DEMAND EQUITY

11 Facts That Show Why We Need to Empower Adolescent Girls NOW

Girls aged 10 to 19 hold the key to creating a more sustainable world for all.



A group of Somali refugee girls playing volleyball at Melkadida primary school for host community and refugee children. | ©UNICEF Ethiopia/2019/Mulugeta Ayene



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The COVID-19 pandemic has reversed decades of progress toward achieving gender equality, and the time is now to ensure that we do not fall any further behind.

Girls hold the key to ending hunger, saving the planet, and boosting the economy — but not without more support.

As part of our year-long campaign, *End Extreme Poverty NOW — Our Future Can't Wait*, Global Citizen is calling on the world to take action.

Sign Now:

Girls are the Future: Empower Them

114,460 / 150,000 actions taken

TAKE ACTION

World leaders have to deliver on commitments to invest in women's health, girls' education, and care responsibilities. More than $400 million is needed now to fund key international mechanisms to address girls' poverty and reach millions of young women in immediate need. We are calling on G7 leaders to commit to a package addressing immediate needs of $400 million while agreeing to a multi-year investment plan that will reach 50 million adolescent girls.

Here are 10 facts that prove we need to support adolescent girls NOW.

1. 129 million girls remain out of school worldwide.

Girls disproportionately miss out on education.A third of the world's poorest girls between 10 and 18 have never attended school, and in rural areas, 61% of girls do not attend secondary school. The COVID-19 pandemic has also resulted in more learning losses for girls than for boys, and an increased risk of facing child labor, gender-based violence, early marriage, and pregnancy.

When girls receive a quality education, every area of their lives and communities benefit. Keeping girls in school supports economic growth, promotes peace, and helps fight climate change. Women who complete secondary education go on to make higher incomes, have healthier children, are less likely to experience intimate partner violence, and report higher levels of psychological well-being.

2. Of the 811 million people who are food insecure around the world, nearly 60% are women and girls.

Women and girls prepare most of the world's meals and grow its food. But even though they work harder to secure meals for the household, they are usually the first to sacrifice their food when families experience economic hardship. Children are one of the groups most vulnerable to hunger because they depend on adults to eat. Young girls often care for relatives and are the last to eat if food is in short supply, or families might marry off their daughters because it's one fewer mouth to feed.

Women also suffer the most from nutrient deficiencies, especially during reproductive years, negatively impacting development that is passed down through generations.

When women earn more, they are more likely to use their money to feed and support their families. Empowering women and girls to receive the same opportunities as boys and men could help end hunger for all.

3. Millions of girls and women affected by the COVID-19 pandemic are experiencing a lack of access to sexual and reproductive health care.

Girls already face several obstacles to accessing sexual and reproductive health, putting them at increased risk of complications, unintended pregnancies, and maternal death. Now during the COVID-19 pandemic, resources have been diverted away from women's health services and towards addressing the public health crisis.

4. More than 12 million women lost access to family planning services in 2020.

Across more than 115 low- and middle-income countries, 1.4 million more unintended pregnancies occurred due to loss of access to family planning in 2020. Almost half of women (48%) surveyed throughout 58 countries faced difficulty in accessing sanitary and health products — including menstrual products, contraceptives, and soap — between 2020 and 2021. And over one-third had trouble accessing medical care such as obstetric and gynecological services.

5. There are approximately 4.3 billion people of reproductive age who will lack at least one essential sexual or reproductive health service throughout their reproductive life.

Access to sexual and reproductive health is key to keeping women and girls safe. Many countries don't categorize rape as a crime, and reproductive health issues are a leading cause of illness and death for women and girls of reproductive age in developing countries. In sub-Saharan Africa, where the majority of the world's poor live, two-thirds of illnesses women of reproductive age experience are caused by sexual and reproductive health issues.

About 23 million girls aged 15 to 19 in developing countries do not have access to modern contraception, including condoms, birth control pills, and IUDs. Without access to family planning, adolescent girls can't make decisions about their own bodies or futures or prevent pregnancy complications.

6. Half of the pregnancies among adolescent girls years in developing regions are estimated to be unintended.

Adolescent pregnancy occurs more in poor and marginalized communities and perpetuates child marriage, which forces girls to drop out of school. The stigma attached to young motherhood and lack of access to health services puts pregnant girls at risk of getting inadequate prenatal care, which can jeopardize their health and their babies' health.

7. More than 31 million girls are out of secondary school in sub-Saharan Africa, many due to early marriage and teenage pregnancy.

Approximately 90% of early pregnancies in developing countries occur within early marriages. When girls are forced into child marriage, there is often an imbalance of power, no access to contraception, and pressure to prove their fertility. Pregnant girls and adolescents also face other health risks and complications due to their immature bodies and adolescent pregnancy is a major contributor to maternal and child mortality. Complications relating to pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death for girls aged 15 to 19 globally.

Unmarried pregnant adolescents may face stigma or rejection by parents and peers as well as violent threats. Girls who become pregnant early are also more likely to experience violence within a marriage or partnership.

When girls miss out on school due to early marriage and teen pregnancy, the impact can be felt for generations. Children born to adolescent parents are more likely to perform poorly in school. These children frequently continue

to live below the poverty line later in life and have a higher chance of dropping out of school and becoming young parents themselves.
Delaying pregnancy has several benefits for young girls, allowing them to stay in school, avoid sexually transmitted diseases, and prevent unsafe abortions.

8. Some 3.9 million unsafe abortions occur each year to adolescent girls in developing regions.

In countries where abortion is prohibited or highly restricted, adolescents typically resort to unsafe abortion, putting their health and lives in jeopardy. Unsafe abortions are the third-leading cause of maternal deaths globally. The World Health Organization estimates that 47,000 women die from unsafe abortions annually.

9. A global COVID-19 recovery that centers on women and girls could prevent 47 million more women and girls from falling into extreme poverty.

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely stunted women's development globally and undone years of progress toward achieving gender equality. Women often bear the economic brunt of crises and women's employment is 19% more at risk during crises, compared to men, putting women at heightened risk. Putting women and girls at the forefront of the global recovery plan can help them meet their full potential.

10. Women and girls are performing more unpaid care work than ever.

Girls often have to undertake an unfair share of unpaid domestic responsibilities, which includes child care and household chores, rather than completing their education or having the childhood they deserve.
Before the COVID-19 pandemic, girls age 10 to 14 did, on average, 50% more unpaid work compared to boys. Women and girls were overall more likely than men and boys to face negative socioeconomic impacts as a result of the pandemic, including an increased burden of unpaid care work.

11. More than 40% of the world's girls and boys under school age do not have regular access to quality care.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed inadequacies in child care that are leaving young girls in unsafe and unstimulating environments. Quality child care is essential to children's future development. Providing girls with a safe and stimulating environment before the age of five helps reduce inequalities later in life.