

## Policy Context

Childhood is a gendered experience. Thus, the needs and rights of the girl child demand specific attention in policies relevant to children. The exposure of girls and boys to gender stereotypes in media and education, and the different treatment of girls and boys contribute to stereotypical educational choices and professional careers. Girl children are more vulnerable to gender-based violence, including sexual abuse, pornography and trafficking. Other forms of violence using new technologies to target children, and more specifically girls have recently appeared, such as cyber-bullying. Girls from remote rural areas, girls with disabilities, Roma girls and girls in child institutions continue to face challenges in accessing health, education and social services. Additionally, eating habits, general and sexual health have a gendered dimension and are experienced differently by girls and boys.

### Conclusions of the Council of the EU regarding the Slovenian Presidency Report (2008)

- Finds EU policies and commitments targeting children not sufficiently gender-sensitive.
- States that particular attention to girls' specific disadvantages is only paid in few areas (e.g. certain forms of discrimination and violence, such as female genital mutilation).

### European Union Agenda for the Rights of the Child (2011)

- Seeks to foster effective implementation of the provisions of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights addressing children's rights and of the UNCRC.
- Proposes a number of concrete actions (e.g. child-friendly justice, protecting children in vulnerable situations, fighting violence against children in and outside of the EU).

### Directives of the European Union (2011-12)

- Identify children as particularly at risk of violence and aim to reinforce a framework for victim protection (Directive 2011/36/EU on human trafficking and Directive 2011/92/EU on combating sexual offences committed against children).
- Emphasise that specialised services for vulnerable groups are needed (e.g. women victims of abuse and their children) (Directive 2012/29/EU on victims of violence).

### Advisory Report to the European Commission and EPSCO Council Conclusions (2012)

- Addresses the impact of the economic and financial crisis on children.

### European Commission Recommendation (2013)

- Recognises children's heightened risk of poverty and social exclusion.
- Stresses that gender equality and the fight against discrimination on all grounds faced by children should be part of any effort to tackle child poverty and social exclusion.
- Recognises children as independent rights-holders and calls for action targeting child-specific issues (e.g. reducing early school leaving) and violence against children.

## The strategic objectives of the BPfA and the EU indicators

- L.1.** Eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl child.
- L.2.** Eliminate negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls.
- L.3.** Promote and protect the rights of the girl child and increase awareness of her needs and potential.
- L.4.** Eliminate discrimination against girls in education, skills development and training.
- L.5.** Eliminate discrimination against girls in health and nutrition.
- L.6.** Eliminate the economic exploitation of child labour and protect young girls at work.
- L.7.** Eradicate violence against the girl child.
- L.8.** Promote the girl child's awareness of and participation in social, economic and political life.
- L.9.** Strengthen the role of the family in improving the status of the girl child.



In 2008, under the Slovenian EU Presidency, the Council agreed on three indicators which assess sex and relationship education, the extent of negative self-image amongst girls and boys and the relative performance of girls and boys at age 15 in mathematics and sciences, as well as the presence of women in tertiary education in subjects in which they tend to be under-represented.

The database, Women and men in the EU — facts and figures, developed by the European Institute for Gender Equality provides the latest data and information on these indicators, available at:

<http://eige.europa.eu/content/women-and-men-in-the-eu-facts-and-figures>

## Findings from EU-wide data

### Closing the gender gap on performance in mathematics and scientific literacy

The 2012 PISA (OECD PISA Study) results indicate that girls' results are lower in mathematics, than boys'. However, the differences between boys' and girls' results seem to be reducing compared to 2009. In science, the differences between girls' and boys' results are smaller and girls outperform boys in the majority of Member States.

The proportion of women students in teacher training and education science was very high in 2006 and remains to be such, reaching 77 % of all students at EU level in 2012.

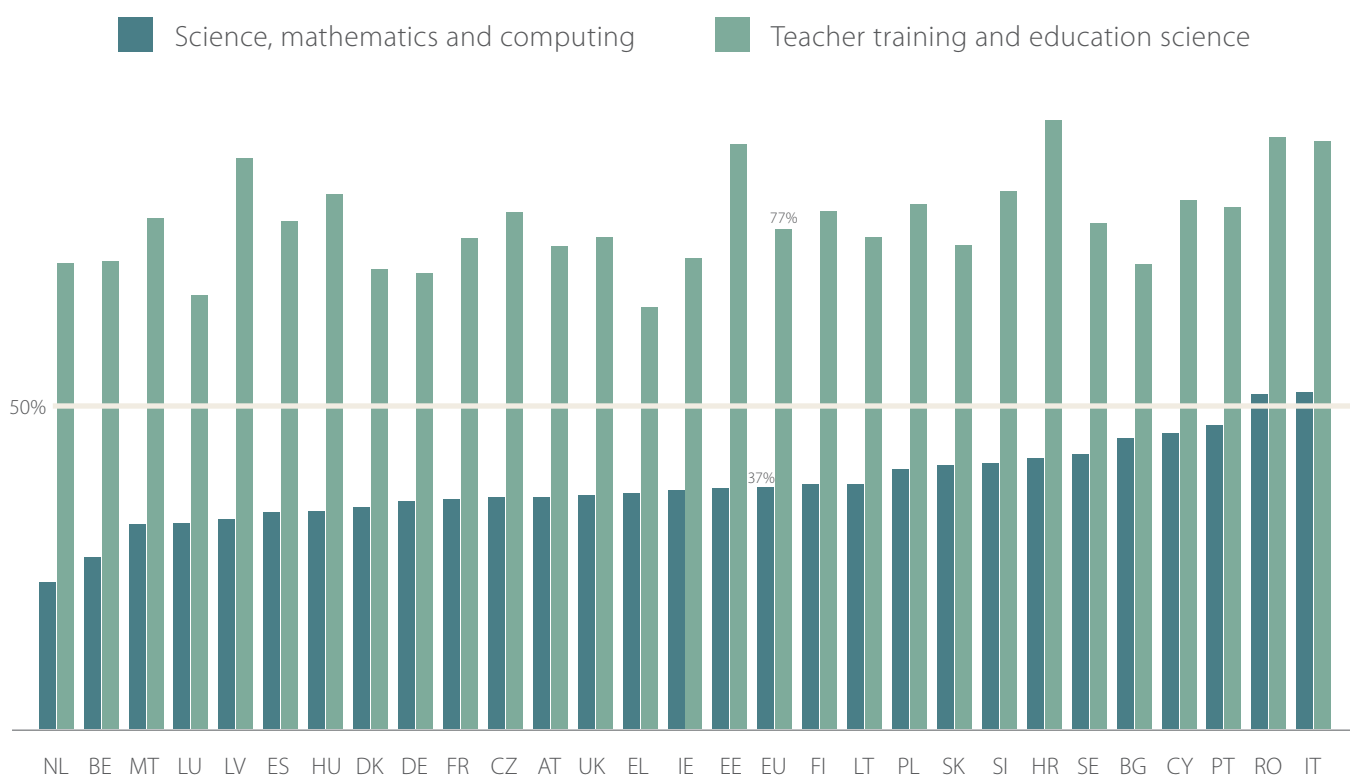
The biggest gender imbalance to the disadvantage of women can be observed among students in tertiary education in the field of science, mathematics and computing: in 2012, girls made up less than 50 % in majority of Member States

### Sex and relationship education in the EU varies and tends to focus on health

Sex and relationship education is diverse among Member States and addresses different age groups. In 2012, sex education was not mandatory in seven Member States. Many Member States provide sex and relationship education only at an early age, while only few provide it throughout school years.

Sex and relationship education is predominantly focused on issues such as contraception, sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancies in all Member States. In most cases, curricula fail to address subjects such as gender-based violence, gender stereotypes in romantic relationships, stigma related to HIV/AIDS and LGBT youths. Several Member States implemented policies to guarantee girls' access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

## PERCENTAGES OF WOMEN TERTIARY EDUCATION STUDENTS FROM ALL STUDENTS, 2012



Source: Eurostat, education statistics



## Girls from very young age have a negative perception of their body

The 2009/2010 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey, Social determinants of health and well-being among young people, provides information on the development of girls' and boys' body self-image, by questioning girls and boys on their actual Body Mass Index (BMI) and the perception they have of their own body.

In 2010, the number of girls and boys who reported 'they are a bit fat' or 'much too fat', varied among Member States, but overall and over time, there are more girls than boys who report these assessments; 27 % of 11-year-old girls overestimated their weight, compared to 22 % of boys. In the meantime, BMI calculations show that boys (17 %) are more likely to be medically overweight or obese, compared to girls (13 %) at age 11.

Girls' negative self-image worsens with age, with the highest proportion of dissatisfaction being found at age 15. Among 15-year-olds, a considerable proportion of girls (40 %) identified themselves as overweight in 2010, in contrast to boys (22 %). Consistently, due to their negative perception of their bodies, girls are more likely to engage in weight reduction programmes at a very young age. The proportion of girls starting a diet increases with age, while boys' decreases.

These behaviours are also an outcome of gender stereotypes' and the media's impact on girls' self-image, by stigmatising weight and shape, an aspect not yet considered by current indicators.

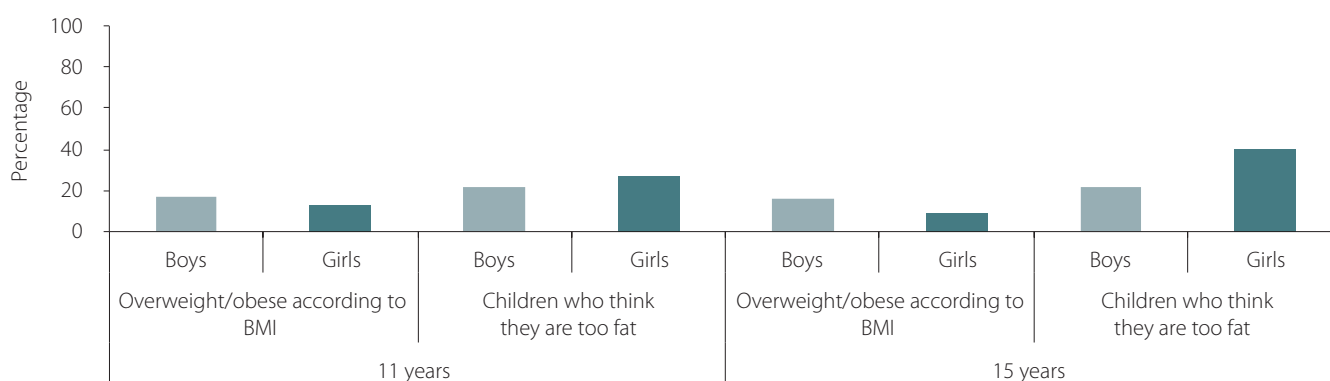
## Gender stereotypes impact specific groups of girls differently

The specific situations and challenges facing Roma girls have been subject to policies and measures in several Member States, who have Roma communities. Issues such as early school leaving, lower educational attainment and a high rate of illiteracy need to be addressed. The same phenomenon can be observed among girls with a migrant background or coming from poorer families. These girls tend to leave school early as they need to take on low paid work or assume care and family responsibilities.

## New forms of violence targeting girls

Other forms of violence using new technologies to target children — and more specifically girls — have recently appeared (e.g. cyber-bullying). Some Member States have begun to modify their legislation to ensure girls are protected from this form of psychological violence, particularly at an age where it can have disastrous consequences on the well-being of girls.

### BODY SELF-IMAGE: DISSATISFACTION OF GIRLS AND BOYS WITH THEIR BODIES



Source: Survey of Health Behaviour in School aged Children (HBSC)

## Useful initiatives:

Some Member States implemented gender-specific interventions encouraging girls and boys to consider 'non-traditional' subject and **career pathways**. Austria, Germany and the Netherlands hold annual 'Girls' Days', Cyprus, Denmark and Poland report similar actions, such as the 'Girls as Engineers' campaign in Poland, in Estonia, there are career days for girls (and boys), support and training to encourage girls and boys for non-traditional career-path and several empowerment trainings (UNECE, 2014).

Some Member States mentioned actions addressed to girls facing specific discrimination, Romania and Slovenia developed **programmes to improve the access to education** of children from the Roma community.



**Health issues and addressing violence against girls** were among initiatives noted in the reports to UNECE. Portugal, Hungary and Denmark introduced the Human Papilloma Viruses (HPV) vaccination for teenage girls, whilst in Croatia, the Programme to Combat and Prevent Sexually Transmitted Diseases offers specific guidance to girls and parents on HPV. Austria and Hungary highlighted the interest to target resources towards more vulnerable groups of girls: Austria funds emergency support services ‘for girls and young women at risk of falling victim to or who are victims of forced marriage’; Hungary runs an engagement programme for teenage girls considered to be ‘vulnerable in several respects’, such as young mothers and drug users.

## ADVANCEMENTS AND OBSTACLES IN AREA L: THE GIRL CHILD

### ADVANCEMENTS

- WHO developed standards offer a strong basis for the implementation of guidelines on sex and relationship education for Member States.
- The gap between girls’ and boys’ results is reducing in mathematics.
- Girls are doing well in sciences (and out-perform boys in most cases).

### OBSTACLES

- Sex and relationship education varies greatly in the EU and mainly focus on health issues.
- Girls are much more prone to have the false impression that they are overweight, which can be damaging to their health.
- Girls are under-represented in the field of science, mathematics and computing in school, as well as in tertiary education.
- Girls remain much more likely to choose careers in education and training science.

## The way forward for the EU

- The perspectives of girls need a holistic approach, which cuts across other areas of BPfA, (e.g. health, education, poverty and media).
- Progress in girls’ performance in mathematics and science must be strengthened by reaching a more gender-balanced representation in higher fields of study in science, mathematics and computing.
- A more holistic approach to sex and relationship education is needed; expanding the focus to the impact of norms, attitudes and stereotypes, and promoting gender-equal relationships.
- Right perceptions of body-image and measures addressing girls’ self-image need to be reinforced from an early age, including norms, attitudes and stereotypes..
- Measures to address forms of violence that are using new technologies (e.g. cyber-bullying) are needed.

## European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is the EU knowledge centre on gender equality. EIGE supports policy-makers and all relevant institutions in their efforts to make equality between women and men a reality for all Europeans and beyond by providing them with specific expertise and comparable and reliable data on gender equality in Europe.

More information: <http://eige.europa.eu>

The Resource and Documentation Centre (RDC) of the European Institute for Gender Equality is an innovative and practical tool developed to assist in locating key resources on gender equality, to facilitate the exchange of knowledge among those with an interest in gender equality policies and practices and to offer an online space for discussion and debate.

More information: <http://eige.europa.eu/content/rdc>



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ISBN: 978-92-9218-560-2  
doi: 10.2839/65428  
MH-04-15-022-EN-C