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EUROPEAN TRADE UNION COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION
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Report of the ETUCE Peer Learning
Activity on

**Teacher Trade Union
Actions Challenging Gender
Stereotypes and Gender
Segregation in the Labour
Market**

9 May 2012, Brussels



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d'enseignants dans la lutte contre les stéréotypes et la ségrégation liés au genre sur le
marché de l'emploi »*

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*Teacher Trade Union Actions Challenging Gender Stereotypes
and Gender Segregation in the Labour Market*

1. Introduction

Gender stereotypes are one of the main causes of gender inequality on today's labour market. Though women are highly successful in education and gaining qualifications, their career paths are often interrupted or blocked by family responsibilities that are unequally distributed between women and men.

Education systems play a crucial role in shaping gender stereotypes and gender stereotyping in education is one of the reasons for gender inequality in the labour market and teacher unions play a key role in gender sensitive education. With the project *Teacher Trade Union Actions Challenging Gender Stereotypes and Gender Segregation in the Labour Market*, ETUCE seeks to work towards education systems that reduce gender stereotypes and to equip teachers and their unions with the necessary know-how to promote gender sensitive education.

Building on the work of the former project on promoting gender equality within teacher trade unions and in the teaching profession, which resulted in the ETUCE Action Plan¹ in which ETUCE committed itself to promote gender sensitive education, the present project aims to develop guidelines on how teacher unions can mitigate gender stereotypes and gender segregation in the labour market.

In this setting, ETUCE organised a Peer Learning Activity for representatives from national teacher unions dealing with gender equality in their unions in Brussels on 9 May 2012.

The objective of the Peer Learning Activity was to raise teacher unions' awareness on how gender stereotypes are linked to gender inequality in the labour market and to exchange ideas on how to address gender stereotypes in education. Moreover, the Peer Learning Activity provided the participants inspiration and concrete measures on how teacher unions can promote gender equality in the education sector.

2. Opening

The EU institutions² play an important role in achieving gender equality in the labour market with the legal framework that it provides to the EU member states. The European Commission's policy³ on gender inequality seeks to tackle the still existing pay gap between men and women of 17, 8%. The European Director, Martin Rømer, stressed the high priority that gender equality has on the ETUCE agenda. Stereotypes in the education system (and in society) produce specific expectations towards which jobs men and women can supposedly and/or should achieve in the labour market.

¹ http://etuce.homestead.com/EUprojects/Gender/ETUCE_action_plan_gender_equality_EN_final.pdf

² There are 13 directives covering equality issues e.g. equal pay, protection of workers and maternity leave.

³ The Commission has adopted a five-year strategy ("Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015") for promoting equality between women and men in Europe. The gender equality strategy includes a series of actions based around five priorities: the economy and labour market; equal pay; equality in senior positions; tackling gender violence; and promoting equality beyond the EU.

Women and men may therefore have clear preferences for certain occupations. Stereotypes towards women in organisational practices also constitute gender segregation. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the role that education plays in shaping gender stereotypes and in shaping gender inequality issues in general. Martin Rømer called for new approaches in the education sector to avoid the (re)production of gender stereotypes.



Martin Rømer, European Director, opened the Peer Learning Activity

“Teaching methods, curriculum content and knowledge on the issue are all points where we have a responsibility to promote better equality and to avoid shaping stereotypes. The objectives of the project are therefore to challenge gender stereotypes and gender segregation in the labour market”.

Martin Rømer, European Director

The Peer Learning Activity welcomed two major presentations by Thomas Viola Rieske, Potsdam University, Germany and by Agnes Parent-Thirion from EUROFOUND.

3. Boys and Feminised Education

Thomas Viola Rieske structured his presentation around the four topics of the Debate about Boys & Education in general, disadvantaged boys, feminised education and masculine pedagogies.

The reason for the debate on boys’ performance in schools is brought about by the fact that girls achieve higher grades than boys in the education system, as the data from PISA regularly shows. Especially in reading girls outperform boys in all countries assessed by PISA. Rieske thought warned to be careful when interpreting these results. According to him the PISA results could easily give a generalised picture that boys are disadvantaged in schools which is not the case. Data collected in Germany shows that especially immigrant and working class boys are at risk of exclusion from the education system rather than boys in general.

The high proportion of women in education, referred to as feminised education, was also a theme that Rieske examined. He explained that some people believe that there is a lack of role models for boys since female teachers are overrepresented in the education system. Hence, there is also a lack of identification for boys. Female teachers might have a cultural feminisation of teaching and behaviour rules, which will privilege girls and feminism. Rieske raised the issue whether more masculine pedagogies and masculine culture in schools would adjust more to the interest of boys and if more male teachers as role models would provide a broader acceptance of boys’ behaviour and identities.

Rieske concluded that the claim for a system that is fairer to boys is based on assumptions that do not acknowledge gender diversity. Accusations and polarisations contribute to an unproductive atmosphere of a battle between the sexes. The root of the problem is rather that a person's gender continues to determine what kind of education they can access and acquire. Gender constructions and expectations make masculinity and success in school incompatible for certain boys. There is no link to be made between the teacher's gender and students' results.

Some alternative approaches to avoid gender stereotypes were presented which focused on gender-sensitive pedagogical concepts reflect on the teachers view on gender and gender practices; allowing for diversity and intersectionality; gender-sensitive pedagogy to avoid the impulse to "normalise".

By means of providing an alternative approach, Frauke Gützkow from the union Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft (GEW) presented the GEW policy paper *Disadvantaged Boys – Dominating Women? The GEW's Demands and Positions Regarding the Debate on the Education of Boys and Gender Relations in Educational Institutions*.

With this paper, GEW has developed concrete policy on which goals and demands that they are working for in order to achieve gender equality in the education system and in the labour market. Frauke Gützkow highlighted that GEW very much supports the implementation of pedagogies that accept and support diversity, and requires that gender competences should be an integral part of any education at university level and professional trainings for educators. Education institutions at all levels need to provide gender equality and to dismantle and deconstruct gender related prejudices and assumptions. Better support for gender research is needed to develop better insight into the long term impacts of particular gender concepts on children and adolescents' educational opportunities.

4. Gender Segregation in the Labour Market

Agnes Parent-Thirion from the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (EUROFOUND) presented some key findings of the 5th Eurofound working conditions survey (EWCS)⁴. The data showed that the EU member states vary a lot in their performance on gender equality in the labour market. Gender segregation in Europe is most visible due to the fact of, low proportion of women in supervisory positions; a gap between men and women on the working hours of the household; a gap between men and women on the working time duration; a gap between men and women on the number of hours spent on paid and unpaid work.



⁴ <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2011/82/en/1/EF1182EN.pdf>

*Agnes Parent-Thirion presented key findings of gender segregation
in the labour market in the 5th Eurofound Working Conditions Survey (EWCS)*

Data also showed a little progress in female participation in the labour market. However, only 63% of women are in work compared to 76% of men. Sectors can still be classified according to gender. Male sectors, with a male employment rate over 60%, are for example transport and construction, and female sectors, with a female employment rate over 60%, are in contrast health and education. Gender division also exists at workplace level. Hairdressing is globally a mixed gender occupation but in practice women work in female hairdresser's shops and male hairdressers work in male hairdresser's shops. The example illustrates gender segregation in two levels: gender segregation in sectors and gender segregation in occupations. Finally, workers with supervisory responsibilities are more commonly men, and women supervisors tend to be at a lower level hierarchy than their male colleagues. Parent-Thirion concluded that even though women are highly educated their achieved skills do not necessarily pay off in the labour market.

5. Working Groups

The participants exchanged in working groups their national trade unions' good practices in promoting gender sensitiveness in national education systems. The participants suggested that challenging gender stereotypes in the education system and mitigating gender segregation in the labour market should start in teacher training institutions. Unions should also try to influence changes in the curricula where certain gender prejudices exist. Gender stereotypes are not only (re)produced in schools but culture and history have a great impact on the perception of men and women.

The participants from the Peer Learning Activity agreed that overcoming gender stereotypes in education starts with teachers' attitude towards the perception of gender expectations. The society in general also constructs gender expectations and stereotypes which influence how people perceive gender in specific sectors and occupations. They concluded that gender stereotypes indeed can be challenged by teachers, e.g. with new teaching approaches, since the education system has a great impact on the way students are socialised. Challenging gender expectations and stereotypes in the education system will help boys and girls to develop a wider perspective on their career paths and choices in the labour market.



*The participants in a working group sharing good practices
and ideas on how to mitigate gender stereotypes in the
education sector*





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