

Investing in Girls and Women: The Power of Global Citizenship

Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan April 2025 White Paper



Abstract

Women and girls advance social, political, environmental, and economic progress worldwide. This is supported by decades of research, showing when women are more involved in global diplomacy, the economy and social systems are stronger and more sustainable. Despite this well-documented positive influence, women and girls face systemic barriers that limit their opportunities to fully participate as global citizens. Educational disparities, economic inequality, legal restrictions, and gender-based violence disproportionately affect them, preventing girls from developing the skills and resources to lead, and preventing women from realizing their full potential on the global stage.

Investing in girls' leadership, advocacy training, and education not only benefits girls and women in their personal development but also results in a more just and successful world. Despite the potential benefits provided by this type of giving, philanthropy dedicated to opportunities that provide girls and women with the skills, networks, and opportunities to engage in global leadership remains significantly lower than other areas of giving. In 2021, organizations specifically focusing their efforts on women and girls received only 1.9% of overall philanthropic giving. Funding for girls' and women's advocacy, education, and civic engagement made up less than 0.5% of all donations. This gap limits girls' access to leadership training, civic engagement programs, and international advocacy opportunities.

Philanthropy can remove financial barriers and create opportunities to develop girls into global citizens. Increasing philanthropy in these areas can provide young women with the knowledge, confidence, and tools they need to shape their communities and the world. Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan's (GSSEM) participation in the United Nations Working Group on Girls and the Commission on the Status of Women demonstrates how early investments in leadership training can allow girls to contribute to global policy discussions.

If we prioritize funding programs for girls' leadership and advocacy development, we can build a future where women and girls have the ability to engage as global citizens.

The Importance of Global Citizenship for Girls and Women

Women and girls' involvement in social, political, environmental, and economic actions brings an overwhelming positive effect on economic and social prosperity within the United States and abroad. Studies show that when women participate in peace negotiations, the agreements are more likely to be implemented and sustained. For example, a 2018 study found that when women were signatories on a peace agreement there was a 70% probability of no new fighting within 20 years, while agreements with no women signing only resulted in a 25% probability of continued peace over a 20-year period.¹

International Monetary Fund (IMF) studies have reported significant macroeconomic gains when women's participation in the labor market increases.² While global economic growth was predicted to languish at about 3% between 2023-2028, IMF estimated that increasing women's involvement in the global workforce by about 6% could boost the size of the economy by almost 8%.³

Women involved in the workforce do not just have a positive economic impact but also benefit the greater good in their corporate roles. Women on corporate boards tend to prioritize environmental and social governance issues, seeing the important link between their company's impact on the world, people around the world, and their business strategy.⁴ In addition, companies with at least 30% female board representation show increased innovation in climate governance and environmental innovation.⁵

Despite the supported positive impact their contributions have, women and girls worldwide face significant systemic barriers that prevent them from participating as global citizens. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by educational disparities, economic inequality, legal and policy restrictions, and gender-based violence. As discussed in GSSEM's March 2024 White Paper From Girlhood to Leadership, in the United States alone, women are significantly underrepresented in both the business sector and the government.⁶

Worldwide 10.3% of women live in extreme poverty and are more significantly affected by food insecurity than men.⁷ Women continue to hold less than 25% of science, engineering, and information technology jobs internationally⁸, and less than one-third of researchers are women.⁹ Each of these barriers that girls and women face on a daily limits their ability to contribute as "global minded individuals on a worldwide scale."¹⁰

Investing in girls' leadership, advocacy, and education is not only an issue of justice, but an important strategic move for global progress. With the inclusion of more women and girls in global decision-making, the world sees strong economies, stronger communities, and more sustainable peace.

Investment in the future of girls and women

Although evidence strongly supports that women and girls strongly benefit global society, philanthropic giving to organizations that give them the tools to participate remains disproportionately low. Women and girls' organization received only 1.9% of overall charitable donations in 2021, a figure that includes funding for all women-specific organizations regardless of specific focus.¹¹ More specifically, philanthropic giving for women's and girls' education, civil rights and advocacy, and equality and employment only made up .42% philanthropic giving in 2021.¹² This funding gap limits opportunities for girls to access global leadership programs, civic engagement initiatives, and advocacy training.

Philanthropy plays an important role in removing financial barriers and creating opportunities for girls to practice global citizenship. Investment strategies to allow for these opportunities could include:

- **Scholarships for international leadership and advocacy experiences**
 - For example, a \$10,000 grant from the Skillman Foundation made it possible for four GSSEM Girl Scouts to attend the sixty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York in March 2025
- **Funding for global citizenship education and civic engagement**
 - Grants to local youth-serving organizations support educational programs that integrate global perspectives, human rights education, and leadership training for girls
- **Connecting local and global programs**
 - Investing in Southeastern Michigan Girl Scouts' Gold Award projects can provide Girl Scouts with the resources and mentorship to address global issues through local action
 - Supporting programs and partnerships like the GSSEM Girl Advisory Board and GSUSA's involvement in the Working Group on Girls (see below) can teach girls about policymaking, human rights, and community organizing

When funders focus their investments on programs supporting girls and women, they reduce the impact of systemic barriers to global citizenship and support equality in global leadership.

GSSEM's role in building global citizenship

Girl Scouts has a long history of empowering girls and young women in leadership, civic engagement, and advocacy. GSSEM's participation in the United Nations Working Group on Girls (WGG) and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69) provided a unique opportunity for GSSEM Girl Scouts to engage directly in international discussions on gender equity, human rights, and youth leadership.

In fall 2024 four Girl Scouts were selected to participate in the Beijing+30 WGG, joining 12 other delegates from other Girl Scout Councils around the United States. The 16 Girl Scout youth representatives participated in months of biweekly meetings studying the UN's landmark framework for gender equality, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. During this time participants learned about sustainable development goals, global trends, and advocacy strategies. Select participants from GSSEM also assisted in drafting the "Girl Statement" to CSW69, ensuring youth perspectives were included in global discussions on gender equity. This work culminated in the participants' attendance at CSW69 at the United Nations in New York, which was enabled by the Skillman Foundation grant in early 2025.

GSSEM Girl Scout participants reported that they gained confidence in advocating for issues on a global level, understanding and discussing international policies, and even leading initiatives in their own community. CSW69 and the experiences leading up to it exposed participants not only to knowledge about policies and the global landscape but gave them the opportunity to collaborate with people across generations, cultures, and experiences. Girl Scouts learned that driving change is not something reserved for adult professionals in explicit policymaking spaces, but is something they can do through dialogue, interpersonal connection, and collective action.

After attending CSW69, some Girl Scouts used their experience to shape their approach to their Gold Award, girl-led initiatives that address important community issues with sustainable, lasting solutions. Experience in this advocacy

space gave participants ideas for how to incorporate advocacy into their ongoing projects, using their experience with the UN WGG to lead change in their own communities.

Participants in the UN WGG and CSW69 developed important skills to support their global citizenship and are already implementing them to lead in their own communities. With the support of funders, GSSEM can continue to support girls in Southeastern Michigan, providing unique opportunities for them to develop the skills, confidence, and networks they will need to continue local and global change work.

Conclusion/Call to Action

Girls and women are integral to solving problems around the world, and it is imperative that we give them the tools to do so. Studies overwhelmingly show the economic, social, and political benefits that women have, but they are too often prevented from participating as leaders because of systemic inequality. Funding for programs in the United States that help girls overcome these programs is significantly outpaced by other areas of giving. If we want to build an equitable and sustainable future, we must invest in young women's leadership today.

Opportunities like GSSEM's participation in the WGG and the CSW69 provide girls with firsthand experience in international advocacy, diplomacy, and policymaking. Young women attending the CSW developed confidence and skills that will allow them to significantly impact their communities and the world. But the reality is that access to these experiences often depends on financial resources that remain scarce for programs dedicated to girls' leadership development.

Philanthropy dedicated to girls and women is a powerful tool that removes financial barrier to opportunities that enable them to be global leaders. Financial investments in scholarships for international advocacy experiences, education, leadership, and advocacy projects such as the Girl Scout Gold Award, allow young women to see the impact their actions have on their community, and encourages them to advocate on a global scale.

Investing in women and girls clearly creates stronger communities, more resilient economies, and a more just and equitable world. Let's ensure that girls have every opportunity to support their development in courage, confidence, and character so they can make the world a better place.

¹Krause, J., Krause, W., & Bränfors, P. (2018). Women's participation in peace negotiations and the durability of peace. *International Interactions*, 44(6), 985–1016. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2018.1492386>

²Lagarde, C. (2016, September 14). *To boost growth: Employ more women*. International Monetary Fund. <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2016/09/14/to-boost-growth-employ-more-women>

³European Investment Bank. (n.d.). *The economic power of gender equality*. European Investment Bank. Retrieved March 18, 2025, from <https://www.eib.org/en/stories/gender-equality-power>

⁴PricewaterhouseCoopers. (2020). PwC's 2020 annual corporate directors survey. PwC. <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/services/governance-insights-center/assets/pwc-2020-annual-corporate-directors-survey.pdf>

⁵The Sasakawa Peace Foundation & BloombergNEF. (2020). *Gender diversity and climate innovation*. Bloomberg Finance L.P. https://assets.bbhub.io/professional/sites/24/BNEF-Sasakawa-Peace-Foundation-Gender-Diversity-and-Climate-Innovation_12012020_FINAL.pdf

⁶Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan. (2024). *From girlhood to leadership: Transformative pathways to equality and inclusion* [White paper].

⁷United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, & United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division. (2023). *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2023*. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2023-en.pdf>

⁸United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, & United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division. (2023). *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2023*. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2023-en.pdf>

⁹UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (n.d.). *UIS Data Browser: Female researchers as a percentage of total researchers*. Retrieved March 13, 2025, from https://databrowser.uis.unesco.org/view#indicatorPaths=UIS-ScienceOPRI%3A0%3AFRESPTH&geoMode=regions&geoUnits=SDG%3A+Central+and+Southern+Asia%2CSDG%3A+Eastern+and+South-Eastern+Asia%2CSDG%3A+Europe+and+Northern+America%2CSDG%3A+Latin+America+and+the+Caribbean%2CSDG%3A+Northern+Africa+and+Western+Asia%2CSDG%3A+World%2CSDG%3A+Sub-Saharan+Africa&browsePath=SCIENCE_TECHNOLOGY_INNOVATION%2FUIS-ScienceOPRI%2Ffem-res%2Fper-fem-res&timeMode=range&view=table&chartMode=multiple&tableIndicatorId=FRESPTH&chartHighlightSeries=&chartHighlightEnabled=true

¹⁰United Nations. *Global citizenship*. United Nations Academic Impact. Retrieved March 13, 2025, from <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/global-citizenship>

¹¹Women's Philanthropy Institute. (2024). *Women & Girls Index 2024: Research brief*. Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. <https://equitablegivinglab.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/WPI-Women-and-Girls-Index-2024-Research-Brief-Final.pdf>

¹²Women's Philanthropy Institute. (2024).