

Dear Chair, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, representatives of civil society organizations, ladies and gentlemen,

the European Youth Forum jointly with two of its members, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts and the Swiss National Youth Council, welcomes the focus of the 54th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women on the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Actions and its contribution to the achievement of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. However, we regret that the declaration adopted by this Commission does not include any strong commitment to further focus on the implementation of the objectives of the Beijing Platform of Action (PoA) which have not been fulfilled yet, including those focusing on education and training, health and political participation which are key to advance fundamental rights of women and in particular of girls and young women.

As regards **education and training for women**, some key actions included in the PoA are still not effectively monitored at the European level, including, for example, the points relating to combating gender-based stereotypes in the field of education and training, especially in curricula and textbooks.

Existing EU indicators show that gender-based stereotypes still make certain fields of education extremely segregated and that existing policies are failing to revert this trend. This phenomenon is particularly worrying considering that segregation in the field of study is also reflected in the employment sector. Indeed, although young women are nowadays more educated than young men in the EU, both the gender employment gap and the pay gap are still hugely affecting women and young women in particular.

Combating gender stereotypes and achieving gender equality should therefore be a strong focus of the follow up strategy on the EU roadmap for achieving equality between women and men 2006-2010. Moreover, the effective implementation of the existing Council of Europe instruments in the field of gender equality would also foster the implementation of the Beijing PoA in the field of education and training.

In the area of **health**, the PoA recognises the importance of tackling traditional and cultural practices that hamper the right of young women and young men to attain the highest level of physical and mental health. Prejudices, gender-based stereotypes and lack of self-esteem have a particularly heavy impact on the sexual and reproductive health of young women and young men. In this respect, non-formal education and sex-education in formal education systems have been acknowledged as crucial by the PoA.

However, the implementation of these actions should be given further priority in Europe. Although sex-education at school appears to be quite widespread, it is sometimes inadequate in overcoming gender-based stereotypes on sexual and reproductive health and rights, and is often not comprehensive, failing to include issues relating to gender equality, self-image and sexual orientation.

A more integrated approach is needed among EU policies in the areas of education, youth, health and equality and a specific priority focusing on promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights should be included in the follow-up strategy of the Roadmap. Furthermore, the effective implementation of existing instruments at the Council of Europe level, such as the 2008 Recommendations from the Committee of Ministers on the inclusion of gender differences in health policies and article 11 and E of the Revised European Social Charter, are essential to achieve the health-focused objectives agreed upon in Beijing.

This approach is also crucial in addressing sexually transmitted diseases, which are one of the most serious public health issues for young people. Given the fact that the European and Central

Asia region is experiencing the world's fastest growing HIV/AIDS epidemic, urgent efforts are needed to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015 and thus achieve MDG 6.

To this aim, it is therefore necessary to develop new indicators at the European level focusing on the role of non-formal education in raising the awareness of young men and women on sexual and reproductive health, including HIV and STIs, on the access for young women and men to sexual and reproductive health services and counseling and on the impact of policies designed to address SRH among the most vulnerable groups of young women and men.

The situation of young women in **politics and decision making** reflects the problems faced in this area by young people on the one hand and by women in general on the other. Besides gender-based stereotypes, another strong barrier hampering women's participation in decision-making is represented by the unequal share of care responsibilities faced by women and, in particular, by young women.

Overcoming the vertical gender segregation in many employment sectors requires, therefore, the establishment of a comprehensive legal framework that includes maternity, paternity and parental leaves, as the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers has already highlighted.

To conclude, It should be once more highlighted that an enhanced synergy among different policy areas, and in particular those of equality, non-discrimination and youth, is needed in order to achieve equality between young women and young men and to effectively implement the actions agreed upon in Beijing focusing on girls and young women.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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