Empowering girls through education in the EU

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The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted an own-initiative report by Liliana RODRIGUES (S&D, PT) on empowering girls through education in the EU.

Members made a series of **general recommendations** aiming to improve measures to apply gender equality at all levels of the education system.

Overall, Members called on educational policymakers in the Commission and the Member States to ensure that the **commitment to gender equality goes beyond declarations of principles and political intentions**, and is manifested in substantial increases in the efforts and resources invested in it, recalling the primary importance of education in effecting cultural change.

They called on Member States to increase essential investment in education in order that everyone may benefit from free public education of high quality. In particular, they called on them to ensure that their education authorities guarantee an equal right to education for women and men by actively incorporating the principle of equal treatment into educational goals and actions, thus preventing the emergence of inequalities between women and men as a result of sexist conduct and associated social stereotyping.

The Commission is urged to ensure that this recommendation be put to the national institutions responsible for implementing central, regional and local education policies, school management bodies and regional and local authorities.

Fighting stereotypes: specific measures are called for in this regard such as: (i) increasing the presence of women both in vocational education and in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics)-related sectors; (ii) encouraging teachers to guide girls towards these subjects.

Members urged the Commission to initiate as soon as possible the procedure for EU accession to the Istanbul Convention. They underlined the close links between gender stereotypes and bullying, cyberbullying and violence against women, and the need to fight these from an early age. In this context, Members stressed that the Istanbul Convention calls for signatories to include teaching materials on issues such as non-stereotyped gender roles and mutual respect, adapted to the evolving capacity of learners, in formal curricula and at all levels of education.

Improve the quality of education: Members called on the Member States to ensure equal access to education for girls and boys, regardless of their age, gender, socio-economic status, cultural background or religion, and emphasises the need for European, national, and local institutions to promote specific programmes to integrate marginalised communities. They also called for support to ensure that migrant women and their families can be taught the language of their host country in locally based, free public education services.

As regards Roma women, the Member States are called upon to develop specific programmes to ensure that **Roma girls and young women remain in primary, secondary and higher education**, and also to put in place special measures for teenage mothers and early school leaver girls.

Curriculum and training: Members insisted on paying proper attention to gender equality in all its forms, in curricula. They considered that gender equality in education should explicitly address the principle of equality and must include a range of issues, such as literacy, bullying, violence, hate speech, human rights and civic education.

The report stressed that schools should help to develop an **intercultural approach to education**, in contrast to one geared to assimilation or multiculturalism, in order to promote openness, mutual respect and intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

Measures are called for to promote gender equality in their comprehensive sex and relationship education programmes, including teaching girls and boys about relationships based on consent, respect and reciprocity. Sensitive, age-appropriate, and scientifically accurate sex and relationship education is an essential tool in the empowerment of girls and boys.

The implementation of sex and relationship education in curricular programmes aimed at empowering girls through awareness and control over their own bodies is called for.

Members urged the Commission to support the **inclusion of objective information on LGBTI issues** in school curricula.

Further measures are called for in order to:

- promote women in the fields of culture and the production and dissemination of artistic and intellectual works;
- improve education in rural areas, marginalised communities, and those with special needs;
- improve training and entrepreneurship.

Member States should ensure the elimination of stereotypes and sexist distortions that textbooks and teaching materials may include.

Teachers should be aware of the impact of gender roles and stereotypes on their students' self-confidence and their subject choices during their studies.

Fight against violence: convinced of the transformative potential of education in championing gender equality, Members recognised that formal and informal education programmes must address and fight against gender-based violence, gender discrimination, harassment, homophobia and transphobia in all their forms, including forms of cyberbullying or online harassment.

As regards childcare, Members called on the Member States to engage in initiatives that reduce direct and indirect educational costs and to increase the capacity of all nurseries and creches, pre-school, school and after-school networks, in due respect of the principles of inclusion for children living in poverty or at risk of poverty.

They stressed that any strategy for promoting gender equality and for the empowerment of girls and women must actively involve and engage boys and men.

Investment, monitoring and evaluation: Members noted the need for monitoring and evaluation by independent bodies of the progress made as a result of the adoption of gender equality policies in educational institutions.

They called on the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) to continue its work on putting together comparable gender-disaggregated data and scoreboards in all policy areas, including in the field of education, and reiterates the importance of conducting impact studies for educational policies to address gender inequalities.

Lastly, according to Members, it is of **fundamental importance to assess the impact of future education legislation on gender equality** and, where necessary, to revise existing laws in accordance with this principle.

To conclude, Members suggested the creation of an **Annual European Award for Gender Equality** for educational institutions which have excelled in attaining this objective, and encourages Member States to do the same at national level.