Empowering girls through education in the EU

2014/2250(INI) - 09/09/2015 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 408 votes to 236 with 40 abstentions, a resolution on empowering girls through education in the EU.

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

Parliament began by calling on Member States to implement and improve measures to apply gender equality at all levels of the education system, and to fully integrate improving awareness of gender issues into teacher training, and into training for all categories of school professionals.

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

It called on Member States to increase essential investment in education in order that everyone might benefit from free public education of high quality. In particular, it 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 was 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 were 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. Parliament also urged the Commission to initiate as soon as possible the procedure for EU accession to the Istanbul Convention. It underlined the close links between gender stereotypes and bullying, cyber bullying and violence against women, and the need to fight these from an early age. In this context, Members stressed that the Istanbul Convention called 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: Parliament called on 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 emphasised the need for European, national, and local institutions to promote specific programmes to integrate marginalised communities. It called on Member States to provide the active support necessary to ensure that migrant women and their families could be **taught the language of their host country** in locally based, free public education services.

As regards Roma women, Member States were called upon to develop specific programmes to ensure that Roma girls and young women remained 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: Parliament insisted on paying proper attention to gender equality in all its forms, in curricula. It 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.

It stressed that schools should help to develop an **intercultural approach to education**, in order to promote openness, mutual respect and intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

Measures were 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 was 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 was called for. Parliament encouraged Member States to consider making age-appropriate comprehensive sex and relationship education compulsory in their school curricula for **all primary and secondary school children.**

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 in their content, language or illustrations.

Parliament also stressed the need to integrate the study and application of the principle of equality between women and men into both initial and ongoing training of teachers, in order to remove any obstacles to realising students' full potential, irrespective of gender.

Fight against violence: convinced of the transformative potential of education in championing gender equality, Parliament 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, Parliament 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.

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

Recognition of diplomas: Members called on the EU institutions and Member States to make progress on the mutual recognition of diplomas, certificates and other evidence of vocational qualifications issued in

the various Member States, and on coordinating and harmonising national rules on access to various professions, so that emigrant women from within or outside the Union could get jobs appropriate to their training and qualifications.

Investment, monitoring and evaluation: Parliament 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.

Parliament felt that it was 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 **Annual European Award for Gender Equality** for educational institutions that had excelled in attaining this objective, and encourages Member States to do the same at national level.

It should be noted that an alternative motion for a resolution tabled by the ENF group was rejected by Parliament.