



# The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

## Gender segregation in the labour market and education

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### Comments Paper - Austria



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# Horizontal Gender Segregation in Austria

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## 1. Horizontal Segregation in Austria – Introduction and Country Context

In Austria, horizontal gender segregation in occupations and in economic sectors is quite similar to the EU-28 averages: it stood at 26.9 and 18.9 respectively in 2014, with no remarkable change over the last years (EU averages being 24.4 and 18.9 respectively) (see Bergmann & Sorger, 2015).

A notion of ‘appropriate’ occupation for men and women is still deeply rooted in the labour market and gender-based horizontal sectoral and occupational segregation continues to be a characteristic of the Austrian labour market. It is particularly pronounced in professional care like nursing, care for the elderly or early childhood education on the one side and machinery and technical occupations in general on the other side. Segregation starts already in education: gendered patterns in different fields of studies are still persistent, within upper secondary and tertiary level. (Young) women tend to be predominantly present in fields like social, care and welfare, while the rate of (young) men is still high in engineering, manufacturing and construction.

### 1.1. Women in STEM

In regard to women’s participation in male dominated branches a strong correlation between educational level and women’s participation can be found; the lower the educational level, the lower women’s participation is in these sectors. While women’s participation is around only 6 % in comparable apprenticeship trades, it rises to 12 % in upper-secondary education (see Sora, 2012). In tertiary education women’s share in STEM-study fields is meanwhile around 33 % (see Gender Monitoring uni:data, Federal Ministry for Science, Research and Economy<sup>1</sup>) – in 2000 the share was only around 25 %. Worth mentioning is a huge difference between STEM-study fields: while women’s share in machinery is 8.6 %, it is 62.2 % in biology.

That women’s share is rising with higher qualification (even when it is still below a balanced participation) can be described as quite long-standing trend in Austria. Several explanations are discussed to rationalise this trend. Most important arguments might be that on the one hand deciding against traditional gender roles is more difficult the younger women (or men) are and that the influence of parents is more pronounced for young people. Empirical evidence indicates that parents are even more traditional than their children and less likely to support non-traditional educational paths (see Bergmann et al., 2004, Tschenett, 2015). On the other hand the main focus of initiatives to support women’s participation rate in non-traditional

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<sup>1</sup> <http://wissenschaft.bmwf.gv.at/bmwf/wissenschaft-hochschulen/universitaeten/statistiken/>

occupations focuses on higher education. Universities and comparable educational institutions have been aware of the necessity to encourage women to enter in these study fields and also to start questioning male-dominated university structures which might be a further barrier for women. Research indicates that in some sectors women's participating rate has been remarkably changing. These are mainly study fields which combine technical, social and natural science aspects, while others still seem to be less attractive for women, like machinery (see Bergmann & Sorger, 2009).

Responsible ministries have implemented different campaigns and programmes to encourage (young) women to consider STEM study fields and related professions and to interest them for subjects like mathematics:

- The Austrian Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs supports for example schools to implement a respective career choice counselling (see <http://www.gender.schule.at>) and launched a website around the topic 'women in technics' (see <https://www.meine-technik.at/>).
- The Federal Ministry for Science, Research and Economy initiated programmes like 'w-ffORTE', which enables establishing equal opportunities in scientific and technological worlds of work (see <http://www.w-fforte.at>).
- The universities (e.g. <http://www.geschlecht-und-innovation.at>) support programmes with the aim to attain more women for STEM study fields and to decide for an academic career path in respective professions. Awareness-raising campaigns, 'Schnuppertage' (women can participate in technical areas for a short period of time to get a taste of them) in different universities, (female) role models visiting schools to encourage women to enrol in technical branches, summer universities preparing young women for their first years and the support of female networking are amongst the initiatives to encourage more women for atypical career choices.

## 1.2. Men in Care

Concerning the situation of men in female-dominated sectors, mainly in the care sector, statistics also reveal a pronounced gender segregation. Only around 15 % of all employees working in care-related professions are men (see Scambor, Wojnicka & Bergmann, 2013). Focusing on the question of male participation in kindergarten professions the situation is even worse: In crèches 1.6 % of all employees are male, in kindergarten the proportion is 1.4 %<sup>2</sup>; looking more specific at pedagogues the respective share declines even further to 0.8 % according to a recent study (see Aigner et al., 2012).

Although some campaigns and other measures have been launched, it has to be concluded that the discussion is still in its infancy and respective initiatives take place only on a small-scale base and do not have a longstanding tradition in Austria.

Recently, the Ministry of Family Affairs and Youth supports campaigns in the federal states to interest more (young) men to become kindergarten pedagogues. 50,000 € per year per federal state will be available for the next years. Additionally, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection has launched a

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bmfj.gv.at/ministerin/Aktuelles/Themen/Zivis-Kinderg-rten.html>

campaign about men in atypical jobs and supports 'Boys Days' in Austria, where young men learn more about social jobs, also in the field of early childhood education (see <http://www.boysday.at>).

## 2. Current Policy Debate in Austria

Although the pronounced horizontal segregation has been on the political agenda for some decades and some improvements have taken place (see chapter 1), the necessity for further activities and structural changes is evident. Current discussion and initiatives can be assessed as scattered, lacking an overall strategic approach. Additionally, funding for respective initiatives is not secured – this situation has aggravated even further since the economic crisis.

Structural reasons for segregation have not thoroughly started to be solved, amongst others the low-payment structure of the primary education and caring sector, social stereotypes and statues, gendered education, glass ceiling etc. An assessment of the activities of different ministries shows that most initiatives are campaigns and awareness-raising activities, often concentrating on short-term measures. Recently, the Ministry of Family Affairs and Youth triggered a (small) public discussion around the release of a survey on gender roles and the start of a campaign by dealing with gender stereotypes<sup>3</sup>, although the public discussion is quite controversial.

Other campaigns and approaches are the preparation of information material and existing small-scale initiatives on Internet websites of different ministries (the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Women Affairs and the Ministry for Science, Research and Economy). The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs for example launched a campaign about men in atypical jobs and supports 'Boys Day' in Austria, where young men can visit for one day 'atypical' companies and organisations (e.g. kindergartens) (see <http://www.boysday.at>), the Ministry of Education and Women Affairs has established a platform recently about 'women in technics' (see <https://www.meine-technik.at>) and supports the 'Girls Day' and 'Girls' Day MINI' for girls attending kindergarten on federal level (<https://www.bmbf.gv.at/frauen/girlsday/gdbd.html> and <https://www.bmbf.gv.at/frauen/girlsday/gdbdmini.html>). Around these days transgressing traditional roles are discussed also in media, but besides these days public discourse in Austria is still rather stereotyped and often quite biologicistic.

Devaluation of care work – for example contrast to many other countries, kindergarten pedagogues' education in Austria is still only an upper secondary education, which might also contribute to low male participation – or gendered working culture, 'old boy networks' etc. are not really approached – neither from responsible stakeholders nor in most media.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.bmfj.gv.at/ministerin/Aktuelles/Themen/Geschlechterstereotype.html>

### **3. Transferability of the Danish, Dutch and Northern Ireland Practices to Austria?**

#### **3.1. Transferability of the Danish Practices to Austria**

In Austria not only the low share of male kindergarten pedagogues is a problem but also to 'convince' men to choose this educational path in the first run. Therefore one priority in Austria is to involve more (young) men in this educational pathway. Hence the good practice example from Denmark has some interesting approaches to encourage more men to decide for a job in a kindergarten, in Austria a necessary first step would be to attract young men to attend kindergarten colleges.

Despite the different starting points, the Danish example has some interesting elements which could be useful in Austria. First of all the structure of funding seems interesting: national funding and regional implementation on municipality level. In Austria many decisions concerning the kindergartens are at federal state and even municipalities' levels, too. Hence, a regional approach seems to be interesting. Even when structural problems – like low payment and the educational system – have to be solved at the national level, regional initiatives and solutions can have positive influences also for national approaches.

Concerning the content, the projects can be described as balancing act between broadening the occupational profile and kindergarten culture along possible male-dominated qualities (like outdoor-activities) and re-stereotyping gender norms by doing so. Also the debate in Austria can be characterised by this risk as is underlined by a recent study (see Aigner et al., 2012). Nevertheless it seems to be important to discuss male and female images and the profile of kindergarten professions very open-mindedly to interest more men for caring jobs. In that regard the Danish experiences might be interesting for Austrian kindergarten authorities.

As pointed out in chapter 1, in Austria some funding will be made available for campaigning at the federal state level. Reflecting the Danish example, it seems additionally interesting to think about specific measures on municipality level, not only campaigning and/or awareness measures.

Of great importance seems to be to guarantee sustainable transformation of gendered profiles and working culture in kindergarten, as similar projects show that after their termination, structural change has not taken place.

#### **3.2. Transferability of the Dutch and North Ireland Practices to Austria**

The other examples relate to women in STEM which is also still an important issue in Austria, although with a longer tradition than the topic of men in caring professions. While the Dutch example focuses on the educational system, the Northern Irish one focuses on companies. For both approaches there are also similar examples in Austria. The following differences seem to be worth mentioning: Especially the Dutch example might be characterised as more comprehensive and developed than comparable policies in Austria, while the Northern Irish experience with an own co-ordinator seems to be more institutionalised than Austrian policies.

Basically both practices are at least in parts transferable to the Austrian system as they meet problems which are also valid for Austria.

What is worth considering from the Northern Irish example is that the main responsibility for such initiatives is placed on ministerial level (while in Austria such a co-ordinator would be placed within the social partner system, mainly the institutions of companies). Such a person might have time and influence to convince companies to rethink their policies.

The Dutch example seems to be in some elements quite similar to Austrian approaches – for example the fact that funding is not secured, that it contains mainly voluntarily initiatives – but it seems to be part of a comprehensive and concerted approach, which is still lacking in Austria. Besides that, concrete initiatives seem to have more importance than campaigns in the Netherlands and might therefore be inspiring for Austria. The appointment of a non-profit organisation has two sides: on the one hand non-profit experts might be more involved and flexible than experts from the authorities; on the other hand the voluntary nature of the approach is even more stressed. All in all, the comprehensive Dutch approach seems to be – despite the weaknesses which are also mentioned in the paper – an interesting example also for Austria with its scattered system. Concrete goals and a comprehensive strategy could be inspiring for Austria.

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## **Annex: Recommendations for Action**

### **1. Development of Action with Those (Potentially) Affected – Women and Men**

Men's participation in professional care as well as women's share in technical professions challenges traditional concepts of gender roles and open up room for rethinking concepts of masculinity and femininity. Gender-balanced practices have become more 'fluid' and 'negotiable' in the last decades. While challenging gender roles have a longer tradition from a female point of view (as well as women's involvement in these policies), the same is not true for men. Research indicates that experiences from the past decades show that policies for men will be less successful if presented from what can be seen as a women's point of view. 'There must be a men's point of view as well, and even more, these gender views need to be integrated into a democratic policy that reaches out to all' (see Scambor, Wojnicka & Bergmann 2013, 78).

### **2. Avoiding Re-Stereotyping – Broadening the Gender Roles for both Genders**

Concepts like the 'forest man' show the balancing act between re-stereotyping and broadening the gender roles for both genders. Opening and 're-defining' professions and educational fields for all is still lacking in many fields.

### **3. National Funding – Regional Development**

National and regional differences have also influence on gender roles and norms, whereas initiatives and projects have to be tailored along regional needs. National funding and common principles which guide regional implementation seem to be good examples.

### **4. Strategic Approach, Concrete Goals and Sustainable Funding**

Most countries show the same pattern of rather scattered initiatives instead of a strategic approach with sustainable funding. Schools, universities, public companies should be involved on compulsory level and also a quota might be a suitable instrument.