



Contribution to the Call of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education for her country visit to Finland (20 - 29 November 2023)

21 September 2023

The Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (GI-ESCR) welcomes the call for contributions launched by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Ms Farida Shaheed, for her official country visit to Finland from 20 to 29 November 2023, at the invitation of the Government.

We take this opportunity to call the Special Rapporteur's attention to explore any promising examples of **educational approaches** within the Finnish education system that are **climate-conscious and/or gender transformative and promote the right to public education and other human rights**.

International human rights law mandates States to provide services essential for realising economic, social, and cultural rights, including the right to education, in a democratic and non-commercial manner. To ensure the full realisation of the right to education, States are under an obligation to provide public education that is accessible for all, free, of high-quality and genuinely inclusive. However, the growing involvement of private actors in education in the last two decades has resulted in increased commercialisation and privatisation of the education sector. Commercialisation risks shifting the power away from democratic frameworks to unaccountable corporate actors prioritising profit over the well-being of learners and teachers. Moreover, by turning education into a consumer good, commercialisation exacerbates structural inequalities regarding access to education – with pronounced negative implications for girls and young women – and erodes the essence of education as a public good and equaliser within society. Compared to public educational institutions, market-based educational systems have proved less resilient and more vulnerable to shocks, as exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many profit-based private schools closed, leaving millions of children behind.

In addition to their obligation to ensure the full realisation of the right to education for everyone without discrimination, and primarily through public education, States

are obliged to nurture respect for human rights and the environment through education. Nevertheless, many education systems have to focus on the impending ecological crisis adequately. As revealed by a recent UNESCO study, there is a glaring gap in climate change education across countries.¹ Addressing the ecological crisis requires a transformation in education that emphasises sustainability, and environmental stewardship, and equips learners to tackle the ensuing socio-economic challenges. Furthermore, to ensure education caters to the specific needs of all, especially the most vulnerable and marginalised as well as benefiting society as a whole, public education should be seen as a tool to foster critical examination of gender roles, and redistribute resources and opportunities; enhance understanding of the natural world; strengthen positive social practices that enhance gender equality and climate awareness; and essentially point towards more just and sustainable societies.

We thus bring to the Special Rapporteur's attention the request to explore whether Finland has **pioneered in adopting any promising examples of educational approaches that are non-commercial** (either by being part of the public education system or by being organised in any other way that benefits the public) and are climate conscious and/or promote enhanced gender equality.

Additional Resources:

COSYDEP and GI-ESCR, *Privatisation et marchandisation de l'éducation au Sénégal* (2022), available at: <https://gi-escr.org/fr/ressources/publications/privatisation-et-marchandisation-de-leducation-au-senegal>

GI-ESCR, *GI-ESCR's Magdalena Sepúlveda discusses the impact of COVID-19 in the leading (Spanish language newspaper El País)* (2020), available at: <https://gi-escr.org/en/our-work/on-the-ground/magdalena-sepulveda-discusses-the-impact-of-covid-19>

GI-ESCR, *Transparency of private commercial education providers: A case study of Bridge International Academies* (2022), available at: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a6e0958f6576ebde0e78c18/t/628d5e51f870352bfe9cf9d9/1653431894865/Transparency_of_private_commercial_education_providers_FINAL.pdf

MIDH and GI-ESCR, *L'impact de la privatisation et de la marchandisation de l'éducation sur le droit à l'éducation en Côte d'Ivoire au regard des principes d'Abidjan* (2022), available at: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a6e0958f6576ebde0e78c18/t/62cc37fb4d975773e522a3a2/1657550864697/Rapport+de+Recherche_Education_Final_Revise.pdf

OXFAM, *The power of education to fight inequality: How increasing educational equality and quality is crucial to fighting economic and gender inequality* (2019), available at: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/power-education-fight-inequality>

¹ UNESCO, *Educational content up close: Examining learning dimensions of ESD and GCE* (2020), available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000372327> (last accessed 5 January 2023).

Re-building resilient education systems: three lessons on the privatisation of education emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic (2020), available at: <https://gi-escr.org/en/covid-19-article-blog/re-building-resilient-education-systems-three-lessons-on-the-privatisation-of-education-emerging-from-the-covid-19-pandemic>

UNESCO, *Educational content up close: Examining learning dimensions of ESD and GCE* (2020), available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000372327>

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