

Education
International
Toolkit

2026

TEACHING INCLUSION, BUILDING BELONGING

*A Toolkit for Educators and Education Unions to Promote Inclusion
and End Stigma Related to Leprosy (Hansen's Disease)*

MODULE 4

Gendered Stigma and Discrimination in Education



Education International
Internationale de l'Éducation
Internacional de la Educación
Bildungsinternationale

SASAKAWA
LEPROSY
HANSEN'S DISEASE
INITIATIVE



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Art for me is a way of observing the world, making sense of what I see, and sharing it with others. I am still finding and developing my voice as an artist, but I enjoy the process of experimenting, learning, and discovering where each artwork takes me."

About Education International:

Education International represents organisations of teachers and other education employees across the globe. It is the world's largest federation of unions and associations, representing thirty million education employees in about four hundred organisations in one hundred and seventy countries and territories, across the globe. Education International unites teachers and education employees.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ILO	International Labour Organization
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
EI	Education International
ESP	Education Support Personnel
GBV	gender-based violence
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics



Module Overview

Gender can shape how stigma and discrimination are experienced in schools, workplaces, and education unions. Women and girls may face expectations about how they should behave, learn, lead, or participate. These expectations can become embedded in everyday interactions, institutional practices, and decision-making processes. For women educators, gender bias may affect authority, career progression, leadership opportunities, workload, and participation in decision-making. For girls, gender stereotypes and unequal expectations can affect participation, safety, and aspirations. These experiences can be further compounded when gender intersects with disability, sexual orientation, leprosy (Hansen's disease)-related stigma, poverty, age, ethnicity, or other forms of marginalisation.

This module focuses on recognising these patterns and identifying practical ways to make education settings more gender-inclusive. It also highlights women educators and education unions, not only as people who may experience discrimination, but also, and more importantly, as agents of change.

Module Learning Objectives

1. Recognise how gender stereotypes and gender bias can shape everyday experiences in education.
2. Identify subtle forms of gender discrimination and microaggressions in education settings.
3. Recognise how gender-based discrimination and violence can affect women educators and girls.
4. Identify practical actions that educators, school leaders, and education unions can take to create more gender-inclusive environments.
5. Identify opportunities for women educators to participate in leadership and decision-making.

Units in this Module

Unit 4.1 Understanding Gendered Stigma and Discrimination in Education

Unit 4.2 Addressing Gendered Stigma and Discrimination in the Workplace



Unit 4.1. Understanding Gendered Stigma and Discrimination in Education

Unit Overview

This unit introduces the key concepts needed to recognise gendered stigma and discrimination in education settings. It explains how gender stereotypes, stereotyping, bias, discrimination, and micro-aggressions shape everyday experiences for learners, teachers, and education workers. The unit also highlights how gender intersects with disability, sexual orientation, leprosy (Hansen's disease)-related stigma, poverty, ethnicity, age, and other factors. It supports users to notice patterns, reflect on their own context, and identify practical ways to challenge exclusion in classrooms, schools, and unions.

Unit Learning Objectives

1. Define gender stereotypes, gender stereotyping, gender bias, gendered stigma, and discrimination.
2. Recognise how gendered stigma and discrimination appear in everyday education practices, interactions, and institutional routines.
3. Explain how gender intersects with disability, sexual orientation, leprosy (Hansen's disease)-related stigma and other forms of exclusion.
4. Identify microaggressions and distinguish between microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations.
5. Apply safe and practical strategies for responding to stereotypes, bias, and microaggressions in education settings.

Unit Outline

4.1.1 What is Gendered Stigma and Discrimination?

4.1.2 What are Microaggressions?



4.1.1 What is Gendered Stigma and Discrimination?

Gender Bias (The Implicit/Explicit Prejudice)

 **Gender bias** refers to conscious or unconscious assumptions, expectations, and preferences that influence how we perceive and judge people based on gender, leading to unequal treatment or discrimination.¹ Most educators do not consciously intend to be sexist, but implicit biases frequently manifest through a school's unwritten attitudes, management practices, and systemic expectations that influence students and staff. Bias is a systemic prejudice or favouritism that affects decision-making and interpersonal dynamics, often operating under the radar without the person realising it.

Examples:

- A teacher may unconsciously perceive boys as more likely to have interesting or challenging ideas, and therefore be more inclined to invite them to elaborate, while viewing girls' contributions as less likely to require further exploration.
- A teacher or school leader may unconsciously perceive assertiveness differently depending on gender, interpreting a male teacher's assertiveness as confidence while perceiving similar assertiveness from a woman teacher as less comfortable or appropriate.
- Union members may unconsciously associate leadership, negotiation, or conflict management with traditionally masculine qualities and therefore perceive male candidates as more naturally suited to high-stakes leadership or lead-negotiator roles.
- A school administrator may unconsciously associate visible impairments with reduced professional capability and, at the same time, hold stronger expectations about women's appearance or physical presentation. These biases may influence how the administrator perceives the competence of a woman teacher affected by leprosy (Hansen's disease) compared with a male colleague.
- School leaders or colleagues may unconsciously associate professionalism, authority, or suitability for particular school roles with conventional ideas about gender and heterosexuality. As a result, they may perceive LGBTQI educators differently from their cisgender, heterosexual colleagues, even when their qualifications and performance are the same.

Gender bias is often the starting point. When these assumptions become beliefs about how women and men should behave, they can reinforce gender stereotypes. When they influence decisions, behaviour, or institutional practices that disadvantage people, they can result in gendered stigma and discrimination.



Gender Stereotype (The Belief)

A **gender stereotype** is a broad generalisation or widely held belief about the characteristics, traits, and roles that men and women inherently possess or should possess. They are culturally learned preconceptions that can be descriptive (what men and women are like) or prescriptive (what they should do).² A stereotype represents the underlying cognitive assumption or cultural narrative. It is the belief itself.

Gender stereotypes are harmful because they prevent a person from enjoying full human rights and limit their potential — their abilities, their career, their choices — regardless of whether the stereotype sounds negative (“women are irrational”) or sounds positive (“women are nurturing”). Even the flattering-sounding stereotypes are damaging: the assumption that women are naturally caregivers is exactly why caregiving roles and work so often fall on women by default rather than by choice.

Examples:

- The societal belief that boys are naturally suited for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and leadership, while girls are inherently submissive. This is actively reinforced by school textbooks that disproportionately depict men in active, public professions and women in passive or domestic roles.
- The stereotype that women are “too emotional,” overly accommodating, or weak negotiators. This systemic bias directly hinders gender equality by systematically passing over women teachers for school leadership positions or lead roles in collective bargaining.
- The assumption that teaching and caregiving are biologically “women’s work.” This stereotype is frequently used by authorities to devalue the education profession, justify poor wages for teachers and support personnel, and ignore the need for family-friendly workplace policies.
- The harmful expectation that women workers should be submissive, quiet, or constantly smiling. This stereotype creates a dangerous power dynamic that normalises gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) from colleagues, management, or the community.

Gender Stereotyping (The Action)

Gender stereotyping is the actual practice or act of assigning specific traits, behaviours, or roles to an individual solely based on their gender identity. If a stereotype is the internal belief, stereotyping is the active application of that belief to a specific person in the real world.³

Gender stereotyping can also contribute to sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence. When assumptions about how women should dress, behave, speak, or respond to men are used to justify unwanted sexual attention, sexual comments, advances, or other harassment, stereotypes can help normalise or excuse the behaviour. Conversely, stereotypes may be used to blame or discredit women who experience harassment—for example, by suggesting that a woman “invited” sexual attention because of how she dressed or behaved. UN Women identifies harmful gender stereotypes and discriminatory gender norms as underlying factors that reinforce violence and harassment against women.⁴



Gender stereotyping becomes a human rights violation, not just a bias, when it results in discrimination or limits a person's rights, opportunities, dignity, or access to justice. For example, failing to prosecute a perpetrator of sexual violence because of stereotypical views about a woman's "appropriate" sexual behaviour, or failing to take marital rape seriously because of assumptions about a wife's role, are examples of stereotyping translated directly into violations of women's rights.⁵

Examples:

- A teacher actively steering a female student away from an advanced physics class because they assume she will naturally struggle with the material, or instinctively assigning boys to carry heavy equipment while asking girls to clean the chalkboards.
- A school district routinely outsourcing and underpaying its woman-dominated cafeteria and custodial staff based on the stereotype that this is low-skilled "women's work," making these ESPs highly vulnerable to economic precariousness and workplace harassment from male superiors.
- A hiring committee passing over a highly qualified woman educator for a principal or lead union negotiator position because they actively apply the stereotype that women are "too emotional" or lack the assertiveness required to handle difficult leadership challenges.
- A school administration formally or informally assigning unpaid pastoral care duties, such as organizing staff social events, comforting distressed students, or managing community relations, exclusively to woman teachers, based on the assumption that women are "natural caregivers."

TRY THIS!

TOOL: GENDER BIAS AND INCLUSION SPOT-CHECK

Use this quick tool to identify where gender stereotypes, bias, or discrimination may be affecting participation and opportunities in your school or education union. It can be completed individually or used by a group to identify practical changes.

Check	Always	Some-times	Not yet	What can I change?	What help is needed?
1. Do women and men have equal opportunities to speak?	☐	☐	☐		
2. Are classroom responsibilities shared regardless of gender?	☐	☐	☐		
3. Do learning materials avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes?	☐	☐	☐		
4. Are sexist comments or jokes challenged, and not brushed off as "harmless," "a joke," or "just part of the job"?	☐	☐	☐		



Check	Always	Some- times	Not yet	What can I change?	What help is needed?
5. Are concerns about discrimination, harassment, or unequal treatment taken seriously and acted upon?	☐	☐	☐		
6. Can staff safely and confidentially raise concerns about violence, harassment or discrimination, including through clear reporting or support mechanisms, without fear that it will affect their job, standing, or how they are treated afterward?	☐	☐	☐		
7. Would a colleague experiencing domestic violence know who to turn to at work, and would they be met with flexibility and support rather than penalised for it?	☐	☐	☐		
8. Are administrative, care, emotional-support, and technical tasks shared fairly among staff, rather than routinely assigned according to gender?	☐	☐	☐		
9. Are women educators encouraged and given real opportunities for leadership and decision-making roles?	☐	☐	☐		
10. Are women provided with opportunities such as mentoring, leadership development, or negotiation training to support their career or union participation?	☐	☐	☐		
11. Are women provided with opportunities such as mentoring, leadership development, or negotiation training to support their career or union participation?	☐	☐	☐		
12. Are practical barriers to participation addressed? For example, meeting times, childcare, transport, or other care responsibilities?	☐	☐	☐		
13. Are women from marginalised groups, including women with disabilities or other under-represented groups, able to participate and progress equally?	☐	☐	☐		



Check	Always	Some-times	Not yet	What can I change?	What help is needed?
14. Does the leadership reflect the gender balance of who is actually doing the work?	☐	☐	☐		
15. Does the school or union collect or review information on who participates in leadership, decision-making, training, and other opportunities?	☐	☐	☐		
16. Does the school or union provide training or other support on gender equality, non-discrimination, harassment, and gender-transformative practices?	☐	☐	☐		
17. Does the school or union have clear policies or procedures to prevent and respond to gender-based violence and harassment?	☐	☐	☐		

Reflection:

- What is one practice that could be changed immediately, and one that could be changed in the mid-term? Add these in the table. Keep this simple and attainable in your context.
- What help is needed to make the change happen? Sometimes, the change needed requires collaborating with others, for example, changing the ways things are currently done. Add this in the table.

Keep in mind that small changes in everyday practice can make a big impact. Small changes that are sustainable are often more effective than big plans that are difficult to implement.



Gendered Stigma and Discrimination (Systemic Devaluation and Exclusion)

Gendered stigma and discrimination occur when people are treated differently, excluded, or given fewer opportunities because of gender or because they do not conform to expected gender roles. Gendered stigma and discrimination are often tied to gender stereotypes, gender discrimination, inequality, and gender-based violence.⁶

In education, this may not always be obvious. It can appear through everyday comments, expectations, decisions, and institutional practices.

Examples in classroom settings:

- Describing assertive girls as “bossy” or “difficult,” while viewing similar behaviour from boys as leadership.
- Discouraging girls from subjects, activities, or careers considered unsuitable for women.
- Making sexual jokes, comments about learners’ bodies, or unwanted sexual remarks.
- Blaming or shaming a learner who reports sexual harassment.

“A woman working in a University was approached by the Academic Vice President who told her that he was interested in her. She tried to tell him that she was not interested, but he started to harass her, telling her and others that he wanted to be with her. He used his position to encourage his colleagues to force her to accept the request. Colleagues sent messages and calls to pressure her, refused to pay her salary, and even made death threats.”

- Ethiopian Teachers Association (ETA), Ethiopia
Source: Georgia Montague-Nelson, and Dave Spooner. Violence and Harassment in the World of Work: Training of Trainers Toolkit on the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206. 2021

Examples in the workplace:

- Giving women additional care, administrative, or emotional-support work without recognition.
- Giving men greater access to training, technical responsibilities, or career opportunities.
- Questioning a woman’s authority or competence more readily than a man’s.
- Expecting women to tolerate sexual jokes or unwanted attention as “part of the job.”
- Making unwanted sexual comments, jokes, messages, or advances.
- Retaliating against or disadvantaging a woman who reports harassment.
- Making employment decisions based on assumptions about pregnancy, marriage, or family responsibilities.
- Refusing to promote or appoint a woman educator with a disability to a leadership or public-facing role because of assumptions that she cannot manage staff, travel, or represent the institution effectively.



- Excluding or disadvantaging a woman of diverse sexual orientation by denying professional opportunities, creating a hostile work environment, or subjecting her to harassment, gossip, or unequal treatment because of her actual or perceived sexual orientation.

Examples in school and union leadership:

- Excluding women from informal networks where decisions are discussed .
- Assigning leadership or technical responsibilities disproportionately to men.
- Assigning women welfare and care-related responsibilities while men take on policy, negotiation, or strategic roles.
- Questioning women's leadership because of family responsibilities.
- Giving women fewer opportunities to represent the school or union in negotiations or high-level meetings.
- Treating harassment complaints as a reputational problem rather than a safeguarding or workplace issue.
- Failing to provide accessible meeting venues, materials, or communication formats, which limits the ability of women leaders with disabilities to participate fully in school or union decision-making.
- Excluding women of diverse sexual orientations from leadership opportunities, committees, public representation roles, or informal decision-making networks because they are perceived as controversial, unsuitable, or not representative of the institution or union.

TRY THIS!

Think About Gendered Stigma and Discrimination in Your School or Union

Gendered stigma can be subtle. Not every experience of gender bias is an obvious act of discrimination. Sometimes it is embedded in routines that have become normal. The questions below can help educators and unions identify patterns that might otherwise remain invisible.

Ask:

- Who is expected to speak?
- Who is expected to listen?
- Who does the organising?
- Who makes the decisions?
- Whose ideas receive recognition?
- Who gets opportunities to lead?
- Whose behaviour is judged more harshly?



Rachna Kumari — “Every person has the right to live life with dignity”

A story of a leprosy (Hansen's disease) survivor and how she became an agent of change in her community.

A leprosy (Hansen's disease) survivor's first-person account illustrating the compounded stigma that women with leprosy (Hansen's disease) experience, published by OHCHR to accompany a UN Special Rapporteur report specifically on women affected by leprosy (Hansen's disease).

Kumari describes the psychological toll directly: “I suffered social exclusion, stigma and discrimination. It was harrowing. I went into depression and lost the will to live.” The accompanying reporting notes that the UN expert's findings found women were at higher risk of both discrimination/violence and of developing leprosy (Hansen's disease)-related physical impairments, often because low social status leads women to conceal the disease and delay care.

Source: OHCHR, “Leprosy survivor, Rachna Kumari: ‘Every person has the right to live life with dignity’” (24 July 2019). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2019/07/leprosy-survivor-rachna-kumari-every-person-has-right-live-life-dignity>

Gender intersects with other forms of exclusion

Module 1, Unit 1.3.2, *Intersectionality and Compounded Discrimination*, has outlined how different parts of a person's identity and circumstances overlap to shape their experience. Gender does not operate in isolation. Gender, together with a person's race, age, sexual orientation and identity, disability, ethnicity, political or religious beliefs, economic and social conditions, or other factors, increases their disadvantage or advantage. Gender stereotypes don't act alone. Layered with other stereotypes, they affect some women more than others. Women affected by leprosy (Hansen's disease), women with disabilities, women of diverse sexual orientations, women from minority, Indigenous, or lower-caste communities, and migrant women all face compounded versions of the same bias.⁷ A girl with a disability, a woman affected by leprosy (Hansen's disease), or a woman from a marginalised community may experience several forms of stigma or discrimination at the same time.

For example, a woman educator affected by leprosy (Hansen's disease) or disability may experience:

- gender stereotypes about leadership, such as being seen as “too emotional” or “not firm enough” to manage staff, while leprosy (Hansen's disease)-related stigma leads others to avoid close contact with her or question whether she should represent the school publicly;
- assumptions about her capacity to perform her role, where disability-related needs are mistaken for inability and gender bias makes colleagues less likely to recognise her expertise, authority or professionalism;
- inaccessible meetings, classrooms, toilets or transport arrangements that limit participation, especially when school or union activities are scheduled in ways that also assume women can



absorb unpaid caregiving responsibilities;

- exclusion from professional development, promotion or public-facing roles because decision-makers assume that a woman affected by leprosy (Hansen's disease) or disability will be a "risk," a burden, or less accepted by parents, learners or community members;
- questioning of her competence when she asks for reasonable accommodations, reports discriminatory treatment, or challenges unsafe conditions, with her concerns dismissed as personal sensitivity rather than legitimate workplace barriers; and
- social isolation in staffrooms, union meetings or community events, where fear and misinformation about leprosy (Hansen's disease) combine with gender norms that expect women to remain agreeable, grateful, and silent about exclusion.

Considering intersectionality helps in understanding how different barriers can combine and create different experiences. When discussing gender, avoid treating women and girls as a single, uniform group.

It helps to ask: Who may experience this differently, and why?

TRY THIS!

Practical Tips for Addressing Gender Stereotypes

- Review who participates in discussions and leadership activities.
- Avoid assigning tasks according to gender.
- Use examples, stories, and learning materials that show women and men in diverse roles.
- Challenge stereotypes when they arise rather than allowing them to become normalised.
- Do not dismiss discriminatory comments as "just jokes".
- Give girls, women, boys, and men equal opportunities to lead, speak, experiment, and make decisions.
- Reflect on your own assumptions about behaviour, ability, and career choices.



4.1.2 What Are Microaggressions?

What are microaggressions?

Much of what makes gendered stigma hard to name is that it rarely arrives as a single, obvious act of discrimination. It accumulates through small, repeated moments, often built from the stereotypes described in the previous section.

Microaggressions are brief, everyday verbal, behavioural, or environmental slights, intentional or not, that communicate a negative message about someone's health condition, gender, disability, race, or other identity.⁸ Microaggressions can seem small when considered individually, but repeated experiences can affect belonging, confidence, participation, and professional well-being.

Three forms of microaggressions:

- Microassaults — explicit, conscious put-downs (a deliberately dismissive comment)
- Microinsults — subtle, often unconscious rudeness (a backhanded compliment)
- Microinvalidations — dismissing or erasing someone's experience entirely

Type	What it looks like	Examples
Microassaults	■ Explicit, conscious put-downs. ■ A deliberately dismissive comment. ■ The person usually knows what they're doing, even if they'd deny meaning harm.	1. Visibly recoiling from, or refusing to shake hands with a colleague or student with leprosy (Hansen's disease)-related impairments. 2. Telling a woman teacher, openly, "you should be home with your kids instead of at this meeting." 3. A union member saying during a bargaining session that "women are too emotional to negotiate." 4. Continuing to use an outdated, stigmatising term for leprosy (Hansen's disease) after being asked to stop. 5. Joking that a teacher with a disability is "wasted" on classes that need a firm hand.



Type	What it looks like	Examples
Microinsults	■ Subtle, often unconscious comments or actions that demean someone's competence or identity. ■ A backhanded compliment. Usually delivered as a compliment, joke, or "helpful" assumption.	1. Automatically asking a woman colleague to take notes or organise refreshments in every meeting, without asking anyone else. 2. Telling a teacher affected by leprosy (Hansen's disease) she's "coping so well" — centering others' comfort with her condition rather than her actual work. 3. Asking a woman union representative "<i>who's looking after the kids?</i>" before a conference, a question male reps are never asked. 4. Assuming a support staff member with a disability can't handle a physically demanding task without being asked first. 5. Praising a woman school leader as "<i>surprisingly assertive</i>," implying assertiveness is unexpected — or unwelcome — from her.
Microinvalidations	Comments that dismiss, deny, or erase someone's experience of discrimination, often by denying that bias exists at all.	1. Responding to a report of teasing about a family member's leprosy (Hansen's disease) diagnosis with "<i>kids will be kids, don't take it personally</i>." 2. Telling a woman who raises being passed over for promotion, "<i>we don't see gender here, we just pick the best person</i>." 3. Dismissing a union member's account of being excluded from decision-making with "<i>you're overreacting, no one meant anything by it</i>." 4. Saying "<i>I don't see disability, I treat everyone the same</i>" in response to a colleague naming a specific barrier she faces. 5. Interrupting a woman educator mid-sentence, then acting as though the interruption didn't happen when she points it out.

Responding to microaggressions

Microaggressions should be acknowledged when it is recognised or identified and not dismissed so that it will not be normalised. If ignored, the person or group can be further marginalised and the stereotype can persist. However, the response should take into account safety, power, and context. Not every situation requires the person experiencing it to respond directly. The box below shows an example of how to respond to microaggressions:



TRY THIS!

How to Respond to Microaggressions

While it is important to acknowledge and challenge microaggressions, any response should take into account emotional readiness, safety, power dynamics, and context. Not every situation requires direct engagement, and sometimes stepping back is the most appropriate option.

1. **Take a deep breath:** Collect your thoughts before responding.
2. **Acknowledge:** Know and recognise that the other person's perspective is their reality and truth.
3. **Inquire:** Give them the benefit of the doubt. First, ask them to clarify, elaborate, or further explain. This will give you more information about where they're coming from and may also help the speaker to become aware of what they're saying.
 - *"Could you please say more about that?"*
 - *"Can you elaborate on your point?"*
 - *"It sounds like you have a strong opinion about this. Could you please tell me why?"*
 - *"What is it about this that concerns you the most?"*
4. **Reframe:** Create a different way or perspective from which to view the situation.
 - *"Could there be another way to look at this?"*
 - *"Let's reframe this to explore other perspectives/interpretations. Consider for a moment that... What if...?"*
 - *"I'm wondering what message this is sending and how it's being received. Do you think you would have said this/drawn this conclusion if...?"*
5. **Identify:** Directly respond to a comment and identify it as problematic. Calmly and politely explain which specific words or phrases you experienced as disrespectful (or that someone else might have). Use an "I" statement to express feelings, as appropriate, rather than commenting on or labeling the speaker.
 - *"Saying _____ often comes up in popular culture. Some might find it problematic because of _____."*
 - *"When you said X, I felt like Y. In the future, please..."*
 - *"This seems like a good time to revisit and remind ourselves about the guidelines for discussion that we agreed upon as a class."*
 - *"Let's pause on that comment. It may unintentionally question a colleague's competence or role because of gender."*



6. Diffuse to allow productive re-engagement: Sometimes, a hot moment can get out of control.

- If this happens in class, ask students to pause and write individually for a moment about what just happened and how they feel about it.
- Use this time as an opportunity to formulate a strategy for re-engaging the hot moment in a productive, inclusive way.
- Remind your students which discussion guidelines are relevant to the situation.
- In faculty or union settings, pause the discussion if needed, restate shared norms for respectful professional dialogue, and agree on how to return to the issue without leaving the affected colleague to manage the situation alone.

7. Revisit: Sometimes one is caught by surprise, misses an opportunity, or wishes they could have a do-over in response to a microaggression or “hot moment”. Even if the moment has passed, it’s ok to go back and address it later. Research indicates that an unaddressed microaggression can leave just as much of a negative impact as the microaggression itself.

- *I want to go back to something that was brought up earlier.”*
- *I think it would be worthwhile to revisit something that happened ____.”*

8. Check in: In person, talk with the targeted individual/group. Let them know that you value their experiences and perspective and see if they have any suggestions about how to better support them.

When to Report or Escalate

Where behaviour is repeated, serious, discriminatory or harassing, use the appropriate school, workplace, or union mechanism for reporting incidents.

Note: The responsibility for addressing discrimination should not be placed solely on the person experiencing it.

Source: Eberly Center, Carnegie Mellon University, <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/design/teach/classroomclimate/strategies/microaggression.html>

Practice and Application

1. Self-Reflection Prompt

Think of the following questions to reflect on gender stereotypes in your context:

- What behaviours and norms are expected of women and men in your school, workplace, or union?
- How do these gender stereotypes affect you or other women and men you know?
- What practical action can you do in your practice to help address these gender stereotypes?

2. Recognising Microaggressions

Think of a moment in the past month when a comment or exclusion in your staff room or classroom made you pause. Ask yourself:

- Would this comment have been made if the person were a different gender?
- Did it comment on competence, or on how someone “should” behave?
- Was the person’s own account of the moment taken seriously, or was it minimised?

There’s no need to report this or resolve it immediately — the goal is simply to practice noticing.

Unit Summary

- * **Gender stereotypes** are learned beliefs about how women, men, girls, and boys are expected to behave, learn, work, or lead.
- * **Gender stereotyping** happens when these beliefs are applied to individuals, limiting opportunities and choices.
- * **Gender bias** can be conscious or unconscious and can affect decisions, expectations, and everyday interactions.

- * **Gendered stigma and discrimination** occur when people are devalued, excluded, or treated unequally because of gender or expected gender roles.
- * In education, **gendered stigma** can appear through comments, workloads, leadership opportunities, classroom expectations, and union or school decision-making.
- * **Intersectionality matters:** gender can combine with disability, leprosy (Hansen's disease)-related stigma, poverty, ethnicity, age, or other factors to deepen exclusion.
- * **Microaggressions** are everyday slights or dismissive behaviours that may seem small but can accumulate and harm confidence, belonging, and participation. Microaggressions should be named and addressed safely; responsibility should not rest only on the person affected.
- * **Creating inclusive education settings** requires noticing patterns, challenging stereotypes, and changing everyday practices.

Additional Resources

1. **UNESCO Promoting Gender Equality in Education:** <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000370875.locale=en>
2. **UNESCO Gender-responsive education - Toolkit for teachers, teacher educators, school managers, and curriculum developers in Africa:** <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375869.locale=en>
3. **OHCHR Gender Stereotyping as Human Rights Violation:** <https://cambodia.ohchr.org/en/content/gender-stereotyping-human-rights-violation>
4. **Stanford University – Recognizing and Addressing Microaggressions:** <https://sustainability.stanford.edu/sites/sustainability/files/media/file/recognizing-and-addressing-microaggressions-2025.pdf>



Unit 4.2. Addressing Gendered Stigma and Discrimination in the Workplace

Unit Overview

This unit examines how gendered stigma and discrimination affect teachers, school leaders, education support personnel, and union members as workers. It explores how unequal treatment can appear in authority, workload, promotion, leadership, pay, meeting culture, harassment, domestic violence, and decision-making. The unit also introduces practical steps that schools and unions can take to create safer, more equitable, and gender-inclusive workplaces, including systems for prevention, reporting, support, and accountability. It highlights women educators as leaders and agents of change who can help transform school and union cultures toward inclusion.

Unit Learning Objectives

1. Recognise how gendered stigma and discrimination affect teachers, school leaders, education support personnel and union members in the workplace.
2. Identify common forms of workplace gender bias, including unequal workload, questioned authority, exclusion from decision-making, harassment, and barriers to leadership.
3. Explain why violence, harassment, and domestic violence are workplace issues and how ILO Convention No. 190 can guide action.
4. Identify practical steps schools and unions can take to review policies, improve reporting systems, support affected workers, and promote accountability.
5. Describe ways to support women educators as leaders for inclusion through structural change, mentoring, transparent opportunities, and leadership pathways.

Unit Outline

4.2.1 Gendered Stigma and Discrimination Experienced by Educators

4.2.2 Practical Steps for Educators, Schools, and Unions

4.2.3 Supporting Women Educators as Leaders for Inclusion



4.2.1 Gendered Stigma and Discrimination Experienced by Educators

The previous modules on gender-related stigma and discrimination have focused on learners. However, teachers, school administrators, education support personnel, and education union members also continually experience gendered stigma and discrimination.

Women educators routinely navigate situations that stigmatise or discriminate against them due to their gender. This can include authority questioned by students, parents, or colleagues; exclusion from leadership and decision-making spaces; unspoken expectations about how a woman teacher “should” behave; care-coded or support roles that are essential to a school’s functioning but consistently undervalued and overlooked in how “leadership potential” is assessed.

This working environment reality is directly linked to violence and harassment law. Adopted in 2019, International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 190 (C190)^a is the first international law establishing the right to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence. It is supplemented by Recommendation 206 (R206), which guides its national implementation. The ILO notes that violence and harassment can become normalised when they happen so frequently that they are seen as a routine part of working life. This has been observed in education, health care, and other people-facing sectors.⁹ The same process can occur with everyday microaggressions, which may come to be accepted as normal if they are not recognised or challenged.

Examples of how gendered stigma and discrimination manifest in school and union settings for educators include:

1. Teachers

- **The “glass escalator” vs. sticky Floors:** Men teaching in women-dominated areas (like early childhood or primary education) are often fast-tracked into leadership roles (the “glass escalator”), while women teachers remain stagnant in their roles despite equal or greater experience.
- **Role stereotyping:** Women teachers are disproportionately assigned “nurturing” or administrative unpaid tasks (e.g., pastoral care, organising social events, emotional support), while male teachers are often assigned authoritative roles (e.g., head of discipline) or pushed toward STEM subjects.
- **Pregnancy and maternity discrimination:** Women teachers facing contract non-renewals, being passed over for promotions, or being demoted upon returning from maternity leave.
- **Harassment:** Sexual harassment from colleagues, school management, or even parents, ranging from inappropriate comments and “jokes” to unwanted physical contact.
- **Gender pay gap:** Despite standardised pay scales in many public systems, men often earn more due to taking on paid extracurricular roles (like coaching sports) that are more highly valued and compensated than arts or club advising, which are often led by women.

^a See Additional Resources at the end of Unit 4.1 for the links to the full convention 190 and recommendation 206 and the mini guide.



2. Administrators and School Leadership

- **Double standards in leadership:** Women administrators who act assertively are often penalised and labeled as “aggressive,” “bossy,” or “difficult,” whereas the exact same behaviour in male administrators is praised as “strong,” “decisive,” and “leadership material”.
- **The “Boys’ Club” culture:** Exclusion of women administrators from informal networking opportunities where important decisions are made, mentorship is provided, and career advancement is negotiated.
- **Hiring bias:** Systemic preference for male candidates for top executive roles (e.g., District Superintendent, Headmaster), under the assumption that men are better suited to manage large budgets and complex logistics.
- **Harassment from stakeholders:** Women leaders facing gender-based bullying, insubordination, or questioning of their authority by male staff members, school board members, or parents, simply because they are women.

2. Education Support Personnel

- **Devaluation of “women’s work”:** ESP roles are heavily feminised and are chronically undervalued, resulting in precarious contracts, poverty-level wages, and a lack of benefits compared to the formal teaching staff.
- **Vulnerability to harassment:** Because ESPs often lack job security and hold less power within the school hierarchy, they are highly vulnerable to sexual harassment and bullying by higher-ranking staff members, with little recourse for reporting.
- **Unequal access to facilities:** Women support staff (like cleaners or cafeteria workers) sometimes lack access to adequate, safe, and private restrooms or break areas compared to teaching staff or male facilities staff.
- **Invisibility in decision-making:** Total exclusion from school policy discussions or safety planning, despite often being on the front lines of student interaction and campus safety.

3. Education Unions¹⁰

- **Underrepresentation in leadership:** Despite education being a heavily feminised profession globally, senior union leadership (presidents, lead negotiators) remains disproportionately male.
- **Marginalisation of “women’s issues”:** Gender equality issues do not always receive the same level of attention across union advocacy and bargaining priorities. The 2024 Quadrennial Gender Survey identifies maternity and carers’ leave, flexible work, childcare, career progression, GBV, and other gender-related issues as areas of union advocacy.
- **Hostile meeting environments:** Women may face barriers to speaking freely and participating fully in union spaces. Interviewees cited in Education International (EI)’s 2024 Quadrennial Gender Survey highlighted the value of women’s spaces where members could speak without fear of being interrupted or questioned.
- **Exclusionary structures:** Union structures and meeting arrangements may create barriers to women’s participation, particularly where care responsibilities limit their available time. Practical measures such as childcare can help facilitate participation.



- Harassment within the union: Women who seek union leadership may face disproportionate scrutiny, abuse, intimidation and threats, which can discourage them from standing for public-facing leadership roles. The 2024 Quadrennial Gender Survey also identified GBVH within unions and gaps in reporting and response mechanisms.

Domestic violence is also a workplace issue

Domestic violence,^b even though it originates outside the workplace, commonly spills into work. For example, a perpetrator following a victim to her workplace, or using her professional phone or email to harass and control her or prohibit her from leaving the home to go to work. Domestic violence has a real and harmful impact on a person's physical and mental health and may even lead to loss of life. It also spills over between home and work. Domestic abuse causes trauma that impairs work performance for both victims and perpetrators, while violent workplaces can condition employees to commit violence at home.¹¹

ILO Convention 190¹² explicitly recognises this, requiring governments, employers, and unions to help “recognise, respond to and address the impacts of domestic violence” in the world of work. Several unions have secured concrete protections: the Philippines and New Zealand both provide ten days of paid leave for victims of domestic violence, achieved through union advocacy.¹³

Here is how schools and unions, as employers, can act as vital allies in supporting their staff or representatives who are survivors of domestic violence:¹⁴

- **Ensuring job security and providing leave:** Offering dedicated leave and temporary protection against dismissal allows survivors to attend court, seek medical help, and relocate safely without the fear of losing their income and financial independence.
- **Fostering a safe and flexible environment:** Creating an inclusive workplace culture, supported by domestic violence risk assessments and flexible working arrangements, enables survivors to safely disclose their situation and adjust their schedules to avoid abusers who might track their whereabouts.
- **Facilitating access to support and justice:** Workplaces can encourage early intervention by running awareness campaigns, training staff to handle disclosures, and actively providing survivors with information on public services and legal resources.

By implementing these supportive measures in alignment with ILO Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206, employers can help build a world of work rooted in safety, respect, and dignity for all.

For further learning, see also Annex 1: Role of unions in ending domestic violence

^b Domestic violence is defined by ILO as “partner violence but [...] can also encompass child or elder abuse, or abuse by any member of a household”.



4.2.2 Practical Steps for Educators, Schools, and Unions to Address Gendered Stigma and Discrimination

A gender-inclusive environment requires more than responding to incidents after they occur. Schools and unions should examine whether their everyday systems create equal opportunities and safe working and learning conditions.

Practical areas for review include policies and practices on:

- recruitment and promotion
- leadership opportunities
- professional development
- workload distribution
- meeting arrangements
- decision-making
- parental and caregiving responsibilities
- sexual harassment prevention
- reporting and grievance procedures
- maternity and other relevant leave
- flexible working arrangements, where appropriate
- safe transportation and work-related travel
- access to support services

See Additional Resources at the end of Unit 4.2.2 for links to some tools to help with reviewing some areas in this list.



Try This!

TOOL: WORKPLACE POLICY CHECKLIST: GENDER EQUALITY, VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT¹⁵

Use this checklist to review your school or education union's existing policies and guidelines. Use the results to identify specific provisions that can be proposed for new or revised workplace policies, staff guidelines, or collective bargaining agreements.

For each item, mark whether it is **Present**, **Partially Present**, or **Missing**. The checklist can also be used to identify priorities for policy development, revision, social dialogue or collective bargaining. This tool can be adjusted based on your context and needs.

Does the policy or guideline include...	Present ✓	Partially ~	Missing x
1. A clear statement that violence, harassment and discrimination are not tolerated	☐	☐	☐
2. A clear definition of violence and harassment, including sexual harassment and gender-based harassment	☐	☐	☐
3. Protection for all workers, including teachers, education support personnel, school leaders and other staff	☐	☐	☐
4. Protection against discrimination based on gender, disability, health status, or leprosy (Hansen's disease)	☐	☐	☐
5. Measures to prevent violence, harassment and discrimination, including awareness-raising and training	☐	☐	☐
6. Clear roles and responsibilities for school leaders, employers, workers and union representatives	☐	☐	☐
7. Safe and accessible ways to report concerns or make complaints	☐	☐	☐
8. Clear procedures for investigating and responding to complaints	☐	☐	☐
9. Confidentiality and privacy for complainants, survivors, and witnesses	☐	☐	☐
10. Protection against retaliation or victimisation for people who report or support a complaint	☐	☐	☐
11. Support and referral services for people experiencing violence or harassment, such as counselling, health or legal support	☐	☐	☐
12. Reasonable accommodation and accessibility for workers with disabilities or other access needs, including when reporting or participating in investigations	☐	☐	☐
13. Clear consequences, remedies, and sanctions for violence, harassment, and discrimination	☐	☐	☐

Does the policy or guideline include...		Present ✓	Partially ~	Missing ✗
14.	Protection from harassment by third parties, where relevant, such as parents, students, contractors, or members of the public	☐	☐	☐
15.	Measures to support workers experiencing domestic violence, where appropriate	☐	☐	☐
16.	Participation of workers and their representatives, including education unions, in developing and reviewing the policy	☐	☐	☐
17.	Regular monitoring and review to check whether the policy is being implemented effectively	☐	☐	☐
18.	The policy is communicated in accessible formats and languages so that all workers know their rights and where to seek help	☐	☐	☐
After completing the checklist, ask: ■ What are the three most important gaps? ■ Which gaps can the school/union address immediately? ■ Which gaps require union advocacy, social dialogue, or collective bargaining? ■ Who needs to be involved in addressing these gaps?				

Checking for gender mainstreaming in school and union management

The table on the next page names specific areas, in both school administration and union structures, where gendered stigma and discrimination can settle into routine management practices that may go unchecked for years. These areas are paired with examples of simple concrete actions an educator or a union can take. It is built to work as a starting-point checklist.

Pick one area from each half, check it honestly, and build from there, rather than trying to fix all thirteen areas at once. Neither list is exhaustive, and neither is meant to be worked through in one sitting. This mirrors the “small, sustained changes” principle already established in this toolkit.



Part A: School Management and Administration

Area	What to check	What teachers can do	What school leaders can do
1. Leadership and school governance	Does school leadership and the school management committee actually include women, or just formally allow them to participate?	Nominate or support a colleague for a leadership or committee role rather than assuming someone else will.	Set a concrete target for women's representation in leadership and committee roles, and review who is being developed for promotion, not only who is currently in post. ¹⁶
2. Code of conduct and policy	Does the code of conduct name gender-based violence, harassment, and discrimination explicitly and take a zero-tolerance stance, or is it silent on this?	Know the code well enough to explain it plainly to a student or colleague who asks.	Review and update the code of conduct with input from teachers, students, and parents, and formally endorse it rather than leaving it as an informal norm. ¹⁷
3. Teacher and staff capacity and support	Do staff actually have training to identify and respond to gendered stigma and violence, and is there support for staff who experience it themselves?	Flag when training feels theoretical rather than practical, and use the module's microaggressions and stereotype content (Unit 4.1.1) in everyday reflection.	Fund and schedule real training time, not a one-off session, and set up a confidential channel for staff, not only students, to report violence or harassment. ¹⁸
4. Curriculum, participation, and everyday attitudes	Does teaching content and classroom practice reinforce gender stereotypes (who leads group work, who is called on, who is assumed capable of what)?	Reflect on your own classroom patterns using the prompt questions in Unit 4.1.1, and involve both girls and boys equally in leadership tasks within the classroom.	Support curriculum review for stereotyped content, and ensure student councils and leadership roles are gender-balanced by design, not by accident. ¹⁹
5. Reporting and incident response	Are reporting channels safe, confidential, and actually used, or do students and staff stay silent because they don't trust the process?	Be a visibly approachable, trained point of contact, and take a disclosure seriously the first time, not only if it recurs.	Establish anonymous, accessible reporting channels linked to real support and referral pathways, and track whether reports are followed up, not just received. ²⁰
6. Physical environment	Are there safe, private, single-sex sanitary facilities, adequate lighting, and safe routes to and from school?	Report physical safety gaps you notice rather than assume someone else has flagged them.	Conduct a basic safety mapping of the school grounds with staff and students, and budget for fixes rather than deferring them indefinitely. ²¹



Area	What to check	What teachers can do	What school leaders can do
7. Parent and community engagement	Are parents and community members actually part of the conversation on gender and stigma, or only informed after decisions are made?	Use parent-teacher conversations as an opening to raise gender-stereotyped assumptions gently, not only academic performance.	Create a regular, structured space (not just a one-off meeting) for parents to discuss gender norms, discipline, and safety with the school. ²²

Part B: Union Management and Administration

Area	What to check	What educators (as members) can do	What unions can do
8. Union representation and leadership	Does the union's leadership reflect its membership, or does it mirror the same leadership gap found in schools?	Stand for or nominate someone for a union role and ask directly whether recruitment/promotion pathways are genuinely open.	Compare branch leadership composition against membership composition regularly, using EI's Quadrennial Gender Survey as a benchmark for discussion rather than a direct target. ²³
9. Violence and harassment policy (C190-aligned)	Does the union's workplace policy, or the agreements it negotiates, name gender-based violence and harassment explicitly, covering all workers regardless of contract type?	Ask your union representative whether your workplace has a violence and harassment policy, and whether it was ever actually shared with staff.	Use ILO Convention 190 as the baseline for any policy or bargaining position – covering risk assessment, complaint mechanisms, protection from retaliation, and remedies – not just a general non-discrimination clause. ²⁴
10. Collective bargaining and workplace protections	Do collective agreements include practical protections – paid domestic violence leave, safe transfer options, flexible scheduling – for a member experiencing violence at home?	Raise real cases (respecting confidentiality) with your union rep so bargaining priorities reflect lived experience, not assumption.	Negotiate concrete clauses such as paid leave and safe accommodation for members experiencing domestic or gender-based violence, following models, such as IndustriALL's guidance on this issue. ²⁵



Area	What to check	What educators (as members) can do	What unions can do
11. Training and capacity building for union representatives	Do union representatives and stewards actually have training on gender-based violence and harassment, or is it assumed they'll know how to handle it?	Ask for, or attend, available training rather than waiting for it to be offered.	Use existing, ready-made training materials, such as Training of Trainers toolkit on ILO C190, ²⁶ rather than building a program from scratch.
12. Casework, complaints, and confidentiality	When a member raises a gender-based complaint, is there a clear, confidential process, or does it depend on which official happens to take the call?	Know who your first point of contact is for a confidential complaint before you need one.	Formalise a confidential casework process for gender-based complaints, with a named contact and a documented pathway, not an informal or ad hoc one.
13. Data, monitoring, and self-assessment	Does the union actually know its own gender patterns (e.g., representation, complaints, pay, promotion), or would it not know if a problem existed?	Respond honestly to any union survey or consultation on gender equality — the data is only useful if members are honest.	Use the union's own self-assessment (see Rapid Self-Assessment Checklist in Module 3, Unit 3.2.2) and instruments such as EI's Quadrennial Gender Survey as models for what to track and how often. ²⁷



TRY THIS!

Quick gender inclusion checklist for education unions

- Review women's representation at all levels of union leadership.
- Check whether meeting times, locations, and formats create barriers to women's participation.
- Include gender equality and non-discrimination in union policies.
- Ensure complaints and grievance mechanisms are confidential, accessible, and trusted.
- Include provisions addressing violence and harassment in collective bargaining discussions.
- Consider domestic violence in workplace policies and support mechanisms.
- Support women educators to take on leadership roles.
- Collect and use gender-disaggregated information when reviewing union membership, leadership, and participation.
- Work with women's organisations and relevant community organisations where appropriate.
- Ensure gender equality work includes women who experience additional barriers, including women with disabilities and women affected by leprosy (Hansen's disease).



4.2.3 Supporting Women Educators as Leaders for Inclusion

Women educators are not only affected by gendered stigma and discrimination. They are, every day, reshaping school culture through how they teach, mentor, and support colleagues, work that is easy to overlook precisely because it doesn't show up in a leadership-title count. Women educators are not only potential beneficiaries of gender-inclusive policies. They are also important leaders and agents of change.

UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring (GEM) 2025 Women Lead for Learning report²⁸ highlights a persistent leadership gap: although women make up the majority of teachers in many education systems, their representation decreases as one moves up the education leadership ladder. The report also highlights the potential contribution of women leaders to inclusion, teacher development, and collaborative school cultures. It notes that in several contexts, schools led by women showed stronger community engagement and, in some low-income country contexts, measurably improved learning outcomes.²⁹ It is then crucial to identify and remove the barriers that prevent women from progressing into leadership as women educators have proven to be key to addressing gendered stigma and discrimination and building inclusive education systems and practices.

Three broad areas for action³⁰

1. **Identify where the leadership pathway is blocked** - Before introducing new leadership programmes, schools, education authorities, and unions should examine where and why women are being left behind. A key part of this is changing negative attitudes and beliefs about gender.

Examples:

- raising awareness on inclusion and gender to address gendered stigma and discrimination
- tracking women's representation at different levels of education leadership
- examining who applies for, is shortlisted for, and obtains leadership positions
- identifying barriers that discourage women from applying or progressing
- reviewing recruitment, promotion, and selection procedures for gender bias
- examining whether informal networks or relationships influence access to opportunities
- looking at whether women have equal access to professional development and leadership preparation

2. **Fix the structures that create unequal opportunities** - The solution is not simply to "fix women" by asking them to develop more confidence or leadership skills. The attitudes and beliefs, structures, and processes, around leadership also need to change.

Examples:

- training to address gender bias and stereotype
- making recruitment and promotion processes more inclusive and equitable, with clearly



defined and transparent selection criteria and safeguards against bias, stereotypes, and favouritism

- providing flexible working arrangements, taking parental responsibilities into account
- removing systemic barriers that make leadership positions less accessible
- ensuring that leadership opportunities are open and transparent
- creating a culture of inclusive and collaborative leadership, through leadership development, mentoring, and reflection that challenge assumptions that effective leaders must be hierarchical, authoritative or “tough”, and promote approaches based on collaboration, listening, shared decision-making, and collective responsibility

3. Strengthen capacity and build leadership pathways - Structural reform needs to be accompanied by opportunities for women to develop, practice, and strengthen leadership skills. This should not be understood as placing responsibility for gender equality solely on women. Training and mentoring work best when combined with changes to the systems that determine who gets opportunities.

Examples:

- coaching and mentoring women leaders
- building and nurturing professional networks for women leaders
- building inclusive leadership skills through training and mentoring



How educators and union can support women leadership

Below are some examples of how teachers, school leaders, and education unions can help equalise leadership opportunities in their schools and unions. However, not every action will be appropriate in every context. Unions and schools can select those that respond to the barriers identified in their own setting.

Intervention	Teachers / Educators	School Leaders	Education Unions
1. Raise awareness	■ Keep track of who speaks and whose ideas are taken up in staff meetings; invite quieter women colleagues to contribute. ■ Challenge comments that suggest women are “too emotional,” “not assertive enough,” or otherwise unsuitable for leadership. ■ Recognise women’s leadership contributions, including mentoring, pastoral work, and other work that may not carry a formal leadership title.	■ Review who is asked to lead meetings, committees, projects, and school activities. ■ Discuss gender stereotypes and barriers to women’s leadership during staff meetings or professional learning sessions. ■ Publicly recognise women’s contributions and leadership achievements, including less visible work.	■ Include women’s leadership and gender bias in union meetings or training. ■ Collect and share examples or testimonies of gender bias experienced by women educators. ■ Review union communications and leadership events to ensure women are represented and their contributions are visible.



Intervention	Teachers / Educators	School Leaders	Education Unions
2. Create an enabling policy environment	■ Raise concerns when workload, committee assignments, or leadership opportunities are distributed unfairly. ■ Use established procedures to report gender-based discrimination or harassment. ■ Keep a record of recurring barriers and raise them through appropriate school or union channels.	■ Review recruitment, promotion and leadership-selection criteria for gender bias. ■ Check whether women and men have equitable access to committees, training, and leadership assignments. ■ Review staff workload to identify whether women are disproportionately carrying administrative, pastoral, or other undervalued tasks. ■ Ensure staff know how to report harassment and discrimination and where they can obtain support.	■ Review union policies and collective agreements for provisions on non-discrimination, harassment, equal opportunities, and women's leadership. ■ Collect evidence on gender disparities in recruitment, promotion, pay, workload, and leadership positions. ■ Raise identified gaps in social dialogue and collective bargaining. ■ Propose specific measures, such as transparent promotion criteria, anti-harassment procedures, or leadership targets, where appropriate.
3. Train and support women leaders	■ Encourage women colleagues to apply for leadership roles, committees, and professional development opportunities. ■ Share information about leadership training, scholarships, and networking opportunities. ■ Offer peer mentoring or informal support to women taking on new responsibilities.	■ Pair aspiring women leaders with experienced mentors. ■ Give women educators opportunities to chair meetings, lead projects, or coordinate school initiatives. ■ Include leadership development in professional development plans. ■ Provide constructive feedback and support to women taking on leadership roles for the first time.	■ Establish a mentoring or leadership programme for aspiring women leaders. ■ Reserve places for women in relevant leadership training and development programmes. ■ Create opportunities for women educators to take on union committee and leadership responsibilities. ■ Establish a women's leadership network or peer-support group within the union.



Arab Education Unions Confront a Widening Leadership Gap

Example of how an education union addresses barriers in women leadership.

A 2025 Education International study, “Participatory Research on Opportunities, Challenges, Obstacles, and Solutions for Increasing Women’s Participation and Leadership in Arab Educational Unions and Federations”, found something sharper than a stalled gap: **women’s share of leadership positions in Arab education unions had declined to 41.79%, despite women making up 62.79% of primary school educators in the same six countries studied (Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine).**

The research, carried out by EI in partnership with the Office of Arab Moroccan Studies (Acetre Consulting) and the Institute of Trade Unions for Development Cooperation (ISCOD), identified **the barriers behind the gap: gender stereotypes, self-confidence and experience gaps, family and household obligations, social pressure, and outright male dominance in union structures.**

An online research launch was held to open dialogue among unions, and the study set out **concrete recommendations: adopting gender quotas in leadership positions, recruiting gender specialists within unions, establishing zero-tolerance policies on discrimination, and running mentorship programmes and training on gender equality** — explicitly including training aimed at building men’s understanding of why the imbalance matters. The study frames success as requiring collaboration beyond the union itself, calling on unions to work with governments, civil society, and international partners to implement these strategies.

Najat Ganay, Chair of the ACCRS Women’s Committee, captured the intent directly: **“We commit to transforming these findings into action building unions where gender equity is not an aspiration, but a lived reality.”** These initiatives show how education unions are a strong example of how representation alone doesn’t close a leadership gap without deliberate structural change.

Source: Education International. (2025). Arab education unions gear up to increase women’s participation and leadership. <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/30015:arab-education-unions-gear-up-to-increase-womens-participation-and-leadership>

Maya Ranavare — from a child denied school, to a national advocate

A story of a leprosy (Hansen’s disease) survivor and how she became an agent of change in her community.

Maya Ranavare was born in a leprosy (Hansen’s disease) colony in India to a mother affected by leprosy, was diagnosed with leprosy (Hansen’s disease) herself at age 6, and was denied access to school because of it. **She went on to become one of India’s leading advocates for people affected by leprosy (Hansen’s disease), securing a maintenance allowance for more than 3,000 affected persons and building relationships with political leaders to bring basic services to leprosy (Hansen’s disease) colonies.** She received The Leprosy Mission’s Wellesley Bailey Award in 2024. Her story is documented independently by both The Leprosy Mission International and the International Leprosy Association.

Source: The Leprosy Mission International. Maya Ranavare: Wellesley Bailey Award Winner. <https://www.leprosymission.org/leprosy-champions/leprosy-champions/wellesley-bailey-award-winner-maya-ranavare-india/>; WHO Goodwill Ambassador’s Newsletter for the Elimination of Leprosy. (2009). One-Woman Dynamo (Issue No. 41). <https://leprosyhistory.org/reading-material/one-woman-dynamo/>



TRY THIS!

Review of Women Representation in Schools and Unions

Use the following questions to guide your review of women representation in leadership positions in your school or union. The questions can be adapted to your context.

1. Are there clear targets for women's representation in educational leadership in the educational leadership guidelines of your school or union?
2. Are there gender-specific interventions such as affirmative action to encourage women teachers to apply to leadership positions?
3. Are there clear and gender-responsive selection guidelines for principal, supervisor, department head, union president, and other leadership positions?
4. How many leadership positions (principal, department head, committee head, union president, etc.) in your school or union are held by women?
5. How comparable is the percentage of women school principals and union leaders in your region or locality to the percentage of men holding the same positions?
6. How prepared and welcoming are students, teachers, and union members toward women leaders?
7. How interested are women teachers in assuming leadership positions?
8. Are the barriers to women's mobility to leadership positions known? Are there strategies and plans in place to address these barriers?
9. Are there educational opportunities or other forms of support to prepare women to assume leadership positions?
10. Are there any sayings or proverbs that are commonly used to either encourage or inhibit women from aspiring leadership positions?

Source: UNESCO International Institute for Capacity-Building in Africa. (2020). UNESCO Gender-responsive education: Toolkit for teachers, teacher educators, school managers, and curriculum developers in Africa. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf00000375869>



Practice and Application

1. Recognising Gender Bias

a. Identify how gender bias may be operating in a familiar education setting

Choose a setting. This can be a classroom, staffroom, school meeting, school leadership, education union meeting, professional development activity.

b. Look for patterns. Ask:

- Who speaks?
- Who is interrupted?
- Who takes notes or organises?
- Who makes decisions?
- Who receives recognition?
- Who is expected to provide care or emotional support?
- Who has opportunities to lead?
- What might prevent someone from speaking up?

c. Identify one change

d. Complete:

I noticed _____

This may create a barrier because _____

One change we can make is _____

Who can help? _____

When we will review it? _____

2. Simple Gender Inclusion Action Checklist

Reflect on the following areas and choose one priority, identify one simple action, and set a realistic timeframe for implementation.

Area	What to ask	Priority action
Leadership	Are women represented in decision-making?	
Participation	Can women participate meaningfully in meetings?	
Workload	Is additional or invisible work distributed fairly?	
Safety	Are there effective mechanisms for reporting harassment?	
Policies	Do policies address gender discrimination and harassment?	
Professional development	Do women have equal access to opportunities?	
Learning	Are gender stereotypes challenged in teaching and materials?	
Support	Are referral and support services available?	
Intersectionality	Are additional barriers experienced by some women considered?	
Accountability	Is progress reviewed regularly?	

Unit Summary

- * **Gendered stigma and discrimination do not only affect learners**, but also teachers, education support personnel, and union members as workers, through unequal treatment, exclusion, harassment, and undervaluing of care-related work.
- * **Workplace gender bias can appear in leadership pathways, workload distribution, promotion, pay, meeting culture, professional development, and decision-making.**
- * **Women educators may face questioned authority, role stereotyping, pregnancy and maternity discrimination, harassment, exclusion from informal networks, and barriers to leadership.**
- * **Violence, harassment, and domestic violence are workplace issues.** ILO Convention No. 190 provides a framework for prevention, response, reporting, protection, and support.
- * **Gender-inclusive workplaces require systems**, not only individual goodwill, including clear policies, safe reporting channels, support services, and accountability.
- * Schools and unions should **regularly review recruitment, promotion, leadership, workload, meeting arrangements, harassment prevention, grievance procedures, leave, and flexible working arrangements.**
- * **Education unions should model gender equality internally** by improving women's representation, participation, leadership opportunities, and influence in bargaining priorities.
- * **Small, practical, and sustained changes can shift institutional culture** when they are monitored, supported by leadership, and informed by intersectionality.
- * **Women educators** are not only affected by gendered stigma. They **are leaders and agents of change** who help build inclusive school and union cultures.
- * **Supporting women's leadership means identifying blocked leadership pathways, tracking representation, reviewing recruitment and promotion, and challenging gender stereotypes about authority and leadership.**
- * Leadership initiatives should not focus only on "fixing women"; **schools and unions must change the structures, policies, and informal practices that create unequal opportunities.**

Additional Resources

1. **ILO Convention No. 190: Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190):** https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C190
2. **ILO Convention No. 190, Recommendation 206:** https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:R206
3. **International Trade Union Confederation Mini Guide: C190 & R206:** https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/c190_mini_guide_en.pdf
4. **ILO Domestic violence and its impact on the world of work:** https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@gender/documents/briefingnote/wcms_738117.pdf
5. **Tools for building capacity and developing gender-responsive schools,** see: UNESCO Gender-responsive education: Toolkit for teachers, teacher educators, school managers, and curriculum developers in Africa (2020): <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375869.locale=en> Includes, among others:
 - **Tool 1:** Gender mainstreaming in teacher education policy development, p. 37
 - **Tool 2:** Gender responsive staff selection and recruitment assessment, p. 39
 - **Tool 3:** Gender responsive teachers' retention and promotion assessment, p. 40
6. **Tools for analysing gender-responsiveness of teaching and learning materials,** see: UNESCO Promoting gender equality in education (2009), Tool 13, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000186495?posInSet=3&queryId=e2781e7a-6c2b-4e1b-918c-39e7ba38d75f>
7. **Tools for mainstreaming gender equality in one's own context and in curricula and learning materials,** see: Gender in Education Network in Asia-Pacific (GENIA) Toolkit: Promoting Gender Equality in Education (2019), Handout 1 and Tool 18, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000370875.locale=en>



Annexes

Annex 1. Role of Unions in Domestic Violence³¹

Education unions play a critical role in addressing domestic violence, primarily by recognising it not just as a “private” family matter, but as a workplace health and safety issue, a human rights issue, and an economic justice issue. Here are practical examples of what education and trade unions can do to combat domestic violence and support survivors, aligned with frameworks like ILO Convention No. 190:

1. **Collective Bargaining and Workplace Policies** - Unions can use their negotiating power to embed crucial protections directly into collective bargaining agreements and school policies.
 - Negotiating Paid Domestic Violence Leave: Bargaining for dedicated, paid leave (often 10 days or more) so survivors can attend court, seek medical help, or relocate without losing their income or draining their sick leave.
 - Securing Flexible Working Arrangements: Negotiating the right for survivors to temporarily change their working hours, shift assignments, or work locations to protect themselves from abusers who know their daily routines.
 - Protection Against Dismissal: Inserting clauses that protect workers from being fired or disciplined for sudden drops in performance or absenteeism when it is linked to domestic abuse.
 - Workplace Safety Plans: Mandating that employers work with survivors to create safety plans, which might include alerting campus security, providing priority parking near building entrances, offering escorts to vehicles, or intercepting abusive phone calls/emails.
 - Employer-Funded Support: Negotiating for employer-paid legal assistance, counseling, or robust Employee Assistance Programs that specifically cover domestic violence.
2. **Capacity Building and Workplace Representation** - Unions are often the most trusted entity for workers in crisis. They can build internal structures to support members safely:
 - Establishing “Women’s Advocates”: Some unions (like Unifor in Canada) have negotiated specialised “Women’s Advocate” roles. These are union reps trained specifically to recognise the signs of domestic violence, offer confidential, non-judgmental support, and refer victims to community services.
 - Training Shop Stewards and Union Reps: Ensuring all local union representatives receive basic training on how to handle disclosures safely, maintain strict confidentiality, and assist members in accessing available workplace policies.
 - Union Codes of Conduct: Establishing strong internal union policies that explicitly condemn gender-based and domestic violence, ensuring the union itself is a safe, harassment-free space for its members.
3. **Broad Advocacy and Campaigning** - Unions can leverage their collective voice to influence broader public policy and societal norms:
 - Lobbying for ILO C190 Ratification: Pressuring national governments to formally ratify and implement ILO Convention No. 190 and Recommendation 206 into national law.
 - Legislative Campaigns: Campaigning alongside civil society organizations to make paid domestic violence leave a statutory right for all workers nationwide, as unions successfully helped achieve in New Zealand and parts of Canada and Australia.
 - Awareness Campaigns: Utilising union communication channels (newsletters, social media, meetings) to circulate information about domestic violence resources, crisis hotlines, and safety measures. Participating in global movements like the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence to break the silence and stigma.



Annex 2: Practice and Application - Facilitated Activities

Unit 4.1. Understanding Gendered Stigma and Discrimination in Education

A. Understanding Gender-Based Violence

Purpose	To understand in more depth the difference between gender and sex, and the characteristics and causes of gender-based violence.
Time	90 mins
Materials	Two sets of coloured postcard-sized cards; Marker pens; Pins, or adhesives such as sticky tape or putty (e.g., BluTac); Sufficient wall space or display boards to display cards; Flipchart

Instructions:

1. Organise participants into groups, giving each group two stacks of cards, perhaps 20 of each.
2. Ask participants to think of examples of characteristics commonly attributed to women or to men, including behaviours, roles and jobs, of women and men, and note each example on the appropriate coloured-coded card for men or women.
3. Prepare two display areas – one marked 'more power' and the other marked 'less power'.
4. On completion of the cards, ask each group to discuss whether these characteristics, jobs etc. are associated with more power or less power, and then stick or pin each card in the appropriate display area.
5. Gather the participants around the displays and ask them to group together cards in broad themes within each display area (jobs, attitudes, characteristics, behaviour, etc).
6. Regarding each theme, ask and discuss whether these characteristics and roles are determined by our sex, or whether they are gender stereotypes imposed by society.
7. Then, ask participants to consider how these gender-based power differences contribute to inequality and gender-based violence.
8. In a plenary discussion discuss: 'What are the root causes of gender-based violence and harassment?'
9. Using a flipchart, draw a table with 'excuses' at the top of one column and 'causes' at the top of the other column. List all the factors that participants highlight in the appropriate column in the table and ask the groups whether they agree or disagree.



B. Spotting Gendered Stigma in Everyday School Life

Purpose	To help participants recognise how gender stereotypes, bias and microaggressions can affect women and girls in education settings.
Time	30–40 minutes
Materials	Scenario cards or printed scenarios, paper and pens

Instructions:

1. Present the scenarios below, or adapt them to the local context:

- A woman teacher is repeatedly asked to take notes and organise refreshments during staff meetings, while male colleagues are asked to lead discussions.
- A woman teacher who speaks firmly during a meeting is described as “too aggressive,” while a male colleague behaving similarly is considered confident.
- A girl who wants to participate in a school leadership activity is told that boys are better suited to leadership roles.
- A woman educator’s ideas are ignored during a meeting but later accepted when repeated by a male colleague.

2. In small groups, ask participants:

- What is happening in this situation?
- What gender stereotype, bias or microaggression can you identify?
- Who may be affected?
- What could a teacher, school leader or union do differently?

3. Ask groups to share one practical action they would take to address the situation.

Facilitator note: Remind participants that gender bias is not always obvious or intentional. Small, repeated behaviours can contribute to a school culture in which women’s voices, authority and contributions are undervalued.



Unit 4.2 Addressing Gendered Stigma and Discrimination in the Workplace

A. From Barriers to Action – Supporting Women in Education Leadership

Purpose	To help participants identify practical actions to improve women's opportunities to participate in and lead education.
Time	30–40 minutes
Participants	Teachers, school leaders, and/or education union members
Materials	Paper or flipchart

Instructions:

1. Ask participants to think about their school or union and complete:

“What makes it difficult for women educators to participate in or progress into leadership?”

2. Groups identify two or three barriers. These might include:

- unequal distribution of responsibilities;
- limited access to leadership opportunities;
- stereotypes about women's leadership;
- lack of mentoring or professional development;
- harassment or an unsafe working environment.

3. Give each group the following three headings: Raise awareness, Create an enabling environment, Train and support women leaders

4. Ask groups to place each barrier under the heading where they think action is needed and identify one practical action for addressing it.

Barrier	Intervention	Practical action
Few women are asked to lead school projects	Train and support women leaders	Give women educators opportunities to lead projects or chair meetings
Women are expected to take on more administrative tasks	Create an enabling environment	Review how administrative and pastoral tasks are distributed
Stereotypes about women's leadership	Raise awareness	Discuss gender stereotypes during staff or union meetings

5. Ask each group to identify one action that could realistically be started within the next three months.

Facilitator note: Where appropriate, link participants' proposed actions to existing school policies, union policies, professional development programmes, or collective bargaining priorities.

Endnotes

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- ⁵ OHCHR, "Gender Stereotyping"
- ⁶ United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), Learning Brief: Ending Gender Stereotypes in Schools — Good Practices, Experiences and Lessons Learned (2023), <https://www.ungei.org/publication/learning-brief-ending-gender-stereotypes-schools>.
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- ¹⁴ International Labour Organization, "Domestic Violence and Its Impact on the World of Work."
- ¹⁵ Education International, "Training of Trainers Toolkit on the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention (No. 190) and Recommendation (No. 206)," June 25, 2021, <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/25102>; International Trade Union Confederation, Mini Guide C190 & R206, https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/c190_mini_guide_en.pdf.
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- ²⁰ Ibid
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- ²³ Education International, “Report on the 2024 Education International Quadrennial Gender Survey.”
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to Leprosy (Hansen's Disease)*

Gendered Stigma and Discrimination in Education



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