

CSW70 GIRL-CENTRED ADVOCACY BRIEF

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The Adolescent Girls Investment Plan (AGIP), together with the Coalition for Adolescent Girls (CAG), and the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health (PMNCH) have leveraged their coalition-wide expertise to put together this advocacy brief, providing up-to-date evidence on the state of adolescent girls' rights and funding aligned with the priority and review theme of the seventieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70). **This brief aims to support the advocacy efforts of girls and girls' rights allies engaging in CSW70 spaces.**

Adolescent girls' rights are being reshaped by a deepening global polycrisis from conflict and climate shocks to economic instability and shrinking development finance. While evidence shows that investing in girls delivers transformative social and economic returns, funding trends and rising debt burdens are moving in the opposite direction.

CSW70 comes at a pivotal moment. Its priority theme on *ensuring access to justice for all women and girls* and its review theme on *participation in public life and the elimination of violence demand* urgent, accountable, and resourced action. Justice is not only about courts and laws; it is about dismantling structural barriers, ending violence, and ensuring girls can meaningfully participate in public and political life.

CURRENT CONTEXT: POLYCRISIS AND THE STATE OF GIRLS' RIGHTS & FUNDING



The following data highlights the widening gap between escalating risks facing adolescent girls and the resources allocated to protect and empower them.

1. Funding landscape

- Despite increasing advocacy for gender equity, the percentage of Official Development Assistance (ODA) targeting adolescents and gender equality has declined for the past five consecutive years dropping from **6.18%** in 2019 to **4.71%** in 2023.¹
- In **2023**, only **0.1%** of the total ODA from the top 10 donors targeted adolescent girls with disabilities, despite global population estimates indicating that approximately **5%** of the population have a disability.²
- Only **2.5%** and **1.6%** of gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA between 2016 and 2020 was spent on child marriage and FGM/C, respectively. This is extremely low and this lack of investment can have significant impacts on achieving the SDGs.³
- Between **2024** and **2025**, **USD 60 billion** for adolescent girls was stripped from ODA.⁴ The financial gap to achieve the 2030 Agenda, which was estimated at **USD 2.5 trillion** per year in 2015, has now grown to over **USD 4 trillion** per year.⁵

CURRENT CONTEXT: POLYCRISIS AND STATE OF GIRLS' RIGHTS & FUNDING (continued)

2. Education and debt-crisis

- Education fuels economic growth. Each additional year of secondary education increases a girl's future earnings by **10-20%**, while every USD invested in girls' education generates almost three times as much return, i.e., a **USD 2.80** return in GDP.⁶ Closing gender gaps in secondary education could add **USD 15-30 trillion** annually to the global economy.⁷
- Developing economies that achieve **100%** secondary school completion rates for adolescent girls by 2030 (through holistic investments for girls across education, health, economic independence and ending violence) could see their gross domestic product (GDP) boosted by an average of **10%**.⁸
- Nearly **40%** of countries classified as developing by the UN (52 in total), are grappling with severe debt distress. On average, these countries spent **42%** of their budgets on debt repayments in 2024.⁹ In 16 countries, debt repayments were five times higher than spending on education.
- Most lower-income governments are falling short of the funding needed to ensure all children can access 12 years of education. Global benchmarks call for **20%** of national budgets or **6%** of GDP to be allocated to education.¹¹ But in 2024, lower-income countries spent an average of just **13.7%** of their budgets and **4.5%** of GDP, both down from previous years.
- In 2024, the 10 countries with the most significant barriers to girls' education spent on average **four times more** on debt servicing than on education. These countries are home to **32 million** out-of-school girls (a quarter of the total).¹²

3. Child, early, and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU)

- The ongoing impacts of COVID-19, conflict, the climate crisis, and the cost-of-living crisis are driving increases in child marriage. For each tenfold increase in conflict-related fatalities, child marriage increases **7%**; for every **10%** change in rainfall due to climate change, child marriage increases by **1%**.¹³
- **Two-thirds** of child marriages happen in regions with higher-than-average climate risks.¹⁴
- Nearly **1 in 4** adolescent girls who have been married or partnered have experienced intimate partner violence worldwide, and **50 million girls** alive today have experienced sexual violence.¹⁵



CURRENT CONTEXT: POLYCRISIS AND STATE OF GIRLS' RIGHTS & FUNDING (continued)

4. Conflicts and international humanitarian law

- In 2023, approximately **1.9 billion** of the world's children lived in a conflict-affected country, and approximately **473 million** (more than one in six) children lived in a conflict zone.¹⁶
- Globally, **one in ten** children has a disability, and a staggering **16%** of these disabilities are directly linked to armed conflict.¹⁷
- Every third victim of conflict-related sexual violence in 2023 was a child, and **98%** of these were girls.¹⁸
- Meanwhile, international humanitarian law (IHL) is eroding as states disregard obligations, attack civilians, block aid, and act with impunity.

5. Climate crisis

- Children and women are disproportionately affected by economic and climatic shocks and recover more slowly from such shocks.¹⁹
- **29.9 million** adolescent girls live in the top 10 child marriage-climate hotspot countries. This is projected to rise to **32.2 million** by 2030. Living with this dual threat will be a reality for many more girls.²⁰
- Despite evidence on the impact of climate change on women, girls, and young people, only **1%** of the gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA in 2020 went to climate change-related sectors.²¹
- The UN estimates that **80%** of people displaced by climate change are women and girls,²² with adolescent girls facing heightened risks of sexual and gender-based violence.

6. Economic and rights-based case for investing in adolescent girls

- The global cost of inaction on adolescents' education and empowerment is estimated at **USD 110 trillion** over 27 years (2024-50)²³, impacting **80%** of the world's population.
- Every dollar invested in adolescent girls' empowerment can generate more than a **tenfold** return²⁴ in economic impact. UNICEF finds that investing **USD 1 billion** in interventions like adolescent-friendly SRHR services, cash transfers, and parenting support in low-/middle-income countries yields over **4x** return on investment.²⁵
- With evidence-informed investments and support, adolescent girls could unlock an additional **USD 2.4 trillion**²⁶ in income, driving Africa's economic transformation.
- In the Asia-Pacific region (five countries), scaling up programs to prevent adolescent pregnancy and child marriage (to 95% coverage) could generate **USD 13.4 billion**²⁷ in economic benefits by 2050, with returns ranging up to **USD 9.80** per USD invested.



KEY ADVOCACY MESSAGES AND CALLS TO ACTION

Uphold international human rights law and eliminate all forms of violence against girls

- States must align national laws with international human rights standards by repealing discriminatory legislation, abolishing child marriage, and removing policies that prevent married girls and adolescent mothers from re-entering school.
- Governments must allocate dedicated, gender-responsive budget lines for preventing and responding to gender-based violence, including survivor-centered justice systems, legal aid, shelters, and comprehensive services (including SRHR).
- Donors and International Financial Institutions (IFIs) must provide sustained, multi-year funding to strengthen justice systems, social protection, healthcare, and education systems that enable girls to claim their rights.
- States and UN agencies must establish binding oversight mechanisms including independent monitoring bodies, public justice scorecards, and age- and disability-disaggregated data with transparent reporting through national and CSW follow-up processes.

Shift power and resources to girl- and youth-led feminist initiatives and movements

- **Donors, governments, philanthropy, and the private sector** must provide multi-year, flexible, and accessible funding directly to girl- and youth-led feminist movements, with transparent public reporting.
- **Governments and donors** must adopt participatory funding and co-creation models that shift decision-making power not only consultation roles to local and youth-led actors.
- **IFIs** must protect and prioritize social sector spending in fiscal and debt frameworks to safeguard investments in adolescent girls.

Recognize girls as equal stakeholders in decision-making and support their leadership

- **Governments** must institutionalize and budget for adolescent girls' participation through legislated advisory bodies, youth councils, and formal consultation mechanisms linked to national policy cycles.
- **UN agencies and multilateral platforms** must create structured, funded engagement pathways tied to outcome documents and accountability frameworks.
- **States** must dismantle structural barriers and track girls' representation and influence through measurable, publicly reported indicators.

Ensure safe civic spaces and political participation

- **States** must safeguard freedoms of expression, association, and assembly, and refrain from legal or administrative restrictions that silence girls and women human rights defenders.
- **Governments, donors, and UN agencies** must resource protection mechanisms and independent oversight bodies to monitor civic space and provide remedies for violations.

CONCLUSION: A CALL FOR URGENT AND BOLD ACTION ON GIRL-CENTERED ACCOUNTABILITY

The convergence of shrinking funding, political backlash, conflict, climate shocks, and girls' exclusion from decision-making spaces threatens to reverse hard-won gains for gender equality. In line with the priority and review themes of CSW70 — advancing access to justice, strengthening participation in public life, and eliminating violence — governments and donors must move beyond rhetoric to ensure adolescent girls can claim their rights, live free from violence, and meaningfully shape the policies that affect them. This requires sustained, adequately resourced investments in girl-centered initiatives, strengthened accountability mechanisms, and formal inclusion of girls in national and global processes.

AGIP, CAG, and PMNCH call for bold, immediate, and accountable action to protect, adequately resource, and institutionalize adolescent girls' rights, wellbeing, and access to justice because without justice, participation, and freedom from violence for girls, gender equality cannot be achieved for all!



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