

Mind the Gap – Step up for gender equality

Recommendations to build a gender inclusive educational environment

In many EU member states stereotypical gender perceptions influence the education, profession, and lives of young people. Gender stereotypes are pervasive and constitute an obstacle in the achievement of gender equality. They don't only cause disparities in access to work or education, but also fuel gender-based violence in all its forms, and intersect with other discrimination and violence based on social categories such as religion, race, socio-economic background, disability, gender identity and sexual orientation, preventing young people from living in an inclusive and safe society.

Partners of the Mind the Gap project (2021-22) have gathered recommendations to build a gender inclusive educational environment through training, mutual exchange, advocacy and communication activities implemented together with teachers; professionals-educators of non-formal systems; students of primary and secondary schools; students, professors and researchers of universities; networks and organisations working to promote gender equality in the educational context and to tackle gender based violence. The recommendations were finalized together with a group of experts¹ within an international virtual exchange meeting that took place on the 3rd of November 2022 and presented during the international advocacy conference "Promoting Gender Equality in the classrooms and beyond" (16th of November 2022).

Recommendations

To the European Union

- Complete the EU accession to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) and its full implementation in all Member States, particularly with reference to Article 14 on the inclusion of teaching material on issues such as gender equality, non-stereotyped gender roles, gender-based violence against women and the right to personal integrity.

¹ The group was composed of teachers, non-formal educators, parents, university professors and researchers and representatives of organisations (Associação igualdade.pt, EL*C - EuroCentralAsian Lesbian* Community, European Students' Union, OII Europe, Parteciparte, Plan International, Scosse), which partners wish to thank for their contribution.

- Ensure full implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025², the European Education Area³ and the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025⁴ and the EU Anti-Racism action plan⁵ to achieve freedom from any form of discrimination, including based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics in all spheres of education and training.
- Ensure the constant monitoring of a gender balance in education and training by implementing tools such as the Updated Skills Agenda for Europe⁶, and the Council recommendation on vocational education and training⁷, breaking gender and discriminatory stereotypes in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields.
- Scale up long-term, flexible investment and funding (including through Erasmus+, CERV) for organisations working to address gender stereotypes and promoting gender equality in formal and non-formal educational contexts and sustaining national efforts to target specific groups and specific intersections (e.g. rural areas, minorities).

To Member States

- Ensure full compliance with the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) particularly in reference to equal opportunities in education and professional (Articles 10 and 11) and the Istanbul Convention (particularly Article 14).
- Include comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in all grades of school, in line with the guidelines of WHO⁸, UNESCO⁹ and with the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, and publish and disseminate guides for teachers on the correct implementation of CSE.

² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0152>

³ <https://education.ec.europa.eu/about-eea/the-eea-explained>

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0698>

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/a_union_of_equality_eu_action_plan_against_racism_20_2025_en.pdf

⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223&langId=en>

⁷ <https://education.ec.europa.eu/about-eea/the-eea-explained>

⁸ WHO Regional Office for Europe and BZgA (2010). 'Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe: A framework for policy makers, educational and health authorities and specialists'. <https://www.icmec.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/WHOStandards-for-Sexuality-Education-in-Europe.pdf>

⁹ UNESCO (2018). 'International technical guidance on sexuality education: an evidence-informed approach'. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260770/>

- Collaborate systematically with civil society organisations and NGOs that have specific expertise on the development and implementation of comprehensive guidelines on gender education.
- Provide comprehensive guidelines on gender equality to textbook publishers and enforce their application.
- Introduce compulsory training on gender education and intersectionality¹⁰ for all teachers of primary, secondary and pre-school on how to address and overcome gender stereotypes, how to promote gender equality and to prevent gender-based violence.
- Dedicate, for each level of education, a part of the school curriculum to gender equality including, but not limited to, increasing knowledge on sexual health and reproductive rights, sexuality and affectivity, consent, gender-based violence (including female and intersex genital mutilation), LGBTQIA + issues, racism.
- Introduce Gender Studies in higher education and include gender education as a curricular subject in university courses related to education and work with minors.
- Avoid vertical and horizontal gender segregation, implement the provisions of the Council of the EU Resolution on European cooperation in education and training.
- Investigate risk factors for Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) people and address specific needs with a gender sensitive perspective to overcome the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on vulnerable groups.

To Schools

- Develop effective internal policies and protocols to prevent and respond to bullying and harassment, gender-based violence (including cyberviolence), racism and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and/or sex characteristics.
- Provide safe spaces for everyone and encourage the redesigning of common spaces with a participatory approach (e.g. avoiding imposing binary dress codes,

¹⁰ Intersectionality is a concept first identified by the black feminist bell hooks and later coined by African American professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to describe how race, class and gender “intersect” with one another and overlap. Intersectionality is a framework to help understand marginalised people’s situation and challenges. If used only by itself, intersectionality has no power to lead to change. Therefore, while intersectionality is a good learning tool, it must not be considered as a solution in itself. It is a crucial lens of understanding; but this understanding must be followed by actions to be effective

including peer support services/ peer counselors that are able to use gender sensitive approaches, providing gender neutral toilets, etc.).

- Include menstrual health¹¹ as a topic addressed in school and ensure menstrual hygiene management (provision of free menstrual hygiene materials, convenient facilities to dispose of them, etc.).
- Institute continuous training for teachers and activities for students to promote gender equality and gender inclusive education, with an intersectional approach, as well as comprehensive sexuality education, consent and LGBTQIA+ issues education, with a view to preventing gender-based violence.
- Organise activities for students on gender issues with civil society, associations and NGOs that have a specific expertise on gender equality, women's rights and LGBTQI+ issues (workshops, assemblies, theatre shows, etc.).
- Organise activities and meetings with parents and families to keep them updated on the school activities and the topics addressed, including gender education, and to promote gender equality in the family and domestic spaces.
- Provide teachers with improved and increased structural and formal channels to share good practices for the promotion of gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence in schools.

To Teachers

- Use gender neutral¹² language that takes into consideration the range of diverse gender identities and gender realities.
- Mainstream a gender lens in the curricula of all subjects by including, for example, a more gender-diverse history curriculum or a more gender balanced and diverse list of authors in literature and try to involve colleagues (including STEM and sports)

¹¹ Menstrual health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in relation to the menstrual cycle. Achieving menstrual health implies that women, girls, and all people who experience a menstrual cycle, throughout their life-course, are able to achieve a set of elements, including accurate access to education and information on menstruation and menstrual cycle, access to affordable menstrual materials, an environment free from menstrual-related stigma or discomfort, the freedom to decide how to participate in all spheres of life. For a more comprehensive definition see: <https://period.org/uploads/Global-Glossary-for-the-Menstrual-Movement-v1.3.pdf>

¹² Gender-neutral language is a generic term covering the use of non-sexist language, inclusive language or gender-fair language. The purpose of gender-neutral language is to avoid word choices which may be interpreted as biased, discriminatory or demeaning by implying that one sex or social gender is the norm. Using gender-fair and inclusive language also helps reduce gender stereotyping, promotes social change and contributes to achieving gender equality.

in the process of promoting gender equality, to develop interdisciplinary activities and foster change at school level. Promote mutual learning and spaces to discuss the implementation of activities to deconstruct gender stereotypes and gender norms in the educational context.

- Ensure a safe space for all students, carrying out participatory activities, providing students with a proper time to express their views, and facilitating these by teaching respect for everyone's opinion and acceptance of diversity, especially with regards to gender identity, gender expression and any assumptions about one's pronouns.
- Avoid choosing textbooks using stereotyped images and sentences and prefer books that refer to diversity (with regards to gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, sex characteristics, religion, disability status, class, geographical background, migrant status, race). If these books don't exist, pressure publishers to revise their publications and in the meantime use the stereotypes in the books to start a conversation in the class.

About the project

"Mind the Gap. Step up for gender equality" is a project (2021/2022) co-funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme, coordinated by AIDOS – Associazione Italiana Donne per lo Sviluppo (Italy) in partnership with APF - Associação para Planeamento Familiar (Portugal), END FGM European Network (based in Belgium, working at EU level) and Medicos del Mundo (Spain).

The Mind the Gap project aims at tackling gender stereotypes in education in Italy, Spain and Portugal, thus reducing the influence of gender expectations on young people's choices in education, work and life. The project's specific objective is to strengthen the capacity of professionals and other adults in contact with children to identify and address gender stereotypes in education.

Project coordinated by:

Partners:

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