

Put quality early childhood education for all on the top of the agenda for governments ^[1]

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EXCERPT

Education International's member organisations have firmly reminded governments that early childhood education is a fundamental human right and a public good, which must be made available to all young children.

This call was made at the Education international (EI) Global Seminar on early childhood education (ECE), held in Nairobi, Kenya, from 24-25 September; an event followed by a meeting of the ECE Working Group on 26 September.

Entitled "Towards quality early childhood education for all", the seminar addressed two sub-themes: turning global commitments into concrete local action; and union renewal, organising and recruitment.

Turning global commitments into concrete local action

Sixty-four participants coming from 16 countries discussed the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4 target 4.2, aiming to ensure that by 2030, all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education. They examined the bottlenecks to the achievement of this goal and came up with strategies for translating this and other global commitments into concrete local action. They also discussed the provisions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) policy guidelines for the promotion of decent work for early childhood education personnel, calling on the ILO and governments to ensure their full implementation.

In her keynote address to the seminar, UNESCO Regional Director for East Africa Ann Therese Ndong-Jatta reiterated UNESCO's commitment to ECE, and invited EI affiliates to work with the UN agency to promote the ECE target. She stressed that "global commitments should be turned to results" by ensuring that governments develop and implement holistic ECE policies. Highlighting the need for education in the mother tongue, Ndong-Jatta argued: "Children must learn in a language they understand, but unfortunately, this is not the case in many African countries".

EI Region Africa President and Kenya National Union of Teachers' General Secretary Wilson Sossion, emphasised the need for governments to guarantee the provision of ECE in the legislation and to ensure that it is fully financed. The seminar participants also stressed the need for improving teachers' salaries and working conditions, strengthening initial teacher education and professional development.

The seminar also focused on various challenges affecting the ECE sector, including privatisation and deprofessionalisation, which is exacerbated by the promotion of high-stakes standardised assessments in ECE.

Organising in the ECE sector essential

Following a presentation on union renewal by Professor Howard Stevenson, Director of Research at the University of Nottingham, UK, participants went on to share and develop concrete strategies for organising in the ECE sector, both in public and non-state educational establishments.

On the need for unions to intensify organising in the ECE sector, EI's Dennis Sinyolo strongly insisted that "renewal, organising and mobilisation are the life-blood of any education union. We must intensify membership recruitment, empower ECE educators and ensure that they have a voice."

An ECE network, bringing together interested EI member organisations in Africa to collaborate and share information and strategies on the promotion of ECE and organising, was also launched at the seminar.

Region: International ^[3]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/18/10/put-quality-early-childhood-education-all-top-agenda-governments> [2] <https://eie.org/en/detail/16012/put-quality-early-childhood-education-for-all-on-the-top-of-the-agenda-for-governments> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/international>