

**GENDER DIFFERENCES IN  
EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES:  
A STUDY ON THE MEASURES  
TAKEN AND THE CURRENT  
SITUATION IN EUROPE**

**Slovenia**

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## Slovenia

### Introduction

Before turning to gender and education in Slovenia, more specifically to gender differences in educational outcomes, a quick look at the historical situation should be presented. It should be noted that in the former socialist system, so-called state feminism with its proclaimed gender equality was prevalent. However, while it did not take into account individual differences it nevertheless had certain real and emancipatory effects. The past decade or so (after full international recognition of Slovenia in 1992) has witnessed progress in some respects, assisted by civil society movements and initiatives, some governmental efforts and, last but not least, research work. Conversely, there have also been various revivals of traditionalism and conservative shifts.

Slovenia became an EU member in 2004 and as such adopts all EU initiatives, including initiatives regarding gender equality, and participates in developing gender mainstreaming to integrate it in various aspects of social life. Generally speaking, there are numerous documents and resolutions, on the level of both Slovenian and European politics that undoubtedly represent a step towards the improvement of the position of women in some, if not many, areas of their social life, with education being the primary concern of this report. In order to obtain a more balanced image of gender equality, one needs to investigate more subtle, hidden, common-sense aspects where the translation of resolutions into practice very often fails.

Among general relevant legislative documents that deal with the issue of gender equality the following should be mentioned: the *Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia* (1991, Article 14, see Annexe 1), the *Act on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men* (2002, see Annexe 3) and the *Act Implementing the Principle of Equal Treatment* (2004).

### 1. General policy framework

In general it could be claimed that the principles of gender equality in Slovenia are respected, at least on the rhetorical level. However, there is a difference between formal rights and their actual fulfilment, and either manifest or subtle violation or discrimination may hinder full realisation of equality. This is all the more relevant in the context of education, where gender equality issues are acknowledged to a certain degree, but not given enough attention; they are often taken as a thing of the past and as something which requires no further attention. It is (perhaps too often) heard that this is 'merely theoretical', no longer important or not an important enough issue given all the other pressing problems that may and do arise in school settings. When adopting the new preschool curriculum in Slovenia (it was published in 1999), for example, there were quite a few objections to the proposed mention of the rights of girls. The main opposing argument was that in our (Slovenian) school system there is no discrimination on the basis of gender and boys and girls are treated equally. It could be claimed that by simply avoiding the issue, existing gender hierarchies are supported (Russell, 1986).

It is precisely this 'taken-for-granted attitude' and this pre-supposed self-evidence that can be very revealing (Bahovec in Bahovec and Bregar Golobič, 2004:13) as it causes the issue to appear non-existent and thus the negative effects are even stronger.

Pupils' academic results in international comparative research raised a great deal of public and professional interest. The results of these research projects are gender-sensitive, which means that the research is also oriented towards detecting possible differences in achievements between boys and girls. However, besides presenting evidence that differences between boys and girls exist (or not), as well as gender being another variable, so far no thorough analyses have been conducted that would deal with achievement and differences in achievement between genders (to some extent, Vendramin, 2009). More attention was given to the general ranking of Slovenia with respect to pupils' academic results and to the reasons for such results, and to the question of whether the Slovenian education system is up to the demands of global economy.

The basic document in the sphere of education in Slovenia is the *White Paper* (Ed.: Krek, 1995). It was published in 1995 by the Ministry of Education and Sport (1996 in English) and is described as the basic document of the modernisation of the education system in Slovenia, while at the same time being a policy framework and the basis of a legislative framework.

The *White Paper* stresses equal opportunities and non-discrimination on the basis of sex, social and cultural background, religion, nationality, physical and psychological condition, and so on. Moreover, the rights of the female child are mentioned in the context of the rights of the child and it is pointed out that the stress should shift from formal to substantive rights. It takes into consideration both national and international legal documents and contemporary theoretical work, which introduces important concepts into the theory and practice of education, such as, the hidden curriculum and the official knowledge.

Reference is made to the hidden curriculums a concept which relates to curricular knowledge or subject content that is not only academic, but includes above all personal and social knowledge, accompanied by the whole area of assumptions, attitudes, beliefs and expectations about the world, which usually remain implicit and unexamined; its persistence and invisibility.

Another relatively modern and important concept that features in the *White Paper* is official knowledge that recognises inclusions and exclusions in the curricula and other materials, and thus political, economic and cultural influences; in other words, particular constructions of reality and particular ways of selecting and organising the vast universe of possible knowledge (Apple, 1993:53-54).

Subtle power mechanisms, typical of the school as an institution of the modern age, such as the organisation of school life, teaching practices, communication, and so on, are brought to the forefront (see Annexe 2).

It can be concluded that the principles and guidelines in the *White Paper* exceed the so called traditional pedagogical/psychological paradigm and introduce relevant concepts of cultural studies, sociology of education, and so forth. Nevertheless, the concrete realisation of such principles in curricula might be still lacking.

The Pre-school Curriculum also takes as its basis the *White Paper*, along with some other documents relevant for this level of education (*The Pre-school Institutions Act, The Organisation and Financing of Education Act*). It stresses, among other things, human rights, democratic principles and non-discrimination. It specifies that one of the aims of the Preschool Curriculum is to create conditions for greater expression of group differences and for raising awareness of those differences (with gender included) (Bahovec *et al.*, 1999).

One of the bases for the systematic introduction of education for gender equality on each and every level of schooling is the *Act on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (Zakon o enakih možnostih žensk in moških)*, which in Article 12 defines education for gender equality as an integral part of the education and preparation of both sexes for active and equal participation in every area of public life. This is to be ensured by the Ministry and other bodies in the field of education (see Annexe 3).

The concept of gender-mainstreaming was introduced in high-level bodies in state administration to raise awareness of gender equality issues (for example, in the course of the project 'Making gender mainstreaming work' under the European Commission's grant, 2008, conducted by the Office for Equal Opportunities). Targeted were policy and decision makers, including those in charge of education. It remains to be seen whether the promotion of gender equality in different areas of national policies will have such far reaching future effects as to impact schools and which mechanisms will be adopted to monitor and evaluate gender policies and their implementation in everyday life in schools. At the moment these policies, together with the regulations with clear gender perspective in mind, have yet to be defined and disseminated.

## 2. Curriculum and guidance

Equal opportunities are said to be one of the principles of the curricular reform in Slovenia and the commissions in charge of new programmes and curricula were supposed to systematically include contents and themes related to gender difference into the subjects according to the Office for Equal Opportunities (see *Urad za enake možnosti*, 2005). However, this was never implemented, and apparently there were no standardised procedures which would confirm that these recommendations were really taken into consideration (Vendramin, 2005).

In principle almost all of the new curricula for basic school, regardless of the subject, seem to be gender-sensitive and they introduce equality in the context of one or more keywords: education for tolerance, intercultural education, discrimination, stereotypes, prejudices, social differences, human rights, solidarity, and so forth. However, this remains on the declarative level only and can be found in the introductions of almost all curricula. A closer look at the contents of subjects reveals that the implementation of these guidelines is clearly lacking. No concrete examples of how to avoid stereotyping and when it may occur are provided. What is more, it presents many views as natural or common-sense (see Vendramin, 2005:10 ff).

Let us look, for example, at the curriculum for Home Economics (ISCED 2) (note: the examples taken from the curricula are for illustrative purposes only), which hardly needs any comment from the point of view of gendered and social sensibilities: 'The family is undoubtedly a source of all human resources', or 'Everybody has a home and family'.

Gender is alongside general recommendations included as a topic in several, for the most part societal or humanity oriented subjects in basic school, compulsory and optional subjects (9-year compulsory education consists of three 3-year cycles and curricular differentiation takes place in the third cycle or ISCED 2), that are perhaps more marked with the so-called socially dominant themes. It is, however, included under different key words. A closer look reveals the following: in the subject Environment and I (compulsory, taken in the first cycle, ISCED 1) pupils will discuss equal rights and the right of the child and equal opportunities of both sexes; in the subject Society (compulsory, first cycle, ISCED 1) pupils will discuss differences among themselves and among people in the society (gender and sexual orientation included), similarly in Religions and Ethics, and 'Civic Culture' (optional, third cycle, ISCED 2); History (compulsory, second and third cycle, ISCED 1 + 2) anticipates the discussion about the situation and role of men and women, and similarly Latin; Civic Education and Ethics (compulsory, third cycle, ISCED 2) includes the debate about gender relations, touches upon sexual violence and tries to justify the need for both sexes to be equally represented in the parliament; and Media Education (optional, third cycle, ISCED 2) deals with the representation of women on television, especially in advertisements. There are some other key words which are not included at this point as they are too general and do not refer specifically to gender/sex, such as: stereotypes, prejudices, inequality.

In short, although curricula anticipate talking about different types of families, equal participation in parliament, different types of sexual behaviour, democracy, and so forth, the majority is based on a definition of knowledge as a result of a random and/or objective choice, which is a problematic question regarding official knowledge and deconstruction of the conception of knowledge as neutral.

## Sex education and personal gender relations

Sex education is a part of the Biology curriculum where a human being is presented as a biological, psychosocial and cultural being. The debate about AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, which is a particularly delicate topic, is anticipated. Didactic recommendations should perhaps specify the ways in which it should be discussed. The same goes for the teaching objective which deals with hormonal changes during the menstrual cycle and its influence on the physical and emotional condition of a woman (p. 27). Menstruation is seen as a source of both individual and social hygiene problems. This theme is of particular importance for non-discriminatory practices in the classroom as pupils learn that menstruation can make girls 'moody' and boys can use references to menstruation to denigrate girls. (Diorio and Munro, 2000:349, 351).

It should be mentioned here that the lack of social aetiology of pre-menstrual and menstrual phenomena is often present in medical fields in general, it is not characteristic of only this curriculum.

## School books

As to other teaching materials and educational texts, no guidelines exist that would truly help authors and illustrators to include the gender dimension in a non-stereotypic and/or potentially emancipating way. Textbooks are not approved on the basis of a gender perspective either. Incidentally, a great deal of research work has been conducted that critically evaluates the omission of gendered sensibilities in textbooks, both on the level of visual images and text. Several textbooks for Slovenian as a home language show stereotypical images of men and women and very few could be said to tackle social stereotypes or balance the representation of men and women. Usually women are underrepresented or marginalised, as various research projects have shown.

It should be added here that a clear guidance for writing and confirming textbooks, both content-wise and visual, would doubtless help eliminate gender insensibilities. It would not be left to individuals and groups that write and develop both textbooks and curricula to include gender in accordance with one's own knowledge (or lack thereof) of emancipatory politics and gendered representations. Consequently, personal interpretations could be avoided, as well as judgments about how important or unimportant, relevant or irrelevant, the inclusion of gendered sensibility in didactic materials may be.

There, however, exist *Rules on the Approval of Textbooks (Pravilnik o potrjevanju učbenikov)* that state that textbooks should be written in accordance with the aims of education in the Republic of Slovenia as defined in the Article 2 of the *Organisation and Financing of Education Act (Zakon o organizaciji in financiranju vzgoje in izobraževanja)* which in turn specifies that one of the aims of education is to develop awareness of gender equality. Furthermore, the inclusion of gendered dimension amounts to the provision of the gender-fair use of language in the *Rules* themselves. It says that the expressions used in the *Rules* refer to feminine and masculine although only the masculine form is used; it does not refer to gender equality in any other direct way. But this is a matter which is regulated by the *Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia* and is used in laws and provisions in general.

A short note on language should perhaps be added here in order to be able to better evaluate teaching materials. The Slovenian language draws a distinction between feminine and masculine nouns, as do most adjectives and verbs. All the reasons for and against gender specific terminology cannot be elaborated here, nevertheless it should be pointed out that there are some convincing reasons, both empirical and conceptual, for avoiding the (pseudo)generic 'he' and for creating gender balance, especially in educational contexts. The review of curricula showed the more or less consistent use of the generic 'he' when referring to pupils, teachers, authors, professionals, and others. Among other solutions are: 'boys and girls'; 'boys/girls'; 'both boys and girls'; 'girls and boys'; 'girls/boys'; and so forth (such use affects adjectives and verbs as well).

It is true that inclusionary alternatives lengthen the text (which is often cited as one of the reasons against their use), but the message sent in this particular kind of document, in curricula and other related materials, can be a valuable one as far as gender equality is concerned.



Although the *White Paper* stresses the importance of a shift from formal rights to substantive rights and advocates the provision of equal opportunities at all levels of the education system, it seems that at this level (the organisation of school life, concrete teaching practice and styles, and so on) there is still a weakness that would require a more proactive approach.

In general there are not enough initiatives to encourage greater cross-gender participation in traditionally 'gender-biased' subjects or to make subjects either more 'girl-friendly' or 'boy-friendly'. One quite important exception is perhaps Computer Science as an optional subject (ISCED 2) which fairly consistently addresses both boys and girls and can be in this context labelled proactive, for example, 'every girl-student and boy-student should...'; 'girl-students and boy-students are capable of...'

The importance of developing computer and/or cyber literacy is manifold. This discipline is not only regarded as being more appealing to boys, it is also taken as an area where boys naturally excel. In this way the ideology of male-superior, female-subordinate is frequently supported; it may arise in classroom conversation and is often uncritically accepted as natural. Pupils and students themselves are often trapped in narrow gender stereotypes and see some subject areas as appropriate for either boys or girls or even perceive themselves as either having the potential or as not having the ability at all. Moreover, social hierarchies (gender is of main interest here) are converted into academic hierarchies (Russell, 1986:20). Subjects are valued as more important or less important and hierarchical relations are established amongst different forms of knowledge.

Furthermore, cyber literacy has a key role in the process of socialisation and is included, as a part of scientific literacy, in one of the three indicators concerning the subject of 'the girl-child'. 'The girl-child' was chosen in the context of the follow-up of the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted during the United Nations World Conference on Women in 1995. Indicators were developed and presented by the Slovenian Presidency of the EU (the other two indicators being sexuality-related education and body self-image) (Ule and Šribar, 2008).

In this author's view, only one basic school syllabus (for the subject Environment and I, first cycle, ISCED 1) deals with the gender dimension in a distinctly proactive way, which means it includes cautions against using preconceptions such as: girls are beautiful, girls are cry-babies; boys are strong, boys do not cry, and so on. It also cautions against using sexual stereotypes when discussing different professions and suggests introducing non-typical professions along gender lines.

The focus of this section was placed on basic school subject syllabi (compulsory education). A quick check on the general upper secondary school (*gimnazija*, ISCED 3) syllabi for Sociology and Biology respectively (assuming that these are subjects where gender issues are most likely to be found) show that in Sociology, the issue of gender and (in)equality is included, together with the development of the feminist movement, whereas in Biology the focus is on reproductive questions only.

## Guidance

Any specific guidance to encourage either girls (or boys) to choose educational fields that could prepare them for traditionally male (or female) professions is non-existent, although some concern is expressed as to the feminisation of teacher and some other professions, but this more or less remains at the level of popular discussions. On the level of policy making, the problem is recorded in the *Resolution on the National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2005-2013)* and educational measures for integrating untypical 'female' and 'male' occupations to reduce horizontal and vertical segregation are called for. Among the proposed measures is the promotion of scholarships for female pupils and students in the educational programmes traditionally dominated by men, and for male pupils and students in the programmes traditionally dominated by women.

Some statistical data regarding the teaching profession at various levels of schooling are presented in Section 5.

### 3. Attainment

In recent years attainment in general has come to the forefront and features as a kind of news in the education media and daily newspapers, above all in connection with the results in global research, such as TIMSS (*Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study*), PISA (*Programme for International Student Assessment*) and PIRLS (*Progress in International Reading Literacy*). In these research projects Slovenian girls generally out-performed boys in language and literacy subjects which is in line with world-wide results. Nevertheless, it seems that the reflection on gender gap relating to the attainment of girls and boys in basic and upper secondary schools has not (yet) been put very high on the agenda. Thus, when the issue enters educational and wider public debates it is relatively narrowly conceived and hence not given sufficient consideration, which means that achievement is positioned almost exclusively as performance in examinations; all other aspects, such as social competence, citizenship, and so forth, are more or less not taken into account (Francis and Skelton, 2005:2).

In contrast, there is only little concern detectable in relation to girls and computer education or computer literacy, where girls in general do not show as much initiative and skill as boys, which may be one of the proofs for the lack of appropriate reflection of the concept of attainment. The relationship between computer competences in girls and in boys show the effects of discriminatory traditional socialisation in relation to computer technology, which is characteristic of Slovenia and of wider European area, it is also shown in a study of indicators concerning the girl-child (Ule and Šribar, 2008:317).

Other factors that can affect attainment at different levels of education in connection to gender are not explained in educational statistics, although ethnic groups, such as Roma children and children of migrants, feature in national action plans and strategies (for example, for the advancement of literacy), but this is still in the process of being translated into concrete policies and implementation. There is a need for disaggregated statistical evidence regarding various social determinants.

National statistics should now be examined in order to see what they can reveal about the possible differences in attainment in various levels of the school system.

In basic school (ISCED 1 + 2) national measuring of knowledge takes the form of the so-called National Assessment of Knowledge (or NAK). Pupils from Year 6, (at the end of the second cycle) can apply for NAK of their own accord. They can take the NAK in their mother tongue (which is either Slovenian or Italian or Hungarian), mathematics and a modern foreign language (English or German). NAK is compulsory at the end of the third cycle in Year 9 (ISCED 2). Pupils take tests in mother tongue, mathematics and a third subject which is selected each year by the Minister of Education (source: National Examinations Centre).

The latest report for the school year 2007/08 touches upon gender-related achievement. The results of the NAK show that as in previous years, girls, on average, performed better than boys in Slovenian. There are no significant differences in other subjects (Rigler Šilc, 2008:233)

At the end of upper secondary schooling students are required to take so-called *Matura*. *Matura* is a state-wide school-leaving external examination. General *Matura* provides access to any academic or professional higher education, whereas vocational *Matura* provides access to higher vocational colleges and professional types of studies, with the option of taking an additional exam to gain access to academic types of studies (source: National Examinations Centre).

The data available for the year 2008 show that general *Matura* was taken by 58.7 % of females and 41.3 % of males. Of those who successfully completed the exam (86.5 %), 40.3 % were male and 59.6 % female (Vogel *et al.*, 2008:105).

For vocational *Matura*, the data show that this exam was taken by 52.5 % of females and 47.5 % of males (adult students are included in these numbers). Of those who successfully completed the examination (91.6 %), 52.9 % were female and 47.1 % were male (Mohorčič *et al.*, 2008:11, 15).

Gender-specific results in subjects are not available.

National statistics for the school year 2007/08 show that in the beginning of the 2007 school year, of 100 pupils who were repeating classes in the 8-year primary school (see above regarding the school reform), 70 were boys and 30 girls, whereas in the 9-year basic school, of 715 pupils repeating classes, 473 were boys and 242 girls (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia).

Other important data might be the following: at the end of the school year 2006/07 (latest available data), 416 persons concluded their education without having completed basic schooling, however, the statistical data does not give any specification along the gender lines.

#### 4. School climate and environment

The school climate related problems that are becoming visible recently are receiving increasing attention. There are many organisations dealing with this issue at various levels. Bullying and other forms of violence directed toward peers and teachers are pushing their way up on the educational agenda of policy makers and researchers alike. In 2005, Slovenia as a member of the International Network on School Bullying and Violence appointed its national coordinator.

Guidelines for counselling services in kindergartens, basic and upper secondary schools do not give any directions as to gender specificities beside a general statement that the basic educational aim and the aim of counselling services is the optimal development of the child regardless of various determinants, among others, sex (see *Kurikularna komisija*, 1999:5).

It is left to individual schools to prepare their school-specific pedagogical plan, which is based on the aims, defined by the school in the framework of existing regulations and co-defined by staff, parents and pupils. Pedagogical plans and house rules deal with the school climate as well, but, as it seems, specific gender-related policies are not envisioned.

Other forms of violence (such as cyber-bullying) are coming to the forefront as well. However, in debates about violence in schools on the policy making level there is rarely any discussion about bullying that is based on vulnerability that stems from being different in a significant 'other' way (for example, gay or lesbian). In the concept of the school climate, gender-related policies are not included. Groups of children, pupils and also teachers, are too often homogenized with issues explained in terms of traditional psychological concepts.

Sexual harassment is an issue that is gaining ground especially in connection with the work place; there is far less attention given to the same phenomenon in school.

The *Guidelines for the Analysis, Prevention and Action/Management of School Violence (Smernice za analizo, preprečevanje in obravnavo/obvladovanje nasilja v šolskem prostoru)* (2004) are not gender-specific in the principles of dealing with violence on school premises and neither they are sensitive to gender in the strategy section where measures are provided. They refer to boys and girls sporadically, although they anticipate the participation of parents and raise awareness of violence issues with parents.

#### 5. Teachers

Statistical data for the year 2006/07 reveal that in Slovenia there were 97.8 % of women among primary school teachers at the lower level, (first and second cycle), according to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, and 79.2 % of women at the higher level of basic school (third cycle).

In secondary education the percentage for the same year amounted to 65.1 %, whereas in tertiary education the percentage was 35.3 %. Among university teachers only 34.5 % were female teachers. It can be concluded that as the educational level increases, the number of females among teaching staff decreases, which is in line with the situation in other European Union member states.

Statistical data for ISCED level 0 (pre-primary education) are even more in favour of women. They show, according to the same source, that in the year 2007 in 793 Slovenian kindergartens only 1.37 % men were among the childcare staff (management, advisory and other professional staff is not included here). This



percentage includes the numbers of both preschool teachers and preschool teacher assistants; the percentage of preschool teachers alone would be even lower (0.19 % in absolute numbers that means only 15 male preschool teachers out of total 106 male childcare staff).

At ISCED level 7 (the university level) female students in the area of teacher education are again in the lead according to the Statistical Office. The latest data for the year 2006/07 available at the time of this report show that 77.4 % of all students were women.

This is related to deeper and more significant issues: it has not only to do with the assumptions about which professions and areas of work are more appropriate for men or women, but also with the actual status of women and men and the evaluation of their contributions in social life and development (Ule and Šribar, 2008:320). Hierarchical relations among different forms of knowledge are established and such hierarchy appears as natural. Discrimination is established not only among different forms of knowledge but among people as well (Donald, 1992:176). Social organisation and patterns of interaction provide a setting for academic activities that can either extend or constrain learning opportunities.

As the review of study programmes has shown, there is little emphasis on gender issues at the stage of initial teacher education. However, it may be assumed that gender issues are included (or at least mentioned) to some extent in some other subjects that deal with social realms (for example, theory of education, sociology of education, philosophy of education), but this is not confirmed. There exists one explicitly gender-oriented subject as an optional professional subject at the Faculty of Education at the University of Ljubljana: Gender-specific socialisation (translation unofficial, made by the author).

Initiatives to encourage men to become teachers at lower ISCED levels have been few; as already mentioned (see above, the end of Section 2), there are some measures for reducing gender based segregation in educational programmes proposed in the *Resolution on the National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2005-2013)*.

Similarly, no gender guidelines for teacher's everyday practices are available, meaning wide-spread, specific guidelines that are an essential part of everyday pedagogical work in schools and everyday communication as this is where the influence of the hidden curriculum is most profound. The calls and initiatives come from various researchers in the field of gender studies, women's studies and feminist theory that realise the need to introduce gender equality themes into all levels of education in Slovenia more systematically, although this still remains at the research level (see, for example, Bahovec, 1996; Vendramin, 2005).

However, some initiatives have been recorded recently where in-service teacher education is concerned. Currently the professional training of professional workers in education in the field of social and civic competencies is under way, which includes equal opportunities and is to be conducted in years 2008-2011. The training is partly financed by the European Union (the European Social Fund) and is organised by the Faculty of Education at the University of Ljubljana and its consortium partners. In the past, gender issues were included in some sections of training in in-service education for preschool teachers.

## 6. Single sex education

Co-education is, according to the *White Paper* (see Annexe 2), regarded as a step toward the elimination of discrimination at the school level. It is therefore embedded as a principle and included in the curricular documents. However, the differentiation of boys and girls may occur in some subjects, for example, it is mandated in the curriculum for Physical Education (a compulsory subject in the 9-year basic school) that single-sex classes are formed in the second and third cycle. In Sports, an optional subject, this division of girls and boys is not required, unless a large group of pupils (more than 20) takes this subject.

In compulsory subjects this does not take place. For example, it is explicitly stated in the curriculum for Home Economics that this subject is to be taken by both boys and girls and that activities and tasks are not to be divided according to sex (Lap Drozg *et al.*, 2003:9).

In principle, there are no single-sex classes in other compulsory subjects. This paper cannot detail the optional subjects system, however, it must be pointed out that statistics about which subjects are taken by girls and which are taken by boys do not exist, nevertheless, there is data available as to which subjects are taken by the majority of pupils. It can be assumed that in practice, due to the nature of optional subjects of which some can be described as traditionally more boy-oriented (for example, Chess, Computer Networks) or girl-oriented (for example, Bobbin Lace-Making Technique, Embroidery), that gender differentiation may occur, but this is not confirmed.

## 7. Higher education

This section covers higher education and partly the issue that usually goes under the title of 'women and science'. It is difficult to address gender differences at BA level and not to touch upon MA and PhD levels and postdoctoral studies as the differences increase higher on the educational vertical. Undergraduate studies are successfully completed by more female than male students. At the postgraduate level, the proportion of women decreases. As a consequence, the proportion of women in science and research is lower than the proportion of men. Apart from this vertical gender-based segregation which is demonstrated by an extremely low proportion of women in senior positions in science and research, there is also segregation in scientific fields with women dominating medical and social sciences and men dominating natural and technical sciences (Source: *Resolution on the National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men*).

Gender differences that are related to the choices for particular study fields are brought forward as an issue of concern especially by the Commission for the Enforcement of the Role of Women in Science at the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology (founded in 2001). The Commission prepared a report, based on statistical data about the gender of project leaders in basic, applicative and postdoctoral projects financed in Slovenia, concluded there was no discrimination against female researchers. In 2004, the Commission also organised workshops about gender equality at the university level which targeted the respective administrations of the University of Ljubljana and the University of Primorska, and later also the University of Maribor (all three being public universities).

The work plan for 2008 and 2009 includes the cooperation of the Commission with universities in preparing and evaluating important documents (strategic and development programmes, legal acts, and so on) from the point of view of their influence over (possible) discrimination according to gender, and in evaluating the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities in various bodies of the university.

On the other hand, there is an area of media reports that still reveal a lack of understanding of the issue, and ethnographic reports about sexual harassment in various forms at the university level that are virtually never dealt with, such as in (male) teacher - (female) student relations.

A measure, introduced in 2006, which aims both at the improvement of the position of women in science and at the reconciliation of family and professional life and which has real effects, is found in the *Rules about (co)financing of basic, applicative and postdoctoral projects*. The *Rules* which have been in use since 2006 recognise the significance of maternity leave in two points: as a factor that might have a negative impact on the 5-year research history which is required from a candidate for a project leader (the 5-year period has been extended accordingly); and as a factor that influences the age of a potential leader of a post-doctoral project (the age limit can be extended from the prescribed age of 35 for the period of maternity leave(s)).

## Conclusion

It can be concluded that efforts have been made and the grounds for introducing gender equality in the educational system in Slovenia have been developed. However, there is still a gap between introducing the measures and implementing them on all levels: individual and institutional. Legislative measures are considered an important step which can facilitate enforcement of substantial rights. In striving towards substantial (and not only formal) gender equality that is implemented in everyday situations, there are certain issues/problems/questions that should be actively reconsidered and compared with alternative views. Rather

than saying that, for example, in 'our' school system, 'our' culture and so on, there is no gender discrimination, one should actively reflect on one's practices and values.

In short, gender equality in education should be defined as 'a basic right as well as a pedagogical issue' (Gray and Leith, 2004:14), both as aim and content, which means that schools should not only strive for equality, but be equal as well ('equality' is used here in the broadest sense of the word). In other words, this issue is relevant for consideration of the effectiveness of the learning process and performance of all boys and girls.

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## Annexes

### 1. Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia, article 14

In Slovenia everyone shall be guaranteed equal human rights and fundamental freedoms irrespective of national origin, race, sex, language, religion, political, or other conviction, material standing, birth, education, social status, disability, or any other personal circumstance. All are equal before the law.

### 2. The White Paper

[...] discussions on children's rights should specifically refer to the *rights of girls* and the contradictory nature of the idea of equal opportunities in a system of education in which the members of one sex are still privileged in one way or another. With the introduction of coeducation, discrimination at the school level was apparently eliminated, but more subtle power mechanisms typical of the school as a contemporary institution (such as the organisation of school life, concrete teaching practice and styles, communication between students and teachers, etc.) teaching girls 'how to lose' are still preserved in the form of the 'hidden curriculum'. (pp. 40-41).

### **3. Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act, Article 12**

(1) Education on matters of gender equality shall be an integral part of the system of education and vocational training which, among other things, shall include the preparation of both genders for active and equal participation in all fields of social life.

(2) The ministries responsible for education and labour as well as other bodies and persons with competencies in the field of education and vocational training shall ensure equal treatment for women and men, especially with regard to the preparation, adoption and implementation of public programmes of education or vocational training, to the attestation of schoolbooks and teaching aids and to the introduction of organisational innovations and the modification of pedagogical and andragogical methods. They shall also establish, within the framework of their competencies, an appropriate system of measures for the elimination of established forms of unequal treatment of women and men.

ZOFVI:

Objectives of the education system in the Republic of Slovenia are the following:

- the guaranteed optimal development of each individual irrespective of gender, social and cultural background, religion, ethnicity and the state of physical and mental health;
- bringing up children in the spirit of mutual tolerance; developing awareness of the equality of sexes, respect for diversity and cooperation with others, respect for children's and human rights and basic freedoms; developing equal opportunities for both sexes and thus developing skills for life in a democratic society.

Unrevised English

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