



Exchange of good practices on gender equality

Gender training in education

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Comments Paper - Bulgaria

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Transferability to Bulgaria of Good Practices on Gender training in Education

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1. Introduction

As recent sociological survey has pointed out Bulgarians underestimate discrimination on most grounds. Responsibility for overcoming discrimination in the EU lies with the individual and with educational institutions, and in Bulgaria – with the state. In 2010, 76.5% of Bulgarians attribute the leading role to the state, followed by parents (30%) and schools and universities (27%)¹. In Bulgarian school education gender inequalities are underestimated concluded another survey², done in 2009.

1.1. Policy context

The main efforts of the Government in the field of gender equality and antidiscrimination on all grounds aim at: building the capacity of the administration at central and local level of governance, of the judiciary, of social partners on the issue; strengthening the national institutional mechanism; raising the awareness and sensitivity of the society; and implementation of the National Strategy for Promotion of Gender Equality (2009-2015), which main objective in the sphere of education is "eradication of stereotypes". Activities (trainings, guides, assessments, campaigns, etc.) are projects based funded mainly from the EU sources (Equal, Progress, Social Fund etc.).

The priorities in education in the National Youth Strategy (2010-2020) aim at improving the quality of education; linking educational programmes to the actual needs of economy; ensuring that education is accessible to all and opening up the education system; creating conditions and environment for implementing in practice the educational concept of Lifelong Learning; turning Bulgaria into a country of knowledge and innovations. Awareness raising and training in gender equality is included among others in the operational target "Promotion of civic education and training".

1.2. Legal and Institutional Background

1.2.1. Gender Equality

The principles of equality and non-discrimination are embedded in the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria as well as in the number of codes and acts including those on education. In 2004 Protection against Discrimination Act was enforced and

¹ Rumiana Stoilova, Bozhidar Ivkov, Gergana Nikolova. Analysis of Results from a National Representative Survey on Equality and Discrimination, commissioned by the MLSP (2010).

² Commission on Protection against Discrimination. Guide on Equal Treatment. Sofia, 2010, p. 22.

relevant structures were established, including the National Council on Equality between Women and Men (NCEWM)³ as a consultative body to the Council of Ministers. It develops and implements the national policy on gender equality through annual National Action Plans on Equality of Women and Men (NAP). The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) is responsible for the implementation of gender equality policy at the level of the executive. A gender equality law has not been yet adopted.

1.2.1. Gender in Education

1.2.1.1. Legislation

The statutory framework regulating access to education and qualification, do not allow gender discrimination in the Bulgarian educational system⁴.

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)".

1.2.1.2. Teachers' training

Civic education is an interdisciplinary cross-cutting element of the compulsory general primary and secondary education and is integrated into the following subjects: homeland, individual and the society, history and civilization, geography and economy, philosophy (psychology, logics, ethics, law), world and personality. The State educational requirement/syllabus on civic education contains the topics of civil and human rights and equality but do not specifically mention women's rights or gender equality, thus it is up to the good will of the teachers either to include them in the teaching process or not. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (MEYS) reported in 2010 that gender equality is one of the themes in the school books in "History and civilizations" in VI grade of the secondary school⁵. MEYS promotes training aids which can help teachers in terms of methodology and content of teaching in the field of gender equality⁶, developed under different projects mainly by NGOs. A "Guide on equal treatment" was developed for educators, police officers and local authorities in 2010, and in 2011 training modules for teachers in prevention of discrimination including some gender equality issues. However, it is not evident how many and how teachers do use them, and with what impact.

³ It is chaired by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy and its permanent members are deputy ministers from each Ministry, as well as officials from other governmental bodies. Representatives of academic institutions, national organisations of the social partners and selected NGOs are associated members of the Council. It supports different governmental bodies, non-governmental organisations and social partners in the implementation of national and international projects in the field.

⁴ According to the Public Education Act, no limitations or privileges are permitted on grounds of race, nationality, gender, ethnic or social origin, religion and social status. No gender quotas are admissible in the admission of pupils to the schools.

⁵ Report on the implementation of the NAP on Equality of Women and Men.

⁶ Violeta Stoycheva, Kina Kotlarska. Teaching gender equality. Teacher's reference book. Veliko Turnovo, 2006. In Bulgarian and in English.

Some teachers participate in informal training in gender knowledge in project based initiatives of NGOs or academic institutions⁷.

The 2012 NAP envisages elaboration of a motion to the higher education institutions on including equality issues, protection against discrimination and gender equality into the process of teachers' education and qualification.

1.2.1.3. Gender studies and academic activities in Gender in Education

A Master's degree programme in Gender Studies is available to the students at the Faculty of Philosophy of the St Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia. This is the only programme of its kind in the country. Occasionally separate courses in the connection with the subject of gender equality are offered within the degree programmes in Pedagogy (e.g. elective course on violence against women), Sociology, Cultural Anthropology, Literature, etc. in different universities in the country. Academic researches on the matters of gender in education are focused mainly on the content of the school books for primary and secondary education.

2. Policy debate on Gender in Education

Three major issues in the recent policy debate on gender in education can be pointed out:

2.1. Dropouts

According to the national statistics, the share of girls in general school enrolment was about 50.6 per cent for the period 2002-2008, while in all types of secondary schools it was 48 per cent for the same period. Majority of dropout leave school because of "family reasons". The Government is taking steps to counteract early school leaving through tailored programmes. However, gender remains largely absent from existing indicators as most of them are gender neutral. There are few gender-specific indicators and even fewer gender-sensitive (mainstreamed) indicators⁸.

2.3. Stereotypes in School Books and Teaching Methods

The conclusions of the 2011 research commissioned by the Commission for protection against discrimination on stereotypes and prejudices in the school books, training materials and educational programmes in the primary and secondary education had in last three months tremendous reverberations in the public, but the findings on gender stereotyping were derisively interpreted by media.

NGOs strongly criticize the state for non supervision and non implementation of the provisions of the Anti-discrimination Law to ensure quality and continuous gender sensitive and gender education⁹.

⁷ E.g. see "Equal at school – equal in life" - project of the CWSP, includes e-based training modules for pupils of V –VII class: <http://www.cwsp.bg/en/htmls/page.php?category=504>.

⁸ Maria-Carmen Pantea. Gender Mainstreaming in the National Action Plans for the Decade of Roma Inclusion, UNIFEM, 2009.

⁹ Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation. Gender Stereotyping - a pervasive and overlooked source of Discrimination against Women in Bulgaria. Special Alternative Report to the 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th governmental report. 52nd session of CEDAW Committee (9-27 July, 2012).

2.3. Sexual and Reproductive Health

The state admits that it is necessary to develop and strengthen further the programmes and the teaching methods in order to enhance pupils' knowledge in the area of sexual and reproductive health¹⁰. The number of school-aged girls (under 19) who give birth or do abortions has tended to increase. The MEYS, jointly with professional NGOs, has developed teaching aids on early birth risk for pupils, who are already used in most of the schools in the country but their usage depends on the school authorities.

3. Transferability issues

In last 15 years there were sporadic individual projects in Bulgaria implemented mainly by NGOs in cooperation with teachers and school authorities to introduce gender as teaching content or teaching method. However, there is no data base of the projects implemented, of training or educational materials produced, and on the sustainability and impact of these activities. In that respect similar activities as presented in the Discussion Papers, have been already piloted but remained isolated cases which have not been systematically adopted and further developed at the national level.

3.1. Good practices from Denmark

The situation in Bulgaria looks to be very similar to that described in the Discussion Paper from Denmark, namely:

- “Research-based gender-perspectives are not part of the structure and content of the teaching in schools. It is not part of the curriculum neither for pupils nor teachers' education”.
- “The organisation and content of the teaching is structured according to the traditional perceptions of sex” – biological approach.
- There is a lack of systematic efforts of the responsible institutions to monitor and to evaluate of how gender is mainstreamed in the educational process and system which results in the lack of sound ground to measure the impacts of any kind of activities in this area.

3.1.1. The children's book on gender roles and educators' guide

The attempt to introduce gender sensitive approach in kindergartens can be transferred as practice to Bulgaria. The aims of the project are well set and clear, based on a preliminary background research; authorities are committed; quality assurance of the product (guide) is secured; the evaluation is done.

¹⁰ Combined 4th, 5th, 6th and 7 periodic reports of Bulgaria to the CEDAW Committee, January 2011. Portugal, 18-19 October 2012

3.1.2. The magazine + film/CD for boys and girls about body confidence and “porn chic” + teachers guide

The practice to start a debate with teenage girls and boys on the images and messages of sexualized behaviour which are popularized by mass media is timely needed in Bulgaria as well. The practice can be accepted by committed educators and piloted in order to be fine tuned to the experience of the audience.

3.1.3. Possible constraints

Practically, experience to introduce gender in kindergartens and at primary school existed in Bulgaria in late 90-ties due to the efforts of women’s NGOs and thanks to international donors, but unfortunately has not been further developed. The recent attempts of NGOs (e.g. CWSP) to communicate gender to kindergarten teachers met resistance as they have assumptions that will not be supported by the educational authorities and by parents.

If the second practice is not put in a broader context of the existing gender stereotypes in the society/local tradition, this initiative will not meet its objectives and might have negative impact to the foreseen. It is disputable and needs further and serious discussion whether the teachers, rather than the peers, are the most appropriate mediators for such type of discussions in the classroom.

3.2. Good Practice from Portugal

The Portuguese experience seems to be the most applicable one at these stage of development of gender issues in education in Bulgaria, as informal teachers' training, having in mind the following reasons:

- Civic education in Bulgaria has the same characteristics as the cross-curricula activity of Education for Citizenship in Portugal;
- The Guides aim to mainstream gender by offering teachers a range of concrete and common themes from a gender perspective to work on with their pupils and students what is needed in the Bulgarian schools as well;
- The main purpose of the Guides is to mainstream gender in formal educational practices thus supporting eradication of gender stereotyping which is the main goal of the gender equality policy in education in Bulgaria;

The strong sides of the practice are:

- Clear and measurable goals;
- Partnership between experts, teachers and authorities;
- Tangible implementation plan;
- Clear and reasonable targeting of beneficiaries (pupils attending the last three years of basic education and with young children as soon as they enter the educational system);

- Combination of theoretical framework with practical suggestions for implementation;
- Respect to the expertise of the teachers and avoiding innovations that might provoke resistance;
- Understanding that the usage of the Guides should not create an extra work for teachers but will help to use them in the context of their existing teaching practices;
- Enough time (well foreseen time frame);
- Validation of the training by the educational authorities;
- Well designed monitoring and evaluation activities;
- Communication of outputs;
- Sound understanding of challenges and threats for the further development;
- Realistic understanding about the impact of the activity.

Constraints to transfer the practice to Bulgaria are:

- Very few academic researches on gender in education - lack of research ground.

3.3. Good Practice from Spain

The practice from Spain offers online initial and continuous teacher's training in gender issues. As a format it might be transferable to Bulgaria as an informal teacher's training. The second course is interactive and provides more opportunities to the trainees to learn from each other and to share experience. Except mentioned satisfaction of participants however, there is no other evidence that evaluation of the activity has been done especially having in mind that its objectives are very ambitious (e.g. one of the aims of the course is "to mainstream gender equality"). Lack of measurable indicators might jeopardize the initial intention of the project. There is no information provided how the course is validated, and is it certified.

3.4. Conclusions

All presented practices are worthy to discuss in the Bulgarian educational community. In order to transfer them, their impact in the country of origin has to be thoroughly examined, preliminary background research beforehand the implementation has to be done, awareness raising among and coalition between authorities, teachers and parents built.

The main constraints to transfer the commented practices to Bulgaria might be:

- Lack of will or demand to include gender training into the formal teachers' education and lack of legal regulations to include it to the teacher's qualification.

- Lack of institutional support from the responsible authorities at all levels for the informal teachers' qualification:
 - Ministry of Education, Science and Youth;
 - Regional Inspectorates of Education;
 - Directors of the educational institutions.
- Lack of financial provisions for teachers' training and for the implementation of the respective initiatives.
- Resistance of teachers who might perceive it as additional burden if it is not officially required, validated and certified.
- Lack of understanding and support from parents.
- Little expertise on gender issues in the educational system.