



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
28 December 2022

English only

---

## Commission on Population and Development

Fifty-sixth session

10–14 April 2023

Population, education and sustainable development

### **Statement submitted by the International Planned Parenthood Federation, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council<sup>1</sup>**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

---

<sup>1</sup> The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## **Statement**

### **About the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)**

A leading advocate of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and a global service provider, the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) is a locally owned, globally connected federation which works through Member Associations and collaborative partners in a total of 142 countries to empower women, men and young people in the most vulnerable situations to access life-saving services and programmes and live with dignity. We have had general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 1973.

### **Education is fundamental human right**

Education is a fundamental human right and the right to quality education is already firmly rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international legal instruments. The right to education has a transformative potential that supports the empowerment of all women and girls to claim their human rights, including the right to participate in public affairs, as well as in political, economic, social and cultural life, and to fully, equally and meaningfully participate in the decision-making processes that shape society.

### **Education has a transformative potential**

Education is widely recognised as a powerful tool to empower women and girls within the household and society, and is considered a key pathway for women and girls' bodily autonomy, to make informed decisions about their lives, have access to better jobs and decent work, housing, etc. Educated women are more likely to marry later, use contraception and access healthcare; and to understand their rights and have the self-confidence to act on them. Each additional year of schooling for girls improves their employment prospects, increases future earnings by about 10 per cent and reduces infant mortality by up to 10 per cent. Post-primary education has far stronger positive effects on empowerment than primary education; girls with only primary education are twice as likely to marry before the age of 18 as those with secondary or higher education. It's well known that adolescent childbearing interrupts school attendance and impairs young women's long-term social and economic mobility, access to decent work, and, indirectly, their empowerment across the life course. Furthermore, girls and young women often do not have access to the information, education and sexual and reproductive health services, including contraceptives, they want and need. Four in ten adolescent girls aged 15–19 years who want to avoid pregnancy are currently not using a modern contraceptive – a wide variation is however observed across regions.

Complications related to pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death for girls aged 15–19. Adolescent childbearing may interrupt school attendance and impair young women's long-term social and economic mobility and, indirectly, their empowerment. Adolescent pregnancy is also recognised as both a driver and a consequence of child, early and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU). Furthermore, girls and young women often do not have access to the contraceptives and information they want and need; in sub-Saharan Africa and South Central and Southeast Asia, more than 60 percent of adolescents who wish to avoid pregnancy do not have access to modern contraception. Inequality, discriminatory social norms and attitudes towards girls and young women underlie and drive these issues. In this regard, comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is a vital promising strategy by which to shift negative norms and attitudes, and empower young people to negotiate safe, consensual and enjoyable conscious, healthy and respectful choices about

relationships and sexuality. However, comprehensive programmes are not available in most countries. SRH policies should be combined with educational policies to address quality and equity, including social pressures such as stigma and peer pressure, as these impact keenly on young mothers and girls who may be subjected to child, early and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU), female genital mutilation (FGM), result in unintended pregnancy, and have unsafe abortions, and may prevent their return to school.

### **Non-discrimination and school (re-)enrolment**

Only half of countries worldwide protect the Right to Education without discrimination in their constitutions. In all regions of the world we still see people being denied education or school (re-)enrolment based on their abilities, sexual orientation and gender identity, HIV-status or after pregnancy, whereas, schools should be safe for all young people including young queer people and free of homophobia, transphobia, discrimination and bullying. The schools' curricula on comprehensive sexuality education should address the needs of all young people, including young queer identifying people, young people with disabilities, young people living with HIV, and other marginalized populations. Moreover, it is important to ensure that curriculum and learning materials do not perpetuate existing discrimination and gender bias to ensure all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote gender equality, in line with SDG target 4.7 and SDG 5.1. School enrolment, CSE and adolescent friendly sexual and reproductive health services are essential in preventing adolescent pregnancies. The school closures and subsequent disappearance of safe spaces during COVID-19 as well as a lack of sexuality education and closure of health facilities meant a rise in adolescent pregnancies. Unfortunately, in many countries we still see girls being denied (re-) enrolment during and after they have become pregnant which is a violation of their right to education.

### **Gendered aspects of education**

Access to education, or lack thereof, is not gender neutral; often girls and adolescent girls have additional gendered barriers that prevent them participating in schooling and other educational opportunities. For example, unpaid care work and domestic work often falls disproportionately on the shoulders of girls and adolescent girls who often have to drop out of school in order to help in the house; or the lack of access to SRHR can also lead to unplanned and early pregnancies which can be compounding factors in terms of being excluded from school and other educational opportunities. Lack of access to comprehensive sexuality education in formal and non-formal settings can also mean young people are unaware of their rights and lack basic information on their bodies and development which can affect their capacity to make informed decisions about their lives.

### **Menstrual health and hygiene management**

Schools provide not only an environment for learning, but also for many adolescent girls' accesses to menstrual health and hygiene supplies, knowledge, skills and social support. Particularly adolescent girls had limited access to menstrual health and hygiene management during the COVID-19 pandemic due to a lack of critical information, limited access to technology and digital platforms, school closures, suspension of community-based programming, and low levels of literacy. Ensuring gender equality and increasing school enrolment requires investments in menstrual health and hygiene management in and out of school settings.

**Education in emergencies**

During conflicts, girls' educational access, attendance and learning outcomes risk being undone. Girls experience disproportionate impacts from climate change and conflicts as it amplifies the barriers they already face in accessing education. In countries affected by conflict, girls are more than twice as likely to be out of primary school and 90 per cent more likely to be out of secondary school than their counterparts living in non-affected countries. Girls with disabilities living in humanitarian and conflict settings are far more likely to be excluded from education service than their non-disabled counterparts. Acts of school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) is also aggravated in countries affected by conflict and when education systems are affected by conflict and crisis. Moreover, girls tend to experience higher rates of pre-existing gender discrimination in and out of school as well as child marriages and early pregnancies rises compared to non-crisis times.

**Barriers to education resulting from climate change**

Several of the prevalent barriers to education are attributable to climate change. Like most humanitarian crises, climate change affects already marginalized communities most acutely. The climate crisis poses a significant barrier to the enjoyment of the right to education in all communities. The ways that climate change prevents individuals from accessing education are multidimensional. Climate change is a significant driver of the displacement of communities as their homes become destroyed or unlivable. As families are displaced, education-seeking members of the family are separated physically from their places of learning. Furthermore, climate change often leads to a loss of income for families because their jobs cannot continue in the climate crisis or they are displaced. When climate-affected families experience a loss in income, they may be faced with fewer choices in the face of scarcity, for example schooling may be an additional cost many cannot afford or girls may be kept at home to help with unpaid care work and domestic labour. Many families choose to put the reduced income towards schooling sons rather than daughters, adding a gendered aspect. Climate-affected families also experience an increase in gender-based violence and child early and forced marriage, both of which lower rates of education for women and girls.

**Barriers to education resulting from COVID-19**

The COVID-19 health crisis impacted every aspect of everyday life, disrupting existing programs targeting education access. Again, COVID-19 was discriminatory in its effects, affecting marginalized communities and those experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination to a greater degree. The COVID-19 pandemic's effects on development efforts has stalled initiatives to offer educational opportunities to girls and young people, in part, because schools have been physically closed, thereby reducing access, especially for those who do not have access to technology and online opportunities for learning. Though many schools offered remote learning opportunities, which could be helpful to students physically far from educational institutions and in rural and remote areas, it also became a barrier when students did not have access to computers and equipment as well as stable internet connections. Increased caretaking needs in the home also disproportionately were felt by women and girls, preventing them from accessing education. Gendered divisions of family responsibilities again prioritized boys' education over girls'.

IPPF makes the following recommendations in terms of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on Development's priority theme:

**Recommendations:**

- Respect, protect and fulfil the right to quality education for all children, especially girls, without discrimination of any kind as well as children's' safety from school-related gender-based violence.
- Recognize the provision of CSE as integral to improving the health and safety as well as the attainment of rights of adolescents and youth, as well as realizing gender equality and sustainable development by implementing the commitments made in the area of education, and include CSE in SDG4.7 policies, programs, implementation, budgeting and reporting.
- Ensure human rights-based and gender-transformative CSE is part of the national school curricula and at all levels and is implemented through a whole school approach.
- Ensure pre- and in-service CSE teacher/educator training and provide them with sufficient materials, budget, skills and knowledge and a supportive environment to the extent possible in order for them to deliver quality CSE and to challenge and change harmful gender norms in the education system to ensure gender-transformative approaches.
- Ensure the provision of non-formal CSE and that it is sustainably and sufficiently financed and available to young people out of school.
- Recognize the role of civil society and community-based organizations in ensuring access to education, including CSE in and out of school.
- Ensure all adolescents and young people receive a wide range of support and can remain in and return to school in case of (adolescent) pregnancies as well in humanitarian crises or emergencies.
- Ensure sufficient water, sanitation and menstrual health facilities and services in schools and integrate menstrual health and hygiene management into school curricula.