



Item 7: Interventions

Education for Gender Equality: a powerful tool for transformation

**UNECE Regional Review Meeting
29 October 2019**

Thank you chair.

My name is Madeleine Kennedy-Macfoy and I work for Education International, the global federation of teachers' trade unions and organisations. I am here with the other Global Union Federations, and today I'm speaking on behalf of Women's Major Group.

As we heard from UN Assistant Secretary General Asa Regner this morning, there has been considerable progress towards achieving gender equality in education since the adoption of BPfA. However, we still face a number of critical barriers to universal, full enjoyment of the right to education.

Students and education staff commonly face discrimination and violence on the basis of real or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression in educational settings, particularly targeted at trans and gender non-conforming youth. The resulting forms of harassment and bullying, including cyber bullying, contribute unsafe environments for teachers and learners alike. Among students, this leads to higher absenteeism and negative impacts on school performance, with a disproportionate rate of school drop-out among trans youth, and adverse effects on mental and physical well-being.

Despite girls outperforming boys in education at all levels in most countries in the region, women still have worse employment and learning outcomes than men. This is due in part to the fact that women are less likely to undertake and graduate tertiary level education in high-paying fields, including STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines. Only 6% of women complete a degree in engineering, compared to 25% of men.

Within the teaching profession, the majority of early childhood educators are women, but fewer than one in two tertiary level educators are women. And when it comes to leadership, the data shows that gender inequality also persists in OECD countries: there are more male headteachers than females, and only 18% of full professors in Europe are female.

We suggest the following two recommendations to address the most critical aspects within education and training for women and girls in the region:

The first recommendation is to ensure free quality education that is accessible to all from early childhood to further, higher, technical and vocational education, within well-resourced educational settings staffed by well-trained and supported educators by:

- Increasing and sustaining Government investment in quality public education including through progressive domestic taxation;
- Establishing mentoring programmes for educators and learners alike;
- Ensuring improved water, health and sanitation (WASH) facilities that are gender-friendly and transport facilities to ensure students can get to and from school, especially in rural areas and for disabled students;
- Adopting measures to ensure no girls are left behind, including measures to re-integrate young mothers back into education and to address other barriers preventing girls from going to school, such as gender-based violence, poverty, disability and other intersecting forms of discrimination including those based on race, ethnicity, Indigeneity, sexual orientation or gender identity;
- Sustaining women's and girls' education during emergencies such as armed conflict, refugee crises, natural disasters and the climate emergency.

The second recommendation is to broaden the educational paradigm to include a focus on global citizenship education that is inclusive of peace and reconciliation, human rights, trauma- informed education, and community development processes by:

- Establishing and sustaining mentoring programmes that include professionally supported opportunities for girls and young women to receive guidance and support to make non-traditional choices in education (including STEM subjects) and for subsequent labour market choices;
- Promoting peer-to-peer learning within formal education, and lifelong learning opportunities for all women;
- Including a focus within curricula on global citizenship education that is inclusive of peace and reconciliation, human rights, trauma- informed education, and community development processes; and

- Ensuring teachers are trained to challenge gender inequality in and through education, including gender stereotypes in educational materials.

I thank you for your attention.

INTERVENTION 2

Thank you chair,

My name is Kate van de Krol and I work for Rutgers, the Dutch Centre of Expertise on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. Today I'm speaking on behalf of the Women's Major Group.

This session is called: "Education for Gender Equality: a powerful tool for transformation". Because of this, I want to take this time to talk about the transformational impact of comprehensive sexuality education.

As a young person myself I did not receive sufficient information about my own body, sexuality and healthy relationships. I don't want other young people to have the same restrictions namely that questions about the physical and emotional aspects of growing up remain unanswered. We need CSE to help transform our societies into ones that are gender just and violence free.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education is integral to young people's ability to exercise the full scope of our human rights and our ability to protect ourselves from violence. Evidence shows that CSE is five times more likely to be successful in preventing unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, when it pays explicit attention to the topics of gender and power. However, unfortunately, to this day, many countries throughout the region fail in their obligation to provide evidence-based, comprehensive and youth-friendly information and education on sexual and reproductive health and rights to young people (in and out of school).

To be fully effective, CSE programs must be inclusive of the diversity of sexual orientations, gender identities- and expressions, and sex characteristics: information which helps to build safer school environments, combat stigma, and equip all youth, including those who are gender non-conforming, with skills to have happy and healthy lives.

Mandatory CSE must include: a positive approach to sexuality and reproduction, information to make well-informed choices in our relationships and our own self-determined sexual lives, including factual information about safe abortion.

In closing, I would like to pose a question to everyone in this room (pause) - how can we achieve Generation Equality when generation after generation are denied comprehensive sexuality education and therefore their rights to bodily integrity and autonomy?

Thank you.