



The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

Gender segregation in the labour market and education

Denmark, 29-30 September 2015

Comments Paper - Poland



The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.

This publication is supported by the European Union Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020).

This programme is implemented by the European Commission and shall contribute to the further development of an area where equality and the rights of persons, as enshrined in the Treaty, the Charter and international human rights conventions, are promoted and protected.

For more information see: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/grants1/programmes-2014-2020/rec/index_en.htm

Gender segregation in the labour market and education in Poland

Bianka Siwinska,
Perspektywy Education Foundation

1. Introduction and relevant country context

1.1. STEM as a policy priority

- As for as public policy regarding the development of society and economy by support of the STEM-related skills, it is currently not embodied by any initiative/activities. Previously, from 2008 to 2014, there was a programme of so-called “ordered specialities”, coordinated by the MNiSW. The goal of the programme was to change the unfavourable structure of education at the HEIs, so that more students would choose to study in the fields strategic to the economy (STEM) and so that their education and skills were useful on the job market.
- Currently the STEM education is not centrally supported in any way. There is also no document on prioritising of this type of skills, or a government strategy on this issue. Such activities are, however, undertaken by NGOs. Examples: the Perspektywy Education Foundation (workshops for teachers), the Catalyst Foundation (tools for self-learning).

1.2. Women in STEM in Poland

1.2.1. Fact and numbers

- Girls make up 37 % of students at technical universities (increase by 7 % during the last 8 years). Later, on the job market in the technological industry, they are far fewer (a leaking pipeline phenomenon) – between 15 and 25 % (the “*Women’s Potential for Technological Industry*” report by the Perspektywy Education Foundation and Siemens). There are only 13 % female students in ICT-related fields. As for business activity in the STEM area, women are three times less likely to create technological start-ups. Their average survival rate on the market is also 3 times shorter. Only just above 3 % of them complete 3 years of activity (in case of men this factor is above 9 %).
- Similarly, women are a minority in scientific activity in the STEM area– out of 9 professors only one is female. Out of 20 Polish technical universities, only one has a female rector (Częstochowa University of Technology)

1.2.2. Best practice

- In the public policy (unlike in the Dutch case study) there is so far no overlap between the two areas: encouragement to choose fields of study from the STEM area and the general women's rights policy (three years ago, after three editions,

the only such public initiative: a competition addressed only to women active in the STEM area – "Girls of the Future," organised by MNiSW, was discontinued¹).

- This gap is filled by NGOs, often in cooperation with the high-tech industry and academia. The examples of good practice in this area include: the activities of the Perspektywy Education Foundation (activities supporting women in STEM have been conducted for 10 years), the "Girls as Engineers!" and "Girls go STEM" campaigns (promotion of technical and scientific studies among young women), the "Lean in STEM" mentoring programme (www.leaninstem.pl), "Girls Go Start-Up! Academy", the "Girls Go Science!" campaign (promotion of scientific careers among the female students of the STEM universities), "Inspiration Academy for Girls" webinars (middle-school girls as a target) and such events as: Girls Code Fun, Geek Girls Carrots, Women in Technology.

1.3. Male pedagogues

1.3.1. Facts and numbers

- Support of participation of men in preschool education and general encouragement for them to join child-caring and teaching professions did not take form of coordinated action in Poland so far (nor has it become systemic). The issue and the need for such activities sometimes appear in the public debate. And there is definitely need for such activities. According to the publication by the Central Statistical Office of Poland "Higher Education Institutions and their Finances in 2013", 146,317 persons in general studied in pedagogical fields, out of which 29,417 were men, i.e. 20.1 % of the total number of students. However, at the biggest pedagogical university in Poland, the Maria Grzegorzewska University, there were 6,782 students in total, out of which just 444 were men, i.e. 6.5 % of the student body(!).
- As for the profession of an educator, or a teacher in general, the public reporting in Poland does not take gender into account. According to the Central Statistical Office (GUS) in 2013 there were 83,048.79 persons employed as preschool educators (the "Education in the School Year 2012/2013" report).
- Information necessary to evaluate the scale of gender disproportion in these professions may be provided by individual (regional) systems of education information – SIO (in Poland the local authorities, not the central one, are responsible for preschool, primary and lower secondary education). And according to SIO – in the Łódzkie voivodeship in September 2011 there were 43 men working in preschools out of the total number of 3,367 employees (1.28 %) and in the city of Łódź out of the total number of 1,136 only 11 (0,97 %) were male. The gender disproportion is therefore shocking, bigger than in most EU countries.²
- The need for action is therefore burning (they may take the form of, e.g. a campaign encouraging men to take interest in the pedagogical studies – "Boys

¹ Some activities intended to increase women's activity on the job market were also organised by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, but the emphasis was put on professional training, not specifically STEM. (the "Active Woman" programme, or the "More Women in Professions Dominated by Men" competition, where the activities were supposed to combat stereotypes about the role of women on the job market.

² According to the data by the Central Statistical Office from 2009 the most feminised professional fields in Poland are: health care and social services and education. Approximately 80 % of jobs in these fields are held by women.

to Education!", and inspiration might be taken from the German "Neue Wege für Jungs" campaign – www.neue-wege-fuer-jungs.de). But the mental resistance in the society against such activities is stronger than in the case of activities promoting educational and professional careers of women in the STEM area.

2. Policy debate

2.1. Hot topics

- **Social image of the *temporary special measures*.** The "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" (CEDAW) – ratified by Poland in 1980 – recommends the so-called "*temporary special measure*" – until achieving gender equality in the given field of activity. Equalising or affirmative actions, however, are still causing social controversies. A lot of discussion was caused recently by the launch of a new scholarship programme by Intel and Perspektywy Education Foundation – "New Technologies for Girls." Scholarship in this programme will be awarded solely to female students in ICT fields. This fits into the temporary special measures system recommended by the EU and UN. The solution caused a lot of controversy. There were accusations of discrimination against men. A complex debate developed on the internet and there were official complaints about the programme sent to the office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment.
- The debate also concerns the fact that **men do not use parenthood leave**. According to the data from MPiPS only 2 % of the men entitled took such leave in the previous year. The ways to change the social image of the role of men in the family/relationship and encouraging them to take parenthood leave is a subject of debate at numerous dedicated conferences.
- **Winter is coming?** A change is coming to Poland in the wider political context. After two terms of the government by the central-liberal Citizens' Platform (Platforma Obywatelska) the power will be probably taken over by strongly right-wing, conservative Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PiS) – the parliamentary elections will take place on 25 October 2015. The experts claim that this might slow down the social and political changes towards equality (PiS once declared its plans to close the office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment).

3. Transferability aspects

3.1. The Netherlands case

- All three discussion papers present good practices in equalising chances on the job market for women and men. They do that on different levels. The Dutch case shows very advanced, systemic, centralised solutions. In Denmark the attention focuses on spot activities, micro-scale influence, used as pilot programmes for further, more strategic activities in the future (testing, knowledge and know-how aggregation). The Northern Ireland example is of a slightly different character, as it does not focus on presenting specific activities but on strategic and ideological tools related to forming a political will. These are necessary at one stage of shaping the policy for wider support of women in STEM.

- The activities taken up in the Netherlands, described in the discussion papers, are impressive by their systemic nature. They extend essentially over the whole "talent pipeline" related to educating girls/women in the STEM area. These activities fit into two discourses – the support of equality and women's empowerment and the promotion of STEM in public policy (it is good that supporting girls in STEM here is also a part of complex activities supporting the Science and Technology field (National Platform Science & Technology))
- The scale of activities is imposing, as is the number and complementary nature of the solutions applied. The emphasis is put on raising awareness among teachers ('the teachers are also trained to discuss gender stereotypes with pupils') and professional guidance for girls³. Parents are also correctly considered as an important link in the whole chain. Their influence (and that of other persons from the immediate surroundings, such as peers) on shaping the girls' approach and their cognitive horizons cannot be appreciated enough. The activities described are largely financed from public resources.
- The activities are implemented using the top-down approach – i.e. the changes introduced are inspired by the central authorities.
- In Poland the public funds – with minor exceptions mentioned in the first point of the paper – are not used to fund activities aimed specifically at girls. Increasing their participation in the STEM area is not among the priorities of the public policy for education and the job market. Also a systemic solution of creating a platform for implementation of the public policy in this area, where an NGO conducts activities fitting into the social mission, drawing on public funds, is not possible. However, individual segments of such activities, such as e.g. the National Girls' Day (the scale of this activity in Poland is much smaller, only technical universities participate and the whole is coordinated by an NGO) are possible for implementation or implemented already. The Dutch example encourages to consider a possibility of extending the Polish model to include technological companies and research institutions
- The "Decision strengthening trajectories" project would be difficult to implement in Poland. The individual counselling is very important, but difficult to introduce systemically. In Poland the professional counselling system in schools is rudimentary and this is the main systemic barrier, apart from the lack of funding sources for transfer of this good practice.
- What can be implemented in Poland without much difficulty are specific fragment activities, particular separate solutions, removed from the systemic context, such as: "speed dating" at schools", "gender scan" at HEIs.

3.1.1. Constraints

- The lack of political critical mass for deep, systemic changes requiring strategic decisions and sustainable financing.
- Lack of steady financing for the activities in this area conducted by NGOs.
- Conservative mentality. In comparison to other European countries, especially the Western ones, the Polish society is among the most traditionalistic and the most homogenous. One of the reasons for such a state of affairs is the historically strong position of the Catholic Church (one of the highest

³ It is difficult to address the Dutch activities on the higher education level in more detail, as they have only been presented in a limited way in the discussion paper.

percentages of Catholics in the world). Despite many impulses on the part of a civic society, the EU and the experiences of other countries, the critical mass necessary for real changes in this area has not congregated yet.

- Unconscious bias. Thanks to the conservative mentality, the stereotypes related to the presence of women in STEM and their skills in this area are still flourishing. The "Women's Potential for Technological Industry" (FEP 2015) research showed that these stereotypes are extremely strong, up to the level of autostereotyping by women in STEM (high school graduates and university students).

3.2. The Denmark case

- The Danish activities presented in the discussion paper are also interesting and inspiring. It would definitely be good to start building awareness in Poland about gender balance among the preschool educators (as well as pedagogues and teachers as the whole). The Danish experience from the local micro-activities presented may serve as informational and exemplary material in this case.

3.2.1. Constraints:

- Ideas for projects in this vein did not receive positive response in Poland so far, on any level. There is also no industry involved here, so businesses are not a potential partner. The state must intervene (central and local authorities) as well as pedagogical HEIs.
- The biggest problem is the low status of a preschool educator in Poland – this profession is extremely badly paid and does not enjoy social prestige. The changes require a great systemic transformation, very difficult and complex.

3.3. The Northern Ireland case

- The strategic documents concerning support of women in STEM, or Recommendations, are currently being created in many parts of the world and reading them is always enlightening, as due to particular social, political and cultural conditions the problem is always approached in a slightly different way. In case of Northern Ireland notable is the engagement of the government and the fact that public funds are being invested in creation of a platform for cooperation with business (the government – Department for Employment and Learning – has created and funded the post of the STEM Business Co-ordinator), which is an example of PPP (a bit dampening for the enthusiasm is the fact that, as the authors of the discussion paper write: "the post is unlikely to be continued").
- The documents described and the already mentioned "Charter" were used by FEP as one of the sources for inspiration in creating the set of Recommendations "How to support women in STEM?"

4. Recommendations⁴

4.1. The European level

- European activities supporting the development of the STEM or STEA(Art)M skills should be launched. The 2009 initiative of Barack Obama, “Change the Equation”, may serve as an inspiration. A transnational strategy for social and economic development by strengthening STEM should be a part of the European campaign with a strong emphasis on the role of women and the necessity to equalise chances. (<http://changetheequation.org>)

4.2. The national level

4.2.1. Education

- **Priority: STEM.** The emphasis in schools should be put on the attractive teaching of science subjects, inspiring fascination with science and technology and on creative and logical thinking – irrespective of the child’s gender. Of course, without neglecting the postulates related to the holistic vision of humanity
- **Support for teachers.** Teachers’ appropriate professional preparation and providing them with possibilities of constant, geometric development, of learning new, innovative forms of imparting knowledge, of international good practice in this area, inspiring them to be open and creative, should be a priority in the education-related public policy in Poland.
- **Emphasis on ICT competencies.** Young people should be taught programming languages and other ways of creating new technologies.
- **Stereotype-free school.** A systemic approach to ensuring lack of gender stereotyping in schools, from the primary (and preschool) to university level is necessary. Teachers should have access to knowledge concerning the cultural and social clichés related to perception of men’s and women’s place in the society and the influence of these stereotypes on the education process. Prejudices which might discourage girls from taking up scientific subjects and later technological studies and careers in the technological industry should be eliminated, also from the educational communication itself (e.g. stereotype-reinforcing textbooks).
- **Role models availability.** Extremely important is confronting female students on various education levels with female role models from the STEM area, enabling them to draw inspiration from active, notable women enjoying spectacular managerial or scientific careers in technology.

⁴ This set of recommendation is part of the project "Women's potential for high tech industry" (www.potencjalkobiet.pl).

4.2.2. Higher Education - STEM

- **Support for female students entering the job market.** Female students from the technical and scientific study areas should be familiarised with the reality of the technological industry and the chances related to it.
- **Support for female careers in science.** Apart from the transfer of know-how and inspiration related to planning a future in the technological industry, it is important to program a scientific path for female students in the technical and scientific areas (e.g. the “Girls for Science!” campaign). Also implementation of the solutions supporting scientific careers of women in the STEM area (mentoring system at HEIs, career coaching, transparent promotion procedures, salaries monitoring, encouraging women to apply for high positions, appointing them as leaders of research teams, improving the visibility of female scientists in the universities’ communication policies, etc.).
- **Equality culture at HEIs and in research.** An equality training programme should be launched for the academic and administrative staff of the technical universities (and others). It is also recommended to have equal treatment officers at universities, modelled on the German example (Frauenbeauftragte), and centres for research into the gender aspect in STEM. As far as the research itself is concerned, in technical and science areas it is important to include the gender perspective, e.g. gender mainstreaming, gendered innovation.
- **Talents pipeline⁵.** The technical universities and science faculties of other types of HEIs should maintain and extend the activities aimed at encouraging talented female high school students to study, they should also engage in new forms of linking with education.
- **University image.** The technical universities should take care to frame their public communication in appropriate imagery and language such as do not exclude women.

4.2.3. Social influence level

- **Socialisation not burdened with stereotypes.** “Working on the basis” is necessary in the area of breaking stereotypes and mechanisms of passing the masculinity and femininity models to young people. The starting point should be socialisation that is open, modern and does not limit thinking. In this context work with parents, educators and direct surroundings of girls is the key. One of the important aspects, not readily recognised in the Polish discourse, is the necessity of emphasis on cognitive spatial skills⁶ for girls, largely determining their engineering or other STEM-related skills in the future. Its important element is discarding the stereotypes related to dividing toys into those intended for girls

⁵ The American term for the connected containers – from primary school to higher education – related to inspiring and educating talents in the STEM area.

⁶ According to the American AAUW report "Why so few?" it is the development of the spatial cognitive skills that forms the biggest differences between boys and girls. Also in this area boys, thanks to being used from the earliest childhood to operating spatially with multi-dimensional objects – such as balls, building blocks, game environment in 3D games, mechanical toys, etc. – are clearly better than girls. In later stage of development these skills turn out to be vital for development of technical and other skills in the STEM area.

(related to housekeeping, looks and widely-understood nurturing) and for boys (educational, mechanical, logical, construction).

- **Men and promotion of partnership.** An important element of the social change must be education and improvement of consciousness of men and including them in activities intended to increase participation of women in the STEM area. Also promotion of partnership in relationships (it has positive influence on the shape of a professional career and is the most important factor is achieving true work-life equality).
- **Women – leaving the comfort zone.** Part of the responsibility also lies with the women, not just the environment in which they operate. Women themselves need to become the “architects of changes”, to become active, to “aim high”, to look for chances of development for themselves, to be ready to leave their comfort zone, to develop leadership skills, to negotiate employment terms competently, to not be afraid to take advantage of chances appearing in their way, to be creative. They need to participate in the everyday life, to engage in changing the anti-women stereotypes using their own example, in wider engagement, in support for other women.
- **Including the media.** The media and artists should be asked to fight stereotypes in their daily work. It would be good to introduce a plot about a successful woman active in the technological industry into a high quality, popular show in one of the major media channels, as this might be a breakthrough in social influence. Female role models must be more visible/available as an inspiration source for young women in the public sphere. Achievements of women in the STEM area need to be widely communicated.
- **Knowledge aggregation.** It is necessary to build a knowledge base for interchange of ideas on the subject of female input in STEM and the technological industry as well as conditions for their presence in these areas.

4.2.4. High-tech industry

- **Diversity standards.** On the organisational/institutional level the key issue is implementation of a set of standards which are a condition of establishing the company as a woman-friendly space: regular employment monitoring from the gender point of view, employee-promotion monitoring, appropriate procedures in the recruitment process, prevention of discrimination and mobbing in the workplace, including in the strategy the diversity management rule and equal-chances policy.
- **Advantages of the women’s presence.** The advantages for the technological industry companies stemming from employment of women and engagement in diversity management activities – especially the business/economic ones – need to be emphasised. Diversity also needs to be promoted as an autonomous value, justified both from the social justice and market point of view (improved competitive edge, support of creativity).
- **Solutions for parents** (“tailored” in such a way so that both parents can use them). Stronger participation of women in the technological industry also entails preparing the companies to receive them. Allowances for pregnant women (parking spaces etc.), parent-and-child rooms, maybe even onsite daycare and

kindergarten should become standard. Even more important is large-scale implementation of work form and time flexibility solutions, as well as appropriate preparation for employees to take advantage of them.

- **Equal recruitment.** In the recruitment process, in published job offers, it is possible to inform about being open to employing women without violating the current legal regulations (e.g. “we are a company employing a record number of women in the ICT industry”). It is important to use inclusive language in such job offers. Requiring the headhunters to also deliver female candidates for specific jobs should be standard.
- **The “bad lady-boss” stereotype.** Negative stereotypes burdening the image of female managers should be opposed. This may be done by promoting female leaders in internal and external communication. The companies should also emphasise development of leadership skills in female employees and offer coaching/training/themed groups in this area.

4.2.5. Prioritising STEM in public policy – central level

- **STEM strategy.** A National Strategy for creation of a high-quality, conscious society and innovative economy by developing skills from the STEM area should be created (modelled on the USA, United Kingdom or Germany). A vital part of such a strategy should be postulates related to the necessity of fully activating the potential of half of the society – women. The strategy should be implemented on the multi-sector level, engaging all the stakeholder groups.
- **Combating the pay gap.** Part of the strategy should be an undertaking by the government to initiate actions aimed at removing the pay gap between men and women in Poland. The public sector should start any such activities on its own side – by salaries monitoring, introducing the obligatory inclusion of “salary brackets” in published job offers or obligation to implement development and awareness activities in this area (action plans).
- **Quotas/parities.** One of the methods of increasing the influence of women in the technological industry to consider is introducing gender parities or (as a milder version) quotas, i.e. legal requirements to employ a specified number (percentage) of women in management boards or in managerial positions in companies.
- **Large-format promotion and information initiatives.** The government should develop (modelled on the “Girls Day — Mädchenzukunftstag” initiative, or the Dutch “Girls Day”) financial support to organise a large-scale national Open Day for Girls. These activities in their first phase should involve at least 10 % of the 7-19 years of age population and should require engagement from representatives of all sectors.