

Written Contribution to the General Discussion on Girls/Women's Right to Education on the occasion of the 58th Session of the CEDAW on 7 July 2014

Comments for consideration

by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

for the General Recommendation on Girls/Women's Right to Education

Submission by UNESCO

with support by UN Women

June 2014

Introduction

UNESCO welcomes the decision of the CEDAW Committee to issue a General Recommendation on Girls'/Women's Right to Education.

UNESCO appreciates CEDAW as one of the most important international legal framework that defines quality education from a gender-equality perspective. One of the critical features of the CEDAW is that it provides a legal basis for defining "relevant quality education" as an education that empowers women and girls and builds their capacities to claim and exercise their broader socio-economic and political rights (freedom of choice). UNESCO has been using and promoting the use of the Convention along with its Convention against Discrimination in Education, to guide Member States to implement gender-responsive policies and practices that seek to improve the quality of education for women and girls, at all levels.

UNESCO understands that the core principles informing Article 10 of CEDAW in terms of the General Recommendation on Girls' and Women's Right to Education, could be the following five core principles¹:

- a) **Non-discrimination** - Elimination of all forms of discrimination to ensure that women and girls receive equal opportunity with men and boys to the same quality and type of education and have the same potential to benefit from such education; This principle must be understood as allowing for **affirmative action and positive measures on a temporary basis**;
- b) **Lifelong learning** - Education is not limited to primary and secondary education. An expansive framework is adopted to include all levels of education from pre-school through to tertiary level in academic and technical-vocational fields as well as sports and physical education and continuing education;
- c) **High standards of equity** - Education must be available, accessible, acceptable, and adaptable to all women and girls, regardless of their place of dwelling, religion, ethnic origin, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, etc.;
- d) **"Transformational"**- Measures that are designed to enhance the right of women and girls to education and ensure their ability to freely choose their fields of study and careers should be transformational and support broader gender equality objectives, such as the elimination of stereotypical conceptions, of women's and men's roles, aptitudes and status in society;
- e) **Interconnectedness of rights** - Promoting the right of women and girls to education facilitates enjoyment of rights in their personal and family life as well as in their political and public life.

In the current document and with these five core principles in mind, UNESCO provides an overview of the current state of girls' and women's education, including main challenges, presents UNESCO's action in terms of monitoring and advocating in this area, and makes reference to the importance of girls' and women's right to education in the post-2015 education agenda. The document concludes by putting forward a set of concrete recommendations for the considerations by the CEDAW Committee in view of the preparation of the General Recommendation.

1. Girls' and Women's Education Globally: the general state

Significant progress has been made in girls' and women's education, particularly in terms of parity, mainly at the primary education level. An increasing number of countries are also demonstrating rapid expansion of

¹ Adapting and building on the original five principles provided in the concept note prepared by OHCHR

lower secondary enrolment of girls. Evidence shows that girls who successfully transition to lower secondary education are more likely to stay and complete the cycle than boys. In some countries, for example in Latin America and Southeast Asia, girls regularly outperform boys in terms of retention and performance in learning outcomes²

The quantitative progress in girls' and women's education has been supported by the enhancement of both the legal and policy environments to support girls' and women's education. According to UNESCO's recent overview of the measures supporting the right to education reported on by Member States within the framework of the Eighth Consultation³, 40 of the 59 reporting Member States have explicit reference to guaranteeing girls' and women's right to education or forbidding gender-based discrimination under national constitution, legislation or specific policies.

In terms of strategies to operationalize legal commitments, many countries, for example Afghanistan⁴, Bangladesh⁵, Burkina Faso⁶, Ethiopia⁷, Ghana⁸, Morocco⁹, Zimbabwe¹⁰, to mention just a few, have integrated gender considerations into their national education plans, national strategic plans, or national policies. These national policies include provisions for gender mainstreaming in education or the promotion of girls' and women's right to education¹¹.

However, in parallel to the positive developments, the latest UNESCO Global Monitoring Report (GMR) 2013/2014 reveals that girls and women, especially those from the poorest families, have continued to be denied their right to quality education over the decade. According to the GMR 2013/14 there are still 57 million out-of-school children; the majority of them are girls. In 2011, only 60% of countries had achieved gender parity at the primary level and 38% at the secondary level. Among low-income countries, 20% achieve gender parity in primary education, 10% in lower secondary education and 8% in upper secondary education. The situation is even worse in rural areas where poverty, gender roles, discrimination and stereotyping impact greatly on girls' and women's education opportunities. The magnitude of adult illiteracy of women has remained unchanged over the last two decades at 64 % (or 493 million) of the world's adult illiterate population. With the current pace, the ultimate goal of achieving gender equality in education by 2015 will not be met. Looking ahead, it is projected that by 2015, 70% of countries will have reached the goal and 9% of countries will be close. By contrast, 14% of countries will still be far from the target, and 7% will be very far, of which three-quarters are in sub-Saharan Africa¹².

² UNESCO GMR 2013/2014.

³ *Girls' and Women's Right to Education, Overview of the Measures Supporting the Right to Education for Girls and Women reported on by Member States*, UNESCO, 2014, available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002278/227859E.pdf>

⁴ Afghanistan's Education Interim Plan 2011-13

⁵ Bangladesh's National Education Policy 2010 and Education for All National Plan of Action (NPA II) 2003-2015

⁶ Burkina Faso's *Programme sectoriel de l'éducation et de la formation (PSEF) 2012-2021 and Politique Nationale de Jeunesse*

⁷ Ethiopia's Education Sector Development Program IV (ESDP IV)

⁸ Ghana's Education Strategic Plan 2010 to 2020

⁹ Morocco's *Plan d'Action Stratégique à Moyen Terme pour l'Institutionnalisation de l'Égalité entre les Sexes (PASMT-IES)*

¹⁰ Zimbabwe's Education medium-term plan 2011-2015

¹¹ UNESCO Database on the Right to Education (in preparation)

¹² Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2013/14, Goal 5 Gender parity

The persistence of stark inequalities in education is both a cause and a result of wider discrimination to which girls and women are subject. There are multiple reasons why girls and women are not accessing education, which are all interconnected in one way or another - poverty, geographical isolation, early marriage and pregnancy, gender-based violence and other discriminatory socio-cultural and socio-economic practices and policies, attitudes and perceptions about the role and status of girls and women. In school, negative gender stereotypes and discrimination in education laws and policies, learning contents, teaching practices and attitudes, together with unsuitable and unsafe learning environments and school-related gender-based violence compromise girls' retention in school, their educational choices and achievement and, consequently, their work and life opportunities. Learning programmes designed for women could also limit or expand their capabilities.

Gender inequalities are manifested in all aspects of the education process (e.g. access, retention, completion, treatment, learning outcomes, as well as education and career choices), disproportionately affecting girls and women. This is both a cause and a result of systemic discrimination and gender stereotyping. In some contexts, the gender gap is against boys, however the worst forms of discrimination are undeniably experienced by girls and women.

2. UNESCO's Action in terms of Monitoring of and Advocacy on Girls' and Women's Right to Education

UNESCO has set gender equality as a global organizational priority. For UNESCO, gender equality in education is a basic human right: the organization promotes gender equality to, in and through education so as to ensure women's and men's, girls' and boys' equal access to learning opportunities, fair treatment in the learning process, equitable outcomes as well as access to opportunities in all spheres of life.

UNESCO promotes social norms that value girls' and women's education and works at multiple levels, through advocacy, policy dialogue, normative and standard setting, technical assistance and capacity development, especially in the following areas where it has a comparative advantage, including: education laws and policies, teaching and learning approaches and assessment, curriculum (learning objectives, expected outcomes and educational content), learning environment and reaching those hardest to reach.

2.1 UNESCO's Mechanisms and Procedures to Monitor the Right to Education of Girls and Women

UNESCO is intensifying advocacy for girls' and women's right to education and the eradication of gender-based discrimination, notably through the monitoring of the implementation of the **1960 UNESCO Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education**, which provides an international legal framework for the protection of the right to education and prohibits any form of discrimination "based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, economic condition or birth". The Convention against Discrimination in Education gives expression to the fundamental principles of non-discrimination and equality of opportunity for all, as enshrined in UNESCO's Constitution. UNESCO addresses the question of the right to education by affirming, through this Convention, its determination to apply the prescriptions and principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

Advocacy on the right to education as a fundamental and inalienable right is essential, emphasizing inclusion¹³ and State obligations to ensure its effective implementation. To promote girls' and women's

¹³ Inclusion requires responding to the diversity of needs among all learners, through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion from and within education. It involves changes in content,

education, it is critical to intensify efforts to eradicate gender-based discrimination, in line with the normative instruments, and to give full effect to the provisions contained in the Convention against Discrimination in Education. UNESCO Member States have the constitutional obligation to report to the Organization on concrete measures they take for implementing UNESCO's instruments. UNESCO organizes periodic consultations¹⁴ to monitor the implementation of the 1960 Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education.

The Eighth Consultation of Member States, covering the period from 2006 to 2011, has been completed and the results of the Consultation were presented to UNESCO's Governing Bodies in 2013¹⁵. National reports submitted for this purpose show that many States have reinforced their legal frameworks and equity measures to ensure gender equality, and have adopted measures to make their education systems more inclusive of girls and women. Ensuring *de facto* equality of educational opportunities for all, including girls and women, is a continuing challenge faced by Member States. UNESCO, therefore, places greater emphasis on action at national level for universalizing access to quality education for all without discrimination or exclusion.

2.2 Collaboration with United Nations Human Rights Bodies

Pursuant to Article 22 of CEDAW, as specialized agency for education, science and culture, UNESCO submits regular reports (three times a year) on the activities undertaken within its scope of competence in the countries whose national reports are subject to periodical examination by the CEDAW Committee. The bulk of the information in these reports relate to measures taken in assisting member states in the elimination of discrimination of women in the area of education and in ensuring right to education for girls and women (Article 10 of CEDAW).

Girls' and women's right to education was also subject to cooperation within the Joint Expert Group UNESCO (CR) – ECOSOC (CESCR) on the monitoring of the right to education (notably the concept paper prepared for the 8th and 9th meetings of the Expert Group on inclusive dimensions of the right to education in 2008). Among the landmarks of the cooperation between UNESCO and CESCR, *inter alia*, was the elaboration of General Comment 13 on Article 13 (right to education) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1999.

2.3 Advocacy on Girls' and Women's Right to Education through the "4-As Approach"

Challenges to girls' and women's right to education are interconnected and multi-layered, and gender inequalities are manifested in all aspects of the education process disproportionately affecting girls and women (e.g. access, retention, completion, treatment, learning outcomes, as well as education and career choices). If gender equality in education is to be achieved, the entire education system – from laws and policies to educational content, pedagogies and learning environments – must be gender-sensitive,

approaches, structures, and strategies, driven by a common vision that covers all children and the conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all of them.

¹⁴ This consultation process takes place every four years. The purpose of reporting is to illustrate the action taken to implement the instruments, the progress achieved and the difficulties encountered by Member States. UNESCO has so far conducted eight consultations on the implementation of the Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education.

¹⁵ The results of the Eighth Consultation were presented to UNESCO's Executive Board (at the 192nd session) and to UNESCO's General Conference (at the 37th session) respectively in September and November 2013.

responsive and transformative. Besides ensuring sufficient allocation of funds to expand and improve learning opportunities, education must also be promoted beyond traditional establishments through alternative modes of delivery. Targeted policies that ensure girls and women, particularly from the poorest households and/or living in rural areas, have the opportunity and means to go to school, stay in school, and to perform and complete the full cycle of basic education, are required. It is vital that girls and women have equal access to learning opportunities that are gender-sensitive, in terms of education contents, teaching practices and the learning environment so that girls and women feel welcomed, respected, confident and secure and are equally benefitting from education as their boy and men peers.

The international obligation for States to support gender equality in education engages them to guarantee schooling and learning environments that are free of discrimination and that provide equal opportunities for boys and girls and men and women to realize their full potential. They are also obliged to ensure the right to education of both men and women in the context of lifelong learning.

In advocating the fulfilment of the right to quality education, UNESCO promotes the “4-As framework” to encourage Member States to adopt and implement solid legal and policy frameworks prohibiting discrimination on the ground of gender, and protecting girls’ and women’s right to education. Seen through the lens of gender equality, this framework provides a useful approach to understanding obligations relating to the right to education of girls and women. Member States should therefore ensure the following 4-A principles through appropriate action:

- **Availability:** increase, where necessary the education budget and economic aid to countries that are ready to speed up girls’ and women’s education and promote the recruitment of female teachers. The prohibition of discrimination is unconditional and should not be affected by lack of resources.
- **Accessibility:** take the necessary legal and administrative steps to guarantee that admission and enrolment criteria for girls and women are applied in the same way as for boys and men; address physical and economic barriers such as distance to school, school fees, sanitary provisions for girls, school security, etc.; remove barriers to the enrolment and retention in school of young and teenage girls, especially those belonging to ethnic groups, castes and communities that are discriminated against; and, address any other reason causing drop-out.
- **Acceptability:** take legal, technical and administrative action necessary to provide high quality education based on learning about human rights and their application in real life, in line with the principles of equality and non-discrimination; form local and regional commissions to identify which aspects of customs, traditions and any other socio-cultural factors impeding egalitarian treatment of girls and women in educational institutions (teaching practices, curriculum, school activities, etc.) and recommend measures to eradicate them forthwith.
- **Adaptability:** ensure that in addition to experts, girls and women also play an active part in identifying their educational, social and cultural needs, so that they can propose solutions, based on their own knowledge and experience. In some countries the challenge appears to be not just making education available but also adapting the education on offer to suit the specific needs of women and girls together with family support.

2.4 Support to sustaining political commitments to Girls’ and Women’s Right to Education

UNESCO is supporting governments in keeping their political commitments to meet international development goals and objectives and particularly those addressing gender equality in education, including

the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Strategic Objective B on the right of women and girls to education, UNESCO, as the lead agency for Education for All coordination and monitoring, has been supporting its Member States, in collaboration with partner EFA Convening agencies, in strengthening national capacities in mainstreaming gender into all the EFA goals and education-related goals and targets under the Millennium Development Goals. Particular attention has been paid to ensuring gender-sensitivity of national action plans for EFA through providing gender training to education policy makers, teacher trainers, curriculum developers, teachers, and other stakeholders, and monitoring progress on Goal 5 of the Dakar Education for All Framework for Action (2000)¹⁶.

3. Girls' and Women's Right to Education in the Context of Post-2015 Education Agenda

Gender equality, in general and in education in particular, is a priority on the international development agenda and should remain a central issue in the post-2015 agenda. Education, especially for girls and women, is considered to be one of the most effective investments for sustainable and inclusive development. Educating girls and women is decisive not only for improving their own living conditions but also because it yields personal, social and development benefits: e.g. it empowers women and improves their life chances, those of their families and their communities; it reduces poverty and vulnerability to violence, diseases and child and maternal mortality. Therefore, gender equality is explicitly acknowledged as a fundamental principle for the post-2015 education goal and is referenced in all the specific targets on education.

Recognizing that achieving gender equality in education necessitates a **holistic and multi-sectoral** approach, while education holds the key to achieving gender equality in society overall, UNESCO closely collaborates with UN Women and other advocates for gender equality to ensure that there are systematic reference to education of girls and women and to gender equality under every development goal and target in the post-2015 development agenda.

4. Concrete Recommendations to realize the right of girls and women to education and gender equality in education

In order to meet the abovementioned challenges, advocacy for the right to education as a fundamental and inalienable right, with a focus on its inclusive dimensions, and with greater emphasis on State obligations for its effective implementation, is indispensable. Regarding specifically girls' and women's education, it is of critical importance to intensify advocacy for non-discrimination based upon gender, in line with normative instruments (in particular the Convention against Discrimination in Education), and accelerate progress to achieve gender equality. Strengthening the right of girls and women to quality education through the implementation of international instruments is thus the key to eliminate discrimination and to realize equality of rights between genders beyond the rhetoric.

UNESCO makes the following general and specific observations and recommendations for consideration by the CEDAW Committee.

4.1 General Observations on the Introductory Chapeau of Article 10

¹⁶ EFA Goal 5 aims to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and to achieve gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' and women's full and equal access to, and achievement in, education of good quality.

Article 10: “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women: [...]”

In this introductory sentence the wording “**all appropriate measures**” is of crucial importance. This is the reason why UNESCO recommends that CEDAW takes into consideration in its interpretation that the term “all appropriate measures” should encompass both legal and policy provisions to provide for the right to education, in order to ensure that:

- Laws that directly discriminate on the basis of gender or have secondary effects of discrimination are eradicated from Member States’ legal systems, and institutional, administrative or regulatory practices that are discriminatory on the basis of gender are corrected; De facto discrimination in society should be prevented and corrective measures be taken;
- Measures taken should be designed to be able to reach those who are most excluded and marginalized; they should also address the intersection of different forms of discrimination as a result of being simultaneously exposed to gender inequality and other forms of discrimination suffered by disadvantaged or vulnerable groups; affirmative steps should be taken to reduce gender gaps and disparities in education; and public awareness on gender equality in education should be promoted on a regular basis.

As the implementation of the legal and policy framework in Member States remains a challenge, UNESCO would like to draw the Committee’s attention on the importance of the reporting made by Member States in their national reports submitted within the framework of consultations to United Nations Human Rights Bodies. Member States should be encouraged to report on concrete implementation measures, as well as on progress and remaining difficulties. Detailed information must be provided by Member states for the monitoring of international normative instruments, specifically regarding gender equality and gender discrimination, as well as sex-disaggregated data. This will include information on governance and administrative structures, the teaching staff, learners and their destination in the world of work and further education. In preparing their national reports, State parties should take into account the information and opinions of NGOs and other civil society entities working in the area of education, women’s rights and gender equality, which are normally much more critical than the official government report on the status of women’s rights and gender equality in the country.

4.2 Paragraph-by-Paragraph Observations

Specific observations by paragraphs could be taken into consideration by the Committee. First and foremost, with respect to the wording used throughout article 10, the term “same” used in several paragraphs (i.e. “same conditions” in paragraph a, “same opportunities” in paragraphs e and g) may deserve careful attention as it may risk introducing and justifying provisions that could be to the disadvantage of girls and women. It should instead be understood as creating conditions for equal opportunities and allowing positive measures and affirmative action (which could be deliberately “discriminatory” in practice in order to achieve the equitable condition required for girls and women to eventually perform equally with boys and men) devised to compensate girls’ and women’s disadvantages.

The notion of “sameness” suggests that member states should promote “equal opportunities”, as well as “equal treatment” when appropriate. The guiding principles that should be used to interpret the notion of “sameness” are “non-discrimination” and “equity”. Equity without equality falls short of addressing women’s

long-term aspirations as a “worst-off” group and fails to lead to the transformative changes that are inherent in any development efforts. Furthermore, equality without equity is also insufficient as it does not address the social inequities that prohibit the most disadvantaged women from benefiting from opportunities, newly acquired rights and improvements in legal status. Equity and equality should be instead seen as mutually supporting strategies. The Recommendation should help Member States implement the Convention and appreciate how to balance equity and equality measures. The guiding principle is to make sure all measures support women’s strategic and practical needs.

UNESCO recommends to the CEDAW Committee to take into consideration the specific observations with respect to each paragraph that follows:

Paragraph a): *“The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of certificates and diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas; this equality shall be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training;”*

With regard to *paragraph a*, UNESCO considers that the reference to preschool education may not be appropriate as it is and recommends therefore that a separate consideration may be dedicated to the interpretation of obligations related to early childhood education.

Regarding the rest of the paragraph, UNESCO recommends the Committee to take into account the importance of making the learning and working environments gender-sensitive and ensuring equality of opportunity for work-based learning and all types of training. The learning and working environment should be made suitable for the participation of girls and women by removing overt and covert bias and discrimination. Strategies for motivating girls and women to take an interest in technical and vocational education and training should be identified. Furthermore, it is important that women are fully represented in positions of TVET governance, leadership, management and research. The benefits of modern and traditional apprenticeships should also be maximized whilst addressing any weaknesses including often poor working conditions, limited social protection and gender imbalances in management and leadership positions.

Paragraph b): *“Access to the same curricula, the same examinations, teaching staff with qualifications of the same standard and school premises and equipment of the same quality;”*

With regard to *paragraph b*, UNESCO recommends that the Committee underline that this paragraph provides elements to define quality education, including but not limited to the nature and quality of the curricula, examinations and teaching staff, while relying on the guiding principle of “equal treatment”. It provides legal basis for defining relevant education that empowers women and girls and enable them to exercise their other human rights – taking into consideration the equal learning outcomes and the equal chance to translate this into empowerment.

The paragraph should be understood in a way that ensures admissions criteria and learning processes be gender sensitive, with the aim of achieving equality. Participation in education or training, as well as process and content of learning and assessment should not be adversely affected by the gender of the learner. Women and men should be involved on an equal basis in the design of curricula, examinations, teacher education qualifications and educational facilities and materials. Full consultation with women and men

should help to ensure that curricula, teaching and learning processes, assessment and materials avoid gender stereotyping. School curricula, examinations, teacher recruitment and training and school physical environments should address the specific needs of girls and women.

Specific reference to the teaching staff should be also addressed by the Committee in its interpretation. The provisions of the paragraph should be understood as to apply both to female and male teachers and acknowledge the need to reform teacher policies from a gender-based perspective.

Paragraph c): *“The elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education by encouraging coeducation and other types of education which will help to achieve this aim and, in particular, by the revision of textbooks and school programmes and the adaptation of teaching methods;”*

With regard to *paragraph c*, UNESCO recommends to the Committee that careful attention be given to the reference to “coeducation” assuming that is it always positive. The decision to opt or not for coeducation should be driven by the intent to act in girls “best interest”, in line with the guiding principle: “acting in the best interests of girls and fulfilling their right to quality education”. Therefore, other types of education should be taken into consideration and be encouraged equally in the paragraph, including sex-segregated education, provided that the same curricula and quality standards of education are guaranteed. In terms of other types of education, particular attention should be given to TVET policies and practices.

The Committee may also like to specify that the revision of textbooks, programs and methodologies should not only aim at eliminating gender stereotypes, but also at transforming gender relations and facilitating routes toward empowerment and social change.

Paragraph d): *“The same opportunities to benefit from scholarships and other study grants;”*

With regard to *paragraph d*, UNESCO recommends the Committee to take into consideration the multiple forms of discrimination that are disproportionately affecting girls and women and to clarify that this sentence should be treated with due care and diligence. The interpretation should indeed be clarified, taking into consideration that depending on the context, offering different opportunities to girls and women may be decided in order to address the educational and socio-economic disadvantages that are affecting particularly girls and women.

This paragraph should not be understood as preventing the possibility for member states to adopt positive measures and affirmative action targeting the most disadvantaged girls and women who are affected by multiple forms of discrimination, including special scholarships and study grants, in order to promote their access to education and to compensate partially the socio-economic disadvantages they are subject to. These measures, of a temporary nature, may help to achieve fully the objective of equality of educational opportunities.

Paragraph e): *“The same opportunities for access to programmes of continuing education, including adult and functional literacy programmes, particularly those aimed at reducing, at the earliest possible time, any gap in education existing between men and women;”*

With regard to *paragraph e*, UNESCO recommends the Committee to take into consideration that access to programmes of continuing education should also include TVET learning, literacy programmes, and are not limited to learning in the formal educational setting. Work-based learning should be further encouraged.

UNESCO would also like to draw the Committee's attention to the fact that adult and functional literacy programmes may not be sufficient actions, or in their initial objectives, to fill in the gap between men and women, especially "at the earliest possible time". Special attention should be drawn to the issue of women's illiteracy and the need for urgent remedial action.

Paragraph f): *"The reduction of female student drop-out rates and the organization of programmes for girls and women who have left school prematurely;"*

With regard to *paragraph f*, UNESCO recommends the Committee, in its interpretation, to encourage member states to understand factors that contribute to drop-out rates and to indicate how to identify factors leading to girls leaving school prematurely.

The Committee may like to encourage member states to promote flexible measures (i.e. in terms of programming and admissions requirements) to ensure that girls and women do not experience disadvantages in accessing learning on account of their gender, marital status or family responsibilities. In situations where early marriage is common, girls are taken out of school or expelled if they are pregnant, despite existence of protective legislation. In this respect, special attention should be paid to addressing discrimination against pregnant girls, which affects too many girls, especially in cases of accepted early marriage. It is of crucial importance to insist on the importance of guaranteeing that pregnancy cannot be a reason to exclude girls from school.

Where relevant and feasible, the Committee may consider encouraging member states to adopt financial measures, as appropriate, to promote and support work-based learning, and the learning supported by communities, social networks, the internet, mobile technology and other media.

Paragraph g): *"The same opportunities to participate actively in sports and physical education;"*

With regard to *paragraph g*, UNESCO recommends the Committee to further elaborate what "same opportunities to participate actively" implies and to provide more explicit and clearer indications on how this education should be encouraged by member states. Due to cultural and social values and norms, the availability of opportunities per se may not be sufficient to encourage girls and women to participate, actively, in sports and physical education. It would be important to note that there are societies where sports and physical education are not considered to be a valuable element of education to due to lack of understanding of the critical and positive relationship between cognitive development, physical health and psycho-emotional well-being of individuals, particularly adolescent girls and boys¹⁷. To this effect, UNESCO recommends the Committee to also clarify as part of awareness-raising for member states the rationale for increased opportunities and promotion of participation of girls and women in sports and physical education. The importance of increasing the role of sporting role models for girls must not be understated.

¹⁷ UN (2007), Women, gender equality and sports, Division for the Advancement of Women. Various other studies available.

Paragraph h): “Access to specific educational information to help to ensure the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning.”

With regard to *paragraph h*, UNESCO recommends the Committee to take into consideration that the content of information and advice provided should not be limited to family planning and also extend to comprehensive sexuality education for girls and young women and boys and young men, that is age and culturally appropriate, evidence-informed and includes linkages to independently accessible sexual and reproductive health services (including HIV prevention) and commodities. This education should also be provided to boys and young men, including education on health relationships, and awareness-raising on gender-based violence.

Furthermore, advice and information provided in educational or workplace settings should take into account of gender differences and the specific aspects of health and well-being, including family planning, for girls and women, in a lifelong and life-wide perspective. Education and health officials should collaborate in addressing the needs of girls and women.
