



The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

Gender segregation in the labour market and education

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Comments Paper - Finland



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Much has been done, more is still needed

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1. Introduction to the Finnish country context

1.1. Brief assessment of the policy context

Dismantling of gender segregation in working life and in education has been on the agenda of Finnish gender equality policies ever since the 1960s. Moreover, gender segregation has been retained as a political challenge in the programme of also recent governments, most notably in the 2007 and 2011 programmes. The focus has thereby been, first and foremost, on gender pay gaps, but also on gender mainstreaming in all administrative sectors and processes, as well as on promoting gender equality in care and education policies. A key guidance document for recent policies is the Government Action Plan for Gender Equality (2012-2015).

1.2. Snapshot on economic and social circumstances

There is a multitude of national statistics unravelling existing differences across genders in economic and social circumstances. These statistics have, in more recent years, been compiled by Statistics Finland into comprehensive publications on gender equality in Finland. Based on this source, only 18 % of the students in technical and transport fields were women (in 2012) while the corresponding share was 78 % for humanistic and pedagogic fields, but as high as 88 % for fields related to welfare and health. Not surprisingly, occupations in care and health are among the most typical ones for women (a female share of close to 93 %), and specialist scientific-technical occupations for men (a male share of about 78 %). Furthermore, own calculations from administrative registers reveal that over 97 % of kindergarten teachers are women.

Other sources show that less than 14 % of Finnish employees are in occupations with at least 40 % representing the gender in minority. Indeed, while the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), in its second index measuring gender equality in the EU (released 25.6.2015), ranks Finland second among the 28 Member States, the greatest declines for Finland – compared with the first index released in 2013 – were in points depicting educational attainment and segregation.

1.3. Brief outline of the institutional and legal background

The Constitution and the Equality Act (609/1986; 1329/2014) are the main bodies of legislation in Finland ruling on matters of equality between men and women, nowadays further supported by the Non-discrimination Act (1325/2014). Institutionally, gender equality issues come under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. A total of four authorities, all based at the Ministry, are to promote gender equality: the Equality Unit, which is responsible for policy

preparation and coordination at the Ministry; the Ombudsman for Equality, which is an independent authority monitoring and overseeing compliance with legislation concerning gender equality; the Equality Board, which is an independent committee overseeing compliance with gender equality legislation and also resolving matters related to it; the Council for Gender Equality, which is the board of a parliamentary body working to promote gender equality in societal matters. Additionally, the Parliament has a sub-committee dealing with issues of equality in working life and in gender relations.

2. Policy debate

The programme of the current government lays down that “Finland is [also] a land of gender equality.” (2015, p. 8) Nonetheless, gender equality in general and gender segregation and gender pay gaps in particular will most likely continue to remain high on the political agenda. This is guaranteed by particularly three key statistics concerning working life: First, both horizontal and vertical gender segregation is strong and only slowly changing. Indeed, the European Commission has remarked on the sharp gender division characterising Finnish working life. Second, the distribution of genders across atypical employment contracts is overwhelmingly biased towards women in a conspicuously cemented way. Third, the average gender pay gap still exceeds the goal of 15 % (for 2015), with moves towards it being slow and bumpy.

A crucial source feeding into the policy debate embraces the multitude of research and actions assessing various aspects of gender equality. All this activity has produced broad-based information particularly on gender segregation, as well as on worthy ways to dismantle gender segregation. The number of projects undertaken in Finland in search for good practices when it comes to tackling various modes of gender segregation is impressive. A distinct feature of these projects is that many of them have been initiated under the umbrella of a national development programme of the European Social Fund, notably in the ESF period 2007–2013.

Because of limited space, it is not possible to provide a full picture of all relevant projects realised over the years. One comprehensive contribution, completed in 2014, definitely deserves attention, though, namely the Valtava Gender Mainstreaming Programme¹, a national development programme of the ESF coordinated by the Ministry of Employment and the Economy. Apart from addressing gender mainstreaming-enhancing activities, several projects of Valtava focused on developing activities in support of dismantling gender segregation in education and the labour market.

The Valtava projects approached gender segregation from several different angles. Some projects attempted to raise general awareness of gender equality in education and in working life by designing and implementing online courses for students in secondary and higher educational institutions or by producing and testing material for higher comprehensive schools, while others developed tools, such as cards and games but also marketing campaigns for educational institutions, with a view to

¹ <https://www.tem.fi/valtava>. For some English information see: <http://www.tem.fi/valtava/tulokset>

bringing up gender equality issues. A few projects also focused on ways to recruit and train women and men for gender-atypical occupations and sectors. In particular, one project resulted in a 'Manual to Men'² intended to help teachers and workplaces in the social and health care sector to recruit male students into practical nurse's training using new types of recruitment methods in combination with male-specific pedagogy. Other projects focused on a theme which has for long been at the forefront when searching for good practices to dismantle gender segregation in education and in the labour market, namely girls/women and technology. In the Valtava projects, the focus was on guiding higher comprehensive school pupils to select atypical placements for their introduction into working life, on the one hand, and on giving women planning a career change the opportunity to attend a two-month training course to familiarise themselves with the technology industry and, ultimately, enhance their move to relevant vocational education and training.

The overall impression is that the multitude of good practice material and models developed over the years is underutilised in educational institutions, by employers and also by policymakers at all levels of the society.

3. Transferability aspects

The optimal way of successfully transferring initiatives recognised as good practices to other countries would, of course, be that the activity in question – typically designed and implemented in a local setting – is first tested and further amended in other parts of the host country. Transferability logically requires reliable information on underlying reasons and motivations for the undertaking, in-depth description of its implementation including critical steps, as well as convincing evidence on achievable impacts. Other crucial prerequisites include satisfactory knowledge about the institutional framework in which the good practice is developed. Successful implementation cannot hang on continuous support from the project staff having initially developed the good practice.

Having said this, the overall conclusion about the possibilities to transfer the DK, NL and NI initiatives put forth as good practices will inevitably be that their usefulness is hard to assess based on the available information.

- *The DK initiative:* It remains open whether the projects undertaken could add new insight on top of the many actions taken by Finnish authorities when it comes to gender inequality and segregation in the organisation, teaching and practices of educational institutions. While in Finland the focus has rather been on health care, the aim of tackling gender segregation in childcare is interesting. Exchange of experiences across these sectors might be useful.
- *The NL initiative:* As indicated above, Finland has extensive experience from programmes and projects aiming to dismantle gender segregation in STEM in education and in the labour market. In view of this it is hard to see that Finland could benefit from STEM stimulation policies being implemented by a large

² https://www.tem.fi/ajankohtaista/julkaisut/julkaisujen_haku/good_practices_from_valtava_gender_mainstreaming_programme.98249.xhtml

organisation backed up by considerable annual external funding. Noteworthy are several of the implemented solutions, e.g. the role models.

- *The NI initiative:* Networking of employers for exchanging good practices in tackling gender segregation in their organisations might be a worthy complementary activity to the current Finnish legislative (e.g. mandatory gender equality plans for higher educational institutions and employers) and institutional (equality bodies and broad-based cooperation between employers' and employees' associations) framework.

4. Recommendations for action

There is ample evidence on gender segregation in education and in the labour market having detrimental effects on the economy and, ultimately, on the society as a whole. The gender segregation observable in working life is manifested in gender differences in pay and careers, and starts out from the different educational choices made by girls and boys, mostly already in higher comprehensive school. While a multitude of practices for dismantling gender segregation in education and working life has been developed over the years, much improvement is still needed. This improvement also concerns the depth as well as the width of the initiatives and projects realised so far. Without such action there is an obvious risk that the gender division in education and in the labour market remains basically unchanged. In relation to a deepened perspective, several topical actions may be mentioned:

- *Girls/women are not a homogenous group.* – In projects addressing issues of gender segregation in education and in the labour market, girls and women are mostly treated as a homogeneous group, occasionally with separate focus on managers, entrepreneurs and/or immigrants. This holds true, by the way, also for the few initiatives directed towards men. However, in order to better understand the factors and mechanisms underlying gender segregation, a more distinctive approach to the gender in minority might be gainful.
- *Most focus on the individual and...* – Most undertakings tend to focus on supporting and encouraging the individual in his or her choices. This is essential, but far from enough. Also the practices and cultures of educational institutions or workplaces might need to be amended. It is striking, that these types of considerations show up almost exclusively in initiatives directed towards men but seldom, if ever, in initiatives directed towards women. This notion could be interpreted as indicating that initiatives aimed to dismantle gender segregation are themselves often plagued by gender inequality.
- *...too little on surrounding attitudes.* – Surrounding attitudes influence and shape a person's mind, starting from parents, childcare personnel, teachers, employers, PES staff, policymakers, etc. These attitudes are about the true capacity of the person, as well as about his or her potential to learn gender-atypical subjects and jobs. Accordingly, there is an obvious risk that also the gender segregation dismantling initiatives and implementations themselves mirror gender stereotype attitudes.
- *Better motivation and reliable validation needed.* – Conservative surrounding attitudes are likely to affect the final impact of single projects, however

successful. By the same token, a single project will seldom have a widespread amending effect on attitudes. Nonetheless, it is important that each project provides broad-based, illustrative information about why gender segregation in educational, training and job careers can be seen as an economic and societal problem that needs to be tackled. Of particular importance in this context is to disentangle major reasons for the gender segregation observed in the study field, occupation and/or sector under scrutiny; to show why this segregation needs to be dismantled; to assess the potential for undertaking the changes needed; and to clearly indicate who will benefit from this gender segregation dismantling activity – and how. At best, these motivations are embedded in empirical-based evidence showing what can be achieved by less gender segregation in educational institutions and in the labour market. But despite the importance of profound motivation of projects aiming to design efficient ways for tackling gender segregation, this is a weak point in most initiatives. Likewise, before presenting the outcome of a project as a good practice, its results and impact should have been reported and validated in some reliable way.

- *Active employer involvement is mostly lacking.* – The labour market has turned increasingly demand-driven due to rapid technological change, international trade and globalisation. Labour market structures are no longer changing only at sector and company levels. The process has entered individual workplaces and is reshaping their organisation and job structure. This affects profoundly the demand for differently educated and skilled labour. Accordingly it is not enough to try to raise awareness of gender segregation among employers. Instead, serious attempts should be made to involve employers actively in gender segregation dismantling undertakings, not merely have them sympathise with the project.
- *Initiatives should be anchored in their history.* – A multitude of projects have been initiated over the past decades in an attempt to identify efficient ways to tackle gender inequality in general and gender segregation in particular. The combined effect of all these efforts seems strikingly weak, though. A conspicuous feature of country project portfolios is that similar projects show up after some time, albeit typically in a different local setting, indicating positive effects that are highly similar or even identical to those already reported in a previous project. This situation points to serious underutilisation of the knowledge contained in successful projects and, ultimately, to a worrying lack of engagement, strategy and vision among relevant stakeholders.
- *More interventions are needed.* – Closely related to several of the previous points is the quite often expressed demand for interventions instead of models, networks, manuals and other types of material that have so far constituted the typical outcome of the projects undertaken. Put differently, there might be well-justified reasons for rethinking the ways in which initiatives are implemented and labelled a good practice.

Finally, it should be stressed that a strict focus on gender segregation in education and in the labour market, with the latter basically referring to the prevailing horizontal and vertical gender division in working life, may prove to be all too limited. The reason is simple: gender segregation in education and in working life represents but two out of several modes of gender segregation discernible also in today's societies. While these additional modes of division by gender show up in other parts of the

society, notably in societal and leisure activities and in the sharing of housework, they are by no means isolated from the gender segregation observable in education and in working life. On the contrary, all these forms of gender segregation are closely interrelated. Hence, segregation should not be addressed only as a question of a gendered division but also as a question of differing gender opportunities. In other words, when searching for ways to dismantle gender segregation in education and in the labour market, account needs to be made also for other crucial forms of gender segregation in the society.