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EUROPEAN TRADE UNION COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION  
COMITE SYNDICAL EUROPEEN DE L'EDUCATION

Report of the ETUCE  
Training Seminar on

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

10 May 2012, Brussels



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*« Rapport de l'Activité d'apprentissage entre pairs pour les responsables des syndicats  
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 Unions 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. The traditional role models of women as mothers/housewives and men as bread winners are a major contributing factor to women's career breaks, unemployment, and their overrepresentation in part-time or atypical employment forms. The education systems play an important role in shaping such gender stereotypes. This concerns all levels of education, from pre-school to higher education and vocational education and training (VET). Stereotypes are formed through interaction in the classroom, the teacher's intervention, teaching methods, the portrayal of women and men in schoolbooks and in other teaching materials, the learning environment, as well as the curriculum content.

The Training Seminar was held on 10 May 2012 in Brussels to raise awareness on gender mainstreaming and on how to improve gender sensitiveness in teaching with a view to mitigate gender stereotypes in students' choice of career paths. It provided the 35 participants from 17 countries in Europe with knowledge and information on gender sensitive working environments and allowed for the exchange of national best practices as regards gender mainstreaming in education.

The Training Seminar took place in connection with the Peer Learning Activity on this topic that ETUCE organised in the frame of the project *Teacher Trade Unions Challenging Gender Stereotypes and Gender Segregation in the Labour Market*.

## 2. Background

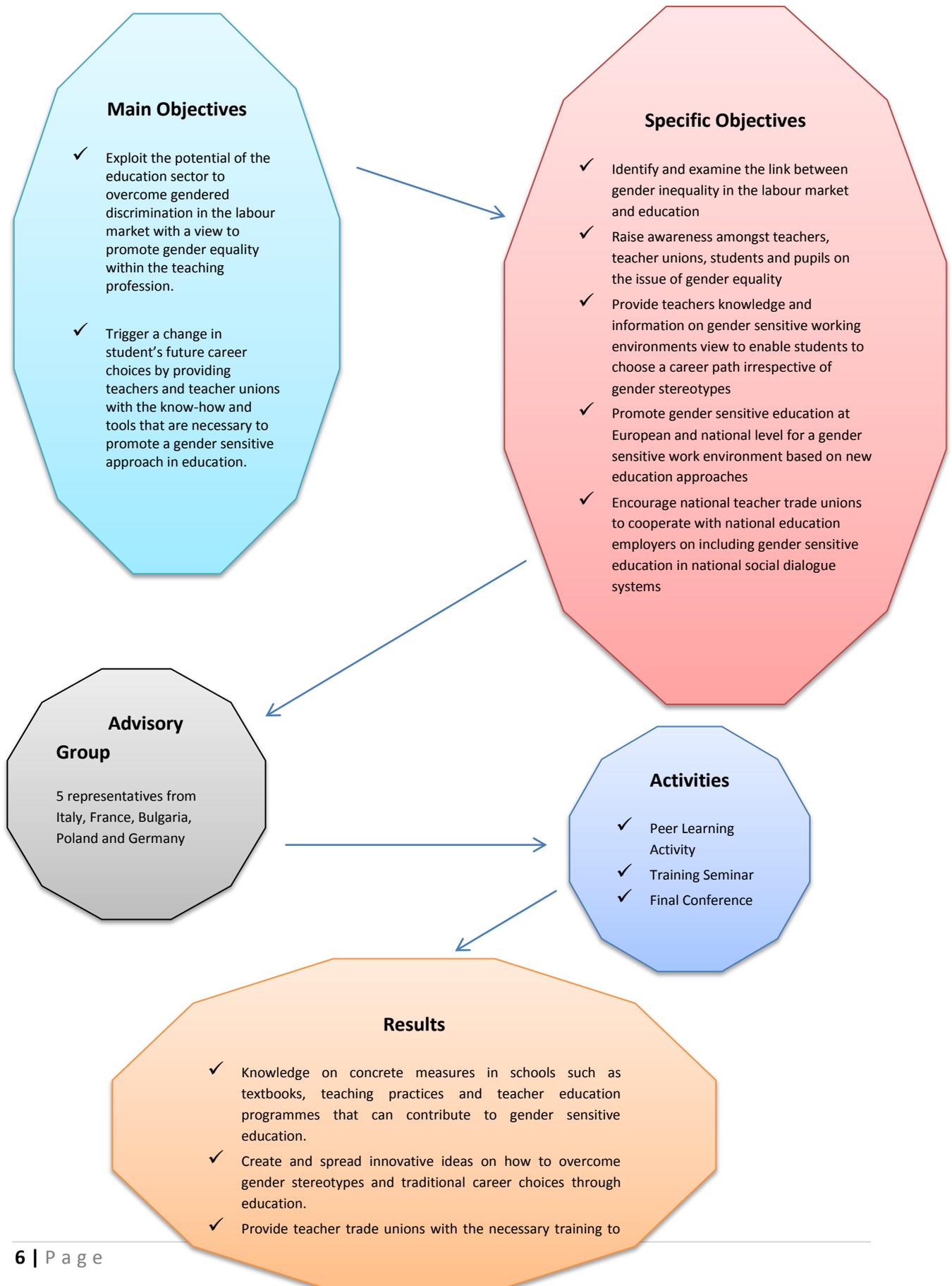
*Teacher trade union actions challenging gender stereotypes and gender segregation in the labour market* aims to develop guidelines on how teacher unions can mitigate gender stereotypes and gender segregation in the labour market. This project continues the work of the former project which aimed to improve the awareness of national teacher unions on major EU policies and legal instruments for action in the field, while helping them with the implementation of the European social partners' instruments on gender equality in the education sector. The project also assessed the actual status of gender equality in the education sector and within teacher unions, resulting in the ETUCE Action Plan on Gender equality within teacher trade unions' structures and in the teaching profession<sup>1</sup>. The Action Plan was adopted by the ETUCE Executive Board in 2010 and includes concrete recommendations for ETUCE and national teacher Unions' action on how to achieve gender equality within the unions and in the teaching profession.



<sup>1</sup> The ETUCE action plan can be found at:

[http://etuce.homestead.com/EUprojects/Gender/ETUCE\\_action\\_plan\\_gender\\_equality\\_EN\\_final.pdf](http://etuce.homestead.com/EUprojects/Gender/ETUCE_action_plan_gender_equality_EN_final.pdf)

### 3. Overview of Project Implementation



#### **4. Aim and Project Objectives**

The project aims to fully exploit the potential of the education sector to overcome gender discrimination in the labour market with a view to promote more gender equality within the teaching profession and to trigger a change in students' future career choices by providing teachers/unions with the know-how that is necessary to promote a gender sensitive approach in education. Moreover, the project seeks to trigger a change in student's future career choices by providing teachers and teacher unions with the know-how and tools that are necessary to promote a gender sensitive approach in education

The specific objectives are to:

- ✓ Identify the link between gender inequality in the labour market and education; reproduction of gender stereotypes in the learning environment that lead to gender stereotypical education results/career choices.
- ✓ Raise awareness amongst teachers, teacher unions, students & pupils on gender equality (roles, labour market participation, legislation, pay gap, women in decision-making) and on how to improve gender sensitiveness in teaching to mitigate gender stereotypes in students' (future employees) choice of career paths
- ✓ Change teaching approaches by improving teachers' attitude on gender stereotypes and their personal competences; hereby reaching all young people in education/training in view of entering all levels and sectors of the labour market
- ✓ Promote gender sensitive education at European/national level for a gender sensitive work environment based on new education approaches.
- ✓ Encourage cooperation between national teacher trade unions and education employers on including gender sensitive education in national social dialogue systems/collective agreements by feeding the project outcomes into the European Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for Education.

#### **5. Advisory Group**

To ensure the successful achievement of the project targets, an advisory group supervises the project implementation. This project advisory group comprises of five representatives of national teacher unions from five EU countries (Italy, Bulgaria, France, Germany and Poland) ensuring a geographical balance and respecting the countries' varying regional experiences within the field. The advisory group members provide their professional experience within the field of gender issues both nationally and at a European level. Most of the advisory group members are also members of the ETUCE Equality Committee.



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GEW, Germany



Kounka Damianova,  
SEB, Bulgaria



Odile Cordelier, SNES-  
FSU, France



Joëlle Casa, CGIL, Italy



Dorota Obidniak, ZNP,  
Poland

## 6. Summary of the Training Seminar

Education plays crucial role in challenging stereotypes and in overcoming gender segregation in the labour market. The economic crisis is not an excuse for not focussing on and dealing with gender issues. Inequalities between men and women might be aggravated due to the economic crisis. Hence, there is an even stronger reason for teacher unions to support gender equality.

### EU actions and legislation on gender equality

Lucie Davoine from the European Commission, DG JUST, gave a presentation gender principles and legislation on gender equality. She also presented data on gender performances and gender attainment rates in education in the EU. Gender equality is a fundamental right in the EU and also a prerequisite to fulfil the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy<sup>2</sup>. A total of 13 directives found the legal basis for gender equality in the EU e.g. the directives on equal pay, protection of pregnant workers, maternity leave or on parental leave.

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<sup>2</sup> The Europe 2020 strategy focuses e.g. on inclusive growth and to increase the employment rate for especially women. Find the document “Europe 2020 – a strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF>

The data showed that women often study longer than men and that 59% of graduates in the EU are women<sup>3</sup>. There are more boys among early school leavers and PISA results clearly show many gender differences in their performance in reading and mathematics. In reading, girls significantly outscore boys in all EU countries. In contrast, boys outscore girls in mathematics<sup>4</sup>. Gender segregation also appears at university level where women and men choose different fields of study. Only 26% of graduates in engineering, manufacturing and construction are women and more than 75% female graduates study health and welfare degrees<sup>5</sup>. Davoine concluded that even when women complete studies in sciences, engineering, technology or mathematics, they are less likely than men to work in these sectors. Moreover, even though there is a directive<sup>6</sup> covering equal pay, the gender pay gap still exists. Women are discriminated against as women's work remains undervalued, the so-called glass ceiling on women's pay continues to exist, as do the unequal balance of work and private life, traditions and stereotypes, and segregation in the labour market. Hence, it leads to lower pensions and higher risk of poverty for women.



Lucie Davoine from the European Commission, DG JUST,  
presented principles of gender equality in the EU

At the end of her presentation Davoine highlighted some of the initiatives taken by the European Commission in order to promote gender equality. The 2010 Women's Charter<sup>7</sup> was presented and aimed at inserting the gender perspective into all policies from 2010-2014. In line with the Women's Charter the European Commission adopted its five-year strategy for the promotion of equality between women and men in Europe<sup>8</sup>. The strategy aims in particular to make better use of women's

<sup>3</sup> The data are to be found at:

[http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_OFFPUB/KS-QA-09-037/EN/KS-QA-09-037-EN.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-QA-09-037/EN/KS-QA-09-037-EN.PDF)

<sup>4</sup> In this case the PISA results are from students of the age of 15.

<sup>5</sup> The data can be found at: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/56/58/37864173.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Council Directive 75/117/EEC of 10 February 1975 on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women. The directive can be found at:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31975L0117:en:HTML>

<sup>7</sup> The Commission's declaration "A Women's Charter" can be found at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/commission\\_2010-2014/president/news/documents/pdf/20100305\\_1\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/president/news/documents/pdf/20100305_1_en.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> The five year strategy (2010-2015) for equality between women and men can be found at:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0491:FIN:EN:PDF>

potential, thereby contributing to the EU's overall economic and social goals. Finally, it translates the principles set out in the European Commission's Women's Charter into specific measures, ranging from getting more women into company boardrooms to the goal of tackling gender-based violence. Moreover, the European Commission launched the European Gender Pay Gap information campaign in 2009 which raises awareness on equal pay and the gender pay gap in companies.

### **Creating a Supportive School Environment for Girls**

Carolyn Hannan, Associate Professor at the University of Lund, Sweden, held a presentation on the situation of girls in schools. Most of the examples given were taken from gender research in Swedish schools but contributed nevertheless to provide knowledge on the (re)production of gender stereotypes in schools in general and can therefore be used in a wider context. According to Hannan, education is one of the most critical steps towards equality with the potential for the increasing recognition of women's and girls' rights and for strengthening their capacity to address discrimination, and inequality in different aspects of their lives. However, educational processes can, in contrast, also reinforce stereotypes rather than challenge them, for example in curricula, textbooks and other teaching materials as well as in teaching methods.

A consequence of these stereotypes is for example that girls who are interested in science or mathematics and those who seek careers in male dominated areas, may be labelled by their peers as 'unfeminine' or 'nerds' and may face disempowering harassment as a result. Such stereotypes may also result in 'gifted' girls not receiving the necessary support of teachers to attain their full potential.



*Carolyn Hannan focused on the consequences  
of gender stereotypes for girls in education*

Hannan stated that one of the direct consequences of such stereotypes can be seen in gender imbalances in subject specialisation at secondary and tertiary levels, and, in the longer term, in career choices. In some countries, women constitute less than one third of students in science and over two thirds in humanities, social sciences and health fields, which is then reflected in the labour market.



Studies in schools have shown that teachers in general give more attention to boys, often because boys are seen (and accepted) as more ‘demanding’ and as having a ‘tendency to misbehave if bored’. The related stereotype that girls are “good” and “well-behaved” has led to a disturbing practice by some teachers to use ‘good’ girls as buffers among boys who are difficult to control. This is a significantly disempowering practice which exposes girls to considerable harassment and reduces their capacity to participate fully in the classroom.

### Strategies for Combating Stereotypes in Education

In the last part of her presentation, Hannan focused on common strategies for combating stereotypes in education. By far the most common strategy to address stereotypes in education has been the revision of educational curricula and teaching materials. Considerable effort has been made to identify negative stereotypes, encourage positive representation of diverse gender roles for both women and men, and avoid stereotypical depictions of families, occupations and activities. Moreover, common actions to improve education materials include increasing the numbers of women and girl characters by portraying role-reversals showing both boys and girls and women and men in atypical roles and functions; increasing the portrayal of women in the public sphere in decision-making and leadership roles and by placing greater emphasis on women’s intellectual and professional capabilities.

A recent study<sup>9</sup> that Hannan presented suggested that one way to teach gender equality at tertiary level is to use stereotypes as the entry-point by encouraging students to understand their own biases and prejudices and use of restrictive stereotypes. This would allow students to better understand how stereotypical thinking in law drafting, advocacy and adjudication can open up for or end opportunities for equality, and would highlight the importance and value of moving beyond categorical or stereotypical thinking.

### Working Groups

The participants focused in three working groups on how to incorporate a clear gender dimension in education at national level. To fulfil this objective the working group focused on three aspects of institutional, legislative and curricula changes.

**Institutional changes** concern the structure of schools; classes, subjects being taught, and the function of the school. They also refer to a change in the schools’ environment. Some unions had taken up different initiatives such as meetings with Ministries of Education and other stakeholders to influence institutional changes. However, some institutional changes are more difficult to reach e.g. changing the schools’ function. Changing the school environment can indeed be instigated by raising teachers’ awareness on teaching methods that might produce and reproduce gender stereotypes. Encouraging students to understand their own biases, prejudices and their use of restrictive stereotypes, as stressed in the presentation by Carolyn Hannan, would also provide a clear gender dimension in education.

The working group agreed that unions indeed have an impact on **legislative changes** that can provide a clear gender dimension. Legislative changes will increase awareness of teachers, parents

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<sup>9</sup> Rebecca Cook: *Teaching gender through stereotypes* (2011). Oklahoma City University Law Review 503



and the school community but it will also take time to implement such changes as a natural dimension in schools. The slow uptake of legislative changes is closely linked to the fact that gender stereotypes are often reproduced because of existing habits of teachers and in society at large. It can be difficult to alter these habits immediately but legislative changes will indeed create an awareness of teachers' practices and methods and therefore challenge gender stereotypes in the education sector.

Gender stereotypes are often (re)produced in the **curricula**. Therefore it is of great interest to change some of the content in the curricula in order to create a clear gender dimension and to overcome gender stereotypes. Initiatives to meet with stakeholders and other relevant partners should be taken up by unions with a view to make concrete curricula changes that consider a clear gender dimension, and could be implemented in the regular school routine.

### **Conclusion**

Many links can be drawn between gender stereotypes in the education system and gender segregation in the labour market. The knowledge exchanged in the Training Seminar will feed into concrete guidelines on how to challenge and mitigate gender stereotypes in the education sector with the ultimate aim to reduce gender segregation in the labour market.

These guidelines will be discussed and validated at the final Project Conference in Warsaw, Poland, on 11-12 September 2012.

## **7. Abbreviations**

ETUCE – European Trade Union Committee for Education

EU – European Union

PISA – Programme for International Student Assessment

VET – Vocational Education and Training





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