

'Concerted effort' must be made to help 600 million-plus adolescent girls realize full potential: UN chief

There are “multiple barriers” including “systemic discrimination” bias and lack of training, which are keeping the largest generation of girls in human history from reaching their full potential, said UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in a [statement](#) on Thursday, marking [International Day of the Girl Child](#).

Noting that “far too often, girls are not given the space and opportunities they need to achieve their full potential,” he said that today, 600 million adolescent girls are preparing to enter a workforce, “transformed by innovation and automation”, in which female college graduates and workers are outnumbered.

Women make up less than 30 percent of graduates in information and technology and occupy less than 30 percent of research and development jobs globally.

Let us recommit to supporting every girl to develop her skills, enter the workforce on equal terms and reach her full potential –
UN chief Guterres

“Negative gender stereotypes related to girls’ education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics begin as early as primary school, and have the devastating effect of making them doubt their own potential.”

He underscored the importance of equipping youth with skills transferable for lifelong success, noting that abilities such as critical thinking, creativity, and digital awareness will shine through in a changing workforce.

Highlighting the value of a support system, he said that having role models in fields where the presence of women is sparse, is key, and referenced the recent launch of [Youth2030](#) in September 2018, a strategy aimed at understanding youth needs, and supporting them in materializing their ideas.

The Secretary-General added, “let us recommit to supporting every girl to develop her skills, enter the workforce on equal terms and reach her full potential.”

The Executive Director of the [UN Population Fund](#) (UNFPA) Natalia Kanem, said to mark the day, that too many girls face roadblocks on their journey to adulthood.

“Child marriage and adolescent pregnancy force millions of girls to drop out of school. Harmful laws and social norms curtail girls’ knowledge of and

autonomy over their own bodies,” she said, adding that “entrenched gender discrimination can lay the foundation for a lifetime of missed opportunities.”

Let’s invest in their health and education, their skills and their leadership, and then let’s get out of their way and let them lead –
UNFPA’s Natalia Kanem

She said that to allow girls to compete fairly, “countries need to ensure each young person entering the labour market has the skills and knowledge needed to help businesses thrive and nations prosper. That means investing now in a skilled girl force that can become a new force for innovation and leadership.”

She said millions of adolescent girls were “waiting to claim their power and fulfil their potential. Let’s help them exercise their rights and realize their aspirations. Let’s invest in their health and education, their skills and their leadership, and then let’s get out of their way and let them lead!”

Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of the [UN Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization](#), [UNESCO](#), said that “girls’ education must be one of our priorities, because to a great extent the peace and prosperity of our world depend upon it.”

“A collective consciousness is rising to ensure that the right to quality education for all girls becomes a reality”, she added.