

ADDRESSING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN, GIRLS AND LGBTI PERSONS: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARLIAMENTARIANS

CONTINUING EDUCATION IN REMOTE SETTINGS

Due to lockdown and school closure measures, the COVID-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption in the world's education systems in history, affecting almost 1.6 billion children and youth globally. LGBTI youth are among the ones most affected by the closure of campuses and other in-person meeting places as they have lost an important source of peer-based community.


It is also important to note that **743 million girls** have already missed out on their education, and 10 million secondary school-aged girls are predicted to be out of school before the pandemic is over. For many girls, this interruption in their education can greatly impact other aspects of their life since lack of education is closely linked with child, early and forced marriage. It is estimated that girls without education are **three times more likely** to marry by the age of 18 than girls with secondary or higher education.

Ending Child, Early and Forced Marriage

The world is witnessing a drastic surge in cases of child marriage as the COVID-19 pandemic disrupts planned efforts to end this harmful practice. As a result, 13 million child marriages are expected to take place in the next decade that otherwise would not have occurred, largely undoing efforts to achieve SDG 5 on Gender Equality by 2030.

However, while lack of education certainly increases girls' risk of being married off early, it is not the only reason. Other root causes of child marriage include gender inequality, poverty, insecurity and lack of economic and social opportunities for girls. Many of these complex factors are also exacerbated in emergency settings as family and community structures break down during crises.

A pandemic of this nature presents unique challenges that require action to protect adolescent girls from violence and exploitation, both in the response and recovery phases. Critical interventions that prioritize gender-responsive education plans, along with economic incentives and other social protection measures, will ensure that adolescent girls are not left behind, and that they receive the education they deserve.



To learn more about PGA's Gender, Equality and Inclusion Program, or to share your country's experience and policies, please contact:

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Actions Parliamentarians can take:

- Advocate for the necessary legal, cultural and technical support to allow pregnant girls, married girls, young mothers and vulnerable LGBTI youth to continue their education;
- Monitor the effective reach and use of distance learning modalities in order to improve the curriculum and prepare for the gradual reopening of schools;
- Provide psychosocial support and remote learning tools, such as internet connectivity and radio broadcasts, for marginalized youth;
- Offer technical skills training and/or alternative education for those who drop out of school or are unable to pursue formal education due to other reasons;
- Lift financial barriers that prevent vulnerable youth from going to school and that are likely to increase due to COVID-19 economic impacts; and
- Integrate comprehensive sexual education, including information on sexual and reproductive health and relevant services, into the distance learning curriculum.

Country-Specific Practices:

Africa

Côte d'Ivoire: The government launched a nation-wide distance learning program where teachers, mothers' groups, community health workers and leaders can track how the pandemic is affecting students and families and offer insights on how to prevent child marriage, early pregnancy and other threats.

Zimbabwe: President Emmerson Mnangagwa signed amendments to the Education Act that officially prohibits state schools from banning pregnant students from attending. The amendments also allow students to continue going to school even if they owe fees.

Middle East

Jordan: The government has implemented a set of policies to provide girls with psychosocial support through the education system, and teachers with professional development training in life skills education and effective ways to support victims of violence.

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