



## **EDUCATIONAL ISSUES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EQUAL RIGHTS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN AND MEN**

### **Meeting of the National Assembly-Civil Society Cooperation Platform**

#### **COMMUNIQUE**

On September 8, 2020, a regular meeting of the National Assembly and Civil Society Cooperation Platform was held. The meeting was devoted to the Beijing+25 processes and specifically focused on commitments undertaken by Armenia within the framework of the critical area of concern “Education and training of women” as well as the actual educational challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic considering the issue from the perspective of ensuring equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men.

Participants of the meeting were members of the Parliament, representatives of the Government and state structures, representatives of civil society, and experts.

The meeting was organized within the framework of the project “*Modern Parliament for a Modern Armenia*”. The UNDP “Modern Parliament for a Modern Armenia” project is co-implemented with the OxYGen Foundation, the International Center for Human Development, and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, in cooperation with the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia. The project is funded by the United Kingdom's Good Governance Fund and the Government of Sweden.

At the meeting, expert Lilit Zakaryan presented the report on alternative analysis of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for action in Armenia in relation to the area of concern “Education and training of women”. The report presented the general evaluation of achievements of the state policies aimed at ensuring equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men in the area of education and training and of systemic issues over the past five years, as well as recommendations on improving the effectiveness of the NA and Government’s actions. Find attached the presentation below and the [link for the alternative analyses](#).

### **Raised issues, problems**

- The educational system does not target the promotion of students' perceptions of gender equality norms and principles and the overcoming of gender stereotypes.
- Although at the legislative level there is no discrimination in the area of education, there is latent gender discrimination, the “latent curriculum” is still existing.
- The gender equality component is not included in the curriculum at all levels of education. Textbooks, teaching materials are not free of gender stereotypes, and the topic of intolerance to gender-based violence has not been developed or introduced.
  - For example, more than 94% of characters in history textbooks and 80% of those in the Armenian literature are male (Osipov, Sargizova 2015). The number of male characters in the high school textbook on the Armenian history exceeds female characters by approximately 30 times. Female characters make up just 3% of all characters.  
Pictures portraying men exceed pictures portraying women by seven times. As a rule, pictures portraying men are associated with power, strength, and domination.
  - As a result, only the image of an active, conquering, protecting, and creating male is instilled in the consciousness of students. Perceptions are developed that women have not made any contributions to culture. Women are mentioned only in those cases when they appear with functions typical of the men - the defender of the homeland.
  - The lack of tolerance and gender-sensitive environment in the higher education sphere results in the reduction of the class hours of gender-sensitive subjects in different faculties.
- Gender segregation of professions in all areas of education persists because of the absence of gender-sensitive professional orientation sessions. As a result, the involvement of women in the spheres of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) is slow.
- The accessibility of preschool education in the country is very serious. 70% of children of preschool age have no opportunity to receive a preschool education. The problem can be solved in the result of consolidation of communities if the problems of the roads between the villages and the transportation are solved. Armenia had not yet implemented the commitments it made in the area of education: basic, general, and high levels.
- Although women's enrolment in the area of higher education is higher than that of men, due to gender vertical segregation most of the decisions are made by men.
- The opportunity of continuing education for women is not ensured in Armenia. The institute of baby-sitters is being implemented, but the program is new, and the results are not yet visible.

### **Recommendations**

#### **To the National Assembly**

- To fix the definition of sex-based discrimination in the laws “On education”, “On General education”, "On Technical Vocational Education and training (craft) and secondary professional education", " On Higher and postgraduate professional education (since this will also contribute to raising information about education), regulating the area of education aligning it with the spirit of the RA law " On equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men".
- To implement gender mainstreaming of all laws and sub-legislative acts related to the area of education

- Require the government to submit draft laws and policy documents to the National Assembly with a mandatory gender mainstreaming which will be based on gender analysis of the relevant field and gender disaggregated statistics
- To keep the focus on the implementation of the Beijing platform for action and the related issues in the field of education.
- The Parliament can create a platform for discussing the gender agenda of education, periodically organize parliamentary hearings and expert discussions on women's problems on education
- It can serve an example for the government and other state structures to including the gender issues in legislative processes.

### **To the Government of the Republic of Armenia**

- Education should be considered as a constitutional right of a citizen, as a strategic value. Unfortunately, today there is no such realization and approach. Perceptions about education need to be changed. Many educational problems in Armenia today are solved by NGO's through non-formal education.
- To implement gender mainstreaming of all laws and sub-legislative acts related to the area of education
- It is necessary to engage gender experts in the monitoring of the 2019-2023 gender policy implementation in the Republic of Armenia
- It is necessary to include a gender component into the subject-matter of scientific research funded by the state
- Since the National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance will continually be carrying out accreditation of colleges and higher education institutions in the republic and it is envisioned to review criteria and standards for institutional accreditation, it is necessary to add a gender standard to the accreditation
- To provide for gender expertise of training programs for principals, deputy principals, and teachers of general education schools and Vocational education training (VET) institutions and to engage gender experts in training with gender modules
- Professional orientation programs should be gender sensitive. For this purpose, all those responsible for this area should be trained with gender modules
- Newly developed educational criteria, standards, educational and methodological sets, and textbooks should undergo gender mainstreaming
- To initiate broad-based discussions in society on benefits of education and career in the STEM areas, to encourage girls to develop a profound interest in mathematics and science, and to present to schoolgirls positive role models of women working in STEM jobs
- Increase the flexibility of secondary education system, creating opportunities for girls who have not completed their studies to continue their education in parallel with work
- To carry out work with the Armenian state pedagogical University named after Khachatur Abovyan, as this University is entrusted with a large component of providing education
- To carry out work to increase the sensitivity of teachers to gender issues. Educational standards are very important, but most teachers do not know how to present the material
- Overcome gender stereotypes and solve gender issues by using culture as a means. Encourage the production of films about women, the screening of materials about women figures on TV. However, it is important to take a sensitive approach during this process so that stereotypes are not reproduced.

### **Steps implemented in this direction**

Presented by Janna Andreasyan, the Deputy Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport:

- The agenda of women's rights in the field of education and their promotion is one of the most important issues, especially we see its connection at this stage of the changing the content of general education.
- Special attention needs to be paid to the monitoring of public impacts in this period of the pandemic, especially in terms of gender. Within the framework of cooperation with the Asian Development Bank, social-psychological support service and launch of a hotline of support is planned for teachers, pupils, parents.
  - In the context of substantial changes in the content of general education, special attention was paid to the issues related to gender expertise of the new education standards, as well as issues related to state gender strategy. In particular, there were special trainings organized for the standards developing experts with the support of the Council of Europe, so that we have gender-sensitive content. Special attention is paid to the experience of identifying and presenting female characters by the standard developers.
  - Gender issues are always being manipulated by pointing that this is an external agenda. Meanwhile, we want to refer to our tradition, showing that we have many examples of gender equality, starting with the history of law and evidence of medieval law.
  - The amount of misinformation related to the communication strategy is very large. A vivid example of this is the talk about the introduction of the subject of sexual education. The Ministry cooperates with specialists in connection with the communication strategy. There will be discussions with professional teaching groups at a new stage.