

RECOMMENDATION 1281 (1995)¹ on gender equality in education Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Assembly believes that education for all girls and boys is a fundamental human right, regardless of gender, race, ethnic origin, family background or personal wealth.

2. In line with its Recommendation 1229 (1994) on equality of rights between men and women, the Assembly asserts the importance of gender equality in education and believes that it should be guaranteed by the educational systems of all States Party to the European Cultural Convention.

3. It acknowledges the action already initiated by the Council of Europe on gender equality and in particular by the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education (11th session in 1979 and 14th session in 1985) on gender equality in education and by the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men on participation of women in public and political life.

4. The Assembly is however concerned that:

i. co-education has led to more equality but in many countries there continue to be institutionalised and non-institutionalised forms of discrimination of girls and women;

ii. traditional gender roles in education still strongly steer and reduce the choices of both sexes as regards education, occupation and lifestyles, thus reinforcing the male norms in division of family responsibilities and in the labour market, as well as their dominance in decision-making processes;

iii. women and girls are still subject to sexual harassment and violence in society and in education.

5. The Assembly believes therefore that strategies should be developed which create for girls and boys, women and men, de jure and de facto freedom of access to and freedom of choice in education including initial and further education, vocational training and adult education. Education should help them to develop their full potential, to preserve their personal integrity, to aim at economic independence and to participate fully in society and in political life.

6. Girls and boys should be presented with positive role models of women of the past and present as a valid educational concept for removing stereotypes. Women as principals and decision-makers within a gender-balanced educational workforce can also be considered as important role-models.

7. Childbearing and motherhood have a considerable impact on women's activities. Knowledge of this, and also the sharing of responsibilities in the home and with the raising of children, should be a basic part of the school curriculum for boys and girls.

8. Gender equality in education can only be achieved by meeting the needs of employed women, especially those working in the educational fields, and by counteracting existing discrimination. The educational authorities of the member states should do all they can to achieve fixed and regular school timetables and provide mothers with support, such as child-oriented timetabling and provisions for personal choice of child care.

9. Gender equality in education must be part of an overall strategy for a more egalitarian and democratic society, considering that women of the past and present have contributed eminently to European culture and society and it is necessary to incorporate into education the knowledge that feminists have gathered on this contribution.

10.The Assembly acknowledges the significant contribution of the women's movement and feminist researchers and activists to human rights and gender equality in the educational field as well as in the political, social, cultural and economic fields and appreciates the expertise gathered in analysing and counteracting sexism and racism.

11.It believes that democracy can only be taught in schools in a democratic setting respecting the cultural plurality in Europe, and stressing the fundamental principle of equality between girls and boys, women and men, whatever differences there may be between them, their different viewpoints and experiences.

12.The Assembly, therefore, recommends that the Committee of Ministers ask the competent authorities of member states to promote education in human rights with a gender-sensitive approach and to take measures to accelerate de jure and de facto equality in education, promoting actively equal rights, equal chances, equal treatment in a gender-sensitive way of girls and boys, women and men, whether students or belonging to the workforce in education, and in particular to:

i.create strategies for freedom of access to and freedom of choice in education, for girls and boys, women and men, including initial and further education, vocational training and adult education;

ii.identify and spread good practice in gender sensitive education, for example by:

a.) revising teaching material and methods with a view to reinforcing non-discriminatory language and non-sexist teaching and to placing greater emphasis on equality and non-violence;

b.) revising stereotypes and role models for girls and boys, improving their self-images and providing them with positive role models while counteracting concepts of inequality and male violence;

c.) better presentation of the importance of women in European history and culture;

d.) taking greater consideration of the needs of girls and women and of boys and men for education in the fields of health, sex, family planning and parenthood;

e.) directing attention in media education to non-sexist, non-racist and non-violent scenes, avoiding verbal and visual violence against girls and women;

iii.include gender sensitivity and the promotion of equality in all initial and in-service teacher training and in the training of vocational advisors;

iv.initiate gender-sensitive research, including the participation of researchers on feminism and migration;

v.improve the gender balance of teaching and administrative staff and school management;

vi.recognise the strategic and supportive role played by teachers and parents in the removal of discrimination, for example by improving communications between schools and parents especially for migrant girls, and by the provision of support services for working parents.

13.The Assembly further recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

i.place special emphasis on activities in the field of monitoring gender equality in education and provide in due course information on the situation within the area of the European Cultural Convention;

ii.expand international consultation and exchange of experiences with regard to legislation, educational programmes, studies or debates on topical problems relating to gender equality in education;

iii.initiate exchange programmes for teachers, students and researchers and increase the possibilities for training and research in gender-sensitive education, in both cases with due regard for gender-balance;

iv.instruct the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance to consider the dimension of gender equality in education in its work;

v.re-establish the former joint working party of the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men and the Council for Cultural Co-operation to study the effects of co-education and to organise subsequently an international policy-making conference.

1. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 9 November 1995.

See Doc. 7366, report of the Committee on Culture and Education, rapporteur: Baroness Gould of Potternewton.

<http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/AdoptedText/ta95/EREC1281.HTM>