



Exchange of good practices on gender equality

Gender training in education

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1. Introduction

1.1. Legal background

“The fundamental values of education in the Republic of Slovenia are derived from the common European heritage of political, cultural and moral values brought together in human rights and concomitant responsibilities, as well as the principles of pluralist democracy, tolerance, solidarity and the legal state” (White Paper on Education 2011: 13). The history of equal treatment of women in education system goes back to the first *Yugoslav Constitution* in 1946. Slovenia (before Yugoslavia), like almost all European countries, includes equality provisions in the constitution and has signed international declarations such as the CEDAW convention. Article 4 of *Slovenian Constitution* stipulates that everyone shall be guaranteed equal human rights and fundamental freedoms. Slovenia in recent years adopted two main acts in the area of gender equality and equal treatment, *Implementation of the Principle of Equal Treatment Act* (2004) and *Equal Opportunities for Woman and Men Act* (2002).

Under the *Constitution of Republic of Slovenia* (Article 57) freedom of education shall be guaranteed. Primary education is compulsory and financed from public funds. The state shall create the opportunities for citizens to obtain a proper education. While education legislation only includes the principle of equal treatment and equal opportunities, the *White Paper on Education* (1996: 23), which contains the main principles of the Slovenian education system, refers to the need to shift the emphasis from formal rights and equal opportunities towards substantive rights and the issue of reproduction of privileges through education. Further it says that when talking about rights of child, we also have to talk about the rights of girls and contradictions of the idea of equal opportunities in the unequal system of education which still favours one sex over the other.

Monumental changes were taking place in the middle and at the end of nineties regarding the education system in Slovenia. In 1996 Slovenian Parliament passed a reform regarding the public education system (most notable being single-structured nine-year primary school). Simultaneously there was also curriculum reform taking place, which was based on systemic solutions written in *White Paper on Education* (1995) and existing education legislation¹. One of the main goals of the reform was critical overview of existing educational programmes. Based on gained knowledge of comparative studies and analysis and taking into account among others also the principle of gender equality, new or reformed course syllabuses were introduced.

¹ Organisation and Financing of Education Act, Kindergarten Act, Elementary School Act, Gimnazije Act, Vocational Education Act, Adult Education Act.

1.2. The education system in Slovenia

The Slovenian education system is organised into several levels: pre-school education (which is optional. Children aged over 11 months can enrol in kindergarten, which they can attend up to enrolling into primary school), compulsory primary education (in Slovenia is organized in a single-structure nine-year primary school attended by pupils aged six to fifteen years), upper secondary education (which takes 2 to 5 years. Educational programmes include vocational, professional and gymnasium programmes) and tertiary education, which are all in the domain of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport.

1.3. Women and education

In Slovenia, men and women do not attain the same level of education. The education gap between men and women has been growing for quite some time. Women exceed men in different levels of education. For example graduation rates from secondary school show that gender gap in Slovenia is one of the greatest², the same situation can be found in tertiary education.

The educational attainment of Slovenian women rose considerably in the last 30 years. 35 years ago every fiftieth women had higher vocational education or higher academic and professional education, today, every fifth. 39 years ago only 1/5 of women had education that was higher than primary, 30% of all women were without education or only had primary education and only 2% of women obtained education that was higher than upper secondary education. Data from 2002 shows that only 1/10 of women didn't finish primary education, while the 2008 data shows there are only 5% of women without primary education and that more than half of women in Slovenia have finished upper secondary education. In 2008 there were 93,6% women in the age group between 20-24 years that have finished at least upper secondary education (EU-27: 81,48%) as the percentage of men in the same age group is 87,4% (in EU: 75,7%) (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia 2011).

Despite being a fundamental right, the question concerning and achieving gender equality in education system is important one, regardless of the progress made so far in Slovenia.

Curriculum documents include provisions and norms concerning equality, which is important, but not enough, because curriculum represents only one of the areas in which is possible to work proactively and achieve a fundamental level of focus on gender equality. At this point it is important to stress out the value of Sociology course in secondary education where course syllabus includes special part devoted to the question of gender.

Special awareness should be given to school climate and everyday praxis that accrue in kindergartens and schools from the perspective of relationships (between pupils, teachers and pupils), communication, encouragement, praise, retribution, organization of time in other words – hidden curriculum.

² Graduation rates among young women exceed those of young men by 10 percentage points or more.

In order to sensitise the issue and gain necessary knowledge and skills, Gender studies are not mandatory in the pedagogical study programs, but as an example of good practice we can point out Faculty of Education (University of Ljubljana) which from academic year 2011/2012 on offers its student (for now optional) course on *Education and gender*.

1.4. Example of good practice

One of the latest successfully finished programs on gender equality in schools was carried out from 2008 to 2011 at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Education together with nine other partner organizations (6 faculties, 2 institutes and regional development agency). The project titled *Professional training of professionals in education in the field of social and civic competencies 2008-2011* was founded by European Social Fund. The main goal of the project was to educate and develop sensitivity of preschool, primary and secondary school teachers and other professionals regarding social and civic competencies. The project consisted of 9 different courses (ranging from active citizenship, intergenerational cohabitation, stimulation of cross-cultural dialogue, recognising and prevention of violence, environment protection to equal opportunities of women and men). Some 504 hours of lectures and workshops were held through the period of three years and 4439 participants attended the training. Each course was divided into two parts. The first part included lectures (which provided some theoretical framework on the discussed topic) and the second part workshops in which (for the course on Equal opportunities) issues of gender stereotypes and examples of good practice has been discussed and evaluated in small groups and then reported to all the participants.

The course on Equal opportunities of women and men was carried out by 22 experts and researchers in the field of gender who all possessed a great deal of pedagogical experiences. The course was divided into three areas: (1) gender equality in education³ (2) men and women in public life⁴ (3) sharing household work⁵.

One of the main goals was to change the opinions and attitudes of participants regarding gender equality and through that transmission of newly gained knowledge to everyday praxis in their practical pedagogical work in kindergartens and schools. At the beginning of each year participants reported and together with experts discussed if and how the new knowledge was implemented in their everyday work, what were the main obstacles, etc.

Based on the final evaluation of each course we can say that education was successfully carried out in respect to set goals. Participants stated that the quality of

³ The aim of this part was to present the main differences between the concepts of sex and gender; similarities and differences between sexes; development of gender roles and identity. We talked about the knowledge and equal educational possibilities of boys and girls. We showed how gender stereotypes in everyday life develop, what are the most common types of stereotypes in mass media.

⁴ The main focus of the second part was a historic overview of the process of achieving gender equality; history of the women's right with the special emphasizing on Slovenia.

⁵ The main goal of the third part was to show the position of women and men in the area of paid work and household work; the concept of double and triple burden of women was introduced. Participants learned of the different types of families and main characteristic of family life in Slovenia were presented as well as new family trends (phenomenon of new fatherhood, gay and lesbian families, protective childhood, etc.).

gained knowledge was high. In the first phase 81,8% said the program was “quite” or “completely” useful in the second phase 89,5% and in the third phase 85,3%.

2. Policy debate

In the last years there is also in Slovenia a vast public debate on different school achievements of boys and girls. The results show, that girls achieve better results (for example latest PISA results) and higher academic attainment. Consequently questions started to arise whether education system is designed in such a way that it suits better to the characteristics and abilities of girls?

Data from the last ten years in Slovenia shows that girls are more successful in secondary school programmes. More girls than boys are enrolled in and successfully complete *gymnasium*; in 2010, 60% of the pupils who successfully passed the *matura* exam were girls and 40% were boys (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia 2011). Structure is similar in tertiary education where women represent the majority of students⁶ and there are also more women than men amongst graduates of tertiary level education⁷. Women largely dominate in the fields of education, health and welfare, law, economics, humanities and arts. Men dominate in engineering, manufacturing and construction.

Among others it is important to point out the latest results of 2009 PISA research which show that girls achieve considerably greater average success in reading literacy⁸, fairly greater success in natural science literacy and statistically insignificant difference among numeracy literacy.

All the data and facts presented above gave rise to numerous questions and are the sources for many analyses in the future. Does the larger proportion of girls in secondary and tertiary programmes derive from culturally conditioned beliefs? What is the role of early childhood socialization on later academic achievement of girls and boys? Why is education of girls of a higher quality? Does education system provide boys with fewer opportunities for acquiring quality knowledge and education?

It is more or less obvious that there is a huge problem that has to be largely discussed among researchers, experts, educators and policy makers on the issue of boys' under-achievement in the schools as such and in some areas particularly. But there is also still an important question how to eliminate gender stereotypes which prevent girls (and boys) to freely choose their own way in the field of education and training.

⁶ In student year 2009/2010 there were 48.428 male and 66.445 female students enrolled in tertiary education – 58% women and 42% men (Statistical Office of Republic of Slovenia).

⁷ In 2008 the overall population of graduate students from tertiary educational programmes included 63% of women and only 37% of men (Ule 2010, str. 21).

⁸ Slovenian girls achieved on average more points (511) than boys (456). The difference between boys and girls in Slovenia is bigger (55 points) than in OECD (39 points) and EU (42 points). A basic reading skill demonstrates 89% Slovenian girls and 69% boys (PISA 2009).

3. Transferability issues

All three of associated countries, Portugal, Denmark and Spain offer interesting and useful examples of good practices. From organizational point of view we couldn't identify any major obstacles as why the transferability wouldn't be possible. Our main concern is, that in the case of Danish good practices (children's book on gender roles and educators guide and the magazine + film/CD for girls and boys about body confidence and "porn chic"), producing and distributing books, and audio-visual material is not sufficient enough if we want to change how teachers think about gender roles and gender equality. The training of teachers is essential if we want to maximise the impact of the material. As mentioned above, pedagogical study programmes for future teachers (with one exception) in Slovenia don't include gender study courses, which means that most teachers are not equipped good enough and lack specific knowledge in order to start changing existing gender roles and combating gender based stereotypes.

In Portuguese Guides for Education "Gender and Citizenship" we can find some similarities with the project that was shown as an example of good practice from Slovenia. But nevertheless the Portuguese Guides for education represent a national program (monitored by the Ministry of Education), which covers everything from school and vocational guidance, school curriculum, school organisation, fighting and preventing discrimination and violence as well as professional training. We think that important contribution of Guides for education is that its implementation covers all school subjects and proposes activities to mainstream gender issues into several curricular areas. The teachers also received a good amount (150 hours) of training which shows that a lot of emphasis was given on training and educating professionals. Based on the received information, the overall aim of the Guides has been achieved (in particular with regard to the implementation of gender issues in school educational projects) which indicates that they can be used as a model and be applied in different countries.

As for the Spanish example of good practice "Coeducation: two sexes in one world" we found the project useful and up to date, especially because it offers an online training course. The project is in its objectives similar to the already mentioned Slovenian project, but the step forward is definitely the possibility of online training courses. Opportunity of online training courses might be especially compelling to younger teachers, for whom internet is part of everyday life, and maybe wouldn't attend courses otherwise. For that matter we found particularly the part of online training valuable in worth implementing, since all the possibilities and different tools have to be taken into consideration while promoting aspects of gender equality between teachers and other professionals.

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