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**Growing Up
Equal**



PROMOTING GENDER = **EQUALITY AND EQUITY** = IN PRIMARY SCHOOL



WORKSHOP
FOR CIVIC
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FOUNDATION





Why is it important to fight gender stereotypes in primary education?

Despite progress in increasing equality between boys and girls in all spheres of public life, prejudices and stereotypes that limit girls'/women's development and place them in situations that are often detrimental to their security and well-being are widely shared by both men and women globally.

These are findings of a new index of gender-related social norms published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2020 (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/GSNI>). This index measures how social beliefs hinder equality between men and women in areas such as politics, work and education and contains data from 75 countries covering over 80% of the world's population.

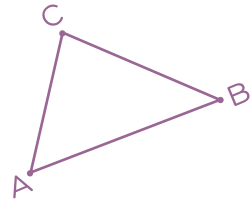
This new analysis reveals that despite decades of progress in closing the gender equality gap, nearly 90% of men and women have some bias against women, providing new insights into the invisible barriers women face in achieving equality and a potential path forward to breaking the „glass ceiling“.

According to the index, about half of the world's men and women think men make better political leaders, and more than 40% think men make better business executives and have a greater right to work when jobs are scarce. 28% think it is justified for a man to beat his wife.

Information is also available on how prejudice is changing in around 30 countries. It shows that while there have been improvements in some countries, in others attitudes appear to have worsened in recent years, a signal that progress cannot be taken for granted.

This new analysis sheds light on the reasons why huge ‚power gaps‘ between men and women still exist in our economies, political systems, and corporations, despite real progress in closing gender gaps in key development areas such as education and health and removing legal barriers to political and economic participation.





For example, although men and women vote in similar percentages, only 24% of seats in parliaments around the world are held by women and there are only 10 female heads of government out of a possible 193. Women in the labour market are paid less than men and are much less likely to hold senior positions: less than 6% of CEOs in S&P 500 companies are women. And while women work more hours than men, these jobs are more likely to be unpaid care work.

The year 2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+25), the most comprehensive women's empowerment agenda ever.

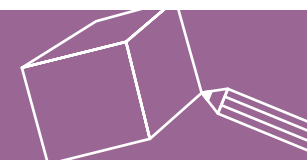
UNDP calls on governments and institutions to use a new generation of policies to change these discriminatory beliefs and practices through education as well as awareness-raising.

Recent research on the situation of women in Bulgarian society (Bulgarian Platform for International Development, 11.2018. Equality between men and women. Pages 10 -12: Where is Bulgaria?) shows that girls and boys have equal access to education, and the percentage of women in higher education has been increasing since 2005, but the trend of women choosing low-paid care and service jobs remains unchanged.

Bulgaria has one of the highest percentages of women administrators in EU countries, but the worrying tendency of women in power to ignore issues related to equality between men and women, the gender pay gap, gender-based violence remains unchanged (the biggest example of this was the debate around the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence

in 2018). The gender pay gap is visible in many areas, especially in services and small-scale trade. Women are more likely than men to hold low-paid jobs and to spend 7 times a higher percentage of their personal time on housework and 3 times higher on childcare. Last but not least, the statistics on domestic violence are staggering (one in three women in Bulgaria is subjected to it) and are linked to the conflict between gender stereotypes and women's new roles in society.

Neither university pedagogy curricula nor teacher training institutes and licensed in-service training providers offer courses that aim to sensitize teachers to their role in building a strong attitude of equality by overcoming gender stereotypes. Teachers are often unaware of their own unconscious biases that affect their classroom communication. Projects addressing the role of teachers in promoting





equality between boys and girls have been implemented consistently in Bulgaria since the 1990s as private initiatives, usually developed by NGOs in collaboration with schools and international donors.

In developing the educational resources for teachers under the Growing Equal project, we conducted preliminary needs assessment through focus groups with teachers in 4 different sized towns (Sofia, Plovdiv, Svishtov and Stara Zagora).

The problem we encountered is the lack of easily accessible open resources in Bulgarian for teachers who want to work on overcoming gender stereotypes. Moreover, primary teachers have not been the subject of projects related to equality between boys and girls. Such projects have mainly been carried out with teachers and young people in secondary and higher education.

The last three years have seen an unprecedented radicalization of the Bulgarian population on the issues of gender and children's rights. 2018 was marked by mass protests by „concerned citizens“ against the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, which led to the rejection of the Convention by the Bulgarian government, and 2019 was marked by mass protests by „parents against the National Strategy for the Child“, which led to the freezing of the adoption of the strategy. Although the roots of these anti-social movements were traced to foreign sources, the government failed to tame the radical public reaction against the strategic policy documents mentioned, and the need to strengthen European values in the mass civic consciousness was felt more than ever. The effect on the edu-

cation system has been extremely negative: even practices that were previously considered useful (such as sexual education for the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases) have been abandoned as harmful, as they were seen as introducing ‚gender ideology‘. Equality between boys and girls has become a sensitive issue in schools; there remain a very limited number of externally promoted good practices, usually under the auspices of domestic violence/child abuse prevention programs. At the same time, **equality between men and women is the number one horizontal policy included in the National Development Programme BG2020** (Council of Ministers, Public Consultation Portal, www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments).



Considering the specific challenges described, the Growing Equal project will address the following needs

- 1.** The need to modernize school policies with gender in mind. The difficulty of this task, as highlighted by the Ministry of Education and Science in its Letter of Support to the Growing Up Equal project, comes from the lack of public consensus on the types of activities that educational institutions should carry out in relation to gender and sexuality education. It is therefore of paramount importance to build consensus among all members of the school community that gender stereotypes must be addressed in order to limit their negative impact on girls' and boys' learning/career/life choices. On this basis, each school could adopt a range of measures to promote equal opportunities for girls and boys.
- 2.** The need to provide primary and preschool teachers with up-to-date, interactive, and easy-to-use online resources in the national language to introduce age-appropriate information on gender stereotypes and their impact on life choices. Primary school teachers (grades 3-4) are the main target group of the project, selected in consultation with the Ministry of Education. Pre-testing of the developed resource materials will be organized to determine their applicability.
- 3.** The need for in-service training of teachers to facilitate their work in building equality between girls and boys in school, which is fundamental in shaping life values and attitudes among children. The Growing Up Equal project will provide 15 trainings across the country, in which we expect a total of around 250 teachers to participate.