



BAUMUN
JUNIOR

UN Women Study Guide

Welcome to Your Future

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1. Letter from The Secretary-General

Honorable Delegates,

Welcome to BAUMUN Junior'26! As your Secretary-General, I am proud to see you taking on one of the most important roles in the world: advocating for the rights of children.

Education is not just a privilege; it is a fundamental human right. However, for millions of children around the globe, a classroom is a distant dream. In this committee, you are not just students—you are diplomats. Your goal is to find creative, fair, and practical ways to make sure every child, no matter where they are born, has a desk, a book, and a teacher.

I look forward to hearing your ideas and seeing your passion in action.

Best regards,

**Abdulrahman Murat Secretary-General,
BAUMUN Junior'26**



2. Introductions

2.1 Introduction to the Committee

UN Women is the United Nations body dedicated to promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls worldwide. Established in 2010, it was created by merging several earlier UN entities focused on gender issues, strengthening the UN's ability to address inequality on a global scale. Its core mission is to eliminate discrimination against women and girls, promote their full participation in political and economic life, and ensure equal access to opportunities and resources.

UN Women works closely with member states to develop and implement policies, laws, and programs that advance gender equality. It provides technical and financial assistance to governments, supports grassroots and civil society organizations, and helps monitor global progress on gender-related commitments. The organization is also instrumental in advocating for women's rights in key areas such as education, employment, health, and protection from violence.

In addition to its policy and advocacy work, UN Women plays a central role in coordinating the United Nations system's efforts on gender equality, ensuring that all UN agencies integrate a gender perspective into their initiatives. It is a key driver in advancing international frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 5: Gender Equality, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Through its global, regional, and local programs, UN Women continues to work toward building a more inclusive and equitable world where women and girls can fully realize their rights and potential.



2.2 Introduction to the Agenda Item: Encouraging Equal Opportunities for Young People

Encouraging equal opportunities for young people is a central challenge in achieving sustainable and inclusive development worldwide. Young people represent a significant portion of the global population and are key drivers of innovation, economic growth, and social progress. However, millions of youth continue to face barriers that limit their ability to access quality education, secure stable employment, and participate meaningfully in society. These challenges are often shaped by intersecting factors such as gender, socio-economic status, geographic location, disability, and cultural norms, creating deep and persistent inequalities.

In many parts of the world, young women and girls are disproportionately affected by these barriers. They may experience restricted access to education, early and forced marriage, gender-based violence, and limited participation in the workforce. These inequalities not only hinder individual potential but also slow broader social and economic development. Addressing these disparities requires targeted efforts to remove systemic discrimination and promote inclusive policies that empower all young people, regardless of background.

This agenda is closely linked to key global priorities, particularly SDG 4: Quality Education, SDG 5: Gender Equality and SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities. These goals emphasize the importance of ensuring access to education, promoting gender equality and reducing disparities within and between countries.



Efforts to encourage equal opportunities for young people, especially young girls must therefore take a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach which includes ; education, access to healthcare, socio-economical disparities, technological inclusion and safe environments and protection from violence. UN Women emphasizes that structural gender inequalities must be addressed across all areas of society to create truly inclusive opportunities.

3. **Key Terms**

Gender Inequality: The unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender, often resulting in limited access to rights, resources, and opportunities for women and girls.

Gender-Responsive Policy: Policies that actively consider and address the different needs, experiences, and challenges of all genders, particularly aiming to reduce inequalities affecting women and girls.

Social Inclusion: The process of ensuring that all individuals, regardless of background or identity, have equal opportunities to participate fully in social, economic, and political life.

Structural Barriers: Systemic obstacles embedded in social, economic, and political systems that limit access to opportunities for certain groups, especially marginalized populations such as young women and girls.



Gender Norms: Socially constructed roles and expectations assigned to individuals based on their gender. These norms often restrict the behavior, choices, and opportunities available to young women and girls.

Gender Mainstreaming: The process of integrating a gender perspective into all policies, programs, and decision-making processes to promote equality.

4. **Structural Barriers to Equal Opportunities**

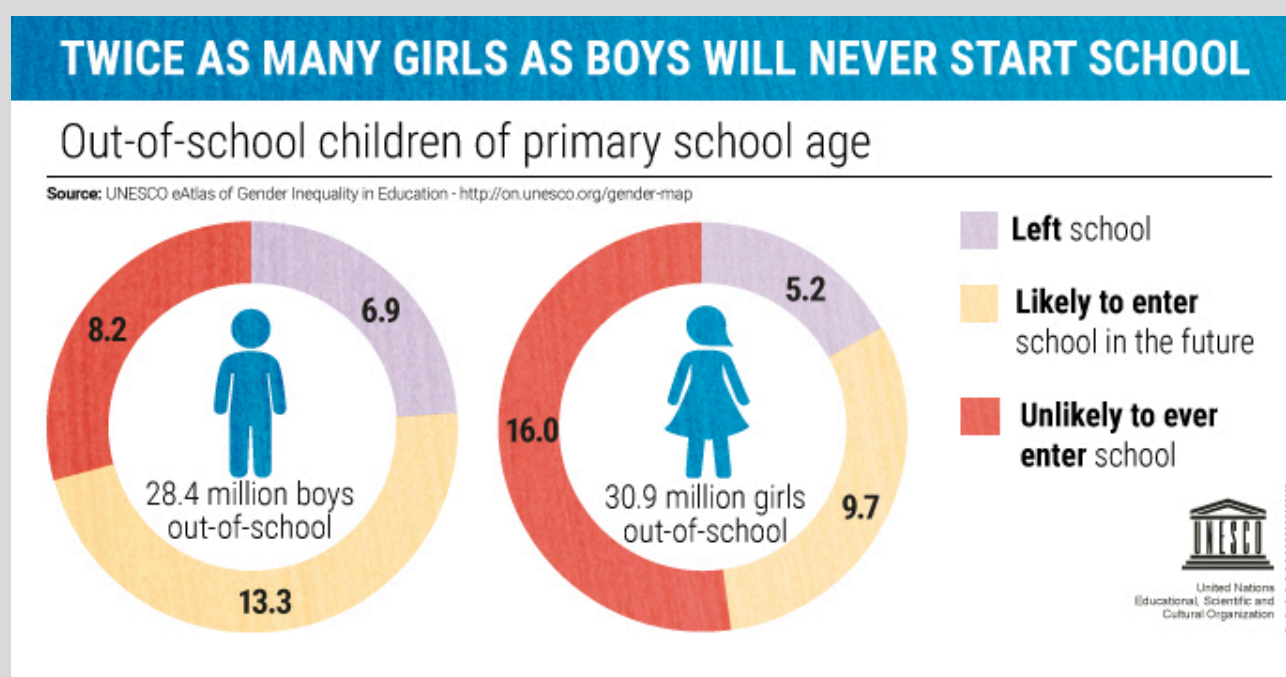
Despite global progress toward gender equality, structural barriers continue to limit equal opportunities for young women and girls across multiple areas of life. These barriers are deeply embedded within economic systems, social norms, and institutional frameworks, making them difficult to identify and address. Unlike individual challenges, structural inequalities are systemic in nature, they are reinforced by policies, cultural expectations, and unequal distribution of resources, often disproportionately affecting marginalized groups.

4.1 **Social and Cultural Barriers**

Social and cultural barriers are among the most deeply entrenched challenges to achieving equal opportunities for young women and girls, as they are often rooted in long-standing traditions, belief systems, and societal expectations. These barriers operate at both the community and household levels, shaping how young people perceive their roles and limiting their ability to make independent choices.



Gender norms, in particular, define what is considered acceptable behavior for males and females, often reinforcing unequal power dynamics. In many societies, girls are expected to prioritize domestic responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, and caregiving from a young age, while boys are encouraged to pursue education and careers. This unequal distribution of roles not only limits girls' time for schooling and personal development but also normalizes the idea that their primary value lies within the household.



Social barriers remain one of the most significant factors limiting girls' access to and continuation in education worldwide. Globally, approximately 129 million girls are out of school, with 32 million of them of primary school age and 97 million of secondary school age, according to UNESCO. Many of these gaps are directly linked to societal norms and expectations.



Early and forced marriage is another pervasive social barrier: in Sub-Saharan Africa, about 40% of girls are married before the age of 18, while in South Asia the figure is close to 30%, forcing many girls to leave school permanently. Safety concerns, such as harassment during travel to school or within educational institutions, further discourage families from sending daughters to class, particularly in rural or conflict-affected areas. Additionally, gender stereotypes discourage girls from pursuing certain subjects; for example, women represent only 35% of students enrolled in STEM programs globally, limiting their future employment and leadership opportunities.

4.2 Institutional Barriers

Institutional barriers are systemic challenges embedded within governments, organizations, and public services that significantly limit opportunities for young women and girls. One key issue is limited representation: globally, women hold only 26.7% of parliamentary seats, and young women are even less represented in local governance and leadership positions. This underrepresentation means that policies often fail to reflect the needs of girls, from access to education and healthcare to safe workplaces and social protections. Biased systems further reinforce inequality. For example, school curricula in many countries continue to reflect gender stereotypes, portraying women in domestic roles and men in professional or leadership positions.



In the labor market, women often face hiring discrimination, pay gaps, and barriers to career advancement; globally, women earn on average 20% less than men for similar work, and youth women are disproportionately represented in informal employment without social protections. Policies and practices within institutions may also fail to protect young women from harassment or discrimination, contributing to high dropout rates in education and limited workforce participation.

Institutional barriers are compounded by intersecting disadvantages, such as disability, rural residence, or socio-economic status. Addressing these challenges requires systemic reforms, including gender-inclusive policymaking, representation of young women in decision-making processes, and the development of targeted services that meet their specific needs. Without addressing these institutional obstacles, efforts to achieve equal opportunities for young women and girls will remain incomplete, as systemic inequalities continue to reproduce cycles of disadvantage.

4.3 Economical Barriers

Economic barriers are among the most significant obstacles preventing young women and girls from accessing equal opportunities.



Poverty limits families' ability to invest in girls' education, training, or extracurricular activities, often forcing them to prioritize boys when resources are scarce. Globally, over 130 million girls are out of school, many from low-income households, illustrating how economic constraints intersect with gender to limit access to education. Unpaid care work further exacerbates inequality: girls and young women spend disproportionately more time on household responsibilities, including cooking, cleaning, and caring for siblings or elderly relatives. According to UN Women, in low- and middle-income countries, girls spend up to three times more hours per day on unpaid domestic work than boys, reducing the time available for schooling, skill development, or paid employment.

5. Key Determinants of Youth Inequality

Youth inequality is shaped by a combination of individual, structural, and systemic determinants that interact to create persistent disparities, particularly for young women and girls. At the individual level, factors such as socio-economic background, health, and educational attainment significantly influence a young person's opportunities. For instance, girls from low-income households are more likely to drop out of school or take on unpaid domestic work, limiting their long-term prospects. Personal circumstances, such as disability or minority status, can further exacerbate these disadvantages.



At the structural level, access to essential services and resources—such as quality education, safe transportation, healthcare, and employment opportunities—plays a crucial role. Gaps in these systems, including poorly resourced schools, gender-biased curricula, and limited vocational training programs, disproportionately affect young women and marginalized youth. Labor markets that favor informal or low-paid work, or that lack protections against discrimination, also contribute to inequality. For example, globally, young women face unemployment rates higher than their male peers and are more likely to work in insecure, informal jobs without social protections.

Finally, systemic determinants encompass the legal, cultural, and institutional frameworks that reinforce inequality. Gender norms, discriminatory laws, and exclusionary policies limit young women's participation in decision-making, leadership, and public life. Cultural expectations around marriage, caregiving, or traditional roles can restrict autonomy, while institutional biases within education, governance, and workplaces maintain structural disadvantages over time. Understanding these interconnected determinants highlights that youth inequality is not the result of a single factor but a web of barriers operating across multiple levels. Addressing these requires a holistic, gender-responsive approach that tackles personal, structural, and systemic challenges simultaneously, ensuring that young people, especially girls, can access education, employment, and leadership opportunities on an equal footing with their peers.



6. Strategies for Gender-Responsive Youth Empowerment

6.1 Economic Empowerment and Financial Inclusion

Economic empowerment and financial inclusion are vital for enabling young women and girls to transform their potential into real opportunities, whether in education, employment, entrepreneurship, or leadership roles. Globally, girls and young women face disproportionate economic barriers that start early. For example, young women make up the majority of the world's 628 million unemployed youth who lack both education and vocational training, and young men are almost 1.5 times more likely to be employed than young women, a gap that reflects deep structural inequality in labour markets. Positive examples illustrate how targeted interventions can help bridge these gaps. Financial literacy programs aimed at youth and women, such as community savings groups, mentoring on budgeting and entrepreneurship, and digital financial education, equip girls with skills that boost confidence and economic agency. In some regions, microfinance initiatives specifically tailored to women have enabled young women to launch small businesses and increase household income, which in turn improves school retention and health outcomes for entire families.

Promoting financial inclusion for girls is not only a matter of economic justice but also a strategic investment in development.



When young women have equitable access to jobs, banking services, credit, and entrepreneurial opportunities, they contribute to stronger local economies, more resilient families, and more inclusive societies. Empowering girls financially helps break intergenerational cycles of poverty, enhances decision-making autonomy, and creates pathways to leadership and innovation that benefit communities and nations alike.

6.2 **Political Participation and Leadership**

Political participation and leadership are essential components of gender-responsive youth empowerment because they ensure that young women's voices, perspectives, and priorities are represented in decision-making processes at all levels, from school governance and local councils to national parliaments and international bodies. Barriers to political participation begin early and are reinforced by social norms that label leadership as "masculine" or unsuitable for girls. Additionally, young women frequently lack access to political networks, mentorship, and resources that would enable them to run for office, engage in advocacy, or participate in youth councils and commissions. These gaps limit not only individual ambitions but also broader community development, as inclusive decision-making leads to more equitable and representative policies.

Examples of progress show how targeted efforts can create pathways for young women's leadership.



Youth parliaments, gender-focused leadership training, and mentorship programs in countries such as Rwanda and Sweden have helped young women gain confidence, build political skills, and compete for elected positions. In several local contexts, quotas for women's representation have increased female participation in municipal councils, creating spaces where young women can influence local policy priorities directly. Similarly, youth advisory councils attached to national governments and international institutions offer platforms for young women to voice their perspectives on issues ranging from climate policy to labor rights.

Encouraging young women's political participation not only promotes gender equality but also strengthens democratic processes and societal resilience. When decision-making tables include diverse voices, policies are more reflective of the needs of entire populations and better equipped to address systemic inequalities. Investing in young women's leadership, through education, mentorship, safe participatory spaces, and supportive legal frameworks, empowers a generation of change-makers who can advocate for inclusive development, human rights, and social justice.

6.3 Educational Development

Educational development plays a central role in enabling young women and girls to break cycles of inequality and achieve economic, social and political empowerment.



Access to quality education equips girls with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to pursue careers, engage in civic life, and challenge discriminatory norms in their communities. However, despite progress in global enrollment rates, significant gaps remain: while basic primary enrollment has improved in many regions, girls are still more likely than boys to be out of school, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels.

Efforts to promote educational development for young women and girls have demonstrated that targeted interventions can create meaningful change. Initiatives that provide gender-sensitive teacher training, safe transportation, and improved school infrastructure help foster environments where girls feel supported and motivated. Community campaigns that promote the value of girls' education, as seen in parts of South Asia and West Africa, have helped shift social attitudes and increase enrollment. Additionally, programs focused on secondary and tertiary education, such as STEM scholarships for girls, expand opportunities in fields traditionally dominated by men and lay the foundation for future economic participation and leadership roles.

Educational development is not only about access; it also means ensuring that learning is relevant, inclusive, and empowering. Curricula that challenge gender stereotypes, incorporate life skills education, and promote critical thinking help girls envision broader possibilities for their futures.



When education systems are designed to meet the needs of all learners, especially girls who have been historically marginalized, societies benefit through increased gender equality, improved economic growth, and stronger communities capable of addressing future challenges.

6.4 **Digital Inclusion and Innovation**

Digital inclusion and innovation are increasingly critical for ensuring that young women and girls can fully participate in the 21st-century economy, society, and public life. As digital technologies transform education, work, communication, and access to services, unequal access to these tools can deepen existing gender disparities. Globally, women are 23% less likely than men to have access to mobile internet, and the gap is even wider for young women in rural areas and low-income countries. Without reliable access to the internet, devices, and digital literacy training, girls are less able to benefit from online learning opportunities, pursue digital careers, access financial services, or engage in innovation ecosystems. This digital divide reinforces patterns of exclusion, hindering girls' educational outcomes, earning potential, and empowerment. Structural barriers such as cost, cultural norms, safety concerns, and lack of infrastructure disproportionately affect young women's ability to access and use digital tools. In many communities, families may prioritize boys' use of technology, viewing it as more "appropriate" for male education or work, while girls are discouraged from engaging with online platforms.



Safety and privacy concerns, such as online harassment or gender-based abuse, also deter girls from participating in digital spaces. Even where infrastructure exists, digital learning platforms and curricula may not be designed with gender inclusivity in mind, limiting their effectiveness for female learners. As a result, girls can be left behind in critical areas such as coding, data science, e-commerce, and digital entrepreneurship.

Despite these challenges, targeted initiatives demonstrate how digital inclusion can expand opportunities for young women and girls. Programs that provide subsidized devices, affordable connectivity, and gender-responsive digital literacy training help bridge the gap.

For example, community technology hubs that offer safe, mentored environments for girls to learn coding and digital skills have gained traction in regions like East Africa and South Asia. Partnerships between governments, NGOs, and private tech companies have launched mobile learning applications that deliver educational content in local languages, enabling girls to continue schooling even where traditional classrooms are inaccessible. Similarly, digital platforms that connect young women to remote work opportunities have allowed many to engage in freelancing, online entrepreneurship, and global labor markets, increasing economic independence and resilience. Digital inclusion not only enhances girls' access to information and opportunities but also empowers them to become creators and innovators rather than merely consumers of technology.



When girls are equipped with digital skills and supportive learning environments, they are better positioned to pursue careers in technology, lead digital startups, participate in civic tech movements, and contribute to solutions that serve their communities. Investing in gender-responsive digital inclusion and innovation is therefore not just a technological imperative but a strategic pathway toward more equitable, resilient, and prosperous societies.



7. Previous Actions and Frameworks

7.1 Girls' Empowerment Principles (GEPs)

The Girls' Empowerment Principles (GEPs) are a set of guidelines developed by UN Women in partnership with the UN Global Compact to help organizations, governments, and civil society promote the rights, safety, and opportunities of girls and young women. The GEPs provide practical guidance on creating gender-responsive policies and programs that address the specific barriers girls face, including discrimination, social norms, limited access to education, and economic exclusion.



They focus on key areas such as eliminating harmful stereotypes, ensuring access to quality education and skill-building, providing safe and supportive learning and work environments, and fostering leadership opportunities for girls. By following these principles, institutions can design strategies that not only protect girls' rights but also empower them to participate fully in economic, social, and civic life. For example, companies implementing GEPs may establish mentorship programs for young women, provide scholarships or training in STEM fields, and develop policies to prevent harassment, thereby creating tangible opportunities for girls to thrive and achieve long-term economic and social empowerment.

7.2 Sustainable Development Goals

SDG 5: Gender Equality in the Context of Advancing Opportunities for Young Women and Girls

Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, making it directly relevant to the agenda item on advancing gender-responsive youth empowerment and eliminating structural barriers. This goal recognizes that young women and girls face specific social, economic, cultural, and institutional obstacles that limit their access to education, employment, leadership, and decision-making.



Targets under SDG 5, such as ending discrimination and harmful practices (including child marriage and gender-based violence), ensuring equal participation in political and economic life, and providing equal access to education and technology, align closely with efforts to remove barriers that prevent girls from reaching their full potential.



For example, initiatives promoting girls' education, leadership programs, financial literacy, and digital inclusion are concrete ways SDG 5 is operationalized. According to UN Women, achieving gender equality and empowering girls is not only a human rights issue but also a strategic investment: societies with higher levels of female education and economic participation experience stronger economic growth, improved health outcomes, and more inclusive governance. In this agenda, SDG 5 serves as a framework to guide policies and programs that target structural, social, and economic barriers, ensuring that young women and girls can access education, participate in leadership, enter the workforce on equal terms, and innovate in digital and technological fields. By implementing SDG 5-focused strategies, UN Women and Member States aim to create environments where no girl is left behind, supporting the broader Sustainable Development Agenda.



7.3 Collaborations Across UN Bodies

Partnerships between UN Women and other United Nations agencies are critical for advancing gender-responsive youth empowerment and addressing the complex barriers that young women and girls face. By collaborating, these agencies combine expertise, resources, and networks to create more comprehensive programs that tackle educational, economic, social, and institutional inequalities simultaneously. For example, UNICEF and UN Women work together to improve girls' access to quality education, protect them from child marriage, and provide health and psychosocial support in humanitarian and low-income settings. Through joint programs, girls are not only able to remain in school but also gain life skills, mentorship, and safe learning environments.

Similarly, UN Women collaborates with UNESCO to promote inclusive education and expand opportunities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. These partnerships focus on both increasing enrollment and ensuring curricula are gender-sensitive, challenging stereotypes, and fostering confidence among young women in non-traditional fields. The International Labour Organization (ILO) works with UN Women to develop youth-targeted employment programs, vocational training, and entrepreneurship initiatives, helping young women access decent work and build financial independence.



Public-private collaborations facilitated by UN agencies further amplify impact, for instance by providing digital literacy programs, technology hubs, or mentorship networks that connect young women to global opportunities. These coordinated efforts demonstrate that gender equality and youth empowerment cannot be achieved in isolation; cross-agency collaboration strengthens the capacity to remove structural barriers, implement policies effectively, and scale initiatives that support young women and girls across multiple sectors. Through these partnerships, the UN system works to ensure that young women are empowered to contribute meaningfully to their communities, economies, and societies at large.



8. Questions to Consider

1. How can harmful gender norms and stereotypes be effectively challenged at the community level to ensure girls remain in school and pursue diverse career paths?
2. What mechanisms can increase young women's representation in political and leadership roles at local, national, and international levels?
3. How can institutions such as schools, workplaces, and government agencies, implement gender-responsive systems to eliminate discrimination and ensure safe, inclusive environments for young women?
4. How can we make sure girls have equal access to computers, the internet, and digital learning opportunities?
5. What role should technology play in bridging gaps in access to quality education for young women and girls?
6. How can digital literacy programs be designed to address the specific barriers girls face, such as safety, affordability, and cultural norms?
7. How can communities effectively challenge harmful gender norms and practices?
8. How can countries share best practices and lessons learned to scale successful programs for girls globally?



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