



Exchange of good practices on gender equality

Gender training in education

Portugal, 18-19 October 2012

Summary Report

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Gender training in education

1. The good practices of the host country and associated countries

The third good practice exchange seminar of 2012 was held in Lisbon on the 18-19th October and focused on gender and education. Three practices were presented, firstly by the host country (Portugal) and then two associated countries (Spain and Denmark).

Portugal

The good practice presented by Portugal is related to Education Guides on “Gender and Citizenship”, planned, coordinated and published by the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (CIG) which is the public institution with responsibility for the area of citizenship.

The Guides, embedded in the 3rd and 4th National Plans for Equality, Citizenship and Gender (2007-2010 and 2011-2013 respectively), are addressed to teachers of preschool (from 3 to 6 years) and basic education (9 years of schooling), and were developed by experts on gender and education and validated by the Ministry of Education. They offer a theoretical and practical approach with the following key aims:

- to mainstream gender equality into the education system;
- to effectively integrate a gender dimension and promote equality between women and men in teaching;
- to place gender equality at the centre of the “Education for Citizenship” programme.

The dissemination and implementation of the Guides started in the school year 2008-09 with pilot testing in one school cluster followed by seven more clusters, all ending in the school year 2012-13.

The Ministry of Education and the CIG started a monitoring process at the beginning of the 2010- 2011 school year involving 93 teachers (88 % female, 12 % male) and 1,573 pupils (52 % female and 48 % male, representing 26 % of all pre-school pupils). In the second and third quarters of the year, the Ministry of Education and the CIG carried out a training workshop, covering both theoretical and practical aspects of the good practice to support those teachers involved in monitoring the implementation phase in a more systematic way. The training covered 43 % of all teachers who participated in the monitored implementation of the Guides in the clusters.

Findings from the monitoring and internal evaluation process showed that the Guides increased teachers' knowledge and skills in the target areas. Furthermore, the reports from teachers stressed that:

- Training and follow-up actions were very useful, particularly in view of the complexity of analysis from a gender perspective.
- The Guides were very helpful for implementing the Education for Citizenship contents.
- The Guides provided a more critical awareness, both personal and professional, of gender issues in education.
- Teachers claimed that further training was needed.

The implementation process of the Guides is still ongoing. In the school year 2011/12, the Guides for the 1st to 6th grades were published and distributed. In 2012/13 two new Guides will be implemented along with the monitored application of the four existing Guides (from pre-school to the 9th grade of schooling) both by the CIG and the Ministry of Education.

Spain

Spain presented the online training course “Co-education: Two sexes in one world” which consists of seven units for teachers and educators from nursery to secondary education. The main aim of the course is to make teachers aware of differences among the two sexes; to make them conscious of how those differences often become inequalities; to break down traditional gender stereotypes and to offer educators a vast amount of reflective exercises, reading, videos and links to introduce gender pedagogy in their everyday practices.

The courses are a collaborative development between the Women’s Institute and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports through the National Institute of Educational Technologies and Teachers Training (INTEF).

Two possible ways of attending the course are envisaged:

1. **“Co-education: two sexes in one world” on-line training** which lasts two months and rewards the teachers attending with a certificate of 6 credits, equivalent to 60 hours of training.
2. **“Co-education: two sexes in one world”, cooperative work** where teachers are required to work in a cooperative environment exchanging with other participants through tools such as a forum and a "chat" available on a moodle¹ platform. This initiative also lasts two months and is based on the same materials, contents and objectives as the other on-line course.

¹ Moodle is a Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic learning environment, an e-learning software platform, also known as a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

In both initiatives, teachers were required to prepare their own project divided into three parts:

- School observation;
- How to introduce gender in school practices;
- Specific implementation proposals.

Since the school year 2008/2009, all the Autonomous Regions were covered by the initiatives and have so far involved a total of 2,689 teachers.

In an evaluation of the programme, teachers were asked to assess the speed of the answers provided, the clarity of the explanations, the appropriateness of the responses to the issues raised and the preparation of tutors/mentors. The results of this evaluation show that the courses were highly regarded, with a score of 4.5 out of possible 5 points.

Denmark

Denmark presented two practical examples, the first of which was a **children's book and an accompanying guide for educators** which targets 5-6-year-old girls and boys in kindergartens. The prior aim is to challenge different expectations of how girls and boys should behave, and with the secondary aim of breaking down traditional gender stereotypes. The book is based on the belief that it is not always best to try and treat girls and boys the same, but instead to give them equal opportunities to develop their skills regardless of their gender. At the same time the book aims to inspire educators and others working with children to integrate gender perspectives in their daily work (for example as part of the educational curricula)

The material was distributed nationally and sent in hard copy to all kindergartens, accompanied by a letter from the Minister for Gender Equality and the chairperson of the union of kindergarten teachers encouraging them to use the book and guide.

In order to establish whether the material was actually being used in kindergartens and how the educators viewed and accepted it, an evaluation was conducted some time after the national distribution of the materials. The results indicated that the material was generally very well received and highly rated by target groups.

The second practice presented consisted of a **magazine and film/CD for girls and boys together with an accompanying guide for teachers** on the issue of the so-called "**porn chic**". This project targets 14-16-year-old girls and boys at school and discusses how differently each gender perceives their own body and how differently they are influenced by soft-core pornographic symbols and codes transmitted through the mass media. The principal aims of the initiative were to stimulate a debate and encourage girls and boys to be critical of the images and messages of gender and pornography that they encounter through the mass media. It consisted of the following two separate activities:

1. A cross-cutting Nordic research study run by the Nordic Institute for Gender Research on the "porn chic" tendency where soft-core pornographic symbols are mainstreamed through advertising, music, fashion, and other means.

2. A national youth conference for Danish pupils in the age group of 14-16 years followed by the development of a teachers' guide, a debate magazine and a film/CD.

The school material was distributed nationally with hard copies sent by post to all schools in Denmark accompanied by a letter from the Minister for Gender Equality. The implementation began in 2006 and has continued since. The material was very well received by the schools to the extent that many requested more copies of publications and films/CDs. However, to date no independent evaluation has been conducted.

2. The situation in the participating countries²

In addition to Portugal, Spain and Denmark, the following countries participated in the seminar: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Iceland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and the United Kingdom. These countries have integrated the gender perspective into education at different levels and within different legislative and cultural contexts.

However, some similar general patterns can be observed as described below.

Most of the countries are facing the same trend in educational achievements with **girls performing better than boys**. For example, in **Lithuania**, research on secondary school educational achievements between the genders over the period 2003-2008 highlights the higher achievements by girls in many subjects and for all age groups. In the **UK** the preoccupation with monitoring examination attainments and the perception that girls have overtaken boys in performance has shifted the focus to the perceived underachievement of boys and a reinterpretation of gender inequality as an issue mainly affecting boys.

At the same time, **gender segregation within different fields of study** is still strongly evident. For example, in science and engineering education in **The Netherlands**, male students remain a large majority in comparison to the relatively small number of female students in these subjects. This apparent gender segregated choice for education also reinforces gender segregation on the labour market and is related to the **gendered expectations and behaviours** of both teachers and pupils. In **Belgium** and particularly in Flanders, gender gaps are evident throughout the educational path. Girls are a small majority in art and general secondary education, whereas boys are a majority in technical and vocational secondary education. Furthermore, more girls than boys continue on to higher education where gender segregation still prevails in terms of field of study. It confirms that 'masculine' and 'feminine' fields of study still exist, often mirroring traditional gender stereotypes.

Another common phenomenon is the **over-representation of female teachers** especially in the first and second levels of education. In some cases this leads to the questioning of female and male role models in schools. In **Austria** the lack of male teachers, and education and kindergarten staff is increasingly viewed as a problem, related to the declining success of boys in the education system.

² This section is based on the contributions of the independent experts from the participating countries. For more details, please refer to the comment paper for each country, available at http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/tools/good-practices/review-seminars/education_en.htm

The majority of participating countries reported an **absence of reflection on gender issues in teaching processes** together with a **lack of research-based knowledge**, two factors that were felt to account for why in most countries educational structures are so resistant to changes favouring a more gender equal system. An exception was the **UK** where action research projects involving collaboration between teachers and higher education researchers have existed since the 1980s onwards, aimed at challenging the stereotypical gender patterns and relations. Early projects focused on the curriculum choices made by girls and their lack of involvement in science and technology, as well as raising gender consciousness more generally. Later projects focused on changing school cultures and raising the achievements of boys.

This apparent lack of focus on gender in teacher education is identified as one of the causes of the existing **gender stereotypes that still prevail in teaching materials**. Some textbooks contain specific stereotypical examples that can have the effect of diminishing the role of women and is particularly prevalent in professional contexts.

In terms of **gender and the curriculum**, the situation in the participating countries is again similar, though in some cases there appears to be increasing attention being paid to the issue and the use of experimental practice. However, in most cases the integration of gender into the curriculum is mostly left to the interpretation of individual schools and teachers. Schools tend to decide autonomously on the educational methods and teaching materials that they deploy.

In many of the **newer Member States**, the integration of gender within the curriculum is often dependent on the policy and legal framework on gender equality drafted as part of the EU accession process. For example, in the **Czech Republic**, the concept of gender equality in education is relatively new, first appearing on the political agenda in the late 1990's at the time of the start of EU accession negotiations. Here one of the requirements was to formulate and to promote gender equality in different fields, including education.

In some cases, gender equality legislation and national programming documents include references to gender and education. In **Bulgaria**, the Protection against Discrimination Act contains a special chapter on education. It requires that *"Individuals conducting education and training, as well as authors of textbooks and manuals for learning, shall provide information and apply educational and training approaches enabling the overcoming of stereotypes referring to the roles of women and men in all spheres of public and family life. kindergartens, schools and higher schools shall include in their educational curricula and syllabuses training on gender issues (Art. 35)"*.

Similarly in **Cyprus**, the National Action Plan for Equality between Men and Women (2007–2013) requires the incorporation of gender mainstreaming in the educational context and the gender dimension has also been recognised as one of the parameters of the reformed school curriculum. However, it must be noted that gender is usually introduced as a sub-theme to the wider thematic areas of Health Education and/or Citizenship.

In the **Slovak Republic**, the National Action Plan for Gender Equality for the years 2010 – 2013, based on primary and secondary EU legislation, contains some provisions for tackling gender sensitive education, but implementation is just starting. In **Slovenia**, curriculum documents include provisions and norms concerning equality, but implementation is not always proving to be easy to achieve.

In **Poland** a gender-sensitive perspective in the system of formal education is yet to be introduced and mainstreamed. At present, basic documents such as the School Education Act, the Teachers' Charter and the official Core Curriculum refer to general notions of human rights and universal ethics but do not address gender directly.

However, a different situation can be found in **Iceland** where the status of gender equality has recently been formally changed in Icelandic compulsory school law and in the new national curriculum. Since 2008 equality issues have been a new subject in compulsory schools, forming a special subject within social studies and an important value to help guide the work of the schools. Moreover, since 2011 equality is formally one of six pillars or values of education in the national curriculum guidelines for all levels of school. In the national curriculum guide, the equality concept is defined in a wide sense, focusing on age, area of living, disability, gender, sexuality, colour, religion, culture, class, language and nationality. The Ministry of Education is now preparing guidelines for implementing this for all levels of school with the expectation that it will be ready at the end of 2012.

3. Summary of the discussions at the exchange seminar

All the participating countries agreed that **the experiences presented were interesting examples of supporting the integration of gender in education**. However, they were not always considered to be easily transferable because of a certain number of pre-requisites and challenges.

In particular, the discussion stressed the **importance of considering the different starting points of each country, especially with regard to the political and cultural vision towards gender equality**. This was particularly true in relation to the possible transferability of the Danish experience of the "porn chic" guide that many countries (for example, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Cyprus, and Bulgaria) considered to be too controversial at present.

Also with regard to the other practices, **different legal frameworks or procedures for teachers training could represent a possible obstacle for transferability**. For example, in some countries, teachers do not have a mandatory number of hours of training and the possibility of central institutions mainstreaming gender into education may differ. This is particularly relevant in countries where schools and teachers may decide their own rules, the method of teaching and the materials used. In these cases, a practice such as that presented by Portugal could represent a problem since it would be difficult to introduce such a top-down approach across the whole country. Therefore, the importance of a legal and strategic framework for education (for example, the extent of deregulation versus centralisation of the education and the approach to equalities driven policy making) was considered an essential pre-requisite for transferring any of the practices presented.

In case of the practice in Spain, reliance on the online methodology was felt to have potential limitations for use by older teachers. Moreover, face-to-face training was considered by many participants to be more effective and productive. Others (for example the UK and Iceland) underlined that online training of teachers with good educational materials may be the best way to move ahead. However, it was

recognised that adoption of this approach would have to be adjusted to the institutional circumstances in each country and reflected in teacher education and their continuing professional development.

Different starting points and concepts with regard to gender mainstreaming and gender equality was reflected in the discussion on the **different use (or non-use) of the words “sex” and “gender”**. Participating countries were divided on this aspect. Some participants emphasised that in order to achieve the final goal of introducing a gender perspective in education, issues such as the terminology used were not that important. Others felt differently, seeing the terminology as critical to open up debate and effect change.

In this regard, the **role of the political and social context** was particularly important. A broad long-term political commitment to gender equality embedded in a legal framework was considered to be necessary, though not sufficient on its own. The **awareness by the whole education system of the importance of adopting a gender perspective in teaching and living in the school environment** both at the institutional level (education ministries; education agencies, schools, etc.) and at the individual level (especially teachers) was also deemed to be essential. During the discussions it was noted that there is sometimes still considerable resistance towards the provision of education on gender equality among teachers and teacher educators. This suggests that gender issues should not be proposed by specialised outsiders, but that the only effective way of integrating or mainstreaming gender issues into the curriculum is directly through the teachers and the leadership of schools at an institutional level. However, the main problem remains how to motivate teachers and school leaders, and how to make this a normal part of the curriculum at the level of each individual school. One of the ways to achieve this was considered to be encouraging the schools to view gender equality as a feature characterising a “good school” and as a condition of effective education.

Nevertheless, the **involvement of other key stakeholders such as gender experts and researchers** was considered to be of particular importance in allowing gender and education research to grow and to influence pedagogy at all educational levels. Thus, another way to approach the problem is to ensure that the education policy, in this case on gender equality, and the professional development of teachers (the official pedagogy) are better linked than is the case at the moment, and to include gender equality as an important topic in education research. Without action the gap between research on equality issues and gender studies and the practice in schools will remain largely out of step with modern views of gender equality now found in most European states.

The discussion also stressed the **importance of giving sufficient weight to results emerging from evaluation or monitoring and internal evaluation exercises**. This will be important for two main reasons. Firstly, monitoring and evaluation will help to increase knowledge of the key strengths and obstacles that could arise in introducing gender aspects in education. Secondly, experiences based on a robust assessment will facilitate the presentation of results in an “appealing and efficient way” that might capture the attention of policy makers. Furthermore, an **evidence based approach** was also considered to be very helpful in stressing the necessity to have a long-term strategy that can give sustainability from single pilot projects and experimentations allowing them to be internalised in the actual policy programming and implementation.

Finally, the discussion also highlighted the importance of working directly with teachers and students, but also of involving parents. Focusing on the **role of parents** was considered to be an integral part in educational policies and practices, achieved through awareness-raising activities among parents (and within parental organisations) and networking on the basis of knowledge on gender equality and gender roles.

4. Conclusions

The good practice exchange seminar has helped to reflect on possible ways to better introduce gender into education and teaching. The presented practices showed a range of different approaches, but stressed the importance of implementing and disseminating experiences through the involvement of the respective national institutions in charge of gender and education.

However, the debate made clear that the introduction of gender in education is still a long and complex process and requires a considerable effort to fully engage the different actors needed (including politicians, teachers, gender researchers and experts, but also parents and citizens) to bring it about.

Over the past few years significant progress has been made by several countries, but there is still a lot more to be done. Several projects and training experiences have been designed and tested, but in many cases single projects struggle to become established, formally recognised and widespread in all education sectors. This risks leaving the introduction of gender into the school curriculum to the goodwill and experience of individual teachers.

Overall, the impression is that much has been done to establish the necessary conditions for the successful mainstreaming of gender issues in teaching. This is based on the acknowledgment that such an approach is legitimate and the necessary tools are developed to alter the formal curriculum for all levels of education. As such, justification for the implementation of gender in education as a field of research and policy-making is clear and strong. Therefore, more should be done to translate broad gender objectives (formally included in national laws and programming documents) into practice and effective pedagogical actions.

However, gender equality in education cannot be achieved without the successful implementation of gender mainstreaming in all areas affecting the social, economic and political participation of women and men. Towards this end, cooperation, coordination and synergies between all relevant stakeholders, both at national and European levels are essential.

The discussion arising from the presented practices showed that the optimal conditions for gender policy to be successful in the education sector include the following:

- A relatively centralised education system which should help avoid the danger inherent in leaving the introduction of gender into education practices to the goodwill of single schools and/or teachers;
- Sufficient resources to implement appropriate staff training and ensure updating through continuous professional development;

- Strong government commitment towards both gender equality policies in general and gender and education policies in particular; and
- Effective systems and tools to implement, monitor and assess the identified good practices.

Adoption of these conditions would permit change to be introduced systematically and then reinforced throughout each area of the curriculum and each sector of education, including, most importantly, initial teacher education and their continuing professional development.