

# Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

## Thematic Report: Gender

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## Table of Contents

1. Introduction and Overview .....	3
2. Definitions and Concepts Related to Gender and Sexuality .....	3
3. Policy Analysis .....	4
a. Educational gender policy analysis .....	4
b. Limitations of the analysis and the EPASI projects.....	4
4. Educational Disadvantage in Light of Gender and Sexuality .....	4
a. Two theoretical views of educational disadvantage.....	4
b. Gender-specific inequalities.....	5
5. Gender, Education and Markers of Inequality .....	6
a. General overview .....	6
b. Markers for inequality in the EPASI countries.....	7
1. Literacy rates .....	7
2. Exclusion – expulsion rates.....	8
3. Attainment levels at the end of compulsory education.....	8
4. Continuing education post compulsory leaving age .....	8
5. Participation rate in Higher Education .....	8
6. Employment rates.....	9
7. Evidence of social exclusion, being bullied .....	9
6. Strategies Used.....	9
a. What priority is given?.....	10
b. Major issues .....	11
c. Different levels of approach: Who implements the policy and the projects? .....	14
7. Conclusions and Recommendations .....	16
a. EU level.....	17
b. National level .....	17
c. Local.....	17
d. School and practitioner level.....	17
References.....	18
Appendix.....	22

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## **1. Introduction and Overview**

Education is a human right; an essential tool for achieving equality. Equality between men and women has been a key issue of social and political debate in the European Union (EU) for several decades and of educational policy.

The Educational Policy Addressing Social Inclusion (EPASI) project is an effort to identify and analyse a sample of existing policies and implemented projects addressing educational inequality in 14 of the 27 member states. This report begins with a brief outlining of gender and sexuality definitions and concepts, moves onto present findings of the projects that deal with gender and sexuality, the educational policies followed, descriptions of projects that represent these policies in practise and concludes with a summary, conclusions and recommendations.

## **2. Definitions and Concepts Related to Gender and Sexuality**

The terms sexual identity and gender identity are often used interchangeably and while there are many definitions of gender, the meaning is clear from the context in which it is used (Bland 2005). According to the World Health Organisation (1998), gender, as an attribute:

is used to describe the characteristics, roles and responsibilities of women and men, boys and girls, which are socially constructed. Gender is related to how we are perceived and expected to think and act as women and men because of the way society is organised, not because of our biological differences (WHO 1998).

In contrast, Acker (1992:205-51) states that, “gender refers to patterned, socially produced, distinctions between female and male, feminine and masculine.” West and Zimmerman (1987:129) “argue that gender is not a set of traits, nor a variable, nor a role, but the product of social doings of some sort”. The concept of gender equality needs to take into consideration both what is meant by gender and sexuality.

Gender relations are closely bound up with the gender stereotypes and expectations which remain in contemporary societies. Gender stereotypes are societal expectations about what it means to be a man or a woman in a certain society and are based on the differentiation of what are the dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity in a specific society. Jackson (2006:41) notes that the terms ‘gender’ and ‘sexuality’ are used in different ways but states: “‘Sexuality’ itself is sometimes understood primarily in terms of the hetero-homo binary, or the straight, gay, lesbian or bisexual identities deriving from it, while others take it to encompass a fuller range of desires, practices and identities’. The relationship with gender is complex and contested nor is sexuality simply about sexual preference or identity. These differences in how the constructs are defined also highlight the problems related to dealing with them.

Gender equality is a concept frequently highlighted in legislative texts. However, men and women are not treated equally. The EU has long been committed to promoting gender equality. EU policy on gender equality has a long history, with the early introduction of legislation on equal treatment, followed by the adoption of equal opportunities legislation and positive actions. Influenced by United Nations (UN) developments, gender mainstreaming was introduced as the main EU policy approach from the mid 1990s onwards.

According to the Council of Europe (1998) the term gender mainstreaming is defined as follows: the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy making (Council of Europe 1998).

The European Commission (EC) Community framework strategy (2) in 2000 takes a dual approach: integration of the 'gender' dimension in all Community policies and activities ('gender mainstreaming'), and setting up institutions targeting gender equality. The Commission encourages gender equality in five areas: economic life, political and social life, civil society and, finally, the fight against stereotyping. In general, the main focus of the EC concerns the incorporation of a gender dimension in the economic sphere and into policies that deal with the labour market. At the same time the EC acknowledges the importance of education both in producing and fighting against inequalities.

### **3. Policy Analysis**

#### ***a. Educational gender policy analysis***

A gender responsive policy consistently and systematically incorporates gender concerns at all the stages of its formulation. Education policies are seen as a sub set of the larger framework which has to be understood and analysed. March *et al.* (1999) define a framework as a practical instrument that enables users to think through the way they do things that will help gender analysis of the educational policies, programmes and plans. They further posit that policy is a blue print with guidelines defining general principles guiding plans, actions and practices. Briefly stated, it appears that a gender responsive policy seeks to redress the historical imbalances that have created gender hierarchies; limited the extent to which an individual's potentials can fully be developed as well as constrained efforts of realising their basic human rights.

#### ***b. Limitations of the analysis and the EPASI projects***

In our effort to present a complete analysis of the educational policies as implemented in each country, we must note that any such effort assumes a scenario where all national and project documents are made available. For this review, this has not always been the case. In some countries, only generalised document descriptions were available. In this case, we relied on the information available in these documents. From all such documents we were able to make generalised references. In this way we had the substance of what constituted policies in general and in some cases specific terms.

### **4. Educational Disadvantage in Light of Gender and Sexuality**

#### ***a. Two theoretical views of educational disadvantage***

According to Spicker (2008), there are several types of explanation for the origins of educational disadvantage. Some theories relate to societal structures while other explanations base their accounts on post-structural theories.

Structuralist accounts relate educational disadvantage to the structured inequalities within society wherein class and income are said to be reproduced in educational attainment as a result of the combination of home, school factors and restricted opportunities and access to resources and support. Young (2001) argues that certain groups such as women suffer from multiple forms of social exclusion that reveals structural or systemic inequality. This is also a result of the historical configuration of social institutions, practices and policies which lead to the reproduction of inequality.

Post-structuralism is said to ‘challenge the certainties of both the structural analysis on which the bodies of knowledge and skill are built and the prescriptions for action suggested by this analysis’ (Hugman 1998:25). Post-structural analysis deals with categories and explanations as discursive constructs that are to be deconstructed rather than to be used as vehicles for action (Harris 2001: 336); wherein it is not about ‘what needs to be done’ but ‘an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is’ (Foucault 1981a:13). This unwillingness to take a normative position has led to its being seen by some as condoning the inequalities that typify public policy (Taylor-Gooby 1994 as cited by Harris 2001:337). Jones (1993:159), states that post-structural educational research views girls as no longer being seen as simply socialised into their appropriate gender roles. Rather Jones argues that they ‘position themselves’ in these roles. This however is not necessarily the case. West and Zimmerman (1987) put forward the concept of “doing gender” wherein gender should be understood as a “routine, methodical and recurring accomplishment” or as Butler (1990:140) puts it is constructed through a “‘stylised repetition of acts’ which ‘founds and consolidates the subject’”.

### ***b. Gender-specific inequalities***

The gender gap in public education has become an international issue (Clark *et al.* 2006). Arnot (2004 as cited by Unterhalter *et al.* 2004:3), stresses that gender equality in the school matters because a) Gender equality is central to achieving rights of not only access but participation, recognition and valuing of all children; b) Gender equality is an integral part of improving the quality of basic education; c) Democracy in the classroom and democratic learning is based in gender equality and quality education; and d) Inequalities exist – race, class, gender - and we need to work with them, not try to ignore them.

Bullying, harassment, school exclusion and violence are often defined with boys as the reference point; however this can be misleading because they also affect girls. Males have been found to be more involved in physical bullying, while females use more covert forms (Olweus 1991). Borg (1998) reported that the prevalence of bullying only appears to decline as students mature; it actually changes from aggressive forms to more passive, verbal forms. According to Takács (2006) young LGBT<sup>1</sup> people face homophobic bullying and harassment in educational settings and in particular the discrimination affects their school performance. Very often students drop out as a result of bullying. The school environment of LGBT youth is often described as a “strictly heteronormative space” that can force them to hide their feelings and sexuality. International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) (Takács 2006) European wide research with regard to LGTB youth concluded that 53 percent of the respondents reported being bullied, while 43 percent found prejudice or discriminative elements in the school curriculum. The EC has recognised the importance of the issues raised above and in 2006 the Commission encourages Member States to take into consideration these measures that seek to combat discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

In the field of education, gender-specific inequalities appear to have been reduced; today in many European countries the educational level of younger women is close to that of men and sometimes higher (Cyba 2005). However, this may in fact be misleading and lead to a sense of ‘task completed’; while inequalities still remain. There is a complex interaction among various factors that may all contribute to gender differences with regard to academic achievement, motivation, and future planning (Clark *et al.* 2008). This can be seen in gender segregation in the educational system and the under-representation of women in specific studies such as those related to science and technical subjects as well as the underachievement of boys. The choice of course of study to be followed is reinforced by traditions and stereotypes which influence employment patterns (EC

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<sup>1</sup>LGBT is an umbrella term used for describing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people (SEC (2007)).

2007:3). Even when women follow such courses of study that lead to male dominated occupations, research has indicated that women tend to resist positioning themselves as women and different, fearing the loss of professional identity in so doing (Dryburgh 1999 as cited by Gill *et al.* 2008). Nonetheless, women appear to lose this advantage when they enter the labour market. Explanations for this vary; one factor is that women tend to choose different courses of study while still in school which may in turn explain the subordinate labour market opportunities of women since these different subjects lead to the acquisition of different skills and competences (Duquet *et al.* 2005). Furthermore, Cyba (2005) points out that even when women do attain the same educational and employment position as men, they often find themselves having to deal with gender-specific forms of discrimination, including among other things barriers to promotion, pay differences and allocation of activities that do not match up to their educational background and training. The European Strategy for Growth and Jobs has as one of its objectives efforts to reduce this pay gap. And yet the pay gap persists in spite of the action taken and the resources that have been spent on challenging the pay gap (EC 2007).

However, the gender issue needs to include references to sexuality and not merely the differences between men and women. According to the ILGA:

LGBT youth encounter structural levels of discrimination related to the lack of representation of homosexuality and gender identity issues in the education curriculum. These experiences have a negative impact on the capacity of young LGBT people to manage the transition from school to work and to become confident and independent adults who can contribute to society (SEC 2007:1009).

Parallel to these issues is that of the role played by socioeconomic factors in conjunction with teacher gender and both the direct and indirect influence that this has on students. While not something that can be generalised across all countries, some studies have indicated that in high and middle income countries issues concerning boys' underachievement and low teacher expectations for boys, appear to be related to the fact that women teachers outnumber men in the primary school (Muito 2004). However, the situation in low income countries is different: lack of female teachers, gender disparities in enrolment and achievement, as well as masculine teaching styles. Furthermore, there is a need to take a more complex view of the factors influencing people's experiences and actions deriving from and acting upon gender issues in education, which includes social class and ethnic background.

## **5. Gender, Education and Markers of Inequality**

### ***a. General overview***

In the education sphere, gender differences are often identified by the educational participation percentages of men and women. A difficulty that one encounters is the paucity of reliable and comparable data generally on issues of gender but even more regarding sexuality.

The 2005 report on equality between men and women in Europe (COM (2005) 44, 14 February 2005), states that, 'women still outnumber men in education'. The percentage of women with a diploma in higher education was 58 percent of the total student population in 2003. In contrast to their historically low representation in education, today in nearly all European countries the number of female and male students is more or less equal; even though this alone does not equate with parity. Among the younger generations women now achieve qualification levels which match or exceed those of their male peers. In some countries, the number of women in tertiary education exceeds the number of men (Eurostat 2006-2007); yet other gender inequalities still remain.

According to the European Commission 2008 report on education, emphasis has now been given towards the equality of men and women outside the field of employment and more attention to gender issues in the educational sphere. The report stresses that boys have educational needs and may have difficulties with literacy. Girls may encounter problems in mathematics, science and technology.

In the case of the benchmark on Mathematics, Science and Technology the number of female graduates is increasing but there is still an imbalance among graduates in engineering and computing and women outnumber men in life sciences. In 35 of 57 countries participating in PISA 2006, males performed significantly ahead of females. In 21 countries no significant differences occur (European Commission 2008). As for reading skills PISA 2006 (European Commission 2008) has shown that in all OECD countries females perform better in reading than males. In 2006 almost twice as many boys as girls had low reading skills.

The EU reports (European Commission 2008) that equal access to primary and lower secondary education, is no longer an issue in that, schooling at this level is compulsory. Data concerning attainment at upper secondary education show that the attainment level of males improved more than the females and the gender gap was closed slightly. Furthermore, within the EU, early school-leaving appears to be more a male phenomenon. In 2007, there were 12.7 percent female and 16.9 percent male early school leavers; while women have closed the gender gap in university education. However, there are still large differences in the fields of study chosen by women and men.

The report concludes that gender differences that occur in education and training are complex, that there is a need to concentrate the policy efforts on boys without neglecting the gender gaps in education that affect girls. The report also stresses that researchers are starting to pose the question of “which boys and which girls” are underachieving (European Commission 2008). According to Gorard *et al.* (1999), perhaps the most common image of the academic achievement and gender gap is that the more girls are achieving the highest grades while more boys are attaining the mid-level grades. However, the size of the gap has been debated and possibly inflated by the way the gap is reported and the statistics interpreted (Gorard *et al.* 1999). The boys’ underachievement debate as presented by the media has raised educational policy concerns with arguments centring on the fact that it: “(a) masks the continuing problems faced by girls in schools; (b) reinforces male privilege by justifying a greater focus and expenditure on meeting boys’ needs (at the expense of girls); and (c) deflects attention from the larger achievement gaps according to ‘race’ and social class” (Francis 2006:188). Zyngier (2009:112) goes on to reflect that “Media coverage often presents a simple ‘boys versus girls analysis. The media have helped to create a public perception of crisis in boys’ education”.

## ***b. Markers for inequality in the EPASI countries***

### *1. Literacy rates*

In most of the countries that have provided data concerning the relationship of gender to literacy levels there are no profound differences among women and men and their literacy levels. There is however, a significant difference in reading literacy between the sexes in Slovakia, Belgium and the Netherlands in which girls achieve better than boys ([Vrabcova et al. 2008b](#), [Lambrechts and Geurts 2008](#), [Geurts and Lambrechts 2008](#)). In Ireland there are data that describe the situation in different types of literacy. The lowest level of literacy was reached in relation to prose literacy, from the 24.2 percent of men and 21.0 percent of women, in relation to quantitative literacy from the 22.0 percent of men and 27.7 percent and in relation to documents, from the 23.6 percent of men and 27.0 percent of women ([Moreau et al. 2008](#)).

## *2. Exclusion – expulsion rates*

Only the UK provided information that had to do with exclusion rates. Eighty percent of the students that are formally excluded from the educational system are boys ([Leathwood et al. 2008](#)). There is also a percentage of female students, who are not formally excluded although they are removed from classes or self excluded. Other information comes from Cyprus where 15-18 year old boys have a lower rate of enrolment although no exclusion rate exists ([Spinthourakis et al. 2008a](#)).

## *3. Attainment levels at the end of compulsory education*

There is a shortage of information in the data concerning the attainment levels in the majority of the countries participating in the EPASI project. Available data come from the UK and Ireland. In these two countries women outperform men in most of the subjects except mathematics where the boys do better ([Leathwood et al. 2008](#):5). An interesting fact comes from the UK where research shows that when ethnicity and social class are taken into account the analysis of the gender differences in attainment levels becomes more complicated; social class proves to be a stronger factor for underachievement (*ibid*). While in Sweden this doesn't seem to be the case, where "Research shows that girls today are more successful than boys irrespective of class, in which area they live or ethnic background" ([Hartsmar 2008](#):24). Data that conclude that girls do better in language are also provided by Malta and the Czech Republic ([Vallejo and Dooly 2008](#), [Vrabcova et al. 2008a](#)).

## *4. Continuing education post compulsory leaving age*

From the data gathered it appears that in most of the EPASI countries boys are more likely to drop out of the educational system than are girls. For example in Ireland, in 2006, 5 percent of men left school without qualifications compared to 3 percent of women and that the percentage of men exiting the second level system without sitting the Leaving Certificate is 9 percent higher than for women ([Moreau et al. 2008](#):20). In Spain, levels of graduation for females in secondary education exceed those of males by more than ten percent ([Dooly and Vallejo 2008](#):13). In the case of Malta the dropout rate is high for all students. According to a 2001 Labour Force Survey of the National Statistics Office Malta had a higher percentage of its early school leavers were boys ([Vallejo and Dooly 2008](#)). While in Luxembourg early school leavers tend to be boys (56.3 percent against 43.7 percent of girls) and girls tend to resume their studies ([Tozzi and Étienne 2008](#):5).

Another point highlighted by the data is that while women perform better than men in most of the subjects, gendered patterns in subject choice still remain and is considered one of the main gender issues that policy making should address. For example in Cyprus, female students make up only 14.8 percent of the secondary technical/vocational education student population ([Spinthourakis et al. 2008a](#):11). This continued non technical orientation in terms of programmes of study translates into fewer women choosing traditionally male dominated areas occupations and impacts upon their presence in the labour market.

## *5. Participation rate in Higher Education*

From the data provided from many of the country reports, the percentage of women who enter Higher Education exceeds that of men (ie UK 54.1 percent of students are female and in Ireland the figure is 57.9 percent). Nevertheless, it should be noted that gendered patterns of subject choice prevail as well as socioeconomic status. For example data from Luxembourg indicate that the number of girls in the mathematics/physics department is low (33 percent); in electro-technology, computer and mechanics, the percentage of girls is below 5 percent ([Tozzi and Étienne 2008](#):5). The high percentage of women in tertiary education however does not translate into better jobs or better salaries. For example women in the Czech Republic are underrepresented in the senior academic rank and in the administration of higher education ([Vrabcova et al. 2008a](#):15).

### 6. *Employment rates*

Continuing the above argument, the major disadvantage for women today seems to be the discrimination they face in the employment sphere. Even though girls currently achieve better qualifications than boys and their participation in the tertiary education is also higher than males, the results in employment and salaries are not those that one would expect. In the UK the pay gap continues to disadvantage women and in 2007 stood at 17.2 percent for full-time and 35.6 percent for part-time workers ([Leathwood et al. 2008:16](#)). The labour force participation rate in Ireland is 74.3 percent for men and 54.1 percent for women with women even after graduation starting their careers with lower salaries than their male counterparts ([Moreau et al. 2008:20](#)). In Malta the percentage of women in formal employment was 32.8 percent for 2004. Data also indicates that it is more common for women to work on a temporary basis ([Vallejo and Dooly 2008:11](#)). In Spain youth unemployment is a major problem which mostly affects women ([Dooly and Vallejo 2008](#)). Likewise in Cyprus the difference between the registered unemployment rate and the other measures is that the former does not include a growing number of female and young workers who are willing to enter the labour market but are not registered ([Spinthourakis et al. 2008a:12](#)). In Denmark the employment rates for 2004 were 71 percent for women and 77 percent for men, the gap is greater when the rates reference only immigrant workers, 38 percent for women and 51 percent for men ([Cederberg and Lingärde 2008:18](#)).

In Greece unemployment is higher among females than among males, regardless of age group or educational qualifications, in 2006, the female unemployment was 13.6 percent, while male unemployment was 5.6 percent. Women in Greece increased their representation in occupations that require particular educational qualifications and that were historically considered male strongholds ([Spinthourakis et al. 2008b:16](#)).

### 7. *Evidence of social exclusion, being bullied*

Data concerning bullying are provided from the UK, Ireland, Greece and Cyprus. The distinction that can be made is that the information from the UK and Ireland tends to focus on homophobic bullying, noting that in the UK 30-50 percent of lesbian, gay and bisexual young people have experienced bullying in educational settings ([Leathwood et al. 2008:16](#)); while in Ireland research indicated that homophobic bullying exists in 79 percent of Irish second-level schools ([Moreau et al. 2008:21](#)). In Greece and Cyprus research finds that more boys than girls report that they had been victimised and more low-achievers than high-achievers report the same ([Spinthourakis et al. 2008b:16](#)).

The lack of information concerning homophobic bullying as well as anything on sexual harassment, sexual name calling and related issues in other countries is not an indicator of its absence (Meyer 2008). It may in fact be due to the fact that sexuality issues are silenced in most of the countries examined as evidenced by the lack of information about sexuality and education in general.

## 6. **Strategies Used**

The EU and the national governments of member states have adopted gender mainstreaming policies since mid 1990s. The concept of gender mainstreaming is usually conceived in relation or in contradiction to previous approaches concerning gender equality policy, such as “equal treatment” and “positive action”, which were the approaches adopted during the 1970s and the 1980s (Sjorup and Schmitz, 2005). Many researchers argue that the evolution of gender mainstreaming concepts and theory is not promoted and remains at a rudimentary level (Booth and Bennett, 2002). Whereas Daly (2005) argues that the international literature focuses on gender mainstreaming as a policy or a set of tools and less on a concept and theory. Leo-Rhynie (1999) referring to research in education and gender points out that education plays a significant role in the

reproduction of inequalities, through all its functions and aspects, such as: literacy, classroom interaction, curriculum, enrolment, attendance and achievement patterns, and teacher training.

The aim of the present report is to illustrate the strategies and the trends that occur in 14 countries in relation to gender and sexuality issues in education.

One of the features of educational policy that relates to gender issues is how and what provisions the educational systems implement in regard to whether there are single-sex classes and/or mixed. While historically the situation has evolved, today coeducation characterizes most of the educational systems in the EPASI countries, in France, Luxemburg, Greece, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Sweden and Denmark a coeducational system prevails. There are also countries that recently have made this shift from single sex schools to mixed schools such as Belgium in which coeducation started in 1994 ([Lambrecht and Geurts 2008:16](#)). There are also countries which follow a broadly coeducational system but where single sex schools also operate. In the UK many private schools and state secondary schools in London are single sex ([Leathwood et al. 2008](#)); in Spain private single sex schools function in the primary, secondary and tertiary level of education although they do not represent the majority of schools and are usually private and run by religious orders ([Dooly and Vallejo 2008:10](#)) and in the Netherlands 75 percent of the schools are mixed but sometimes the separation of girls and boys is applied in physical education lessons ([Geurts and Lambrecht 2008:13](#)). High proportion of single sex schools operate in Ireland and Malta. In Ireland the prevalence of single sex schooling affects the policy making that deals with gender. In Ireland, “boys in single-sex schooling have been identified as more likely to give little consideration to gender equality, have more gender-stereotyped views and express higher levels of prejudice against travellers and gay men, as well as often seeing hegemonic masculinity as superior” ([Moreau et al. 2008:11-12](#)). In Malta state and church secondary schools are single sex and educational policy in Malta is characterized of gender discriminatory elements (Cutajar in [Vallejo and Dooly 2008:10](#)).

According to Unterhalter *et al.* (2004:1), “There are no shortages in many countries today of good policies for gender equality at all levels from central government to schools but these policies often remain as unimplemented documents, for a range of reasons including lack of capacity, coordination, communication and resources. Lack of political will to engage with difficult or sensitive issues or fragmented initiatives means that even the best policies fail to be translated into good practice”. Three subjects concerning the strategies used by the 14 countries in addressing gender inequalities in education were identified from the analysis of the EPASI projects. These subjects are: a) what priority is given to gender issues in education, b) which are the major issues the projects revolve around and c) which are the distinguished different levels of policy approach. Many projects included in the EPASI database lack information concerning the evaluation and outcomes of these projects. This is due to problems connected to the data available (ie lack of evaluation, projects still ongoing, no access given to such data, etc.).

#### **a. What priority is given?**

The issue of the priority given to the issue of gender differs from country to country, with the occasional overlap. In relation to gender and education the collected data indicate that in France and Luxembourg these issues hold an important place. On the other hand we have the slightly different cases of Sweden and Malta. In Sweden priority is given to gender issues at the governmental level ([Hartsmar 2008](#)). Research shows that because gender mainstreaming policies are administered centrally by the government, policy initiatives in which the responsibility lies upon the communities and municipalities such as education policy appear not to succeed to the same degree (Weiner 2002a; Weiner 2002b). In Malta even though there is no structured national policy for gender in education, there are a number of projects dealing with the subject ([Vallejo and Dooly 2008](#)).

The UK projects appear to deal with gender issues from an integrated policy perspective that combines issues of gender inequality with other forms of inequality. Denmark follows a gender mainstreaming policy not directed exclusively to gender and education. Belgium and the Netherlands also tend to integrate gender mainstreaming within gender equality policies. In Ireland, some attention has been given to gender issues but issues related to the socio-economic status are prioritised. Spain has recently adopted the IV Plan for Equality of Opportunities between Women and Men which has ramification on education equality of men and women ([Dooly and Vallejo 2008](#)). In Greece, even though several projects are concerned with gender in education, an EU-Driven model is followed. Greek governmental bodies began to give attention to such matters after a strict demand from the EU. In Cyprus, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, there is no obvious focus on gender issues in education but it is possible to identify a growing attention given to such matters.

In an effort to summarise the above findings, gender mainstreaming in education appears to be a prioritised area in France, Luxemburg, Sweden, the UK, and Malta. In the case of Malta it should be noted that Malta has segregated education and thus there is still a lot to be done in the area. Mainstreaming efforts but not especially focused in education are evident in Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands. Gender issues in education exist to a degree but are not generally seen as a first priority in Spain as it regards other educational issues, as well as in Greece and Ireland. From the data it appears that there is no obvious gender educational policy focus in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Cyprus.

### ***b. Major issues***

The issues dealt with are characteristic of most EU countries even though there are with are not necessarily constructed as policy issues in all countries or in the same way. From the review of the EPASI database, there are three major issues encountered that relate to disadvantages concerning gender in the educational environment: a) the career choices girls and boys make in terms of segregation, b) that some girls seem to achieve better than some boys in school (boys' underachievement), and c) fighting against stereotypes in education (including: teachers views, interactions between students, harassment, curriculum etc.).

#### *Career choice issues*

It appears that career choice issues are addressed in the majority of the countries examined. Most of the projects implemented aim at career counselling activities. They are mainly concerned with encouraging girls to follow subjects such as science, engineering and technology. The projects are focused on girls because they are more likely to be in danger of gender-segregation in the employment sphere. However there is one exception that of Luxembourg, in which boys seem to be disadvantaged by gendered patterned career choice ([Tozzi and Étienne 2008](#)). Career choice gendered patterns are seen as an important aspect of educational policy in the UK, Ireland, Denmark, France, Greece, Malta, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, without it being missing from every country's agenda but to a lesser extent.

Many examples can be found of projects that deal with the career and subject choices girls and boys make. Two such examples found in the EPASI database are: “[WISE](#)” implemented in UK (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) and “[Glyngoere School – Divided education in periods for boys and girls](#)” implemented in Denmark.

The project entitled “[WISE](#)” (UK56) aims at challenging the feature of low representation of women in subjects and professions that have to do with science, engineering and construction. It is an ongoing project which started in 1984, and focused on women and their education setting working with teachers, parents, girls, women, career counsellors, employers, politicians, etc. A

number of schemes are implemented, an example of which is school visits of women that work in the aforementioned fields. According to the UK project analysis the main outcome of this project was that by the turn the millennium the number of the female engineering graduates had increased to 15 percent. It's estimated that the WISE contributed along with other conditions to this increase. However it is a project implemented for many years with no important outcomes. A fact that proves the aforementioned statement is that although there is an increase of the participation of women in engineering, subject stratification still exists as one of the important problems related to gender and education.

[“Glyngoere School – Divided education in periods for boys and girls”](#) (DK161) is a locally implemented project in Denmark which deals with the difficulties that elementary school male and female students face in specific subjects - girls in physics and boys in language. The project is carried out occasionally and its main activity is to organise single sex classes, in order to help girls and boys with physics and language subjects respectively, for a short period of time (approximately 2–3 weeks), so that the advantages of mixed education are maintained. The project is a good example of combining the advantages provided by single-sex schooling and coeducation system.

### *“Boys’ underachievement”*

As mentioned above boys’ underachievement is a topic frequently engaged in political and social discourses in most of the countries but it is not a prioritised policy implementation topic. We can find limited examples of national policy schemes or educational projects addressing boys’ underachievement in the UK, Denmark, Ireland and Slovakia. This is an interesting feature because according to EU reports boy’s underachievement is identified, besides career choice of women, as the second most important aspect of disadvantage related to gender in education. Some researchers have expressed concerns that the boys’ underachievement debate and its use of a ‘poor boys’ discourse have negative consequences for girls’ schooling (Francis 2006).

Two projects which are orientated towards boys are chosen for discussion in this section. These are [“Exploring Masculinities”](#) implemented in Ireland, and the [“Model of Gender Sensitive Education of Boys”](#) implemented in Slovakia.

[“Exploring Masculinities”](#) (IR23) is a centrally funded project, implemented in single-sex schools for boys, aimed at fighting against the masculine stereotypes prevalent in male students in single-sex schools. According to the Ireland’s country report single-sex schooling prevails. Boys in these schools are identified to have more gender-stereotyped views and be less sensitised about gender equality than students in mixed–sex schools. A Social, Personal and Health curriculum and teaching material is developed especially for these schools. The evaluation showed that the material was considered excellent and the teachers and students responses were positive although there is critique that the project could threaten the boys’ masculine identity. The second project entitled [“Model of Gender Sensitive Education of Boys”](#) (SK197) deals especially with gender sensitive education for boys, aiming also at the elimination of gender stereotypes connected to masculinity. It is still implemented in a pilot phase in a secondary school within the vocational field of electronics. The project aims include the development of new teaching methods; it revolves around domains concerned with boys’ sense of care, and seeks to motivate boys to openly discuss issues such as fatherhood and domestic violence in class.

### *Fighting against gender stereotypes*

The third issue encountered in the study is that of fighting against gender stereotypes in education in terms of teacher views, curriculum, and harassment etc. Fighting gender stereotypes is found at the centre of policy implementation in most of the countries mentioned. It is an issue that concerns the

policy spectrum as a whole; and not always specific to the field of education. However, in the communication from the European Commission “Towards a community framework strategy on gender equality (2001–2005)” (COM 2000) in which the objectives and the proposed actions are thoroughly presented the promotion of change of gender roles and stereotypes is stated as one of the main objectives closely related to education. The communication states, “this field of intervention addresses the need to change behaviour, attitudes, norms and values which define and influence gender roles in society through education, training, the media, arts, the culture and science” (COM 2000:13).

Actions mentioned include support to strengthen efforts to eradicate stereotypical gender discrimination in education, ie in educational materials, developing good practice in this field and monitoring of gender perspective integration in policies to overcoming gender stereotypes.

Projects and policies aiming to reduce and fight against stereotypical views can be found in France, Luxembourg, Greece, Slovakia, Ireland, UK, Sweden, Spain and Malta. In Cyprus and the Czech Republic, countries where there remain strong and pervasive views on gender roles, confronting stereotypes hold an important place in social discourses, even if there is no concrete educational policy scheme as yet developed.

Another aspect of stereotyping in education is concerned with sexuality issues. The analysis of the EPASI database presents that sexuality issues are not a prioritised area in education. LGTB youths face homophobic bullying and harassment in the educational setting which very often results in school failure and drop outs. The lack of appropriate measures and policies to tackle the educational disadvantages faced by LGTB youths is evident from the absence of projects that deal with sexuality issues in education. The only example of implemented project provided is the “[Education for All](#)” (UK55) project implemented in UK, funded and carried out by the NGO “Stonewall”, operating nationally. The main aims of the project are to combat homophobic bullying and harassment in the school environment and consequently the LGBT youth’s underachievement. Its implemented actions have to do mostly with providing counselling and guidance to LGBT people, their schools and families.

There are three projects selected in relation to stereotyping in education:

“[Facilitating Equality through Education](#)” (FETE) (MT234) is an example of a project aiming to tackle gender stereotypes in education. FETE is an example of a trans-national project in which three countries participated, Malta, Cyprus and Latvia. The partners worked on their official textbooks and national curricula in order to recognise the needs for revisions related to the ways the sexes and gender roles are illustrated. In the Maltese case, teachers and students were involved in training and actions with the use of appropriate material aiming at challenging the stereotypes and the dominant gender roles. The review of the formal education system and the national curriculum which was the main aim of FETE could be the beginning for the implementation of other projects dealing with such matters.

“[Gen-Basec](#)” (BE10) is a project implemented in Belgium, concerned mostly with raising gender awareness among teachers, school managers, counsellors, pupils and parents. It aims at the sensitisation of teachers and students in gender issues. Attention is focused on the teacher – pupil relationship. Among others, one of the project’s outcomes is the development of a manual for gender coaching and a common ground in which gender coaches can discuss their thoughts, ideas, questions and ways of action (Belgium Project Analysis).

Fighting against stereotypes in education is an important aspect of teacher training projects. These projects are concerned with examining teaching practises, developing new teaching methodologies,

eliminating sexism in educational theory and most of all sensitising the teaching community and the society as a whole. Projects connected with teacher training and sensitisation can be found in Greece, Sweden, Spain, Belgium, France, Ireland, Malta, Slovakia and Czech Republic.

The “[Values Education, Equality and Gender](#)” (SE139) project in Sweden is an example of a centrally designed teacher training project. Its basic objective was to educate and place one gender pedagogue in every Swedish community. The target group consisted of teachers in comprehensive and upper secondary schools. The overall aim of the project was to educate teachers in order to work at the praxis level. The objective was to strengthen competence in equality and gender issues in communities. The programme was evaluated by the Swedish National Agency for School Improvement in 2005-2006. The educational goal was reached but the ambition to place one gender pedagogue in each community has not been achieved. The evaluation also showed that the main result is that pedagogues at an individual level have enhanced their abilities. The training process was successful and had a positive impact on the teacher’s abilities. Unfortunately although this was a positive outcome, there was no national provision for their placement into positions in the educational system for which they received the specific training in order to practise what they had learned and contribute to challenging gender disadvantages. Although it is an example of a good practise in its design, organisation and implementation, the actual outcomes were limited as a result of the lack of policy measures for the employment of the trained gender pedagogues.

### ***c. Different levels of approach: Who implements the policy and the projects?***

The EC’s communication about the community framework strategy on gender equality (2001-2005) (COM(2000) 335 final) points out that even if the member states adopt policies to address gender inequalities, there are still important differences among them, with respect to issues concerning: the ways the actions are implemented, the legislation, methods, mechanisms involved and areas of initiatives. The states are affected by their history and experiences in regard to the designing, administering and implementation of equality policies

The gender related projects described in the EPASI project show a variety of funding and policy implementation types. Many of the projects are funded and come from European Union’s initiatives, in many cases in cooperation with governmental bodies. Especially in Greece but also in France and Belgium we encounter educational policies especially directed to gender that are coordinated and organised through EU Social Funds. Other countries that combine EU funded policies with other centrally implemented policies are Ireland, Malta, Czech Republic, Slovakia and the Netherlands. Some distinctive characteristics we can note is that Slovakia and Czech Republic implement a joint project and that in Malta we have an international project funded by UNESCO.

Projects stemming from national policy initiatives are examples provided from Sweden and Luxembourg. A differentiated case is that of Denmark, in which we can see that most of the projects mentioned are locally funded and administered.

In order to give examples of the three prevailing types of funding and implementation that were encountered when running through the EPASI database, there was a selection of three projects: “Gender Equality Duty” from UK as an example of centrally funded and implemented policy, “Sensitisation of Teachers and Intervention Programmes towards Gender Equality” from Greece as an example of a project funded jointly by the State (25 percent) and the EU (75 percent-Community Support Framework) and “Coeducation project” from Spain as an example of a locally implemented and funded project.

[Gender Equality Duty \(GED\)](#) (UK58) project is implemented by the governmental body of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights. It requires all public authorities to promote gender

equality. Among the public authorities, school units and universities were required to prepare and publish a Gender Equality Scheme and an Action plan by April 30<sup>th</sup> 2007, in other words to set up their own equality objectives and actions. The two overall aims of the programme are to eliminate unlawful sex discrimination and harassment and to promote equality of opportunity between men and women. Schools can initiate actions concerning the following themes: gender stereotypes in subject choice and careers advice, pupil attainment, sexual and sexist bullying as well as violence. The programme has not yet been evaluated, since it is newly implemented. It has to be pointed out though that teachers may be expected to handle and implement an action programme in the school unit with no previous training concerning gender issues.

In 2000 the EU mandated that the Greek Government use at least 10 percent of the funds of the Third Community Support Framework, in actions to promote gender equality in all the aspects of social life. The aforementioned project emanates from this type of EU driven policy approach. The body responsible for the implementation and the administration of the "[Sensitisation of Teachers and Intervention Programmes towards Gender Equality](#)" (GR107) project is the "Research Centre for Equality Matters" in cooperation with the Hellenic Ministry of Education. The target group of the programme includes: teachers of secondary education; educators of professional training; and students. It is concerned mostly with teacher training and the elimination of gender stereotypes in the classroom. The project is implemented nationally. The following actions were to be implemented: a. 78 Teachers Training Programmes: the participant secondary education teachers will be trained to organise and deliver Intervention Programmes in their schools and b. 850 Intervention Programmes - in every programme five school units will participate which will be represented by one or two trained teachers. The programmes include new teaching methods and the completion of projects that have to do with gender issues. One of the aims the intervention programmes was to expand its activities in order to enhance the participation and involvement of the parents and the local communities in them. However there is no available data on that aspect of the project. The project is still in process and as such has not been evaluated. It has to be pointed out that the participation of teachers and the school units to the project is voluntary.

The Spanish project, entitled "[Coeducation Project](#)" (ES213), is a locally implemented project, funded by school funds and awards. The project involves the evolution of methodological strategies different from the ones that are adopted within the traditional educational system in order to eliminate the gender stereotypes and discrimination patterns in the educational theory and practice. Its main aim was the promotion of an education dealing with gender inequality. The implementation of the project involves working through stories, games and other activities that aim to alter learned behaviours in the family and society. The project also includes close cooperation with the student's parents and teachers participation in external activities. An internal evaluation was carried out, which showed important improvement in coeducation awareness and gender issues awareness in teachers, students and parents. We must point out that the project was awarded with the "Premio a la acción magistral" 2005, 1<sup>st</sup> place award. "According to the jury the project is a clear example of implication and dedication of the teaching staff, of its initiative, capacity and interest to make the students' formation more profound, going beyond the mere transmission of subject knowledge" (Spanish Project Analysis).

The analysis and the description of the previous examples, conclude that there can be different types of approaches to the same type of policy domain, in this case gender issues in education. Nevertheless it is interesting to observe that although different types of policy implementation and funding are encountered, there is a link between them, that of, the motivation and the effort educational staff must bring into these attempts in order to successfully address social inequalities in education. As can be seen in all three projects the teachers undertake an important role with respect to the success of each policy approach. In the case of "Gender Equality Duty" teachers should identify the needs of their students and form an action plan. The same is true for the

“Sensitisation of Teachers and Intervention Programmes towards Gender Equality” project. In both cases it appears that school’s and teacher’s participation is voluntary. On the other hand the success of a local project, such as the “Coeducation Project” actually depends on the teacher’s involvement in it; they all participate since it is a project that they sought and implemented.

Finally, the projects of the countries reviewed implement a variety of policy approaches in terms of gender programme funding and implementation. Different funding and implementation models exist in all the countries reviewed. However, in terms of the projects analysed these can be classified as: a) national (Ireland, UK, and Sweden), b) a combination of EU and national (Netherlands, France, Greece, Slovakia and the Czech Republic), c) a combination of international and national (Malta) and d) regional /local (Denmark, Spain, and Belgium). Examples of education gender oriented projects were not identified by the EPASI project for either Cyprus or Luxembourg.

## **7. Conclusions and Recommendations**

European Union educational policies have as their objective the implementation of initiatives targeting educational disadvantages related to gender and sexuality with the aim of eliminating gender inequalities. Our review underscored the need to understand the context within which the educational policies are made and implemented. All the projects mentioned a commitment to principles of gender equality and non-discrimination. This can be seen as a positive starting point for the promotion of individuals’ education and training regardless of gender and sexuality. All the documents and projects reviewed demonstrated a relationship to the policy objectives stated but few were complete in their description especially in terms of evaluation, monitoring indicators and methods for dissemination of their results. No matter how seemingly well designed, organised and implemented a project may be, if the monitoring indicators are not delineated and the evaluation not published, its dissemination will not be effective. More information is needed to make these projects useful to others.

All EPASI countries have their own history in addressing gender inequalities, and the priority given is affected by the amount of time each country has given to such matters and its traditions. It would appear that most national policies view gender related disadvantages and therefore the project design essentially from a structural viewpoint; the same cannot be said of academic researchers with some employing a post-structural analysis perspective. The major issues repeatedly encountered when analysing the gender focused projects, regardless of each country’s policy approach, are career and subject’s choices girls and boys make and fighting against stereotypes in education. Combating stereotypes in the educational setting is a theme which is woven through the majority of the projects even if it is not their primary focus. The issue of boys’ underachievement is a current topic in the debate concerning gender issues and educational attainment. However some feel that this has masked the real issues of gender/sexuality inequalities and educational outcomes. The absence of policies addressing sexuality in the majority of the countries demonstrate that they are not treated as a priority in the educational environment.

### ***Recommendations***

On all levels there is a clear need for concise and unambiguous monitoring indicators, systematic evaluation and broad dissemination of project results in all instances, both when the results are positive as well as when they have not achieved their desired objectives. Most of the projects in this study did not meet the aforementioned criteria with the result being that adopting and/or adapting the practices and activities referenced is not feasible either in the same country or by other European countries.

### *a. EU level*

- Boys and girls should not be treated as homogenous groups but as individuals with initiatives focusing on the individual needs of the participants
- Gender related educational policy needs to be more directly linked to employment practices to ameliorate the pay gap issue
- Issues of sexuality issues need to be given equal treatment and exposure

### *b. National level*

- Gender equality training initiatives should not end with training but should be followed through to appropriate placement, implementation and assessment of the trainees' effectiveness
- The state should work towards the inclusion of gender equality related courses in teacher training programmes and teacher accreditation
- Public school curriculum reform to eradicate gender stereotyping in school textbooks and other teaching materials
- Increased funding for local initiatives that have documented success
- The collection and dissemination of best practice in the effective implementation of sexuality and gender equality policies and strategies

### *c. Local*

- Work with disadvantaged gender group stakeholders whether they are women, men, or LGBTs in planning, implementing, and monitoring projects identified as priorities by their communities.
- Link NGOs with individual groups to provide awareness raising of gender equality issues.
- Employ career counsellors trained in issues of gender equality, gender stereotyping and anti-discrimination practices since gender differences can partially be attributed to stereotypical subject choice of women.
- To participate in the development and monitoring of policies and curriculum development that promotes good practice in sexual equality.

### *d. School and practitioner level*

- Schools should develop a policy that makes specific reference to gender as a factor in inequality in the school environment.
- Schools should develop a policy that makes specific reference to issues of sexuality.
- Schools should discuss the planning, development and implementation of strategies to address gender inequalities with their stakeholders
- Practitioners should accommodate gender differences through gender-sensitive teaching by including tasks and activities that address the needs of different learning styles and preferences as well as avoiding stereotypes.
- Schools should foster parental involvement in gender related policies, strategies and activities.
- Schools should develop anti-bullying initiatives involving the curriculum, targeted group and intensive individual intervention.

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## Appendix

Country	Project	Link
Belgium	<a href="#">Female Engineer</a>	BE9
	<a href="#">Gen-basec</a>	BE10
	<a href="#">Het Beroepenhuis (the house of professions)</a>	BE12
Czech Republic	<a href="#">Gender Issue at School</a>	CZ167
	<a href="#">Breaking the Waves</a>	CZ168
	<a href="#">Summer School of Gender Studies for Roma University Female Students</a>	CZ183
Cyprus		
France	<a href="#">"Le rôle et la place du père dans la famille actuelle et à l'école", Role and Place of the Father in the family and at school"</a>	FR263
	<a href="#">Les femmes et les hommes au rectorat : un début d'approche intégrée de l'égalité (Females and Males at the Rectorat: an integrated approach of equality)</a>	FR264
	<a href="#">"La mixité au fil des pages"</a>	FR265
Denmark	<a href="#">"Glyngoere Skole – Periodevis undervisning i opdeltige pige- og drengehold" (Glyngoere School -Divided education in periods for boys and girls)</a>	DK161
	<a href="#">Koen, karriærer og identitet (Gender, Career and Identity)</a>	DK162
Greece	<a href="#">Ευαισθητοποίηση Εκπαιδευτικών και Παρεμβατικά Προγράμματα για την Προώθηση της Ισότητας των Φύλων-Sensitisation of Teachers and Intervention Programmes Towards Gender Equality</a>	GR107
	<a href="#">Παραγωγή Βοηθητικού Εκπαιδευτικού Υλικού για την Εισαγωγή Θεμάτων στετικά με το φύλο στην Εκπαιδευτική Διαδικασία-Production of Auxiliary Educational Material for the introduction of subjects related to Gender in the Educational Process</a>	GR112
Ireland	<a href="#">Exploring Masculinities</a>	IE23
	<a href="#">Equal Measures</a>	IE24
	<a href="#">Jobs for the Girls: Role model CD Rom</a>	IE37
Luxembourg		
Malta	<a href="#">The Gender Gap in Science and Technology in Malta: evaluating the problem and tackling the issues.</a>	MT233
	<a href="#">Facilitating Equality through Education (FETE)</a>	MT234
	<a href="#">Ghozza (former School Girl Mothers' Unit)</a>	MT235
Netherlands	<a href="#">De glazen muur (The Glass Wall)</a>	NL74
	<a href="#">Kenniscentrum Sekse &amp; Diversiteit in Medisch Onderwijs Diversiteit (SDMO) (Knowledge centre Gender &amp; Diversity in Medical Education Diversity)</a>	NL75
	<a href="#">Participatie van Vrouwen als Prioriteit voor de Wetenschap! (Participation of Women as a priority for Science!)</a>	NL76
	<a href="#">TOP IT klas, talentvolle meisjes richting ICT (talented girls direction ICT)</a>	NL77
	<a href="#">Viking, vrouwelijke ingenieurs als gastdocent (Viking, female engineers as guest lecturer)</a>	NL78
	<a href="#">Gender Sensibilisation in Educational Process at Basic and Secondary Schools as a Preparation of Future Professional Desegregation</a>	SK186
Slovakia	<a href="#">Model of Gender Sensitive Education</a>	SK198
	<a href="#">Summer School of Gender Studies for Roma University Female Students</a>	SK202
	<a href="#">Coeducation programmes in educational centres (Programa de Coeducación en centros educativos)</a>	ES212
Spain	<a href="#">Coeducation Project</a>	ES213
	<a href="#">Galician Government's policy for teacher training on gender violence prevention (in the framework of the Galician Law for gender violence prevention and treatment)</a>	ES214
	<a href="#">Värdegrund, jämställdhet och genus/Values Education, Equality and Gender</a>	SE139
Sweden		
	<a href="#">Education for All</a>	UK55
	<a href="#">The WISE</a>	UK56
United Kingdom	<a href="#">Gender Equality Duty</a>	UK58