



**Building Gender Equality
From the Start**

**Best Practices in Achieving Gender and
Gender Related Access and Use of Digital
Tools Equality in ECEC**



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

EC	European Commission
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care ¹
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
EU	European Union
EU FRA	European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency
GENDERBEST	Building Gender Equality from the Start
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

¹According to the European Commission, it refers to any regulated arrangement that provides education and care for children from birth to compulsory primary school age, which may vary across Europe. It includes centre and family-day care, privately and publicly funded provision, pre-school and pre-primary provision.

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Introduction

Children's experience of childhood and play is becoming more gendered and polarised between girls and boys, with products such as toys, books, online resources and clothes increasingly being produced and marketed along gender lines². Academic research, including the work of Dr Nancy Lombard from Glasgow Caledonian University³, highlights the negative impact on all children of gender stereotyping and the important role that Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) can have in positively promoting gender equality.

As part of promoting gender equality, several partners in GENDERBEST project have already been working on providing support to the ECEC professionals through various types of training (SEQUENCES project – concentrating on the quality assurance in general in kindergartens and preschools, ECD+ - concentrating on supporting ECEC professionals in the development of better relationship with parents and caregivers which leads to the discussions on many issues with children, roles of male and female role models and Children's Rights Up! (CRUP) – prevention of child sexual abuse where talking about girls' and boys' private parts, gender and setting boundaries regardless of the gender and relationships is the focus).

Within GENDERBEST, we have developed a self-assessment tool for spotting one's (un)conscious bias related to gender, gender roles and gender-related expectations. This tool for ECEC professional as well as for parents and caregivers has been tested in Serbia, Slovakia and Italy and the results have clearly shown that, whilst both types of very important adults in any young child's life, agree that gender equality is a good idea, there is a need, on one side, for advice and guidance and, on the other of more competences on how to support gender equality and avoid harmful stereotyping in practice. This Collection of best practices has been developed to offer practical and helpful tips on how to promote gender equality in an accessible way. We have arranged the content per quality area as defined in the European Quality Framework for ECEC – access, workforce, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation, management and budgeting, and prompted by the consequences of Covid-19 related which included extensive need for frequent use of digital resources during the lock-downs, we included examples of achieving gender balance in use of digital technology in early years. In addition to this Collection of best practice examples from a range of different settings, we also advise on other practice resources available to kindergartens and preschools use, such as children's books, toys and activities, training and further reading.

This toolkit has been developed for everyone in the early years' settings and it will also be helpful for

² Peer Toy Play as a Gateway to Children's Gender Flexibility: The Effect of (Counter) Stereotypic Portrayals of Peers in Children's Magazines, in Sex Roles Journal of Research, Spinner L, Cameron L, Calogero R, 2018. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6096659/>

³ Young people's views on violence against women, Dr Nancy Lombard, Lecturer, Napier University, Edinburgh, 2012: <https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/videos/young-peoples-views-violence-against-women-nancy-lombard>

parents, and anyone working with young children. It explains the importance of challenging gender stereotyping in the early years and provides ideas and examples of existing examples of best practice from Serbia, Slovakia, Italy and across Europe.

The purpose of this Toolkit

Already at the age of two, children can not only name main gender groups, but also start creating first stereotypes related to gender. Firm bias towards child's own gender group and other groups is visible around the age of five and it shows in its most rigid form at that age (Martin and Ruble, 2010). Gender stereotypes are rather resilient to changes in the early years and it takes intensive long-term work to lessen them (De Lisi и Johns, 1984; Pardeck и Pardeck, 1985; Ayers и Ayers, 1989; Swadener, 1988), although new research shows that it is more positive bias towards one's own gender group than the negative attitude towards other groups at this age. Children also begin to learn about gender roles and expectations, and pick up messages from their significant adults about what is perceived as 'good' for boys and girls. They learn from everything they see, everyone they hear and everything people around them do. This shapes how they see themselves and others as they grow up and influences expressions of identity.

It is never too early to question what is traditionally expected of boys and girls in our society. In fact, doing so from a very young age helps to protect children from the negative consequences of inequality and discrimination as they grow into adults.

Survey conducted in Serbia, Slovakia and Italy found that nine out of ten parents all kindergarten/preschool teachers agreed that it was important to treat boys and girls the same in early childhood. Yet traditional gender stereotypes remain common in our society and the lack of awareness about how to challenge these harmful patterns is a fundamental obstacle to providing young children with an equal start in life.

Practitioners are in a unique and important position to influence children's development and simultaneously, influence parents and caregivers. They also have the capacity to create environments that encourage equal and respectful relationships, break down traditional gender norms and promote gender equality to ensure that children are free from limiting gender stereotypes.

What have we learnt from Self-Assessment?

Serbia

ECEC settings

In Serbia, all 69 respondents to the Self-assessment survey among educators and preschool teachers were women and around 79% of them answered that they were familiar with the concept of gender and gender equality mostly referring to the stereotypes related to "male" and "female jobs, colours, toys, and sports. Around 86% of them also stated that they could identify gender discrimination and

act against it to some or high extent.

Around two thirds of them answered also that they use gender sensitive language in working with children to a higher extent or frequently, but 45% answered that they don't feel comfortable using it. However, only 40.6% claimed that they use inclusive material and activities.

Around one third of the respondents among preschool teachers stated that they do not avoid gender specific tasks in the daily routines and although around 70% claiming that they avoid such tasks, 10% among them could not name any example for doing so.

Regarding the use of digital tools and devices, almost all of them claimed that they use them and use them equally, but some stated that they use different resources with boys and girls.

When asked about the extent to which educational practices lead to future segregation in terms of distinguishing between men's and women's work, about two thirds of the respondents said that in their opinion, practices in this age group do not affect it..

When asked to state elements missing in the framework curriculum that would ensure gender equality, almost all responded that framework curriculum is good and that the interpretation is where improvements are needed.

When asked if they equally include parents and other family members into education and activities with children, around 59% responded that they include them equally, but 49% include mainly mothers.

When asked to what extent the higher number of women in ECEC settings and in early childhood education in general contributes to reinforcing gender bias and stereotypes, two thirds of all respondents also stated that in their opinion, it contributes.

What is needed in terms of further training, according to the respondents, it is about more awareness raising about stereotypes and prejudice, more training to strengthen teachers' capacities to get out of their comfort zone, talk more about gender equality and include parents and families more into dialogue on gender equality. They also stated the need for improving skills to choose more adequately material, activities, books in this regard, but also for equal approach to boys and girls.

Parents

There were 100 parents who responded to the Self-Assessment questionnaire, 90% of them being women. When asked whether they knew about gender and gender equality concept, 83% answered that they know or know a lot about it and the examples they stated for gender-based stereotypes were mainly about male/female jobs, salary levels for the same jobs, family duties, choice of sports, toys, colours.

When asked if they try to avoid stereotypical division of duties of house chores, 82% said they do whilst 18% stated that they are not trying to break the cycle of traditional job divisions per gender at

home.

When asked if they feel comfortable when offering children the toys in a way that counters gender stereotypes, 71% answered yes and 29% said they don't feel comfortable in this. In their answer to the question why they do not feel comfortable, majority said that it should be up to children to choose with what they would like to play and the most important factor is the happiness of children in play, whilst some answered that it is not "natural" that "normal" that children play with toys "made for other gender", or that they do not mind this sometimes to happen, but would not like if it turned into a child's "habit".

When asked if they allow their children to use digital devices, 8% said no, 5% said rarely and for short period of time. TV, cartoons, music or Wii device and game consoles 6% of parents allow their children to use, whilst 29% allow the use of tablet, 39% allow OC and smart phones allow 78% of parents. There is no significant difference in whether any of these devices are allowed to boys or girls:

Age of the child	boys	girls
0-1	1	0
1-2	3	2
2-3	6	6
3-4	13	11
4-5	15	18
5-6	17	18
Later	38	32

Slovakia

ECEC settings

The results of the self-assessment questionnaire on gender equality (section 1) show that while ECEC practitioners in Slovakia generally recognise the importance of promoting gender equality, they have varying levels of knowledge and confidence in addressing gender issues in their work. The ECEC practitioners who responded to the survey assessed their knowledge and familiarity with the concept and practices related to gender issues as follows 43% reported a high level of knowledge in this area, 37% a medium level and 20% a rather low level. Respondents expressed that they consider themselves capable to identify and act against gender discrimination. Only 3% of respondents reported a very low level of ability in this area. Furthermore, 82% of the respondents indicated they are able to recognise acts of negative gender comparisons or gender name-calling, teasing and harassment.

In the area of practice and workplace (section 2), most of the surveyed ECEC practitioners think that boys and girls in the ECEC setting are not very much affected by gender stereotypes. As regards the use of gender sensitive language, the respondents mentioned the need for more discussion. Some of them expressed that it is not natural in the Slovak language to use both male and female forms of some words - such as professions, because the masculine form is perceived as a gender-neutral variant (that can be used for both men and women). When asked about gender-inclusive language, most practitioners felt that they used it sufficiently. They also felt that they use both male and female role models in their daily practice, giving examples of male and female doctors, judges, policemen and policewomen, although for some professions they tend to use a certain gender more often. When describing adult occupations, the majority of respondents indicated that they take care to use both male and female forms of the occupation. In this context it is important to note that in Slovakia, there is currently a woman holding the function of a president, and it was also the most frequently mentioned example in this context. Practitioners also confirmed that they use activities and materials that are inclusive and give equal representation to boys and girls. In terms of gender bias in the educational process, when asked about the technological equipment available in the ECEC setting, they stated that they let boys and girls use the equipment equally.

We also found that, from the perspective of some practitioners, boys show more interest in technology, some stated that they let boys and girls use the technology to the same extent, but that they use it differently. The majority of practitioners reported that they avoid gender specific tasks, but some mentioned that children sometimes naturally use different toys depending on their gender. However, they feel that they encourage the same positive behaviours in both boys and girls and do not make distinctions in the type of positive behaviours they expect from children in general. When asked about the extent to which educational practices lead to future segregation in terms of distinguishing between men's and women's work, most respondents tended to think that they had little influence in this area. Educational institutions have a gender sensitive curriculum according to most respondents. The family members most involved by ECEC practitioners in children's education and activities are predominantly mothers. When asked to what extent the higher number of women in ECEC settings and in early childhood education in general contributes to reinforcing gender bias and stereotypes, respondents mostly indicated that it has a rather large impact in this area. Most respondents haven't personally experienced discrimination in the workplace because of gender but discrimination because of age was mentioned.

Based on the results of the questionnaire, we identified several areas where more training and support is needed. Among the responses we found the need to address gender issues, including gender stereotypes, gender-based violence and bullying, and strategies to promote gender equality in the classroom and the involvement of fathers. ECEC practitioners generally felt quite confident in addressing gender issues. However, answers to more specific questions suggest there is still very low

recognition of the importance of gender sensitive language and the impact early education might have on developing gender bias. Also, based on the responses collected we came to a conclusion that even those practitioners who declared high awareness about gender roles described gendered behaviour as natural (e.g., natural selection of toys). Overall, these findings suggest that while ECEC practitioners in Slovakia generally recognise the importance of promoting gender equality, there may be a need for more targeted training and support to help them develop the knowledge and skills needed to effectively address gender issues in their work.

Parents

Similar to the responses of practitioners, parents in general declare they understand and promote gender equality. However, they do not tend to confront gender stereotypes intentionally (most of them did not provide examples of effective strategies).

In spite of the general lack of pro-active approach, the analysis of the self-assessment questionnaire and the questionnaire for parents allowed us to collect practices that we consider helpful in the context of the situation in Slovakia.

Italy

ECEC settings

In Italy the majority of the respondents to the self-assessment questionnaire on gender equality were ECEC educators (75%), together with Managers/coordinators (10%), coming almost exclusively from Umbria region. 70% of the overall respondents (20 in total) answered that they are familiar with the concept of gender and Gender Equality, mainly referring to stereotypes linked to female and male colour as well as female and male toys. This kind of gender stereotypes are also reported as source of discriminations they witnessed or personally know throughout their experience. Thus, they feel that they are able to identify and act against gender discrimination. Only 5% of respondents reported a very low level of ability in this area.

In the area of practice and workplace (section 2), ECEC practitioners mostly think that boys and girls in the ECEC setting are not very much affected by gender stereotypes and this is also confirmed by their capacity to use gender sensitive language (90% of the practitioners responded that is comfortable with gender sensitive language). However, when asked to provide examples about gender sensitive language as well as education practices adopted in the settings, few of them do not respond or do not respond properly.

When describing adult occupations, the majority of respondents indicated that they take care to use both male and female forms of the occupation.

Practitioners also responded that they use activities and materials that are inclusive and give equal representation to boys and girls. In this area, they provided meaningful examples, such as books

focused on male and female parity, care activities for boys, trucks and cars for girls, role-playing offering “typical male” roles to girls and vice versa.

In terms of gender bias in the educational process, when asked about the technological equipment available in the ECEC setting, all the respondents stated that they let boys and girls use the equipment equally. This equal approach is confirmed also when they are encouraging both boys and girls in developing a positive attitude, when they are working with emotions as well as in assigning tasks which are not gender stereotyped. In this case most of them reported the educational practice of offering both to boys and girls cleaning, setting and clearing the table.

However, when asked about the extent to which educational practices lead to future segregation in terms of distinguishing between men's and women's work, most respondents tended to think that they had quite significant influence in this area, although the settings, in the opinion of most respondents, have a gender sensitive curriculum.

The family members most involved by ECEC practitioners in children's education and activities are both the parents for the 70% of the respondents, together with grandparents (15%).

When asked to what extent the higher number of women in ECEC settings and in early childhood education in general contributes to reinforcing gender bias and stereotypes, 60% of the respondents indicated that it has a rather large impact in this area. Most respondents (90%) haven't personally experienced discrimination in the workplace because of gender.

Based on the results of the questionnaire, the most relevant area where ECEC practitioners think they should be further supported through training, was the involvement of father in children education and care, how to more naturally use and promote gender sensitive language, mental and physical development in 0-3 children, practical laboratories with parents on gender equality.

Parents

The survey of parents, shows that the majority of respondents were Italian women. They were overall familiar with the concept of gender and gender equality, trying also to avoid the stereotypical division of housework between girls and boys. They are fully convinced of the importance to ensure a gender equal education to their children. With reference to digital devices and eventual gender differences in offering them to their female or male children, the 81% of respondents consider the devices important, but starting from a higher age.

What are gender prejudice and stereotypes and why do they matter?

What is prejudice?

Prejudice is an opinion held in advance about something, someone or some group without good reason or adequate knowledge or experience. They can be both positive and negative.

Often such prejudgements are harmless, making our world seem more manageable. However, such prejudgements can be destructive when they happen between individuals or groups of people in such a way as to negatively affect their behaviour towards each other or in dealing with a topic.

Few of us can escape being prejudiced, due both to our family and societal upbringing and our need to belong to a group.

Truly prejudiced people (bigots) do not change how they feel or what they think, even if they are shown evidence to the contrary, or something happens that would normally change a person's mind about an individual, group or issue.

Prejudice is about feelings and beliefs and it can influence our perception. There is a good deal of evidence to show that what we believe actually influences the way we see an event (i.e. people are not usually prejudiced because of what they see and hear, but will see or hear people / events differently because of what they believe.)

What is a stereotype?

Stereotyping is what happens when we so simplify our prejudgements about a certain group or gender of people that we subsequently see all members of that group as having certain, usually negative, traits e.g. seeing all women as over emotional, all men as aggressive.

It is very difficult for us to avoid stereotyping as our culture, our media, and often our politicians encourage stereotypes.

Stereotypes are sometimes composed, as are prejudices, of a certain degree of truth and falsehood. But stereotypes impose all given characteristics on all individuals, regardless of the degree, or particular truth of the allegation.

Prejudices and stereotypes are mainly concerned with feelings and attitudes. Feelings are nurtured through our childhood, community and society, and are often, by the time we reach adulthood, instinctive. While it is important to recognise the extent of our own prejudiced feelings about many groups, it is what we **do** with those feelings as expressed through our resultant **behaviour** and **action** that we need to work at.

What matters most is not whether we find it difficult to have loving feelings towards any group, or even whether we feel prejudiced against them, but whether these feelings determine our behaviour, and the structures and institutions in our society.

Gender stereotyping is a deeply rooted and common issue in all societies and at all the times. Stereotypes perpetuate inequality and reinforce preconceptions about what a person will like, dress or how they will behave, which job they should go for simply because they belong to a particular group. When it comes to gender, stereotypes are based on an assumption that all boys will be the same and like the same things, and all girls will be the same and like the same things. This puts pressure on boys and girls to conform to certain notions of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ which can really limit and restrict young children. Stereotypes influence the activities children engage in, their interests and skills – and, ultimately, the roles they take in society as adults.⁴

Examples of common stereotypes and perceived gender roles:

	BOYS	GIRLS
EXPECTATION	Strong, adventurous, practical, rough, leader, non-emotional ‘boys don’t cry’, like to get dirty, aggressive, independent, dominant, decisive, logical, unemotional, assertive, tough, stoic, active, worldly, boisterous, brave, challenging, loud.	Sensitive, caring, vain, gentle and ‘proper’, weak, dependant, passive, kind, intuitive, submissive, emotional, illogical, talkative, indecisive, giving, quiet.
SOCIALISATION	Toys focused on: action, construction, technology, fighting and conquering. Social reinforcement through: social media, TV, authority figures (parents and carers).	Toys focused on: baby dolls, cooking, princesses, art and craft. Social reinforcement through: social media, TV, authority figures (parents and carers).

⁴ Care Inspectorate Scotland, UK: Gender play in early learning and child care

GENDER ROLES	Men must be physically strong, aggression is an acceptable part of male behaviour, a willingness to take risks (superheroes / action figures).	Women are expected to highly value appearance (being pretty), being compliant (nice, sweet, gentle), submissive roles (princesses).
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Why does avoiding gender stereotyping matter in the early years?

As we know, both prejudice and stereotyping is based on feelings. Children develop sense of recognition of feelings sometime between the age of two and four, so this is the time when it is most important to work on active development of respect for any individual choice which does not harm others or self, and when positive feeling can be developed towards diversity. A gender equality approach means helping children feel good whatever colour they may like around them or to wear, whatever toy they find interest in using and playing with. This also means teaching them to do any household chore in the age-appropriate way regardless of their gender. We want children to be whoever they want to be and make them feel equally comfortable playing football or taking ballet classes and aspiring to a wide variety of careers and pathways.

Preventing gender stereotypes from a young age helps to stop the negative consequences of inequality and discrimination as it can support children grow without limiting their choices by expectations based on their sex. By providing children with environments that encourage non- gendered norms and expectations, children can feel more accepted and celebrated for their individuality. They can broaden their aspirations and be more open to a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents for anything.

Poverty Reduction

Giving children the opportunity to choose to play with and develop interest in whatever they find interesting to do, means that as they go through the educational process afterwards, they can feel free to pursue their talents and interests, feel equally supported to take their education as far and wide as possible and feel comfortable in choosing their careers. Considering the unconscious impact of bias hidden in the spatial and pedagogical organisation of the setting, it is important for educators to actively promote counter-narratives and ad-hoc actions in order to overcome the gender-stereotyped order. When they grow up, they would have much wider choice of employment, keeping the jobs they truly are interested in and consequently live on their own income, be independent and free to make life choices based on their true feelings and not out of need to financially survive.

Preventing violence against women

In Serbia alone, 72% of girls and 64% of boys in the age group 15-29 have reported being exposed to some kind of the gender-based violence (National Youth Council, 2021). EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) showed that across the EU, 44 % of women have experienced psychological violence from a partner in

their lifetime. In European Institute for Gender Equality's (EIGE) research, non-heterosexual women are among the groups that experience psychological violence at a higher rate than the general population. Gender discrimination and inequality are the root causes of violence against women and girls, and despite many actions taken with teenagers and adults, there remain different treatments and attitudes towards men and women. Levels of violence against women are significantly and consistently higher in societies, communities and relationships where there are more traditional, patriarchal views on the roles of men and women. Therefore, it is of crucial importance that both teachers and parents/families of young children have knowledge, skills and confidence throughout all stages of the early childhood of children to challenge rigid and harmful gender stereotypes, promote equal respect and treatment of both boys and girls.

Mental health and wellbeing

Glennon Doyle, a bestselling author, and blogger who has struggled with mental health disorders says that society's ideas of femininity and masculinity make it impossible for men and women to be fully human. The point is that women can be angry and fierce and strong, and men can be tender and vulnerable, but if people are not allowed to be these things, they will hide from one another and suffer. The need to hide true feelings in the societies with strong, traditional gender-based models and stereotypes, start very early – the moment adults start showing negative attitudes to a boy who likes dancing or ballet, or a girl that would like to play football. It is easy for children to perceive these attitudes as “not being good enough”, “not being worth of love and acceptance”. These feelings impact their confidence, feelings of self-worth and overall mental health. Rigid traditional gender norms and gender stereotyping lead also to how peers will accept a child if the child shows interest in something traditionally viewed as appropriate for the other gender. The damaging effects of these early gender stereotypes also have an impact on children later in life. This includes contributing to girls being at risk of leaving school early, dropping out of sports, eating disorders, early pregnancy, exposure to different forms of violence against women which they find acceptable, and depression. Because of our social gender norms, there is a stereotype that boys and men should not express their emotions as it makes them too feminine, weak, and consequently they usually try to appear emotionally strong when facing difficult life events and rarely seek help when facing mental health problems. Research shows that one in five women would consider asking help if facing mental problems, whilst only one in ten men would consider it.

Data show that in an attempt to fulfil the expectations that boys need to be strong, encourages them to engage in risky behaviour at an earlier age, engage in physical violence to a much greater extent than girls and have more problems in managing emotions and conflicts.

Education and Career Choice

As we already stated, gender stereotyping also impacts how children imagine their futures.

Stereotypes are forcing children to see certain options as open to them while others as out of question regardless of their true interest, talent or wish. This early influence has long-term consequences in sports choice, type of school choice and later in career choice. This might take the form of little girls feeling that they cannot be interested in block play and cars or pursue a career as an engineer and little boys feeling like they should not show nurturing skills or pursue a career in kindergarten teacher. Simultaneously, boys may feel that they should not choose ballet or dancing, and girls should never consider football or boxing.

How to challenge gender stereotyping

Start with yourself

It is important to be aware of different ways in which gender may create unequal opportunities or experiences for children in your kindergarten and preschool. We have named just a few serious and long-term effects above. And in the survey whilst testing our tools, majority of professionals and other people working in the ECEC settings have stated that they are aware of the importance of promoting gender equality.

The testing period of the Self-Assessment tools also showed to each and every respondent that there are situations, moments, or discussions when sometimes consciously, but many times unconsciously we all show certain level of prejudice or action based on gender – based stereotypes in ourselves.

That is why the Self-Assessment tool can always be handy to check oneself and one's own reactions. Being aware of our own biases and how they influence our behaviour and noticing stereotypes when they are present is an important step to challenging gender stereotypes. Personal reflection is one of the entry points in a life-long learning process of all people and a great start in identifying ways in which you can begin to break down stereotypes and gender equality in your nursery, kindergarten or preschool.

Assess the ratio of boys and girls in your group

Children learn from everything they see and everyone they are in contact with. They start noticing sex and gender differences around the age of two, but they on their own do not have negative attitude towards a different sex and gender. Developmentally, they go through a phase when they develop positive bias towards “their own group”, but this development is less strict if there are more-less equal numbers of boys and girls in a group. So, it is a good idea to pay attention to how many boys and how many girls you have in a group. You may want to inquire a few things:

- Is there a gender balance at the nursery, kindergarten or preschool level in the number of boys and girls enrolled?
- Is the access to the nursery / kindergarten / preschool is equal for boys and girls?

- How are the groups formed – is there any policy at the nursery / kindergarten / preschool level how the groups are formed?
- Is there a way to influence good gender balance of the boys and girls in your group?

Assess your environment, materials and toys

Look at your surroundings and do a 'gender' assessment of your room and play areas.

- Are certain areas of the room favoured by one gender in particular? If so, talk to the children about why they like or don't like playing there; they may think that a space is 'meant for boys' or 'meant for girls'. If that's the case, talk to the children about why everyone can play in any area and with any toy. You could consider blending areas and resources across the playroom to encourage the use of all areas and parts of the room in a more gender inclusive way.
- Think about how you organise the space. The presence of a 'home corner' and a block area can unconsciously segregate girls and boys. You could decorate the home corner with photos of some famous chefs who are men and some who are women, which may suggest that the area is for both boys and girls. And you can tell children stories about the people whose photos/posters/pictures as chefs you have used to decorate the area.
- Display posters that show adults in non-stereotypical jobs, for example both male and female firefighters, pilots or politicians, ballet dancers, nurses or kindergarten teachers. This will help prompt all children to play in all areas, discussion about jobs in gender non-discriminatory way, but also will assist you as a backdrop for initiating discussions with parents on their gender stereotypes.
- Have more than one 'male' and 'female' doll in the dressing up play space or home corner, as well as dolls of different ages and ethnicities. If you are using Persona dolls in your work with children, make sure that you create at least one pair of persona dolls (a "boy" and a "girl" and the characteristics, family situation and profile for both before introducing this method in your work with children.
- Review materials and images used with children to make sure they include gender diversity, non-stereotypical images and diverse family structures, such as single or same sex parents.
- Check through the didactic material in your setting - toys and books. Do they promote particular ways of being girls or boys/men or women? Children's story books will often feature more male than female characters, or no female characters at all. Add books with positive, strong images of girls as well as with tender, nurturing boy characters. Or create new books with such characters. Aiming for an equal balance will mean all children have a wide range of role models.
- Ensure dressing up and role play props offer variety and are not limited to costumes that may be aimed specifically at boys or girls. Consider moving from providing ready-made superhero or princess

costumes to providing a variety of general clothes that children can use creatively to dress up.

- Have a variety of open-ended resources that are not perceived as gender specific – for example loose parts play, paints and crafts that inspire creativity and excite all children to play with them. Most activities and toys should be ‘gender neutral’.

Assess how you use digital tools with children and their families

It is advisable not to expose young children to too much digital technology, especially when many parents excessively already do it at home. However, we live in digital world and many preschool teachers use at least some digital technology in their work with children. From many surveys, it is evident that most frequently used devices are tablets, mobile phones and most frequently used channels are YouTube, music and cartoon channels in kindergartens and preschools.

Some digital devices do not involve much of the “screen time”, like camera or music itself. When you use any of the digital devices, you may assess:

- Whether both boys and girls show similar interest in digital devices. It may also be that some of them do not have any access to them at home and do not know what they are, or for the lack of confidence in using them, avoid getting near them from fear. If consistently one gender group shows more interest than the other, you may decide to discuss with children the reasons and then devise activities to help them get more familiar and confident in using digital devices.
- Whether certain devices are frequently more used by one gender group. Again, it may present an opportunity to discuss with children what that device can help with, how it works and how to use it.

In all these discussions with young children, and whenever you use any digital device you should be also stressing that it is more fun actively creating games and play than being a passive viewer, you should be using the devices together with children and not letting them use it for a prolonged period of time.

- Assess if all parents/families of the children in your group have access to the chosen digital devices in communication with them. Do they all use email? Do they have Viber/WhatsApp or any other application on their phone and know them? Are they all literate to be able to read your messages? If possible, try to include in digital communication both parents, not just mothers.
- Check if any of the social networks or platforms that you would like to use to share the information is accessible to all children’s parents and families and whether they would need some guidance for using it. Making parents and families familiar and at ease using digital

devices also helps breaking the gender-based inequality in children's use of them.

Check your language and interactions with children

In analysing Self-Assessment responses of ECEC professionals, it was clear that many teachers do not feel comfortable using the gender sensitive language for the professions which have the name suggesting gender bias for those who are performing them (trainer, pilot, firefighter, etc). Different languages provide different opportunities for using gender sensitive language when naming different professions and in some languages, titles of some professions do not sound common when changed to accommodate gender neutral forms.

However, in every day communication, the words we use to communicate also influence how we think and act. Think about whether what you say to the children reinforces gender stereotypes, and if so, make a conscious effort to use more neutral and inclusive language. This will support their understanding that everyone can do or like anything, regardless of gender. Some of the examples that we usually do not think about:

- Try greeting the children with 'hello everyone' or 'children' instead of 'hello boys and girls'.
- Compliment a child's skill by comparing it to both male and female role models.
- Use the same words of flattery for girls and boys.
- Tell boys it's OK to be scared, upset or emotional.
- Tell girls it's OK to get angry and to express this in a healthy way.
- Praise all children when they share and display co-operative behaviour with other children.
- Think about whether you treat girls and boys who are crying the same – why?
- Think about whether you treat disruptive behaviour of boys and girls differently – why?
- Think about whether you interact more with boys or girls – why?
- Talk to children about how they understand gender and sexism. Young children may have strong ideas that a particular toy or behaviour is not appropriate for their gender. When a child says that something is 'not for girls' or 'not for boys' ask them why not and explore this with them.
- Challenge behaviour which shows signs of gender discrimination, for example: using gender as an insult, like telling someone they 'throw like a girl', or 'naughty like a boy'; putting down other children because of their choice of clothing or toy; if someone says 'girls/boys shouldn't/can't do that', ask why?

Turn the challenge into a discussion instead of a criticism. Ask them why they think that way. What's wrong with that toy choice? Explain why stereotypical or prejudiced comments are unacceptable – give

examples of very successful people in that field as adult both men and women. Try to get deeper into why your children feel that way and it can help them to develop critical thoughts of their own. It will help guide them towards seeing things more equally.

- Suggest alternative storylines and ideas for children's play and storytelling. The rigidly defined gender roles in many children's TV programmes and films are very influential. You could suggest new storylines with heroic princesses who rescue princes or cast girls as builders or dragons and boys in caring, mediating and domestic roles.
- For dressing up games, make it clear that all the children can dress up in whatever clothes they choose and avoid assuming that boys only want to be pirates and girls only want to be princesses.

Assess your communication with parents/families/caretakers on gender equality

The results of Self-Assessment survey tools which parents in Serbia, Slovakia and Italy tested, show that there is considerable level of gender-based prejudice and stereotyping in families, although in a declarative manner most of the parents and families state that they are aware of the gender inequalities and that they are willing to actively work on gender equality among their children. Most of the practitioners also stated that they would need more support in meaningful engagement of parents. It is evident that in order to develop the feeling of comfort in doing and playing whatever interests of a child may be, regardless of one's gender, practitioners need to help parents truly understand the impact of gender inequality, to look at the role that parents can play, particularly as the primary caregivers for young children in shaping healthy attitudes towards gender. Their role in developing social attitudes towards gender should be recognised when developing an approach to tackling gender inequality.

Parents and carers need to play an important role by modelling respect and equality in relationships; challenging rigid and harmful gender stereotypes; and promoting diverse interests, opportunities and experiences for all children. To assist this, you can:

- make sure all visitors are aware of your institution's commitment to gender equality and recognise their own role in tackling gender-based stereotypes
- support your colleagues to respond consistently to sexist comments from parents and children. It is important to that the response is genuine and not just an one-off action, but is planned as process.
- make sure no communications with parents and carers imply caring duties are solely women's responsibility. In this regard, you can include both parents or caregivers into teacher/parents social network platforms' groups, communication groups and make sure that the information reaches both parents or caregivers.
- encourage parents and carers to support gender equality by raising their awareness of how

stereotypes limit children in expressing their talents, reaching their full potential and pursuing their interests not just whilst they are children but over their life time.

- don't be discouraged if gender equality teaching contradicts what children learn at home. By creating a supporting atmosphere and an environment where all children can participate in all the activities, whilst simultaneously encouraging parents, family members and carers to understand and support this in the best interest of their child, you will achieve changes. Even if they may look as small successes.
- You can ask parents and carers to think about roles and tasks shared by people in their household and other adults within and outside the home (like cooking, cleaning, car washing, managing household finances, taking kids to the park or sports and going to work) and how they may influence children.
- You should encourage children to be friends across genders and stress that the only thing that matters is how well they get along regardless of their looks, background or any other characteristic including gender.
- Ask parents and caregivers to think about how they reward or discipline behaviour and give praise or criticism for the same behaviour to their children. For example, praising both boys and girls for being neat or being active in physical activities. Or through statements such as 'boys don't cry', or 'boys will be boys' to excuse inappropriate behaviour.

Check if your nursery/kindergarten/preschool has a gender equality policy

As a practitioner, you are in direct contact and work with children and their parents/families or caretakers, but you are also part of the group of people who shape up the atmosphere of the whole ECEC setting or nursery/kindergarten/preschool. In all the countries, there are national documents (laws, ratified international conventions) that prevent any discrimination, however, on their way down to a single ECEC setting and in combination with local prejudice, stereotypes and deeply rooted gender roles' division, frequently, their strict implementation is not thought of in daily practice. ECEC settings and people connected to them lose sight of consequences of gender discrimination unless it is drastic. Therefore, it is a good idea to develop and implement a gender equality policy at ECEC institution level. A policy will help ensure consistency of practice across a service to ensure all managers, practitioners and professional support team members understand what is expected of them and the role everyone involved in the service can play in enhancing gender equality. It will also help practitioners to think about their role, contribution and practice. Simultaneously, it makes a statement to parents and potential parents around what your service is about – its values and commitments and what they are expected to subscribe to if they enrol their children there.

Gender Equality Policy can be a statement that says that you are an inclusive service, that it is

committed to gender equality and to boys and girls having the same opportunities.

You know your setting or nursery/kindergarten/preschool and can suggest to adapt and tailor policy to your own situation, or can strengthen current and existing national policy by adding a few additional sentences. You may suggest adding a sentence about actively promoting positive attitudes and practices that support gender equality. You may also want to add something to define your commitment to equal approach to all children in your Statute. It is best to include both the staff and parents, families and caretakers in the process and in any relevant training available.

Get the Ideas from other examples of good practice

In this Toolkit, we are also presenting examples of good practice collected from Serbia, Slovakia, Italy and other countries in Europe. These examples are sorted per quality area as they are defined in the EU Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care⁵ based on which quality area they influence most, although many of these practices impact several quality areas. We also added the aspect of digital tools use since the use of digital tools and devices is connected to more than one quality area and has become an integral part of life both of adults and children.

⁵ [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgicfindmkaj/https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605\(01\)&rid=4](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605(01)&rid=4)

1 Access

Practice in Bulgaria	
Title of the Practice	GAMES, SPORTS AND TOYS AS TOOLS FOR COUNTERACTING GENDER STEREOTYPES BETWEEN CHILDREN
Location	Bulgaria, Sofia, Krasno Selo district
Duration	School year
Educational institution/organization	Kindergarten №8 "Prof. Elka Petrova"
Contacts	<i>Bulgarian Teachers' Union (SEB)</i>
Area/s of intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Access <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> Governance & funding <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & evaluation
Objectives	The main objective of the Practice is to stimulate active cooperation between girls and boys in the spirit of gender equality by involving them in a wide range of recreational and sports activities, with the aim of promoting a stereotype-free educational environment.
Short description of the implemented activities	The Practice has been carried out by implementing joint activities, both indoor and outdoor, stressing the importance for children to follow their interests, regardless of what it is traditionally considered appropriate for boys and girls. As a matter of fact, all the toys/games/sports/activities (e.g. puzzles, dolls, construction sets etc.) were accessible to all children and not assigned by gender. The Practice has also been focused on involving children in games linked to their upbringing in the family and domestic commitments, in order to counter the assumption that there are gender-typical housework tasks.
The Practice has contributed to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve access to quality ECEC services and in an inclusive way • Enhance the development of curricula based on pedagogical goals, values and approaches that enable children to reach their full potential in a holistic way.
Target Group	5-6 year-old children
Funding	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Self-funded <input type="checkbox"/> National/Public funding <input type="checkbox"/> EU funding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private funding
Link for further information	

Practice in Italy	
Title of the Practice	PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S SKILLS AND ABILITIES THROUGH A GENDER EQUALITY-BASED PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH
Location	Italy, Campania
Duration	Ongoing
Educational institution/organization	39° Circolo Didattico G. Leopardi
Contacts	albina.arpaia@gmail.com
Area/s of intervention	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Access <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> Governance & funding <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & evaluation
Objectives	The main objective of the Practice is to strengthen and mainstream a gender equality dimension within preschool system and counter gender-related stereotypes and biases.
Short description of the implemented activities	The Practice is carried out by adopting a gender-based pedagogy that aims to help children to fulfil their full potential regardless their gender. As part of the PTOF (Piano Triennale dell'Offerta Formativa – Three-year plan of the educational offer), the Practice contributes to guarantee that different games are freely available to boys and girls and, in this way, they can develop their skills and abilities within a bias-free educational environment.
The Practice has contributed to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve access to quality ECEC services and in an inclusive way • Support the professionalisation of staff working in ECEC contexts, including managerial staff • Enhance the development of curricula based on pedagogical goals, values and approaches that enable children to reach their full potential in a holistic way • Promote the monitoring and evaluation of progress made through the establishment and delivery of high quality ECEC provision and practice.
Target Group	Children from 3 to 5 years old
Funding	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Self-funded <input type="checkbox"/> National/Public funding <input type="checkbox"/> EU funding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private funding
Link for further information	

Practice in Slovakia	
Title of the Practice	Inclusive nursery - nursery for everyone
Location	Bratislava, Slovak Republic
Duration	From January 2021, ongoing
Educational institution/organization	Private nursery "Rozmanita" (in eng. Translation: "Diverse")
Contacts	Ela Dusíková, operačná riaditeľka rastiemespolu@rozmanita.sk +421 911 648 103 Račianska 80, 831 02 Bratislava
Area/s of intervention	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Access <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> Governance & funding <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & evaluation
Objectives	<p>Value of gender equality is integrated into transversal inclusive approach of the nursery. Vision of the organisation is to build inclusive development centre for all, which would offer high quality, replicable and measurable model of inclusive nursery, school and community.</p> <p>Inclusive approach in the nursery is reflected in the following principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - nursery accepts and develops all children, we work together on deconstructing the barriers if identified; children are accepted and treated as equals regardless of their social background, ethnicity, mother language, health (dis)ability, gender or sex, family situation. - financially accessible <p>The financial situation of the family does not pose a potential barrier for a child to be accepted. Nursery offers individualised approach in regard to school fee plan (including scholarships).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - physically accessible and inclusive physical environment <p>The environment is designed inclusively keeping in mind variability in child needs (e.g. accessible for children with mobility disabilities, visual/sensory disabilities)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - respectful and individualised system of learning <p>Each child learns according to individual needs without projecting general expectations based on their age, gender, cultural or social background</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - main focus is on development of skills for the future of all children - Skills and competences which will be necessary in the future are especially creativity, critical thinking, digital skills, mental health self care, resilience towards changed conditions, ability to value diversity of

	community or team.
Short description of the implemented activities	<p>Rozmanita implements gender equality on various levels:</p> <p>Gender sensitive language on the website, social media, information materials and other relevant internal materials, Gender sensitive language in the everyday communication with children and their families Gender equality in the organisation physical environment avoiding gender stereotypes in colours, gendered play areas, etc.</p> <p>Gender neutral/inclusive organisation of educational tools, toys and games in the classroom.</p> <p>Gender equality is reflected in individual approach in learning process developing potential of each child regardless of their gender or sex</p> <p>Respectful and gender-neutral approach in communication and participation with family. Rozmanita organizes regular community events including various types of activities and offers opportunities for all members of families to contribute and enrich the community of Rozmanita families.</p> <p>Digital competences for all – one of important educational goals is to develop digital competence with the use of tablets and Bee-bot robots.</p>
The Practice has contributed to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting values of inclusive community and diversity through everyday practice - mainstream gender sensitive/aware approach integrated into wider inclusive educational programme - creating safe space and welcoming environment for children (and their families) which has been excluded/not accepted in other nursery facilities (e.g. children with disabilities, children with foreign background, children with LGBT+ families), children who do not conform to gendered expectations.
Target Group	2-6 year-old children
Funding	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Self-funded <input type="checkbox"/> National/Public funding <input type="checkbox"/> EU funding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private funding
Link for further information	www.rozmanita.sk

2 Work Force

Practice in Sweden

In an experiment in Swedish preschools, teachers were required to review videotapes of themselves with the children, to identify subtle differences in the way they interacted with boys and girls. Many found that they used more words, and more complex sentences, with girls. And when helping children in the cloakroom they were assisting boys to get dressed more than girls and expected girls to dress themselves.

They were then asked to reflect on what they had seen using the following questions as guide:

- What are some of my own biases, values and belief systems in relation to gender?
- How might these gender values / beliefs influence the way I interact with children? Do I engage differently with boys and girls?
- How can I model a positive attitude to gender equality in my everyday activities, actions and conversations with children? What am I already doing?
- How can I promote and strengthen gender equality in my practice?

When considering if something is a gendered stereotype, the following guiding questions were used:

- would this be the same for either gender?
- why is it like that? - is it only like that because it always has been?
- is that fair? - does it strike you as equal and similar? Or the opposite?

After reflection on what they had seen, a list of questions for the development of the training as part of the professional development for the development of gender-unbiased approach in working with children was put forward and an external consultant was called in to organise a series of training based on the questions.

Practice in Slovakia	
Title of the Practice	Gender equality in the educational team
Location	Košice, Slovak Republic
Duration	2022, ongoing
Educational institution/organization	Súkromná materská škola (Private nursery), Jiskrová, Košice-Staré mesto
Contacts	<p>Materská škola a Detské Montessori centrum Jiskrova 3 040 01 Košice</p> <p>Director: 055 / 622 33 65 0903 272 450</p>
Area/s of intervention	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Access <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Workforce <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> Governance & funding <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & evaluation
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lower gendered view of teaching profession in preprimary and primary education - enable environment offering role models for boys and girls, including caring men; - enrich educational team with gender diversity
Short description of the implemented activities	Private kindergarten with Montessori centre focused in recruitment process on encouraging teachers from various backgrounds and on teachers identifying as men. Recruitment campaign targeted men who would be considering several positions and spread information that team in the kindergarten is welcoming diversity.
The Practice has contributed to:	There are several men working in the kindergarten on the position of teacher which is very unique in comparison with other kindergartens in Slovakia. Children are not faced with gendered picture of the teaching profession (yet) and parents are faced with situation beyond gender stereotypes with very positive feedback.
Target Group	2 – 6 years old
Funding	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Self-funded <input type="checkbox"/> National/Public funding <input type="checkbox"/> EU funding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private funding
Link for further information	Súkromná základná škola, Masarykova 19/A, Košice Exkluzívna ponuka (sukromnazslermontovova.sk)

Practice in Slovakia	
Title of the Practice	Ako sa s deťmi rozprávať o sexualite. (How to talk with kids about sexuality)
Location	online
Duration	From 2022, ongoing
Educational institution/organization	inTYMYta (NGO)
Contacts	Tel: 0950482510 Email: zuzana@intymyta.sk Email pre médiá: radka@intymyta.sk
Area/s of intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Access <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Workforce <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> Governance & funding <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & evaluation
Objectives	Raise competences of teachers in prevention of sexual abuse of children and increasing their understanding of their body, intimacy, respectful communication, etc.
Short description of the implemented activities	Team of INTYMYTA developed various teaching materials and educational programmes for teachers and children on sexual education. Their outputs are organised according to the main topics and age range of children, including age from 5 – 8. Relevant outputs for preprimary education are: Manual for parents and teaching professions “How to talk with kids about sexuality.” Brožúrka – Ako sa deťmi rozprávať o sexualite – intymyta which includes also education goals for various ages. Educational programmes which can be organized for teaching staff on various topics.
The Practice has contributed to:	Increased discussion about the relevance of sexual education as prevention of sexual abuse against children and sexual violence. It attempts to destigmatize sexual education and bring it to schools. Project also provides teachers with educational materials and opportunity to attend online or in-person trainings.
Target Group	5 – 8 years
Funding	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Self-funded <input type="checkbox"/> National/Public funding <input type="checkbox"/> EU funding <input type="checkbox"/> Private funding Norway Grants
Link for further information	intymyta – Vzťahovou a sexuálnou výchovou k zdravej, férovej a rešpektujúcej spoločnosti

Practice in Slovakia	
Title of the Practice	A Pink and a Blue World
Location	Online, Slovak Republic
Duration	2005 – 2008 – active project; project results are available
Educational institution/organization	ASPEKT, Bratislava, Slovak Republic (Main coordinator of the project)
Contacts	ASPEKT, Mýtňa 38 811 07 Bratislava + 421 2 5249 1639 + 421 918 479 677 aspekt (zavinac) aspekt (bodka) sk
Area/s of intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Access <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Workforce <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> Governance & funding <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & evaluation
Objectives	Provide teachers and other educational professionals with teaching materials and other educational tools (manuals, visuals, videos, etc.) raise their awareness about the role of education in gendered socialization and the importance of gender mainstreaming in education. Developing gender sensitivity and teaching competences of teachers in identifying the methods and activities to increase gender equality and to implement them in their everyday practice.
Short description of the implemented activities	A pink and a blue world was a long-term educational project about the process of socialization into specific gender roles. Project included research activities, educational activities (publications, materials, CD, workshops) and raising awareness campaign (website, reports in TV and radio). The main project results are: Publication “A pink and a blue world. Gender stereotypes and how they impact us.” presenting basic thesis of gender theory, research results and data illustrating how gender roles and stereotypes influence our family and public life and how it reflects in our society inequalities. Publication includes also studies about the role of education and family, recommendations for gender mainstreaming, etc. It is used as a resource material for teaching secondary school children but also as a resource material at teacher training programmes at universities or in non-formal education: čitáreň > Rodové stereotypy a rodová rovnosť > Ružový a modrý svet – ruzovymodrysvet.sk Accredited training/course for teachers and other professionals in education – Gender Equality as tool of social change Theater – Several theater plays for children and adults in collaboration with puppet a theater “Na Rázcestí” in Banská Bystrica. Creative workshops for public and discussions about gender sensitive theater for public and experts. Teaching materials – Storytelling based teacher materials and activities published on the website, shared and multiplied through the training course for teachers. učebňa > Rovnosť príležitostí pre školy – ruzovymodrysvet.sk

The Practice has contributed to:	Improving accessibility of teaching materials for teacher training activities Raising awareness about gender stereotypes and early childhood socialization. Improving accessibility of accredited training modules for teachers.
Target Group	Teachers, youth workers, teaching professions
Funding	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-funded <input type="checkbox"/> National/Public funding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EU funding <input type="checkbox"/> Private funding
Link for further information	Rodové stereotypy, rodová rovnosť, výchova a diskriminácia – ruzovamodrysvet.sk

Practice in UK	
Title of the Practice	MITEY - Men in the Early Years
Location	London, UK
Duration	2019 - ongoing
Educational institution/organization	Nationally
Contacts	https://miteyuk.org/
Area/s of intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Access <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Workforce <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> Governance & funding <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & evaluation
Objectives	To develop a “mixed-gender” early years work force where well-rewarded, highly trained practitioners provide, in gender-flexible ways, the best quality, gender-sensitive education and care to the children in their setting
Short description of the implemented activities	<p>The campaign has produced information and resources based on best practice and evidence, in a clear and thoughtful way with a rationale focused on representation. They also delivered a conference in 2019. The website includes information, case studies, a jobs board for men and information and training for employers, as well as the following resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The MITEY Charter · Ten MITEY Myths · The MITEY guide to recruiting men · The MITEY guide to communicating with parents around male staff · The MITEY guide for careers advisors
The Practice has contributed to:	50 people have signed up for the Charter so far, and estimates suggest this represents around 1000 ECEC settings in the UK. A further 500 people have accessed online resources and are included in the MITEY email database. Attitudes towards men in ECEC have improved and those working in the sector are much more aware of the importance of promoting gender equality. A pilot apprenticeship project in Greater Manchester has now been funded, supporting 12 male apprentices through their Level 2 training
Target Group	Male population as potential future ECEC teachers
Funding	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-funded <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> National/Public funding <input type="checkbox"/> EU funding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private funding
Link for further information	<p>Fatherhood Institute/MITEY, UK https://miteyuk.org/ Jeremy Davies, J.Davies@fatherhoodinstitute.org</p>

Practice in Denmark	
Title of the Practice	A CRITICAL AND CREATIVE APPROACH TO PEDAGOGICS
Location	Denmark
Duration	Ongoing
Educational institution/organization	"Røde Rose", "Vesterbro Børnegård", "KVL's Børnehus", "Børnhaven Jordkloden", "Martha Hjemmet", "Børnehusene Fredensborg" and "Tusindfryd"
Contacts	<i>BUPL TRADE UNION</i> kaba@bupl.dk
Area/s of intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Access <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Workforce <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> Governance & funding <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & evaluation
Objectives	The main objective of the Practice is to produce a research-based catalogue with useful inspirations for staff in ECEC settings.
Short description of the implemented activities	The research-based catalogue is a presentation of how 7 ECEC facilities take a critical and creative approach to working with social norms. The presentation evolves around interviews with specific pedagogues who are well-known as 'norm-critical' pioneers within the area. The catalogue illustrates the background and the practical methods of each ECEC involved as well as how they deal with different concepts related to the gender issue.
The Practice has contributed to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the professionalisation of staff working in ECEC contexts, including managerial staff.
Target Group	ECEC pedagogues/core staff
Funding	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-funded <input type="checkbox"/> National/Public funding <input type="checkbox"/> EU funding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private funding
Link for further information	Link n.1 Link n.2

3 Curriculum

Practice in Scotland, UK

Helping children play imaginatively to remove gender restrictions - Aberlour Family Support Centre, Langlees, Falkirk

Aberlour Family Support Centre in Langlees is part of Aberlour Child Care Trust's provision for children and families. The centre is registered with the Care Inspectorate to provide day care to children aged from 18 months until they begin primary school. The aim of the family centre is to work in partnership with the local community by providing a range of services to promote, positively support and strengthen the capacity of families to reach their full potential. The centre serves an urban area and was evaluated as 'very good' across all key areas following an inspection in July 2015.

They work very hard to help children play imaginatively. Changing the dressing up resources to a range of materials has supported this and allowed children to be much freer and more creative. Previously they would have had ready-made tabards and outfits which sometimes limited children. Having a range of textures and colours has allowed children to pretend to be a much wider range of characters without gender restrictions. Colours are not associated with gender and children are encouraged to take on a range of roles. Three boys designed costumes to be kings and used blue, pink and green materials. Another boy used the material to make a princess outfit. These choices are encouraged and not seen as an issue by other children or by parents.

Similarly, the changes to the outdoor area led to children enjoying a range of options. Previously many of the toys available were plastic and were sometimes perceived as being gender specific, such as prams and hoovers. They now have wooden tubs on wheels which allow the children to decide what they would be. This has allowed boys and girls to take on a variety of different roles and not be limited in their play. Previously some of the boys may not have played with prams but now are happy to use the tubs in a range of ways. Girls too are similarly much more freed up and enjoy the active play options available.

The changes are helping teachers to support children to develop their curiosity and imagination. They have worked hard to help parents understand the changes and the benefits for their children. At first parents were wondering why many of the toys had gone. They have spent time bringing parents on board and helping them understand the real benefits for their children. When children are freed up to play imaginatively it helps them acquire speech and language skills as well as having fun.

Practice in Italy	
Title of the Practice	VOLO CON TE ... I fly with you
Location	Various regions of Italy
Duration	Ongoing
Educational institution/organization	Various Italian schools
Contacts	<i>Bet She Can</i> sgollini@nexusconsultation.com
Area/s of intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Access <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> Governance & funding <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & evaluation
Objectives	The main objective of the Practice is to transform a book into an authentic occasion of dialogue, discussion and self-discovery. In this way, it will be improved children's self-confidence, increased the awareness on gender issues as well as promoted relationships avoiding and reducing stereotypes and prejudices.
Short description of the implemented activities	"Volo con te" is a workshop/lab for children, based on the homonymous book "Volo con te", which was written by the children's writer Sabina Colloredo. During the workshop/lab, children explore the theme of stereotypes by playing and reading the book, doing pedagogical and playful activities in order to try to understand together stereotypes' limits and how to counter them. The focus groups arranged, which involve teachers, parents and children, are aimed at identifying the stereotypes to which everyone may be subjected to and at stressing the importance of freedom of choice, as well as promoting an intergenerational dialogue that stimulates the personal and relational development of each individual.
The Practice has contributed to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve access to quality ECEC services and in an inclusive way • Support the professionalisation of staff working in ECEC contexts, including managerial staff • Enhance the development of curricula based on pedagogical goals, values and approaches that enable children to reach their full potential in a holistic way • Ensure adequate funding and a legal framework for the provision of ECEC services.
Target Group	Children, families and other members of the educational staff
Funding	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-funded <input type="checkbox"/> National/Public funding <input type="checkbox"/> EU funding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private funding
Link for further information	

Practice in Italy	
Title of the Practice	LEGGERE SENZA STEREOTIPI ... Reading without stereotypes
Location	Various regions of Italy
Duration	Since 2012 (ongoing)
Educational institution/organization	Various Italian schools
Contacts	<i>Scosse Association</i>
Area/s of intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Access <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> Governance & funding <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & evaluation
Objectives	The main objective of the Practice is to create an observatory to promote gender equality between children adopting as a starting point illustrated books as one of the main tools for countering gender biases from a very early age, since reading a book is considered as an authentic occasion of dialogue, discussion and self-discovery.
Short description of the implemented activities	The project core activities are training courses and seminars on deconstructing gender stereotypes addressed to teachers and members of the educational staff. Moreover, an online database has been set up, which is regularly updated, collecting illustrated books boosting a gender equality perspective and approach in the early childhood education sector. The books of this e-catalog are chosen through the exchange and sharing of ideas and impressions between the participants of the training courses and seminars, in order to spur their active engagement in the identification and collection of books which particularly promote positive models and best practices to be applied.
The Practice has contributed to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve access to quality ECEC services and in an inclusive way • Support the professionalisation of staff working in ECEC contexts, including managerial staff • Enhance the development of curricula based on pedagogical goals, values and approaches that enable children to reach their full potential in a holistic way • Ensure adequate funding and a legal framework for the provision of ECEC services.
Target Group	Teachers and other staff members operating in the education sector
Funding	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-funded <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> National/Public funding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EU funding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private funding
Link for further information	

Practice in Serbia	
Title of the Practice	World-famous Women
Location	Temerin, Serbia
Duration	March 2023
Educational institution/organization	Preschool "Veljko Vlahovic"
Contacts	puvvlahovic@paarabolonet.com
Area/s of intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Access <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> Governance & funding <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & evaluation
Objectives	To let children know about world-famous women (historically and contemporary ones), to develop awareness of children that women can also be pilots, Formula 1 drivers, pirates, scientists, conductors, boxers, astronauts and that these are not exclusively male professions
Short description of the implemented activities	In relation to the International Women's Day, an exhibition was created in the common area of the photos and short stories describing the lives of different famous women. The choice of the women was based on the book "Stories for good night for a little rebel girl – 100 stories about extraordinary women". Children showed great interest in the stories and women shown, asked their parents to read to them again and again these stories. Some examples included also famous women with disabilities.
The Practice has contributed to:	Awareness raising of children, but also parents and staff about these well-known women, reduction of stereotypes and prejudice.
Target Group	Children, parents and staff

Practice in Serbia	
Title of the Practice	Restaurant "Patrolling paws"
Location	Vrbas, Serbia
Duration	Three months
Educational institution/organization	Preschool "Bosko Buha"
Contacts	Bojana Delic boja109@yahoo.com
Area/s of intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Access <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> Governance & funding <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & evaluation
Objectives	To engage children into joint activities regardless of gender bias towards different jobs
Short description of the implemented activities	Out of children's interest in different kitchen appliances, the idea was born to "make a restaurant" where food is prepared in different using different appliances, served, paid for, where all cleaning and preparation, serving and other roles could be played. The children were taken to a local pizza place where they observed both the work in kitchen and dining part of the restaurant. Back at kindergarten they recreated it all. With the assistance from parents and teachers, real food was made, served, eaten and all the jobs were done by all children. Discussion was concentrating on different tasks and jobs and how they can be done regardless of gender.
The Practice has contributed to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To equally engage both boys and girls in dough making, pizza decorating, preparing tables, serving, cleaning and other tasks
Target Group	Children

Practice in Serbia	
Title of the Practice	Order of the Planets
Location	Temerin, Serbia
Duration	2023
Educational institution/organization	Preschool "Veljko Vlahovic"
Contacts	puvvlahovic@paarabolonet.com ; Teodora Oros Lahoš
Area/s of intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Access <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> Governance & funding <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & evaluation
Objectives	To eliminate gender-based bias and prioritising in the group
Short description of the implemented activities	Up to last year, routines like hand washing before meals, taking turns to sit at the tables for meals was either causing all of the children running to do the same thing at the same time, or the order was usually made by calling out girls or boys first to go and do the task. From last year, we have another practice. We introduced unisex toilets and washing rooms. When children (both boys and girls) are grouped around different interest areas, we name each table/area after a planet in the Solar system. Then, for the routines, we use the name of the planets: Planet Mercure goes to wash their hands, planet Jupiter goes to take a meal, planet Saturn, gets dressed... this way, all boys and girls on that planet go and so the routine together.
The Practice has contributed to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal treatment of all boys and girls, taking turns without gender-biased approach; learning that all children are equal
Target Group	Children

Practice in Bulgaria	
Title of the Practice	GAMES, SPORTS AND TOYS AS TOOLS FOR COUNTERACTING GENDER STEREOTYPES BETWEEN CHILDREN
Location	Bulgaria, Sofia, Krasno Selo district
Duration	School year
Educational institution/organization	Kindergarten №8 "Prof. Elka Petrova"
Contacts	<i>Bulgarian Teachers' Union (SEB)</i>
Area/s of intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Access <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> Governance & funding <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & evaluation
Objectives	The main objective of the Practice is to stimulate active cooperation between girls and boys in the spirit of gender equality by involving them in a wide range of recreational and sports activities, with the aim of promoting a stereotype-free educational environment.
Short description of the implemented activities	The Practice has been carried out by implementing joint activities, both indoor and outdoor, stressing the importance for children to follow their interests, regardless of what it is traditionally considered appropriate for boys and girls. As a matter of fact, all the toys/games/sports/activities (e.g. puzzles, dolls, construction sets etc.) were accessible to all children and not assigned by gender. The Practice has also been focused on involving children in games linked to their upbringing in the family and domestic commitments, in order to counter the assumption that there are gender-typical housework tasks.
The Practice has contributed to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve access to quality ECEC services and in an inclusive way • Enhance the development of curricula based on pedagogical goals, values and approaches that enable children to reach their full potential in a holistic way.
Target Group	5-6 year-old children
Funding	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Self-funded <input type="checkbox"/> National/Public funding <input type="checkbox"/> EU funding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private funding
Link for further information	

4 Digital tools use

Practice in Italy	
Title of the Practice	GENDER... ALMENTE LIBERI
Location	Italy, Lazio
Duration	School year 2020-2021 (ongoing)
Educational institution/organization	IC "A. Gramsci"
Contacts	marfil5@alice.it
Area/s of intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Access <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> Governance & funding <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & evaluation
Objectives	The main objectives of the Practice aim at overcoming gender stereotypes, supporting raise-awareness activities on gender equality issue in the early childhood education sector, promoting mutual respect between children as well as fostering their upbringing within a bias- and prejudice-free educational environment.
Short description of the implemented activities	The Practice has been carried out during commemorative international and national days (e.g. World Kindness Day, World Children's Day, International Day for the elimination of Violence against Women, International Day of Education, National Day against Bullying and Cyberbullying) by involving children in storytelling, peer-to-peer and brainstorming activities using tools such as interactive whiteboard and PC as well as innovative-based methodologies. Specifically, the electronic devices were used to show children videos/images related to the topics of the aforementioned days. After watching these contents, children have participated in thought-provoking activities during which they were able to express freely their thoughts and feelings (by talking, drawing and working in small groups) with regard to the commemorative day's topic. Teachers have adopted the "circle time" methodology, which helps to develop positive relationships between children. Specifically, "circle time" consists of everyone sitting in circle, teachers included, and carry out a wide range of activities such as co-operative games, talking and listening exercises which foster the active engagement of all children.
The Practice has contributed to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve access to quality ECEC services and in an inclusive way • Support the professionalisation of staff working in ECEC contexts, including managerial staff • Ensure adequate funding and a legal framework for the provision of ECEC services.

Practice in Italy	
Title of the Practice	PARI IO – PARI... TU – Equal I – Equal You
Location	Italy, Sicily
Duration	4 months from 01-10-2020 to 01-02-2021
Educational institution/organization	-
Contacts	n.fulvio@virgilio.it
Area/s of intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Access <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> Governance & funding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & evaluation
Objectives	The main objective of the Practice is to eliminate gender stereotypes and biases and to promote a discrimination-free environment in the early childhood education settings by experimenting with innovative-led practices.
Short description of the implemented activities	The activities were carried out by using tools such as tablet, pc, dvd player, books, magazines with the aim of providing children with contents promoting a gender equality-based perspective in the early childhood education system. The pedagogical approach adopted was rooted in the implementation of a model for mainstreaming gender culture that succeeds in creating an educational context based on non-discrimination. In this way, children were encouraged to express their unique and original way of being through dramatization and role game activities. Moreover, teachers played a significant role in promoting an environment led by mutual respect and openness between the participants.
The Practice has contributed to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the monitoring and evaluation of progress made through the establishment and delivery of high quality ECEC provision and practice.
Target Group	
Funding	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Self-funded <input type="checkbox"/> National/Public funding <input type="checkbox"/> EU funding <input type="checkbox"/> Private funding
Link for further information	

Practice in Slovakia	
Title of the Practice	This is Equality – interactive online course about gender equality
Location	Online
Duration	December 2022
Educational institution/organization	Institution for research of work and family (Research organisation of the Ministry of work, family and social affairs of the SR)
Contacts	Inštitút pre výskum práce a rodiny Špitálska 25, 27 812 41 Bratislava Slovenská republika napistenam@ivpr.gov.sk
Area/s of intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Access <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Workforce <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> Governance & funding <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & evaluation
Objectives	Increase awareness about gender equality, gender stereotypes in socialization and education and provide educators, social workers, youth workers and other professions with tools to promote gender equality in their practice.
Short description of the implemented activities	“This is Equality” is a long-term national project consisting of various research and educational activities. One of them is an online educational course aiming to increase awareness about gender, gender stereotypes, gendered socialization and how the gender stereotypes can be either constructed or deconstructed in specific stages of life. The course includes also parts specifically devoted to early childhood, childhood (primary education age) and adolescence relevant for teachers and youth workers. The course is free of charge, it is prepared for those who are not familiar with the basic concepts of gender studies and focused on the everyday situations and impacts we can make to lower gender inequality.
The Practice has contributed to:	Raising awareness of various professions in education; developing teaching material which can be further shared (e.g. at the workplace of the kindergarden or school); offering easy to implement recommendations relevant for teachers in preprimary education.
Target Group	Teachers, teaching assistants, social workers, youth workers
Funding	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-funded <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> National/Public funding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EU funding <input type="checkbox"/> Private funding
Link for further information	totojerovnost.online – Toto je rovnosť

5 Monitoring and Evaluation

Practice in Scotland, UK

Observation, reflection and change - Shaw Mhor Early Years Centre, Glasgow

Shaw Mhor Early Years Centre is a local authority centre based in the large urban area of the Southside in Glasgow. The service registered with the Care Inspectorate in 2011 to provide day-care to a maximum of 134 children aged from birth to those not yet attending primary school. It was evaluated as 'very good' for both Care and Support and Management and Leadership following an inspection in December 2016.

During superhero week, it was noted that some of the boys in costume exhibited much more aggressive and destructive behaviour and a decrease in creative and imaginative play than would ordinarily be seen. As a result of this the nursery made changes to their dress up area, the language they used and interactions with the children. Pieces of fabric were added to the dress up area for children to create their own capes and costumes, without overtly branding them as specific heroes. The staff were able to introduce other creative ways of interacting as superheroes, for example by adding bits of string to act as spider webs. Staff also changed their use of language to talk about the qualities of superheroes, challenging the idea that their powers are purely destructive. The focus became more on superheroes being caring, protective and helpful, rather than aggressive and destructive. Later, the focus became the children themselves, and what superpowers they had, encouraging them to think about their own skills and qualities. Effort was made to tie the superhero interest to other areas of the centre for example, mixing potions to give themselves new powers, or to change their appearances.

The staff were surprised by how quickly they managed to turn these mindsets around among the children and were pleased with the response. The following stage was to work more with parents around gender and their attitudes. The centre implemented more regular, formal staff meetings to create a space for all staff to talk about their observations and ideas. As a result of this reframing of the children's interests, play was more controlled, and the quieter children were more engaged. One child took great comfort in wearing a cape and having this shared interest in superheroes with his peers allowed him access to a new group of more confident children. It's about being comfortable in standing back and observing before making changes. Our aim was not to discourage boisterous play but to ensure there were reasonable and respectful reasons behind children's play.

Practice in Italy	
Title of the Practice	AS A GIRL AND AS A BOY. A project on gender identity and differences in pre-schools
Location	Italy
Duration	2015
Educational institution/organization	Scuola Simonazzi, Modena - Italy
Contacts	Via Augusto Valli, 36, 41125 Modena MO Telefono: 059 353307 Teachers Tullia Bertoni, Giulia Bonfatti, Antonietta Marano, Annamaria Pè, Marina Borgonovi e Giovanna Pradelli
Area/s of intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Access <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> Governance & funding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & evaluation
Objectives	<p>Teachers wanted not to remain indifferent to the issue of gender and to deepen the reflection on gender identity and differences with a self-look primarily at Educators professionalism, to understand first of all within the collective of teachers and school collaborators what implicit stereotypes (all stereotypes, cultural, social, gender) guide the educational practices, the expectations, the language. Those ECEC practitioners who have educational responsibility within the school must guarantee children and families the ability to act in their planning choices, in their communication style and in their relationships that cultural openness and depth of analysis that the social complexity in which we live requires of us on a daily basis, including gender as a socio-cultural construct.</p> <p>The aim is also to improve teachers' ability to tackle a series of 'big questions' with children with the intention and attitude not to give them answers, but rather to put them in situations of doubt, provocation and mutual confrontation.</p>
Short description of the implemented activities	<p>The project is characterised by a reflective practice on the part of the teaching staff who wanted to address and problematize the issue of gender stereotypes starting from an attitude of listening to children, families and the self, with respect to its own educational role, but also to its own identity.</p> <p>The methodology adopted by the group of teachers therefore favoured an investigative mode that started first of all by observing and listening to the children in their everyday lives, in the contexts of play among the children, in moments of discussion in large or small groups.</p> <p>ECEC Teachers thus observed boys and girls in their games and choices, trying to grasp with immediacy the doubts, questions and reflections that were raised by them.</p>

Practice in Denmark	
Title of the Practice	EQUALITY IN LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES Taking a Critical Approach to the Understanding of [Gender] Norms in Professional Development
Location	Denmark, Fredensborg
Duration	27 months (September 2016-December 2018)
Educational institution/organization	Børnehusene Kokkedal and Børnehusene Fredensborg
Contacts	<i>BUPL TRADE UNION</i> kaba@bupl.dk
Area/s of intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Access <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Workforce <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input type="checkbox"/> Governance & funding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & evaluation
Objectives	The aims of the Practice were: to widen the children's participation and learning opportunities in order to reduce unequal opportunities; to try out a new way of organizing professional development across multiple ECEC institutions.
Short description of the implemented activities	The Practice has been carried out by fostering professional development and reflection and evaluation in groups facilitated by a consultant with an expertise in the area of critical thinking related to gender norms in pedagogical work. It has been stimulated the reflection on how our norms and preunderstandings related to gender affect significantly the children's learning environment. In this way, it has been evaluated and analysed how the language, presence, openness, activities, interior design, games, toys, songs etc. could further help children in developing their potential regardless their gender.
The Practice has contributed to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the professionalisation of staff working in ECEC contexts, including managerial staff.
Target Group	ECEC core staff (pedagogues)
Funding	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Self-funded <input type="checkbox"/> National/Public funding <input type="checkbox"/> EU funding <input type="checkbox"/> Private funding
Link for further information	

6 Management and Budgeting

Whole service approach - The Gender Friendly Nurseries Project, Glasgow

The Gender Friendly Nursery programme was developed by staff from Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership - North East Health Improvement team. Staff had attended the 2014 Respectme conference, Gender Is Everyone's Agenda, where Zero Tolerance presented their new resource for promoting gender equality in early years, Just like A Child. It was felt that there was great potential for this resource to be used as part of a wider programme to address gender-based violence, mental health, the role of men in parenting and childcare, LGBT issues, creating more choice in education and employability and other areas. Using experience of other whole-school and early years resources as a guide, a training, resource pack and award programme were developed to support early years establishments to reduce gender stereotypes and improve gender equality. The programme in the pilot phase consisted of a full-day training for entire staff groups of early years establishments. This was mostly undertaken on in-service days. During the training staff were introduced to the concepts of gender, equity and equality. They then explored gender stereotypes, where they are found, the relationship between gender stereotypes and gender inequality, and the many types of harm this can cause. Staff groups reflected on their own practice through a M&E session highlighting their existing good practice and exploring areas for development. Consideration was given to leadership and management; staff awareness; curriculum, learning and teaching; environment; resources; and communication with parents, carers and the wider community. Establishments were provided with a variety of tools and resources (including Just like A Child and a support pack developed by Health Improvement). They then worked on an agreed action plan - taken from areas for development in the M&E - and within approximately a year were ready to apply for Gender Friendly Nursery status. Ten nurseries engaged with the process over the pilot phase and the first two of these were recognised as Gender Friendly Nurseries in May 2018. Following a 'share the learning' event held on 31 May 2018, Gender Friendly Nursery resources were shared with a wide range of partners interested in developing this in their own local authorities or areas of work, including the Scottish Prison Service and early learning and childcare practitioner training. The training was then rolled out to management for every local authority and early years establishment in Glasgow that was in partnership with Education Services. It was adapted slightly to allow for a specific input on LGBT awareness. Management was supported by the Leaders of Early Learning team and Health Improvement to cascade this to staff within their own establishments. This was done as part of a wider package of healthy relationships training whereby Early Protective Messages training was also rolled out across the NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde Health Board area.

Practice in Slovakia	
Title of the Practice	"Škola základ života/School for life"
Location	Trnava, Slovak Republic
Duration	2005 – 2008, ongoing
Educational institution/organization	Tulip, Preprimary and primary school
Contacts	Gorkého 21, Trnava www.zstulipantt.edupage.org
Area/s of intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Access <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Governance & funding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & evaluation
Objectives	Elementary school and Pre-primary school collaborated on the project "A pink and a blue world" with aim to provide teachers with the opportunity to participate at the training, co-create teaching materials and explore how they can better support gender equality from the early years of their pupils. Teachers of all teaching cycles from ISCED 0 – 3 participated at the training and developed their action plans as a follow-up activity. School also evaluated their school educational plan and did a SWOT analyses of school governance from gender perspective, the results were consulted with experts who has offered assistance in implementation of several recommendations.
Short description of the implemented activities	The elementary school in Trnava provides space for a pilot project focused on gender-sensitive pedagogy in the further education of teachers, as well as in their practice.
The Practice has contributed to:	Mainstreaming gender equality on the school level, into curriculum and in personal and professional growth of teachers. School can provide their lessons learned and inspire other educational institutions to implement gender equality in their curriculum and school governance.
Target Group	
Funding	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-funded <input type="checkbox"/> National/Public funding <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EU funding <input type="checkbox"/> Private funding
Link for further information	Základná škola s materskou školou, Ulica Maxima Gorkého 21, Trnava (edupage.org)

Practice in Serbia	
Title of the Practice	Team for protection of children from violence, maltreatment and neglect
Location	Temerin, Serbia
Duration	ongoing
Educational institution/organization	Preschool "Veljko Vlahovic"
Contacts	puvvlahovic@paarabolanet.com
Area/s of intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Access <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Governance & funding <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & evaluation
Objectives	To create safe environment of children; to create and nurture the atmosphere of acceptance, tolerance and respect; to raise awareness and sensitivity of all involved staff and visitors to any form of violence, maltreatment or neglect of any child; to change the cultural, social norms, stereotypes and prejudice that may encourage any violence
Short description of the implemented activities	The preschool developed this team and added its roles and responsibilities into the Statute of the preschool
The Practice has contributed to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevention of any violence, maltreatment of any child based on prejudice, stereotypes and including gender-based discrimination within preschool
Target Group	Employees, visitors, parents of children when in preschool
Funding	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Self-funded <input type="checkbox"/> National/Public funding <input type="checkbox"/> EU funding <input type="checkbox"/> Private funding
Link for further information	https://www.vrtictemerin.com/

Practice in Serbia	
Title of the Practice	Policy for prevention of gender discrimination
Location	Temerin, Serbia
Duration	2023
Educational institution/organization	Preschool "Veljko Vlahovic"
Contacts	puvvlahovic@paarabolanet.com
Area/s of intervention	<input type="checkbox"/> Access <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Governance & funding <input type="checkbox"/> Monitoring & evaluation
Objectives	To prevent any gender-based discrimination in the preschool
Short description of the implemented activities	The preschool developed and adopted its own gender-based antidiscrimination policy
The Practice has contributed to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventon of any gender-based discrimination type within preschool
Target Group	employees
Funding	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Self-funded <input type="checkbox"/> National/Public funding <input type="checkbox"/> EU funding <input type="checkbox"/> Private funding
Link for further information	https://www.vrtictemerin.com/

CASE STUDIES

SWEDEN

Sweden was a pioneer in establishing a gender-sensitive education approach at all educational levels and has made a concerted effort to emphasize equality in education from a very young age. This approach has a long tradition in Sweden, with the 1968 Commission on Nursery Provision proposing the introduction of a progressive pedagogy that incorporates values of democracy, gender equality and solidarity into children's upbringing (Korpi, 2017).

It is an example of how a country can implement different bottom-up strategies to strengthen and develop gender equality in preschool, raise awareness of the potential of pre-primary education in this area and become a reference worldwide.

Sweden's gender-transformative pre-primary curriculum

A comprehensive curriculum for Swedish preschools was developed for the first time in 1998, when preschools became the responsibility of the Swedish Ministry of Education and Research (Bayne, 2009). The curriculum clearly stated countering gender stereotypes as one of its objectives: 'Preschools should work to counteract traditional gender and gender roles' (Skolverket 2006; translated in Bayne, 2009).

There were precedents for this elsewhere in the education sector. The curriculum for the nine-year comprehensive school (i.e. primary and secondary), developed in the 1960s, already included changing stereotypical gender roles as one its objectives.

This curriculum has since undergone several reviews and revisions, each time maintaining a strong gender focus. The current preschool curriculum calls for preschools to "actively and consciously promote the equal rights and opportunities of all children, regardless of gender, [and] combat gender patterns that limit children's development, choices and learning" (Skolverket, 2019).

Gender-responsive pedagogy

An evaluation of the preschool curriculum found a gap between the national curriculum and how professionals implement those concepts in their classroom, accentuating the need to train teachers to achieve gender equality in their pedagogical activities (Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2010). Following the move of preschools to be part of the education sector, the Ministry allocated funds to development projects to strengthen gender equality through preschools, including developing tools for preschool staff to examine and analyse pedagogical materials from a gender perspective and increase the recruitment of male preschool teachers (Korpi, 2017). The Council for Equality in Preschools awards projects and conducts gender-based analysis of early childhood teacher policy (Chi, 2018). Since the 1990s Sweden has made several efforts to reach gender equality, implementing different

projects. Bayne describes some of the strategies implemented by Swedish preschools. These included removing some of the gender-specific toys like cars and dolls, and replaced them with more gender-neutral ones, and setting up play stations and let children rotate between them at regular intervals so everyone could use the various resources. The preschools also invited in men and women with different occupations, especially those who did not fit the stereotype for their role (Bayne, 2009).

Tackling gender inequality from the early years

One of the strategies used widely involved video recording teachers' practice in the classroom (Bayne, 2009). This method was proposed in 1991 by Susanne Rithander. Footage consistently revealed that:

- Teachers believed they were gender-neutral in their interaction with children, however, footage revealed that teachers showcase gender-specific patterns
- Girls were addressed with extensive verbal communication while boys received less verbal communication
- Boys' needs were met more urgently at the expense of girls' needs
- Adults, parents and educational staff often did not realize that stereotypical gender roles were embedded in their everyday practices and interactions with children
- Boys took up more space and made themselves heard more than girls

Teachers have certain expectations surrounding gender roles. For example, girls are expected to be pretty, caring and compliant, while boys brave, mischievous and strong (Bayne, 2009). The video recordings demonstrated that change and gender-sensitivity were needed not only among children, but also in the pre-primary workforce. Sweden has continued implementing several projects raising awareness of gender issues and stereotypes, becoming a reference for other countries. Several books have been written on the subject in recent years, gender pedagogy has gained media attention, and there is a general understanding from the Swedish national government to proceed with gender pedagogy (Bayne, 2009). University courses for teachers include gender equality requirements and ECE teachers participate in training related to the Discrimination and Education Acts (Chi, 2018).

Recruiting male preschool teachers

A study in seven Swedish municipalities (kommun) that had formed a network to increase the number of men working in preschools, found that municipalities often started with individual activities or initiatives to retain men who already work in preschools (Heikkilä, 2019). Before long, however, these were deemed insufficient and it became clear that longer-term and more complex strategies were needed to change attitudes, structures and monitoring measures. Some of the initiatives and time-limited processes cited in the study included creating gender-neutral brochures or web-based information on what it means to work in preschools, critically examining the recruitment processes to uncover any gender-biased aspects, and introducing

new methods to obtain information from the criminal records database. The study observed that, in rare instances, municipalities engaged in multidimensional processes that elevated the challenge to a municipality-wide issue, involving interaction and communication between several stakeholders. These processes included engaging with external stakeholders (such as sending male preschool employees to a large, male-dominated local company that was about to make several redundancies, to share information about working in preschools), having men act as role models for other men (such as a mentorship scheme between a higher education institution and municipality to reduce dropout from a preschool teaching programme) and engaging young men who need contact with the labour market (such as unaccompanied male refugees seeking work placements).

Men do not want to be singled out as “men in preschools” but simply to be known as preschool teachers. Normalizing the presence of men in preschools while simultaneously working to increase the number of men is both important and possible.

Gender-responsive parenting

A gender-approach in preschool has grown in Sweden thanks to close and frequent interaction between families and institutions. Karlson and Simonsson studied the Swedish cities of Crownbay and Heatherfield which developed strategies for family and community involvement with gender-responsive education in pre-primary (Karlson and Simonsson, 2008). School staff in Crownbay and Heatherfield organized informal and formal learning platforms for parents. They communicated constantly about the school approach and about gender, developing parents’ knowledge about gender relations. Moreover, they also organized formal activities and classes for parents. Crownbay offered a six-month project focused on gender and values education. Discussion and self-assessment among parents were also encouraged.

Tackling gender inequality from the early years

Preschool staff traditionally gave advice to parents, especially mothers, about their children’s upbringing. However, now they are focusing on involving mothers and fathers equally in their preschool children’s education. For example, if a child is ill, they used to telephone the mother, but now the father is called first to get them more involved. Overall, for daily routines, they talk to and notify the parent that arrives first, while previously it was more common to wait for the mothers.

Quality assurance

In 2011, amendments to the preschool curriculum added a section on monitoring and evaluation of the quality of the preschool (Korpi, 2017). Quality assurance and documentation practices take place at the national, municipal and preschool levels and at all levels these are related to the preschool curriculum. At the national level, the Schools Inspectorate has the responsibility to exercise external inspections

(Vallberg-Roth, 2015). The national level documentation tool and assessment form include a focus on basic values and influence. This asks whether the preschool works systematically to establish the values that [Swedish] society is based on, including empathy and concern for others as well as openness and respect for differences in people's beliefs and ways of life. This work includes counteracting traditional gender patterns, managing conflict, understanding one's rights and obligations, and taking responsibility for common rules. Similarly, the self-assessment tool for principals prior to a Schools Inspectorate visit includes the questions: "In what ways is the preschool working for equality? Will girls and boys in the preschool have the same opportunities to develop and explore their abilities and interests, with no restrictions on gender stereotypes?" (abbreviated version of documentation tool and assessment form at the national level, from Vallberg-Roth, 2015, p. 95). In 2012, School Inspectorate audits of preschools in 46 municipalities showed that the curriculum, including its gender equality components, was still not feeding into preschool activities. Every fifth municipality in the audit received criticism for how they implemented gender values in their preschools, with the inspections finding a lack of awareness of gender knowledge and gender-specific play activities at these preschools.