



The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

Gender segregation in the labour market and education

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Combating Gender Segregation in the Labour Market through Education

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Gender occupational segregation is well entrenched in the Cypriot labour market with Cyprus ranking among the top segregated countries in Europe¹. Following a long period of inertia, the topic of Gender Segregation in the labour market has surfaced in the Cypriot policy agenda and discourse, following the dedicated efforts by the government in combating the gender pay gap. This paper briefly outlines the wider context of occupational segregation in Cyprus and recaps the policy context in which actions are taken to combat segregation through education. Lastly, the transferability of good practices from Denmark, Netherlands and Northern Ireland are discussed, along with their perceived benefits and possible constraints

1. Gender segregation in the labour market

Cyprus remains one of the most occupationally segregated countries in Europe. Horizontal segregation is well entrenched in the Cypriot labour market with the fields of education, health, social welfare, administrative services being highly 'feminized'. On the contrary, men tend to concentrate in manufacturing, construction, transport, information and communication, agriculture and (as of late) gas extraction (Appendix, Figure 1). More importantly, there is a striking concentration of women in professions which require little or no expertise. About 2/3 (64.4%)² of working women are employed in elementary professions (such as cleaners, helpers, launderers etc.), clerical and administrative positions or sales jobs, which not only pay significantly less but carry negligible prospect for career advancement, leading to 'sticky floors'. This is largely attributed to the unequal care responsibilities that burden women: in an effort to reconcile professional and personal life, women are driven to choose professions that would allow them to work shorter or flexible hours and utilize longer parental leave than fathers.

As with the rest of Europe, a significant manifestation of occupational segregation is the pay gap, reaching 16.2% by the end of 2013³. Even among the so called 'pink collar' jobs (sectors that have traditionally been dominated by women) women are still getting paid significantly less than men. In the field of education and health for instance, the corresponding pay gaps are overwhelming, standing at 43% and 39% respectively⁴. The main explanation for this striking difference in wages is the absence of women from managerial positions ('the glass ceiling effect'). Women hold only 18.1% of all leadership positions in the best of cases, even within the female dominated sectors of the economy.

¹ Source: European Commission's Expert Group on Gender and Employment (EGGE) (2007)

² Source: Labour Statistics 2012. Statistical Service of Cyprus.

³ Report: Tracking the Gender Pay Gap in the European Union, European Commission: Directorate of Justice, 2013.

⁴ Source: Labour Statistics 2012. Statistical Service of Cyprus.

2. Gender Segregation in Education

Educational choices of men and women also remain highly segregated, with the overwhelming majority of women⁵ (58%) opting for studies in the fields of education/pedagogy, humanities, social sciences and health. On the contrary, men tend to concentrate in business administration, engineering and information technology (Appendix, Figure 2). Social perceptions of what constitutes ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ jobs, engrained gender roles and rigid parental demands drive boys towards choices that will safeguard their social and professional success, which are perceived to be core components of masculinity. Conversely, girls are geared towards more ‘compromising’ career choices (often failing to reach their true and full potential) with the scope that they will fulfil their role as care-providers first, rather than attain a highly desirable job (Panta et al. 2008).

2.1. Girls’ educational choices in STEM

The share of women who pursue studies within the sciences, engineering, technology and math (STEM) remains low, standing at merely 12.7% (compared to 34.1%⁶ among men). Local and international bibliography suggests that girls do not opt for STEM studies because they are more easily affected by social and family factors than boys (Roger & Duffield, 2000). Parents’ educational levels, backgrounds, attitudes and perceptions about gender or gender equality, unawareness of the possibilities offered within STEM (Vryonides 2007), coupled with cultural norms and teachers’ prejudices about the capabilities of girls and boys act as predominant barriers to girls choosing a field of study within the sciences.

What is also noteworthy is the very low⁷ percentage of STEM graduates who actually do pursue a career in a STEM related field after graduation (less than 50% and the third lowest in Europe) a reflection of the overall lack of availability of jobs in the sciences, scientific research, innovation and technology. This suggests the need for further policy actions by the government, aiming at establishing mechanisms for enhancing technological and industrial specialisation and translating scientific and technological advancements into jobs.

2.2. Male pedagogues in pre-primary education

There exists an almost dichotomous segregation across the different levels of education, with women pedagogues almost exclusively dominating the lower levels (pre-school and primary education) and male educators being heavily skewed towards secondary and tertiary education (Appendix, Figure 3).

In Early Childhood Education (ECE) male pedagogues are scarce: a mere 25 men islandwide are employed in kindergartens or nurseries/crèches, out of which only 13 as teaching staff (the remaining hold managerial positions). Cultural norms and social prejudice about the skills and capabilities of men in relation to nurturing and care, predominant perceptions that care of small children is an expansion of the mother’s role, coupled with mistrust and resistance from parents and co-workers largely remain the key prohibiting factors for men in opting to enter the field of ECE.

⁵ Source: Statistics of Education, 2011/2012, Statistical Service of Cyprus.

⁶ Source: Statistics of Education, 2011/12. Statistical Service of Cyprus.

⁷ Source: European Commission: She Figures 2012-Gender in Research and Innovation

<https://open-data.europa.eu/en/data/dataset/she-figures-2013-gender-in-research-and-innovation>

Furthermore, professions in ECE are under-valued, carry low prestige, are regarded to be of a lower social status, and remain highly underpaid. Kindergarten teachers' earnings are only slightly above the minimum wage⁸, standing at less than 50% of the corresponding salaries of educators in primary and secondary education⁹.

3. Actions addressing Gender Segregation in the Labour Market

3.1. At policy level

Following the need for harmonization with the *acquis communautaire* and in order to bring legislation in line with recommendations of international instruments (Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW, the European Council's Pact for Gender Equality 2011-2020) gender equality in employment has been safeguarded through an array of legislative measures pertaining to the Equal Treatment of Women and Men in the Workplace, Equal Pay, Maternity Protection and Parental leave¹⁰. Moreover, additional policy measures are included in the newly revised 'Strategic Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2014-2017 (SPAGE)'.

The Pedagogical Institute of the Ministry of Education has also developed its own Strategic Planning for Gender Equality in Education (2014-2017), stemming directly from the SPAGE and signifying its commitment to incorporating the gender dimension at all levels of education. While prevention and combating of gender stereotypes remains a primary area of focus for the Ministry, the plan also includes specific objectives that aim at addressing occupational segregation through:

- *Encouraging girls' participation in technical fields of study and the use of new technologies.* 15 -17 year old students who decide to discontinue their formal education can receive technical education through paid internships in order to attain skills for immediate job placement. Nevertheless, most internship positions targeting girls often relate to 'pink collar' jobs such as hairdressing, sewing and pastry-making rather than STEM related fields.
- *The revision of the Vocational Education Course and Textbook* taught in junior high schools, incorporating the gender perspective throughout
- *Presentations by male and female role models working in non-traditional occupations* to promote non-traditional educational choices amongst students.
- *Training of educators, career counsellors, school counsellors and parents on 'Gender Occupational Segregation'* -outlined in in the next section of this paper.

⁸ Salaries stand at €1,042: Source: Circular of the Ministry of Education on the pay of kindergarten teachers www.moec.gov.cy/dde/typoi_nipiagogeion.html , <http://www.paideia-news.com/index.php?id=109&hid=5757>

⁹ Corresponding salaries of educators in primary and secondary education are €2,213 and €2,540 respectively. Source <http://www.oelmek.com.cy/> and www.paideia-news.com

¹⁰ Equal pay for men and women for the same work or work of equal value Law (N.177 (I) / 2002), the Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Employment and Vocational Training Law (2002), the Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act (2002), the Parental Leave and Leave on Grounds of Force Majeure Law (2002) , the Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Professional Social Security Schemes Act (2002) and the Equal Treatment of Men and Women (Access to and Supply of Good and Services) Law (2004).

3.2. Programme ‘Actions for Reducing the Gender Pay Gap’ by the Department of Labour Relations

A five year EU-funded program called ‘Actions for Reducing the Gender Gap,’ is currently being implemented by the Department of Labour Relations incorporating a broad mix of actions, some of which directly relate to combating occupational segregation. These include the following:

The Gender Equality Certification Body: Under the ‘Certification Business Model’, companies can be certified for their good practices in promoting gender equality in the workplace. Certification is provided on the basis of fulfilment of 14 criteria which pertain to equal advancement opportunities, reconciliation of work and family life and equal pay. To date, 20 companies have been certified but as of late, none operating in STEM related fields.

Training of school based vocational counsellors, educators and parents on occupational segregation: Perhaps the most ambitious action of the Program and the most targeted in addressing occupational segregation. A great innovation of this action is the targeting of *the entire universe* of educators and school counsellors, a first ever time attempt to reach these high numbers. By the end of 2015, a total of 10,000 educators of pre-school, primary and secondary education will be trained, in addition to 130 vocational counsellors and 5,000 parents. The main activities of this action include:

- *Documentation of good practices at European Level* targeting occupational segregation through education
- *The development of educational guides for educators* of all levels of education (from pre-school to secondary) including pedagogical material and practical recommendations for possible interventions in the educational environment
- *The development of a comprehensive manual for vocational counsellors* promoting the integration of the gender dimension in the teaching of vocational education and the adoption of gender sensitive career guidance and counselling
- *The development of a guide for parents*, outlining the role of families in the educational choices of boys and girls
- *Training of educators and school based career counsellors:* The primary aim of the training is to challenge existing stereotypical perceptions about gender and enhance the educators’ understanding of how their own perceptions and biases often impact the educational choices of boys and girls. Counsellors will also be trained on how to apply gender sensitive counselling and career guidance
- *Training of parents* aimed at challenging existing norms and stereotypical views of gender roles within families that often impact the educational choices of boys and girls.

4. Transferability of Good Practices

Transferability is very important for Cyprus considering that combating occupational segregation has only quite recently entered the policy debate and action. Truly, most of the actions in this direction have remained largely project-based, are non-systematic and are implemented in the absence of structural funding, systematic follow up and impact driven assessment.

Even though the under-representation of girls and women in STEM has, to some extent, been part of the discourse that pertains to the gendered inequalities within education, little has been done both at policy and at grass-roots level in directly addressing the gender bias in STEM. Similarly, the underrepresentation of male educators in the lower levels of education has scarcely been part of the debate and does not appear to be a field of interest nor a priority for the Ministry of Education.

In light of the above, the good practices in Netherlands, Northern Ireland and Denmark do present very useful recommendations that are highly applicable to Cyprus, although some may require further discussion on account of possible constraints, financial, cultural and at policy level.

4.1. Northern Ireland: Addressing gender balance in STEM

The introduction of the STEM Charter for Businesses can be applicable to Cyprus, especially if introduced through existing structures as for instance the 'Certification Business Model' of the 'Reducing the Pay Gap' programme. The existing criteria for certification can further diversify to include the good practice guidelines proposed by the STEM charter. The establishment of the STEM Employers Equality Network (SEEN) can also be transferable as it will not only create a necessary cohesion among the sector but it will also ultimately strengthen the commitment of STEM companies to becoming equal opportunity employers by encouraging an exchange of good practices amongst them.

However, even though directly applicable, there are some considerations that may hinder the implementation of the good practice in the local context. In the absence of specific and targeted policy measures and considering that women's participation in STEM is not currently recognized as a key economic priority, the government may opt not to support this initiative financially or otherwise at this stage. In lieu of financial considerations, it appears unlikely that an assigned STEM Coordinator will be appointed by the state, entailing for the initiative to be implemented, if adopted, in an ad-hoc, non-centralized manner. The implementation of the first Science and Technology Park may bring the need to enhance participation of women in STEM to the forefront, but this is a longer term venture. In addition, the proposed measures for positive action in favour of women may not be considered a current priority, on account of the need to draft inclusive policies first.

4.2. Netherlands: Encouraging girls to STEM

The overall proposed approach of the Dutch STEM stimulation policy in tackling stereotypes and prejudices from an early age is entirely in line with the Pedagogical Institute's commitment in engaging teachers of all levels of education to take action in combating occupational segregation. Most of the actions proposed in the Dutch good practice are directly relevant for Cyprus, providing interesting, fun, innovative, creative and savvy means which teachers and school-based vocational counsellors can incorporate in their educational practices.

The online database 'This is what I do', for instance, can be integrated both into the existing educational material targeting primary school children and also the Vocational Guidance Textbook of Secondary Education. Moreover, the 'speed dating' process with STEM professionals acting as 'live' role models is indeed a very catchy and innovative idea. Even though inviting professionals to share their stories is a customary practice of vocational education in Cyprus, the idea of having one-

on-one personalized interaction with women that have managed to break gender stereotypes is much more appealing and inspiring to say the least, especially when these women can also undertake the role of mentors through a shadowing process. As proposed in the good practice, the existing scope of the in-service trainings for teachers that pertain to gender equality and combating gender stereotypes can be broadened to include gender-aware STEM teaching. In addition, the decision-strengthening trajectories could also prove to be an effective initiative in attracting girls to STEM, as it also tackles barriers that may come from the surrounding environment, by directly involving the parents.

Lastly, the implementation of Girls Day, which is part of the Dutch STEM stimulation policy, is already under review by the Department of Labour Relations, having already been documented as a good practice under the programme 'Reducing the Gender Pay Gap'. The key drawback remains its financial feasibility taking into consideration the remarkable amount of resources (time, effort and funding) required. In addition, for Girls Day to have an impact, it needs to be introduced as an annual institution, and not as an ad-hoc event, entailing the establishment of synergies and partnerships between various actors (i.e. incumbent governmental bodies, social partners, universities, professional associations, large STEM corporations, NGOs, parents associations, teacher unions etc).

4.3. Denmark: More male kindergarten pedagogues

Despite its substantial benefits, there are serious challenges and obstacles to be overcome in adopting the good practice proposed by Denmark with regards to enhancing the participation of men in early childhood education (ECE). As the feminization of the education profession in Cyprus is largely accepted as an unchallenged status quo, public debate, policy and action with regards to involving men in the care of small children has been practically non-existent. In the absence of such debate, policy and action at a national level, it is doubtful as to whether local authorities (which are primarily responsible for nurseries at a community level), will support initiatives or provide substantial political backing which would safeguard both recruitment and retention of men in ECE. Moreover for such debate, policy and action to be instigated and be effective, a comprehensive and transformative approach is necessary, tackling not only legal and policy gaps but addressing existing social and cultural norms and tackling engraved perceptions about masculinity and femininity.

Nonetheless, in the event that enhancing participation of men in ECE does come to the 'front burner' when addressing occupational segregation, there are many innovative aspects of the Danish good practice that are directly relevant to Cyprus. Firstly, the good practice entails for local, smaller-scale projects. This is particularly beneficial in the absence of comprehensive policy and practice, as the local level is where real change can be instigated. Moreover, other aspects that would be beneficial to adopt include:

Setting aside gender as a feature and concentrating on the qualified pedagogue being the core (Freedeborg Municipality). Shaping the professional identity of kindergarten teachers in terms of their professionalism and not their gender, especially through observation of core values, will enable a hands-on approach to challenging and changing stereotypical perceptions about male kindergarten teachers. This will be greatly beneficial in addressing rigid perceptions of masculinity which often act as significant barriers to male students entering the field of pre-school pedagogy.

Acquiring knowledge about the reasons male pedagogues refrain from working in kindergartens. This is absolutely vital in the Cyprus context, given that there is practically no visibility of male kindergarten teachers and little is known about their individual perceptions, needs, motivations, obstacles, ambitions and expectations. By giving male pedagogues 'a voice', substantial knowledge will be gained in terms of attracting men to child care and kindergarten education.

Communicating it right. Male pedagogues will be more willing to apply for a job at a kindergarten if the recruitment process communicates the right message to them in an appealing and savvy way, (as proposed by Skanderborg municipality)

Man for hire (Aalborg Municipality): Given the extremely small universe of male kindergarten teachers in Cyprus, rotating male teachers across kindergartens will provide the opportunity for children to experience being taught from a different (male) perspective and have the chance to engage in different routines and activities. Nonetheless, in practice this idea may entail a number of logistical and coordination issues that may act as barriers to its implementation (as for instance unwillingness of male teachers to participate in this initiative, difficulties of the kindergarten's to coordinate schedule's amongst themselves because of lack of time etc).

5. Conclusion

Transferability is very important for Cyprus considering that little has been done in the specific topics proposed by the good practices. There are many perceived benefits in adopting the discussed good practices even partially. The current focus of the Department of Labour in taking various actions in reducing the pay gap (which also specifically tackle occupational segregation) and the specific objectives of the Strategic Plan for Gender Equality offer important windows of opportunity which, if tapped strategically could provide fruitful ground for the introduction of these good practices in the national context. It must be noted however, that for transferability of these practices to be effective, feasible and sustainable, the current policy framework needs to widen its scope and include additional objectives pertaining to enhancing participation of girls in STEM and men in early childhood education. To this end, structural financial support, political backing and a comprehensive, transformative approach (tackling gender norms and cultural barriers) are mandatory.

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Appendix

Figure 1: share of female and male employees within each economic sector (Labour Force Survey-Q1 2015)

Economic Activity	% Female Employees	% Male employees
Education	75.60%	24.40%
Human Health and Social Work Activities	70.50%	29.60%
Administrative and Support Service Activities	62.40%	37.60%
Other Service Activities	62.30%	37.70%
Construction	7.7%	92.3%
Electricity and Gas Supply	25.4%	74.6%
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	26.8%	73.2%
Manufacturing	29.4%	70.6%
Transportation and Storage	30.7%	69.3%
Information and Communication	40.9%	59.1%

Figure 2: Educational choices of university graduates 2011/12 (Statistics of Education, Statistical Service of Cyprus)

	Women	Men
Education	20.1%	10.5%
Business Administration	16.4%	23.4%
Humanities	15.7%	6.1%
Social Sciences	12.3%	9.9%
Health	10.0%	5.7%
Architecture	6.5%	7.4%
Physics and Chemistry	4.2%	5.5%
Engineering	3.8%	15.1%
Information Technology	2.6%	10.8%
Mathematics and Statistics	2.1%	2.7%

Figure 3: Distribution of male and female educators per level of education. Statistics of Education 2011/2012

	Absolute Numbers		% distribution	
	Male Educators	Female Educators	Male Educators	Female Educators
Pre-school Education	25	2,296	0.5%	19.5%
Primary Education	840	3,899	17.8%	33.2%
Secondary Education	2,771	4,929	58.7%	41.9%
Tertiary Education	1,083	636	22.9%	5.4%
TOTAL	4,719	11,760	100.0%	100.0%