



Gender Differences in Educational Outcomes

Traditional stereotypes are the biggest challenge for gender equality in education

This study examines to what extent and in what ways gender inequality in education is an issue of concern in European countries. Gender differences persist in both attainment and choice of courses of study. The study therefore provides a mapping of the policies and strategies in place across Europe to tackle gender inequalities in education systems today.

Gender Differences in Educational Outcomes is a contribution to the debate on gender in education from the Eurydice Network, as requested by the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the second half of 2009.

The present study takes the reference year 2008/09 and covers 29 European countries.

All educational levels are covered, but the main part of the report is devoted to school rather than higher education.

What is Eurydice?

The Eurydice Network provides information on and analyses of European education systems and policies. It consists of 35 national units based in all 31 countries participating in the EU's Lifelong Learning programme (EU Member States, EEA countries and Turkey) and is coordinated and managed by the EU Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) in Brussels, which drafts its publications and databases.

All Eurydice publications are available free of charge at http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php.



GENDER ROLES AND STEREOTYPES ARE THE MAIN CONCERN

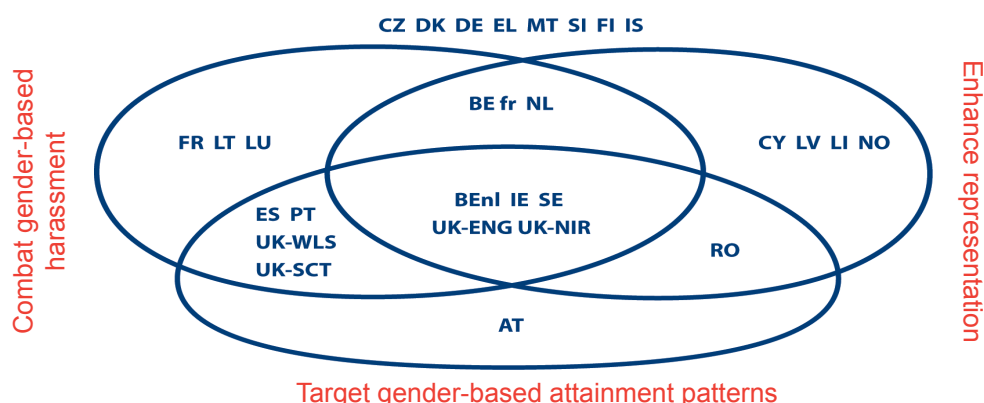
With a few exceptions, all European countries have, or plan to have, gender equality policies in education. The primary aim is to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes. European countries apply different measures to reach this goal such as vocational guidance, gender-sensitive teaching or curricula revision. However, European schools today are far from using all potential means to eradicate traditional gender roles. What boys and girls can and should do in their future professional (and personal) lives is still very much shaped by traditional concepts of gender roles.

In connection with the main aim of challenging gender roles, countries usually

focus on three main areas. Firstly, there are policies centring attention on the hidden curriculum and school climate, mainly to combat gender-based harassment in schools. Another policy priority is to enhance the representation of women in decision-making bodies in the education sector. Finally, a limited number of countries identify the objective of counteracting gender-based attainment patterns. Policy frameworks in Europe range from no policy action to a broad definition of problems.

Government initiatives that aim to inform parents about gender equality issues and involve them more closely in promoting gender equality in education are rare.

Gender equality policies aiming to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes in primary and secondary education, 2008/09



Countries without substantial gender equality policies in education: EE, IT, HU, PL and SK
Data not available: BE de, BG and TR.

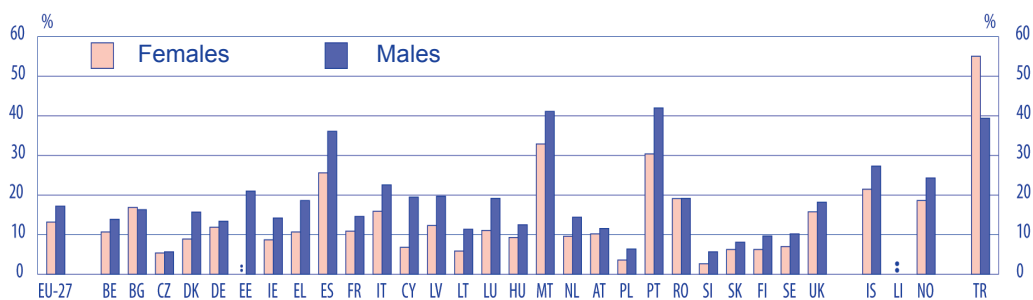
Source: Eurydice.

POLICIES ON ATTAINMENT OF BOYS OR GIRLS ARE RARE

Girls usually obtain higher grades and higher pass rates in school leaving examinations than boys and boys are more likely to drop out of school or repeat school years. International surveys show that boys are more likely to be poor performers in reading whereas girls are more likely to be low achievers in mathematics in around one third of European education systems. The average patterns of girls' lead over boys conceal important differences among certain groups of boys and girls. Socio-economic status remains the most important factor explaining student achievement; thus it is important to consider family background alongside gender when supporting children who are under-achieving.

There are not many initiatives in place to address gender patterns in achievement. Where they exist, the most common policies tackling gender gaps in attainment concern boys' under-achievement. Policies usually involve the promotion of new learning and teaching styles that motivate boys, or improvement of pupil-teacher ratios. Only some countries have developed special programmes for improving boys' reading skills and girls' achievement in mathematics and science. In contrast, many countries have taken measures targeted at pupil groups with low social status.

Early school leavers – % of the female/male population aged 18-24 with at most lower secondary education and not in further education or training, 2007



	EU-27	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU
Females	13.2	10.7	16.9	5.4	8.9	11.9	:	8.7	10.7	25.6	10.9	15.9	6.8	12.3	5.9	11.1
Males	17.2	13.9	16.3	5.7	15.7	13.4	21	14.2	18.6	36.1	14.6	22.6	19.5	19.7	11.4	19.2

	HU	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK	IS	LI	NO	TR
Females	9.3	32.9	9.6	10.2	3.6	30.4	19.1	2.7	6.3	6.3	7	15.8	21.5	:	18.6	55.0
Males	12.5	41.1	14.4	11.6	6.4	42	19.2	5.7	8.1	9.7	10.2	18.2	27.3	:	24.3	39.4

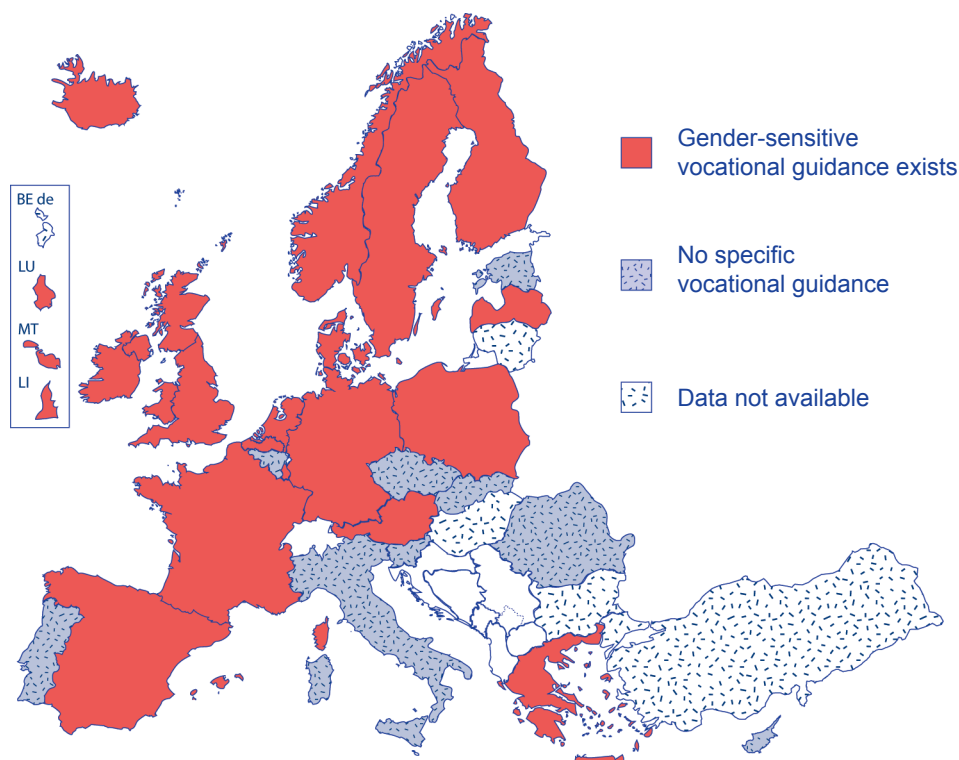
Source: Eurostat.

GENDER-SENSITIVE VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE IS FOCUSED ON GIRLS

Many young men and women in vocational schools and general secondary education still opt for career choices reflecting traditional gender roles. Better vocational guidance is needed to address this issue and for career advisers to be more gender aware and thus more able to challenge stereotypes which exists in school cultures and among students and employers.

Gender-sensitive guidance, which is currently only available in half of the European countries, is more often targeted at girls than boys and usually aims to encourage girls to choose technology and natural science careers. Although interesting individual initiatives and projects exist, overall national strategies to combat gender stereotypes in career choices and initiatives aimed at boys are lacking.

Specific vocational guidance to challenge traditional career choices available, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice.

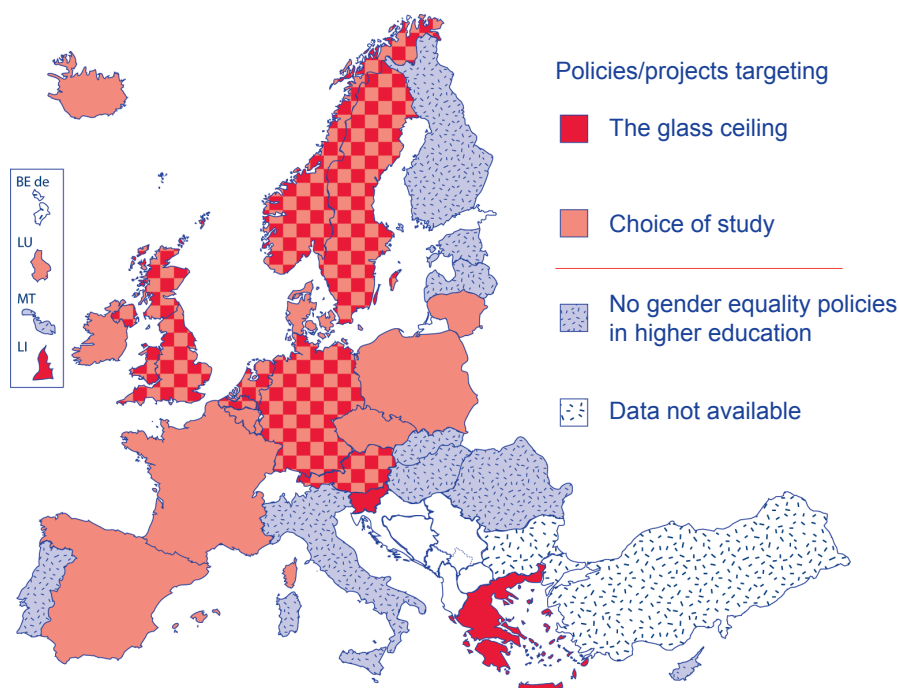
POLICIES ON HIGHER EDUCATION FOCUS MAINLY ON INCREASING NUMBERS OF WOMEN IN MATHS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (MST)

Women represent the majority of students and graduates in almost all countries and dominate in education, health and welfare, humanities and arts. Men dominate in engineering, manufacturing and construction.

Around two thirds of countries have gender equality policies in higher education. However, almost all these policies and projects target only females in order to increase their numbers in engineering and science. On the other hand, the proportion of women among teaching staff in higher education institutions declines with every step on the academic career ladder. However, only about a third of the countries have implemented concrete policies to

address this problem. This support is usually financial, with additional resources given to universities to promote the employment of female researchers and teaching staff. In addition, career guidance and consultancy is offered to young female academics. Finally, countries implement policies or provide funding for easing work-life balance with the provision of childcare facilities or with positive discrimination policies encouraging women to return to work after a career break. Policies targeting both issues are present in the Flemish Community of Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Norway.

Gender equality policies or projects in higher education, 2008/09



Source: Eurydice.

The full study Gender Differences in Educational Outcomes

available in English, French and German

as well as detailed National Descriptions can be found on the Eurydice website:

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/thematic_studies_en.php

Printed copies of the full study are available (eacea-eurydice@ec.europa.eu)

Background information on the Eurydice network

Website: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php

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