific policies and programmes that address gender discrimination and its impact in education.
- States, development actors, the private sector and NGOs must work with women and girls enabling their leadership across all forms of education and training.
- States should ensure that education and training is affordable: poverty and economic disenfranchisement are not only outcomes of a lack of education, but they are significant factors in preventing women and girls from accessing education and training at all life stages.

SI calls upon all parties to expedite efforts across all sustainable development measures and activities to achieve girls' and women's full participation in high-quality education and training through a human-rights based approach at whatever life stage they have reached.