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NOTE

from: General Secretariat
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Subject: Gender, Education, Mobility, and Work - an expert work seminar on the gender-segregated educational choices of young people in Europe
- Information from the Danish delegation

Delegations will find attached an information note prepared by DK.

Gender, Education, Mobility, and Work
*- An expert seminar on the gender-segregated educational choices
of young people in Europe*

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1. Introduction and background

Boys and girls tend to experience and benefit from educational systems differently. Boys more often leave the educational systems too early, and girls -- even if there are no barriers to them gaining the prerequisite skills -- are less prone to pursue a career within science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Boys and girls are strongly oriented towards gender-stereotyped career paths and as a consequence the labour market remains heavily gender-segregated. These are realities that seem to apply in most of Europe.

Thirteen experts from different European countries gathered in Copenhagen on 16 May 2012 for a seminar organised and hosted by the Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The overall objective of the seminar was to discuss and produce recommendations for how the EU can reverse the trend of gender-segregated educational choices and make way for a more inclusive and flexible labour market. A summary of the recommendations along with the background for these recommendations are presented and reviewed in the following paper.

2. Expert Seminar in Copenhagen

On 16 May 2012 the Danish Ministry of Gender Equality and Ecclesiastical Affairs hosted an expert seminar entitled "Gender, Education, and Mobility". The following thirteen experts from different European countries attended the seminar:

- Alexandra Bytchkova, Social Policy Division, *OECD*
- Bernadette Forsthuber, Educational, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, *EURYDICE*
- Emer Smyth, The Economic and Social Research Institute, *Ireland*
- Nikolina Sretenova, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, *Bulgaria*
- Mia Heikkilä, Skolverket, *Sweden*
- Kari Solbrække, University of Oslo, *Norway*
- Carlo Barone, University of Trento, *Italy*
- Elina Lahelma, University of Helsinki, *Finland*

- Ralf Puchert, Dissens, *Germany*
- Steen Baagøe, Roskilde University, *Denmark*
- Becky Francis, The Pearson Centre for Policy and Learning, King's College London, *UK*
- Giedre Purvaneckiene, University of Vilnius, *Lithuania*
- Judith Jakowitsch, Research Society Burgenland, *Austria*

Each expert gave a presentation briefly introducing how their national government addressed gender-segregated education and labour market realities, and they offered a summary of their professional contribution to the matter. The afternoon was spent discussing and sharing approaches, priorities, and paradoxes which all served as a foundation for formulating recommendations for political action.

3. Experts' analysis: gender-segregated educational and career choices

Seen in a gender perspective there are three main challenges that the EU as a transnational political body is facing within education. Despite socioeconomic and cultural differences, many of the same educational inequalities are to be found in all the Member States.

1. Boys leave school earlier than girls.
2. Girls avoid specialization within STEM though they have the required qualifications
3. Boys avoid specialization in the humanities and caring professions.

Young men and women contribute to a gender-segregated labour market by consistently choosing stereotypical educations and career paths. This is categorized as *horizontal segregation*.

Furthermore, young men and women perform unequally within the educational system, with girls receiving more secondary and tertiary degrees than boys. At the same time, young women consistently decline a career where they would take full advantage of their academic skills. This is categorized as *vertical segregation*.

If nothing is done to meet these challenges, Europe will face a diminishing supply of sufficiently skilled labour, especially regarding the part of the workforce with a higher education. In addition, the fact that young men, in general, obtain relatively lower levels of education is linked with demographic, health, and marital factors. For instance uneducated men predominately live in rural and suburban areas whereas well educated women predominately live in urban areas. Uneducated men are more often single, and tend to have more health problems like a significantly lower life expectancy and a higher mortality rate than better educated men and women.

3.1. Girls and boys in primary to tertiary education (vertical segregation)

The gendered differences in achievement and skills are already apparent in primary and lower secondary school. Girls outperform boys in reading by one year's worth of schooling. Statistics also show that boys enjoy reading less than girls. Boys do perform better than girls in mathematics in some OECD countries, but the difference is inconsistent and much smaller than the gap in reading performance.

Statistics show that 16.3 per cent of young European men leave the educational system without a qualifying degree, as compared with 12.5 per cent of young European women.

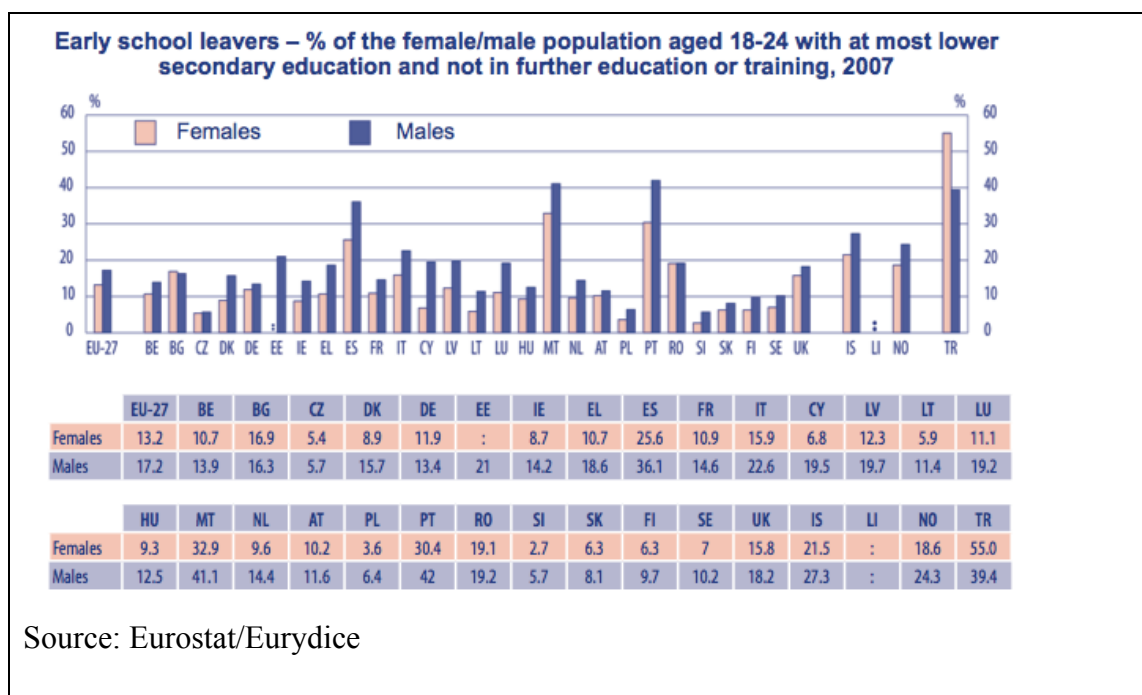


Fig. 1

The gendered dropout trend correlates with higher entrance rates for girls in secondary and tertiary education. In 2007 girls scored 11 percentage points higher in acquisition of secondary degrees (girls 81 per cent, versus 75 per cent for boys).

A study by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) also finds that by the age of 15 the gender differences in performance within science are small and no transnational pattern can be found. This should be held up against the fact that within the EU in 2009, 60 per cent of those who received a tertiary degree were women; however, women's degrees were primarily granted in non-STEM fields:

Proportion of tertiary education qualifications (ISCED 5 and 6) awarded to women by field of education/professional training, 2009:	
	<i>EU (2009)</i>
Education and training	78.7
Health and welfare	76.2
Humanities and arts	68.5
Social sciences, business and law	61.8
Services	52.4
Science, mathematics and computing	40.3
Engineering, manufacturing and construction	26.2

Source: Eurydice

It seems that women enrolled in higher education are concentrated in fields of study such as education and training, health and welfare, the social sciences, business and law. Science, mathematics, and computing are still dominated by men, and recent numbers from the OECD (fig. 2) suggest that this tendency is hard to change.

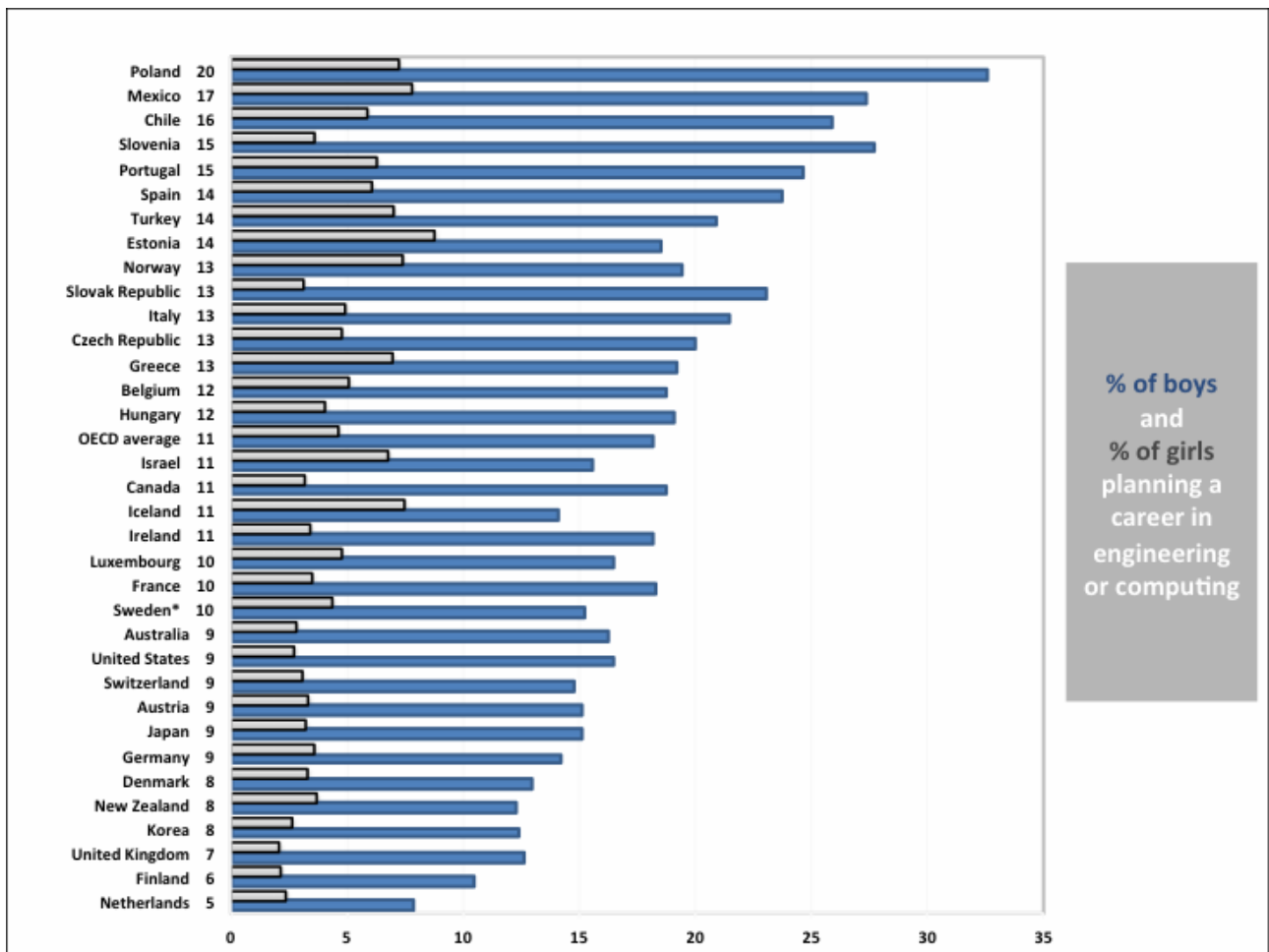


Fig. 2

3.2. Gender stereotypical choices (horizontal segregation)

Girls’ absence from STEM fields within higher education is not the only evidence that career- and educational choices are to a large extent influenced by gender stereotypes. In Europe boys represent only 24.8 per cent of students within health and welfare and 74.8 per cent within the field of engineering, manufacturing and construction.

The apparent effect of gender stereotypes on educational choices is also reflected within upper secondary education and vocational education where a clear horizontal segregation again occurs. Even though numbers from Eurydice indicate that more young men than young women in Europe attend vocational education, the few European countries that actually have developed gender-sensitive vocational counselling have worked towards increasing the number of girls within STEM – but there are no corresponding initiatives encouraging boys and young men to choose non-gender-stereotypical career paths.

4. The discussions among the experts

The knowledge-sharing and discussions addressed two main challenges:

1. Young men who do not complete their education.
2. The gender stereotypical educational paths and the gender-segregated labour market.

The discussions around these main issues focused on the following themes:

1. The importance of an intersectional perspective and a nuanced view of boys' educational challenges
2. Parental involvement
3. Career/educational counselling and decision timing
4. Grasping 'gender identity'
5. Working with gender awareness in educational systems
6. Narratives and role models

4.1. The importance of an intersectional perspective and a nuanced view on boys' educational challenges

Gender is only one of the many factors that should be taken into account when trying to understand educational achievements. Mapping differences between boys' and girls' educational performance is a complex exercise as these are influenced by a number of different factors such as age, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, language etc. When looking at educational inequalities in an intersectional perspective, it is clear that the individual's socioeconomic conditions represent the single most important factor for explaining how well students perform.

This, in turn, means that not every boy is exposed to a higher probability of not attaining formal qualifications. Thus, the story about boys being “today’s losers” is not the complete truth. The problem stems both from received notions of normal/correct behaviour of boys and from the existing school system. Meeting the challenges related to boys' education requires an understanding of the impact of socioeconomic conditions and also means developing more flexible and inclusive educational systems. This could include, for example, socially inclusive learning strategies, more flexible transitions from education to job, and recognition of non-gradable skills.

4.2. Parental involvement

Children’s perception and understanding of femininity and masculinity, and of what women do and what men do, is shaped at a very early age, and heavily influenced by the roles and responsibilities of their parents.

The distribution of parental leave and work in and outside the home, how and when parents do activities with their children and other interactions teach girls and boys how men and women “should behave”. Parents play an essential role in terms of promoting gender equality, and it could be very useful to set up partnerships with schools and childcare institutions to introduce nuanced perceptions of femininity and masculinity through the use of games and activities that include non-stereotypical gender roles.

4.3. Career/educational counselling and decision timing

Career counselling often perpetuates stereotypical gender roles and expectations. However, career counsellors could, instead, challenge young people’s gendered self-perception and potential career paths. Increasing career counsellors’ awareness of gender, along with an understanding of their own influence, would enable them to be more open-minded about the different job and education possibilities on offer to young men and women, thereby encouraging non-gender-stereotypical choices.

Ideas of what profession one could and should choose start to form at an early age. Studies show examples of children who from the age of ten have very articulated and rather stereotypical ideas of what they want to be. At the same time, specialization in particular educational subjects is encouraged and sometimes even required at an early age. However, there is some evidence that the later these choices are made, the greater is the chance for a non stereotypical choice. Several studies show that young people make a final and binding choice of subject at the age of fifteen or sixteen. Early career counselling within primary school would offer young people a chance to broaden their perspectives and to examine their assumptions about possibilities and potential before they are required to make a choice.

4.4. Grasping ‘gender identity’

The age of fifteen is not only the age where individuals form decisions about their educational ambitions (see section 4.3). It is also a time of identity building, including the search for gender identity, which can also be found through choices of professional paths.

The wish to fit in and find peer acceptance plays an overwhelming part in this process of identity building, and is likely to encourage stereotypical and ‘safe’ career choice and plans for the future. This underlines the relevance of teaching young people to reflect on how they contribute to and are influenced by gender stereotypes.

Giving young people the tools and knowledge to recognize gender stereotypical behaviour and life courses can give them the courage and motivation to look for a less stereotypical professional path.

4.5. Working with gender awareness in educational systems

Hitherto, little attention has been given to understanding the role that gender plays within the education system, whether it be through teachers or through teaching materials. The educational system could work actively and concretely on promoting and encouraging gender equality through teaching methods and teaching materials, and by ensuring that there is a balanced distribution of teachers of both sexes.

Introducing knowledge about gender in teachers' formal training can make a teacher more aware of gender. Studies show that girls and boys are treated differently within educational systems and are met with gendered expectations of behaviour and performance. This reinforces and upholds narrow ideas of how 'boyish' and 'girlish' pupils behave. Through addressing gender stereotypical behaviour in the teacher training curriculum, gender equality and diverse career opportunities could then also be introduced and promoted in class and through teaching material.

Finally, the vast majority of teachers and child educators are currently female, which applies across Europe. By increasing the number of male teachers and child educators, children will be presented to equality, diversity, and caring masculine roles from an early age. Therefore the question of how to interest men in the field of education should also be prioritized as part of education policies.

4.6. Narratives and role models

How we talk about different professionals (for example nurses or scientists) and how they are portrayed and perceived in society may have impacts on career and educational choices. Offering different narratives and promoting good role models and examples can be of great help to young people who are considering making non-stereotypical choices. This means finding stories about non-gender-stereotypical career choices, such as men who build their professional identity in childcare, and the promotion of 'caring masculinities', and 'technical femininity' in general.

Role models create curiosity and the possibility for identification. Role models can be used as a specific tool to encourage change. Prejudices, worries, and the fear of losing one's gender identity should be challenged.

Role models can be promoted through career counselling, through visits to various work places where young people can meet the employees and ask questions, and through media representations. Choices can also be influenced by supporting parental leave for fathers as well as day care options within STEM workplaces.

5. Recommendations

Based on the experts' discussion, the following recommendations were proposed:

5.1. On combating gender-segregated educational and career choices (horizontal):

- Develop and implement diverse non-gender-stereotypical narratives on boys' and girls' educational and career paths. These narratives could underpin the overall work with encouraging less gender-segregated and less stereotypical educational and career choices.
- Increase educators' and school teachers' knowledge and awareness of gender as one of several social categories in order for them to actively challenge stereotypical gender practices within pedagogy and educational systems, i.e. interactions between boys and girls and between students and teachers.
- Strengthen the dialogue between parents and teachers with the aim of emphasising the importance of parental influence on children's educational and career choices, and thereby encourage a non-gendered match between students' individual skills with their choice of future education.
- Include evidence-based knowledge about the impact of gender on educational and career choices as part of educational and career counsellors' and guides' training. This should also include a nuanced dissemination of job functions in order to help counsellors in supporting diverse and non-biased career counselling.

5.2. On combating gender-segregated educational and career choices (vertical):

- Establish alliances between educational institutions and the labour market by setting up career days and partnerships that could inspire non-gender-stereotypical career choices.

- Collect and systematize data on potential early school leavers in order to develop policies of retention that take account of social categories such as gender, class, and ethnicity.
 - Set up and promote male and female role models within fields of science and technology with the purpose of illustrating the different kinds of possibilities and priorities personally and professionally.
 - Promote best practices of schools that value non-academic skills such as creativity and entrepreneurship alongside academic performance.
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