Programme of exchange of good practices on gender equality

Good practices and lessons learned from Germany

Introduction

Gender stereotypes both reinforce and create gender inequalities; while gender stereotyping has a major impact on gender equality in all European societies and cultures. Evidence shows that the social construction of the roles and expectations of boys and girls results in different behaviours that impact on subject choices, learning and achievement. The role played by the education system in perpetuating gender stereotypes has a lasting impact on gender equality in the labour market. The Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men, 2006-2010, has identified as one of the 6 priority areas the elimination of gender stereotypes in education, training and culture; the labour market; and the media.

At the seminar on gender stereotypes held in Germany 13-14 May 2009, it was found that the German experience of ‘Girls Days’ and ‘New Paths for Boys’ can have a lasting impact on the extent to which girls and boys take up subjects and career choices where they are under-represented. These measures challenge stereotypical differences between girls and boys and open up new opportunities for girls and boys. However, they cannot be isolated. A national plan needs to be in place to provide a framework and a long-term strategy. The seminar found that breaking down gender stereotypes in education and in the labour market means that women’s talents and potential are more effectively utilised.

Action to address gender stereotyping requires changes in behaviour, attitudes, norms and values which define and influence gender roles in society. Removing cultural prejudices and societal stereotypes is, therefore, viewed as being crucial to the achievement of gender equality.

Good practices and lessons learnt from Germany

The Federal Government in Germany has, over the last 30 years, introduced a number of initiatives to remove gender stereotypes. In particular, Girls’ Day and New Paths for Boys initiatives have been very successful in influencing the vocational and careers choices of boys and girls. They provide regular opportunities for girls and boys to try out new subject areas and to have temporary placements in workplaces where they are introduced to non-traditional jobs. For girls this might be engineering, science or technology, while for boys this might be nursing, childcare or other care work. Materials and publicity of the events are made accessible and relevant to young people, who are also consulted in the projects. Specific projects are undertaken at the level of schools and in local authority areas. Networking between projects, stakeholders, and across the different tiers of government, NGOs, trade unions and employers, is a key element of the success of these projects.

These measures are supported by trade unions and employers. For example, employer organisations see the training of young women in engineering as one way of widening the talent base and helping to recruit more engineers. Trade unions have highlighted the importance of gender-sensitive approaches to vocational training as part of a broader strategy for gender equality in the labour market. The Federal Government, the regional
and local authorities, recognise the importance of targeted action in this area and cite the importance of participation and coordination of all societal actors.

Summary of the main pre-conditions for success in addressing gender stereotyping:

- Political will and political leadership in supporting and developing measures to eliminate gender stereotypes.
- Resources for actions to end gender stereotyping, with possibilities for sustainability and long-term funding if measures are successful.
- Inclusion of gender stereotyping in gender equality legislation and in gender mainstreaming initiatives.
- Multi-stakeholder partnerships are crucial to ensure that there is a broad impact.
- Training and awareness-raising on gender stereotyping for politicians, policy makers, media, teachers and practitioners in all areas of economic and social life.
- Ensure that funding is ring-fenced for action to eliminate gender stereotypes.
- Give a specific focus to education at primary school level and ensure that teachers are equipped to address stereotypes.
- A strategic approach to gender stereotyping that cuts across the different layers of government, employers, trade unions and NGOs.

Lessons from national examples of good practices

While most governments do not have strategies or specific legislation that addresses gender stereotypes directly, there have been a number of good practices that have impacted positively on gender stereotyping. For example:

- Several countries have introduced specific girls’ day initiatives. For example, in Luxembourg a Girls’ Day was introduced in 2002 and this was followed by a Boys’ Day in 2007. It is currently focused on secondary school children and consideration is now being given to extending it to primary school children. The programme has been evaluated very positively by participants. In Austria, a similar national programme to address gender stereotyping has been introduced. An annual Girls’ Day is supported by all government ministries. A Boys’ Day was introduced in 2007.

- In contrast, in Sweden the approach has been to address gender stereotyping through a mainstreaming approach. For example, teachers are provided with specific gender awareness training and schools are required to undertake specific equality actions.

- In Finland, gender stereotypes have been addressed as part of the government’s equal pay strategy, 2007-2011.

- In the UK, a national government project, the Gender Agenda, has focused on the underperformance of both boys and girls. Awareness-raising materials for teachers and young people have helped to improve understanding of gender stereotypes in the classroom. There are also measures to build the confidence of girls and to address the specific issues faced by black and minority ethnic girls.

- In Spain, new legislation on gender equality places a duty on the government to promote equality and address gender stereotypes, for example, by focusing on the impact of notions of femininity and masculinity in economic and social life.
• In the UK and Hungary gender stereotypes have been part of the government’s strategy on gender-based violence.

The following summarises some of the different approaches to addressing gender stereotypes across the Member States:

• **Awareness-raising campaigns**: These have been organised by local authorities and national governments in a number of countries around specific thematic areas - for example, education or careers guidance, the role of working women, etc. They include actions to change attitudes of young people, statutory providers, government departments and other public service agencies. In some cases these have been organised by trade unions or employers or have been based on campaigns organised by civil society and social change organisations.

• **Gender mainstreaming and equality strategies**: Inspired by EU policies, many countries have now introduced gender mainstreaming in national, regional and local government. These strategies rarely cite gender stereotypes but they do provide a mechanism to address them in relation to the anticipated impact of policies on women or men. Across the public sector and to a lesser extent in the private sector there has been a strong focus on the development of equality policies and strategies. These have been important in providing a set of obligations on service providers and employers to promote equality in the workplace or in the provision of services, such as schools or in healthcare.

• **Education and training**: There have been a large number of initiatives in the area of education, particularly in shaping the school curriculum so that it does not represent negative or problematic stereotypes, it addresses femininity and masculinity issues through social and personal education, and it focuses on subject choices where either gender is underrepresented. Girl-only classes in under-represented areas of the curriculum and specific adult education and further training courses for women in under-represented areas are commonplace across Europe, many of which have been supported through the EU’s European Social Fund.

• **Women in the labour market and occupational segregation**: A number of countries have attempted to address occupational segregation the gender pay gap and the position of women in the labour market through workplace equality strategies, equality action plans and equality audits. There have been a large number of EQUAL projects that have focused specifically on these issues.

• **Careers guidance**: There have been a large number of initiatives that have focused on how careers advice can shape gender stereotypes, through toolkits and advice to guidance counsellors and careers advisers, through awareness-raising and training.

• **Media**: It is perhaps in the media that stereotypes are most popularly replicated. While governments and policy makers have not focused on this area to the extent that they have in public services such as education, there are many initiatives that have aimed to use the media to raise awareness. There are also civil society organisations and media organisations that have worked to address the under-representation of girls and women in powerful roles, and also to counter the increasing sexualisation of and violence against girls and women in the media. National broadcasting and media regulation agencies play a role in countering offensive or discriminatory images of women and girls.
Specific programmes to improve access to science, technology and research: There have been a number of national and European projects that have focused on improving the representation of women in science, technology and research.

Women in leadership and political positions: This action has been focused on overcoming stereotypes of women in leadership and enhancing the competence and confidence of women to take up leadership. At a political level some countries have introduced quotas for political representation at party level and/or governmental level, to redress unequal gender balance. Some countries have quotas for the representation of women on company boards and public bodies.

Gender stereotyping and gender equality: lessons for policy

Gender stereotyping initiatives have to focus on all areas of economic and social life - the media, television, magazines and video games; the school curriculum and careers guidance for children and young people; and the labour market.

Governments should address stereotyping in legislation by placing a duty on public authorities to end gender stereotyping. Strengthened equality legislation could help to promote gender-sensitive actions that combat stereotypes. This needs to be part of a strategy for gender mainstreaming in the school, college and university curriculum and in careers guidance, in the media and culture.

Governments, local and regional authorities, social partners, media organisations and the NGOs have a key role to play in taking a coordinated and strategic approach to gender stereotyping. This needs to be located in a national framework that has regional and local applicability.

Specific targeted resources are needed to raise awareness of gender stereotyping in the classroom, through guidance materials and curriculum supports. Awareness-raising materials are also important for girls and boys, so that they can pursue non-traditional subject choices and non-traditional careers.

Changes in family relationships, the reconciliation of work and family life, and the provision of childcare and parental leave are important in shaping different attitudes and perceptions of the roles and expectations of girls and boys.

There is a crucial role to be played in changing societal attitudes and behaviour, particularly in areas such as violence against women and the sexualisation of women in society and in the workplace.

The role of monitoring and evaluation of project objectives and outcomes is critical, particularly the longer-term impact on labour market participation.

Initiatives need to develop a wider understanding of the intersection of gender with other equality grounds, so that the gender stereotyping of black and minority ethnic girls and women, older women and disabled women, is taken into account in strategies to address gender stereotyping.