



# GIRL-CENTERED ADVOCACY BRIEF

## WOMEN DELIVER 2026

The Women Deliver Conference 2026 takes place at a critical moment for gender equality and adolescent girls' rights and wellbeing. Amid rising anti-rights movements, shrinking civic space, and escalating climate crises and conflicts, adolescent girls face intensifying structural barriers while remaining significantly underfunded and underrepresented in global decision-making.

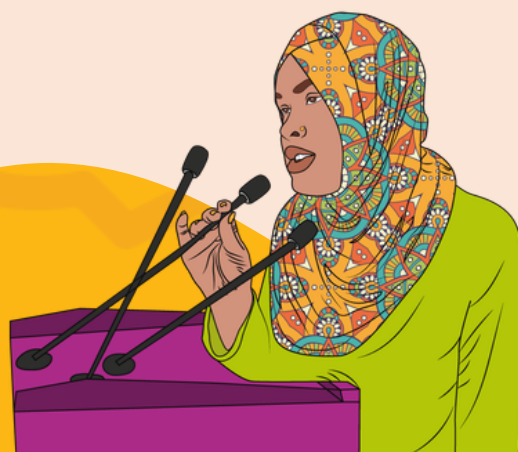
The conference brings together governments, civil society, youth leaders, movements, and funders to drive more coordinated, cross-sector action. It offers a key opportunity to take stock of progress, strengthen collective responsibility, align priorities, and push for more accountable, adequately-resourced commitments that reflect the realities of those most affected by inequality. The strategies shaped here will help define feminist action beyond 2030.

The decisions, partnerships, and commitments that emerge will have far-reaching implications for 1.3 billion adolescents worldwide, particularly the more than 600 million adolescent girls navigating intersecting inequalities across education, health, safety, climate, and economic opportunity. Grounding these outcomes in their lived experiences, leadership, and priorities is essential to achieving meaningful and sustained progress.

Within this context, AGIP works to ensure adolescent girls are not only visible in global agendas and participating in driving action, but meaningfully centered in the commitments, investments, and accountability mechanisms that emerge from moments like WD2026.

AGIP has leveraged coalition-wide expertise to produce this advocacy brief for girl leaders and girls' rights allies at Women Deliver 2026 to:

- Underline the financing gaps for adolescent girls and encourage decision-makers to make more evidence-informed investment in adolescent girls.
- Urge global decision-makers to practice girl-centered accountability to existing commitments.
- Raise awareness on how the rollback on rights and shrinking civic space impacts girls' meaningful engagement and leadership.





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

- 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.<sup>1</sup>
- 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.<sup>2</sup>
- Only **2.5%** and **1.6%**<sup>3</sup> 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.
- Between **2024** and **2025**, **USD 60 billion**<sup>4</sup> for adolescent girls was stripped from ODA. 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.<sup>5</sup>



### 2.1 WHY INVESTING IN ADOLESCENT GIRLS IS A NON-NEGOTIABLE

- Investing in adolescent girls is not only fundamental to realising their rights – it's also an effective and sustainable economic, social, and climate justice strategy.
- The global cost of inaction on adolescents' education and empowerment is estimated at **USD 110 trillion** over 27 years (2024-50), impacting **80%** of the world's population.<sup>6</sup>
- Every dollar invested in adolescent girls' empowerment can generate more than a **tenfold return** in economic impact. UNICEF finds that investing **USD 1 billion**<sup>7</sup> in interventions like adolescent-friendly SRHR services, cash transfers, and parenting support in low-/middle-income countries yields over **4x** return on investment.
- With evidence-informed investments and support, adolescent girls could unlock an additional **USD 2.4 trillion**<sup>8</sup> 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** in economic benefits by 2050, with returns ranging up to USD 9.80 per USD invested.<sup>9</sup>
- Every **\$1** invested in adolescent girls can generate up to **\$10 in economic returns**. While preventing adolescent pregnancy and child marriage yields returns of up to **\$9.80 per \$1 invested** in some regions.<sup>10</sup>
- 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. Closing gender gaps in secondary education could add **USD 15-30 trillion**<sup>11</sup> annually to the global economy.
- 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%**.



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

## 2.3 IMPACT OF THE DEBT CRISIS

- The debt crisis is a girls' rights crisis, yet governments are underinvesting in girls as they are pressured to put creditors before social spending. As governments cut back on essential services, it is adolescent girls who pay the price, getting trapped in a vicious cycle of vulnerability and exclusion.
- According to DFI, more than **60%** of the world's population live in countries where their governments spend more on debt servicing than social spending (health, education and social protection).
- 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. In 16 countries, debt repayments were five times higher than spending on education.<sup>12</sup>
- 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. 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).

## 2.2 CHILD EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE AND UNIONS

- The ongoing impacts of COVID-19, conflict, and the climate 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%**.<sup>13</sup>
- **Two-thirds** of child marriages happen in regions with higher-than-average climate risks.<sup>14</sup>
- Nearly **1 in 4** adolescent girls who have been married or partnered have experienced intimate partner violence worldwide<sup>15</sup>, and **50 million girls** alive today have experienced sexual violence.

## 2.4 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**<sup>16</sup> (more than one in six) children lived in a conflict zone.
- Globally, **one in ten** children has a disability, and a staggering **16%** of these disabilities are directly linked to armed conflict.<sup>17</sup>
- Every third victim of conflict-related sexual violence in 2023 was a child, and **98%**<sup>18</sup> of these were girls.
- Meanwhile, international humanitarian law (IHL) is eroding as states disregard obligations, attack civilians, block aid, and act with impunity.





## 3. KEY ADVOCACY MESSAGES & CALLS TO ACTION

### 1. Make bold, measurable financing commitments and ensure accountability for adolescent girls

- **Increase gender-responsive, adolescent-targeted** financing by allocating dedicated resources that directly respond to the specific needs of adolescent girls across sectors such as education, health, protection, and economic empowerment, ensuring funding is intentional rather than incidental.
- **Protect and prioritize SRHR funding by safeguarding investments** in sexual and reproductive health and rights, including comprehensive sexuality education and adolescent-friendly services, particularly in contexts where such funding is at risk of rollback or restriction.
- **Commit to multi-year, flexible funding** by providing sustained, predictable, and adaptable funding to girl- and youth-led feminist movements, enabling them to plan long-term, respond to emerging needs, and lead advocacy and programming effectively.

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

- **Creditors, including governments, private creditors, the World Bank and IMF**, must protect and prioritize social sector spending in fiscal and debt frameworks to safeguard investments in adolescent girls.
- **Governments, creditors and other debt policy makers (e.g. G20)** should ensure young feminist and girl/youth-led groups are meaningfully included in debt decision making at national levels as part of transparency and accountability improvements.

### 3. 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.

### 4. Ensure safe civic spaces and political participation for adolescent girls

- **Safeguard fundamental freedoms** - States must protect the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, ensuring that adolescent girls and women human rights defenders can speak out, organize, and participate without fear of harassment, intimidation, or reprisals.
- **Remove restrictive laws and practices** - Governments should refrain from imposing legal, policy, or administrative barriers that limit civic space, and actively review and reform existing measures that silence or exclude girls and women from public and political life.



## 4. CONCLUSION: A CALL FOR URGENT AND BOLD ACTION

The alarming decline in funding, growing political and social pushback, and the exclusion of girls from decision-making threaten decades of progress. Now is the time for governments, donors, and global actors to double down on commitments, fund adolescent girl-centered initiatives, and ensure accountability for sustained impact.

AGIP calls on governments, donors, multilaterals, and private actors to:

- **Increase and prioritize funding** for adolescent girls, ensuring sustained, flexible, and gender-responsive investments that reach those most impacted.
- **Strengthen accountability mechanisms** to track commitments, ensure transparency, and hold governments and partners responsible for delivering on promises made to adolescent girls.
- **Ensure safeguarding and safe participation**, protecting adolescent girls' rights, well-being, and agency across all advocacy, policy, and program spaces.

## 5. AGIP EVENTS AT WOMEN DELIVER

AGIP will be leading two girl-centred events which we would love advocates and allies to join:

### 1. Strategy Session at the Girls Deliver Pre-conference

#### *Collective Action on Girl-Centred Accountability*

**Date:** Sunday, 26 April 2026 | **Time:** 11:00 am – 12:30pm

**Co-hosts:** Girl Rising, PMNCH

**AGIP Members:** GAGE, ICRW, Plan International, Women Deliver

### 2. Concurrent Event at the Women Deliver Main Conference

#### *Safeguarding Rights and Agency: Adolescent Engagement in Shrinking Civic Spaces*

**Date:** Thursday, 30 April 2026 | **Time:** 9:30 – 11:00 AM | **Room:** 219

**Co-hosts:** UNFPA, UNGEI

**AGIP Members:** FRIDA, IPPF, Plan International, Restless Development

Please note that there is no pre-registration; seats will be allocated on a first come first served basis. Both events will be in English with interpretation available in French and Spanish.





# REFERENCES

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- 5 [SDG Investment Trends Monitor. 2023. SDG Investment Is Growing, But Too Slowly](#)
- 6, 7 [The case for holistic investment in girls, 2020, Citi Global Insights & Plan International](#)
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- 9 [A world of debt report 2024: A growing burden to global prosperity, 2024, UNCTAD](#)
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- 12 [Towards debt justice for girls: Calling on leaders to reform the G20 Common Framework to unlock resources for girls' education, 2025, Malala Fund](#)
- 13 [Child Marriage and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Thematic Brief, 2025, Girls Not Brides](#)
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- 15 [Fast facts: 30 years of uneven progress for adolescent girls, 2025, Plan International, UNICEF, UN Women](#)
- 16 [Stop the War on Children, Pathways to Peace, 2024, Save the Children, PRIO](#)
- 17 [Persons with disabilities in armed conflict: Inclusive protection, 2020, UNOCHA](#)
- 18 [Remarks of SRSR Pramila Patten at the Security Council Open Debate on "Preventing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence through demilitarization and gender-responsive arms control", New York, 23 April 2024](#)



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