

**GENDER ANALYSIS  
OF ARMENIAN SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND TEXTBOOKS**

**POLICY BRIEF**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Armenian government has articulated the commitment to integrating the principles of gender equality in its education system. This commitment has been reflected in the adoption of the *Gender Policy Concept Paper* in 2010 and the *Law on Securing Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men* in 2013, which identify gender equality as a priority area and call for integrating the gender dimension into the school curriculum at all levels.

This policy report examines whether and to what extent the principles of gender equality are reflected in Armenian school curriculum and textbooks, identifies key issues related to the achievement of gender equality goals in education, and provides policy level recommendations to improve gender-sensitivity in school curriculum and textbooks. Data was drawn from an overview of existing studies on gender representation in Armenian school curricula and textbooks conducted by local experts, primarily relying on the study commissioned by the World Bank (Osipov & Sargizova, 2015). The study was based on a comprehensive analysis of 9 high school textbooks in Social Science (grades 10 and 11), Armenian History (grades 10, 11 and 12), and Armenian Literature (grades 10, 11 and 12), as well as an analysis of academic standards, syllabi, and teacher's guides for the same subjects. Data for the policy report was also supplemented by interviews with key education stakeholders.

While the articulation of gender policy is an impressive step towards promoting gender equality in the education sector, the findings of the policy report suggest that the Armenian government's commitment to gender equality has not yet been fully translated into practice. Evidence from the existing studies indicates several issues that need to be urgently addressed. First, there is a disconnect between key policy documents, practices, and processes, revealing that the principles of gender equality have not been consistently translated into education standards, curricula, and textbooks in all subjects and levels of the education system. Second, school textbooks reflect an imbalanced gender representation, where men significantly outnumber women in all forms of representation, including texts and illustrations. Third, women are predominantly presented in stereotypical ways, appearing in their family roles more frequently than professional occupations. Some textbooks include texts that normalize gender-based violence, discrimination, and bias. Finally, gender stereotypes exist in the broader school culture, shaping educational and career choices among Armenian young men and women.

Key recommendations emerging from the policy report include:

- To explicitly identify gender equality as a goal in state programs and education standards.
- To consistently translate the principles of gender equality into educational materials and practices at all levels, including state educational standards, curricula, syllabi, teacher's guides, and textbooks.
- To eliminate gender bias and stereotypes from school curriculum and textbooks, while acknowledging women's diverse contributions to all areas of life.
- To develop gender sensitive standards and criteria for textbook development and review.
- To raise gender awareness among school principals, teachers, students, and parents.
- To consistently monitor the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies and practices.
- To coordinate efforts among various international donor agencies for the collective endeavor of eliminating gender disparity in education.

# THE INTEGRATION OF GENDER SENSITIVE PERSPECTIVES IN ARMENIAN SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND TEXTBOOKS

## I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Education plays a key role in achieving gender equality, making a significant contribution to reaching the broader goals of human development. This is reflected in numerous international documents – including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Education for All (EFA) goals – which call for the adoption of policies and practices to eliminate gender disparities in education and empower women and girls at all levels. As a signatory to SDGs, MDGs, and EFA, Armenia has demonstrated a strong commitment to ensuring gender equality in education. Armenia has also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993, and the Optional Protocol on violence against women in 2006. Furthermore, it is a member of the Council of Europe since 2001 and is a party to several regional treaties that reiterate the principles of nondiscrimination on the basis of sex.<sup>1</sup>

At the national level, Armenia’s Constitution enshrines the right to gender equality and outlaws all forms of discrimination on the basis of gender and other characteristics (Article 14.1). The *Concept Paper on Gender Equality* and the *Gender Policy Strategic Action Plan, 2011–2015* have provided the basis for national gender policy, including in the education area. In 2013, Armenia also adopted the Law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women, which reiterates Armenia’s commitments under the Constitution and international conventions. While the adoption of the Law was highly contentious, it is a significant step forward. The challenge now is to enforce and comprehensively monitor the implementation of the law and related policies in practice.

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### ☞ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls:  
Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels (Goal 5)

### ☞ Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women (Goal 3)

### • Education for All Goals (EFAs)

Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education and achieve gender equality in education, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality

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## Indicators of Gender (In)Equality

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the European Social Charter. Armenia has also expressed its commitment to implement the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy, 2014–2017.

Indicators of human development (especially the gender dimensions of development) demonstrate that Armenia exhibits positive indicators of equality in some areas, while lagging behind in others. For example, the 2014 UNDP Gender Development Index (GDI),<sup>2</sup> which shows the ratio of the female to the male Human Development Index, was at 0.994 for Armenia, meaning that the gender gap in human development was fairly small and comparable to the gaps observed for Europe and Central Asia combined. In the area of education, Armenia exhibits gender parity in enrollment rates from primary to higher education. In particular, enrollment statistics show that girls tend to stay in education for a greater number of years, up to the level of postgraduate education. Boys more often enter vocational education after having completed basic or general education. In terms of academic achievement, girls tend to outperform boys on international student achievement tests such as Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS, 2003, 2007, 2011), although these differences are not statistically significant (see Appendix II).

Notwithstanding success in school access and academic achievement, gender patterns exist in the type of study programs Armenian students pursue at the postsecondary level. For example, young women tend to dominate the “traditionally female” areas of study (e.g., education, social sciences, and health), which lead to work in lower-paid public sector jobs. Meanwhile, young men tend to concentrate in technical fields (e.g., energy, transport, and construction), which generally correlate with jobs in higher-paying sectors. Furthermore, many young women who complete higher education do not become employed after graduation either because their qualifications do not meet labor market demands or because they are expected to take on family responsibilities after they marry (Asian Development Bank, 2015).

More importantly, data indicate that women’s high levels of school enrollments, academic achievements, and educational attainment have not resulted in corresponding gains in the labor market, where clear gender patterns can be observed in uneven political representation and labor force participation (Asian Development Bank, 2015). For example, Armenian women take only 10.7% of seats in parliament, compared to 43.6% in Sweden, 36.9% in Germany, and 20.1% in Kazakhstan (see Appendix II). Among the country’s economically active population (15–75 years old), working women constitute 55.2% compared with 72.1% of men (Asian Development Bank, 2015, p 25). Furthermore, the labor market exhibits stratification in the type of work performed by men and women. In particular, men tend to engage in a more diverse range of economic activities, while women are more concentrated in the lower-paying fields of education, health services, and trade (Asian Development Bank, 2015, p. 27).<sup>3</sup> Such labor market segregation leads to a significant gender wage gap between men and women in Armenia, which remains one of the largest in Southeast Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (Asian Development Bank, 2015, p. 30).

In other words, women in Armenia are highly educated, yet their participation in the labor market and representation in political decision-making remain quite low. Such gender imbalance stems largely from the persisting influence of gender stereotypes, which is not unique to Armenia, but is characteristic to many developing economies and OECD countries.

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<sup>2</sup> UNDP GDI is based on sex-disaggregated data from the Human Development Index.

<sup>3</sup> In the field of education, 84% of employees are women, yet they account for fewer than 40% of school directors (Asian Development Bank, 2015).

It is likely that gender stereotypes contribute to the reproduction of traditional (patriarchal) gender roles through mass media, as well as school culture, curricula, and textbooks. As OECD (2011) states, the effect of such gender imbalance is clearly serious:

It hinders women's careers, it lowers their future earning levels and deprives [OECD] economies of a source of talent and innovation. It is also an inefficient use of investment in education. (p. 2)

However, gender equality is not only a means to other ends such as economic development. It is also “a value in its own right” (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2014, p. 6). Moving beyond the economic argument, it is important to acknowledge gender equality as key to achieving a broader principle of improving the quality of life of individuals, families, and communities. Above all, gender equality is a fundamental human right.

### **Policy Report Goals and Overview**

This policy report examines whether and to what extent the principles of gender equality are reflected in Armenian school curriculum and textbooks, identifies key issues related to the achievement of gender equality goals in education, and provides policy level recommendations to improve gender-sensitivity in school curriculum and textbooks. Data is drawn from an overview of existing studies on gender representation in Armenian school curricula and textbooks conducted by local experts primarily relying on the study commissioned by the World Bank (Osipov & Sargizova, 2015), which was based on the analysis of 9 high school textbooks in Social Studies (grades 10 and 11), Armenian History (grades 10, 11 and 12), and Armenian Literature (grades 10, 11 and 12). In addition, the study included the analysis of academic standards, syllabi, and teacher's guides for the same subjects.

Methodologically, this in-depth study drew on both quantitative and qualitative analysis of both texts and illustrations, including the analysis of the frequency of appearance of male and female characters and their relative share in the total number of appearances; frequency and share of quotations attributed to male and female figures; personality attributes of male and female characters described in the textbooks. In addition to quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis focused on how textbooks describe women and men (as well as girls and boys), specifically identifying and analyzing instances of gender bias and stereotypical representation of males and females in the context of family, employment, and socio-political spheres. Finally, the study analyzed gender composition of teams of textbook authors. Not only was this approach methodologically sound and sophisticated, but it was also very detailed in providing both concrete examples of how gender issues are addressed in textbooks and very practical examples of how gender representation could be improved in line with international standards in order to reflect the diverse contribution of women to Armenian history, politics, economics, and culture in meaningful ways.

The policy note also drew on the UNDP (2011) study of 138 textbooks for grades 1-11 in all subjects, as well as a study by the NGO *Society Without Violence* (2014) of 5 social science textbooks for grades 8-11. Interviews with key stakeholders were conducted in February 2016, including the representatives of the Ministry of Education, textbook authors, schools, non-governmental organizations, and international agencies in Yerevan, Armenia.

## II. THE ROLE OF SCHOOL CURRICULUM IN PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY

Numerous international agreements – including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the Education for All (EFA) – have emphasized the importance of achieving gender equality in education. To date, these goals have primarily focused on achieving gender parity in enrollments (i.e., ensuring equal access and participation in education for boys and girls) and increasing education quality for all learners (i.e., ensuring equal academic achievement among boys and girls). As data reveal, Armenia does very well in both of these areas, strongly exhibiting gender parity in enrollment rates from primary to higher education, as well as demonstrating virtually no difference in academic achievement among girls and boys.

However, school access and academic achievement alone do not guarantee gender equality. In fact, the OECD report *Closing the Gender Gap: Act Now* (2013) found that gender equality and women's empowerment remain “unfinished business” across all countries. In many OECD countries and developing economies, including Armenia, women are still less likely to be represented in politics, they participate less in labor force, concentrate in lower-paying economic sectors, and earn less than men. As Longwe (1998) notes, this is because schools perpetuate – whether advertently or inadvertently – gender inequalities through power relations, pedagogy, and stereotypical portrayal of male and female roles in textbooks, curricula, and learning materials. Based on the analysis of studies from both developing economies and OECD countries, Blumberg (2007) argued that gender bias in textbooks is much more spread geographically than the remaining gender gap in parity. In particular, females tend to be greatly underrepresented in school textbooks, and both males and females are often depicted in gender-stereotyped roles, constraining visions of who boys and girls are and what they can become. Similarly, an overview of textbook research in the countries of Southeast/Central Europe and the former Soviet Union concluded that school textbooks transmit rigid gender-based stereotypes that disadvantage women (Magno & Silova, 2007). In this context, gender bias in textbooks and school curricula remains “one of the best camouflaged – and hardest to budge – rocks in the road to gender equality in education” (Blumberg, 2007, p. 4).

In addition to textbooks and school curricula, traditional gender stereotypes could also be reproduced by teachers and the broader school culture. For example, the 2007 EFA report (UNESCO 2006) concluded that in addition to stereotypes in learning materials, [differing] teachers' expectations of girls and boys negatively affect gender equality (p. 2). A recent study commissioned by the European Parliament (McCracken, Unterhalter, Márquez, Chełstowska, 2015) similarly concluded that teacher attitudes and beliefs towards gender “reinforce students' gender roles, often to the disadvantage of girls” (p. 50). The study revealed that traditional beliefs are frequently transferred “through teacher training, through teachers' attitudes and practices towards boys and girls and also through young people themselves” (p. 51). As a result, education systems continue to subtly reproduce invisible gender stereotypes both inside and outside the European Union.

Recognizing the role of schools in alleviating gender bias, the 2004 EFA report reaffirmed that girls and boys should enjoy “teaching methods, curricula, and academic orientation *unaffected by gender bias*” (UNESCO, 2003, p. 17, emphasis added). This means that schools can no longer be seen as value-free, neutral environments that prepare all students equally for citizenship (Stromquist, 2002). The emphasis needs to shift from *equality* of education opportunity to *equity*, focusing on the concepts of fairness and justice that have the potential to minimize disadvantages over which individuals have little or no control, including economic situation, occupational choices, income, environment, and life chances. OECD (1997) explains:

Educational equity refers to an educational environment in which individuals can consider options and make choices based on their abilities and talents, not on the basis of stereotypes, biased expectations or discrimination. The achievement of educational equity enables females and males of all races and ethnic backgrounds [to] develop skills needed to be productive, empowered citizens. It opens economic and social opportunities regardless of gender, ethnicity or social status.

The focus on equity or the rights-based approach has formed the basis of the Beijing Declaration (1995), which proclaims that “women’s rights are human rights” and argues that achievement of gender equity “will require changes at many levels, including changes in attitudes and relationships, changes in institutions and legal frameworks, changes in economic institutions, and changes in political decision-making structures” (UN, 2002, p. 1). Gender equity has also been identified as the goal of the Dakar Declaration (2010), which appeals to governments and international development agencies to take “urgent action” to create empowerment opportunities for girls by “transform[ing] power hierarchies in learning spaces, communities and policy structures.” Both instruments indicate the need for a systemic approach to overcoming gender inequalities rather than a more limited “add-on” approach or a narrow (yet important) focus on parity. Rather, the Beijing Declaration (and subsequently the Dakar Declaration) has established gender mainstreaming as “a major global strategy for the promotion of gender equality” (UN, 2002).

### **Gender mainstreaming**

Gender mainstreaming is defined as “...the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality” (UN, 2002).

The gender mainstreaming approach is intended as *a transformative process* across multiple areas, including sociocultural, economic, and institutional factors (McCracken et al., 2015). As the study commissioned by the European Parliament (2015) argues, the impact of gender mainstreaming efforts will be substantial only if implemented systemically. In the area of education, this means a commitment to developing and implementing gender-sensitive policies, curricula, textbooks, teacher training, and the overall school culture with the goal of ultimately transforming social norms and values that perpetuate discrimination.



In the EU, three legislative models are used to address gender mainstreaming in education, reflecting the degree to which gender equality concepts are embedded in legislative frameworks: (1) general equal treatment and equal opportunities, (2) equal treatment and equal opportunities in education, and (3) gender equality in education (Eurydice, 2010). The first model, *equal treatment and equal opportunities*, entails general anti-discrimination provisions on the equal treatment of and equal opportunities for women and men, which provide the legal basis for gender equality policies in education. Anti-discrimination provisions may appear as a separate anti-discrimination law or as a part of other acts (e.g., the Labor Code), but are not always explicitly reflected in education statutes. As the Eurydice report (2010) summarizes, this model forms the basis of policymaking in Belgium (Flemish and French communities), Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Cyprus, Hungary, the Netherlands, and Poland. The second model, *equal treatment and equal opportunities in education*, includes specific legislation on equal treatment and equal opportunities for women and men in the education sector, as well as education acts that make specific references to gender equality. However, gender equality is framed in terms of goals but not outcomes. This means that education acts *aim* to ensure equal access to and equal treatment in education for all students, but do not include specific provisions for combatting existing inequalities in a wider society (Eurydice, 2010). This model can be found in Greece, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia. The third model, *gender equality in education*, explicitly states the goal of achieving gender equality as an *outcome* of education and can be found in the Czech Republic, Germany, Spain, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Austria, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway (Eurydice, 2010).

While most European governments aim to address gender inequalities in education, fewer countries have explicitly articulated the aim of reaching gender equality in terms of outcomes or have successfully implemented a systemic approach to the gender mainstreaming. The challenges associated with the implementation of gender-mainstreaming strategies are multiple and diverse, including (1) the distribution of educational provision and financial resources available to girls and women, (2) policies and institutional factors that deliver education, and (3) cultural and social norms relating to gender (McCracken et al., 2015). At the global level, no country has yet fully achieved gender equity and, while many countries have made progress in the development of legislation on gender equality and women's rights (including Armenia), wide gaps remain between legislation and its implementation in all areas of the Beijing Platform for Action (Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission, 2015).

Notwithstanding the challenges of implementing a systemic approach to gender-mainstreaming, there are many examples of successful policies, projects, and programs. For the purposes of this report, only a select number of cases will be discussed, including gender mainstreaming policies in the educational systems of the European Union countries (for more detailed examples of gender mainstreaming policies in Sweden and Latvia, see Appendix I for case-studies). These examples were chosen because of a relative success of gender mainstreaming in these societies, but also because both cases demonstrate that progress towards gender equality is a lengthy, extensive, and complex process.

For example, **Sweden**, which is currently one of the most gender egalitarian societies in the world, has been consistently addressing gender equality in national policies since the 1970s (Numhauser-Henning, 2015). Since 1994, gender mainstreaming has been the main feature and currently the principle strategy for achieving Sweden's national gender equality policy objectives. According to the Swedish government (Ministry of Education and Research, 2014), "gender mainstreaming means that decisions in all policy areas are to be permeated by a gender equality perspective," including the allocation of resources and the establishment of standards. In the education area, curricula at the pre-school, compulsory school, and upper secondary school levels are guided by the *Education Act* (2010:800) in the development of non-discrimination guidelines, which apply to both public and independent schools. Standard non-discrimination clauses (including a direct reference to gender equality) can be found at each level of the national curriculum and standards. At the upper secondary level, the statement reads:

The school should promote understanding of other people and the ability to empathise. No one in school should be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnic affiliation, religion or other belief system, transgender identity or its expression, sexual orientation, age or functional impairment, or to other forms of degrading treatment. All tendencies to discrimination or degrading treatment should be actively combated. Xenophobia and intolerance must be confronted with knowledge, open discussion and active measures. (Skolverket, 2013, p. 4)

Similarly, gender equality appears as an overarching principle of the curriculum in such countries as **Malta, Austria, Sweden, Liechtenstein, and Norway**. In these countries, the gender perspective permeates the whole curriculum and is taken into consideration throughout all subjects and areas (Eurydice, 2010). For example, the **Maltese** National Minimum Curriculum states that

Gender equality is not a theme that should be treated by the school in isolation or during the teaching of a particular subject. Equality should be an interdisciplinary theme which teachers can develop within the context of their particular subject, confronting prejudice and promoting more gender-inclusive alternatives. (quoted in Eurydice, 2010, p. 57)

However, other countries' experiences with gender-mainstreaming are much more limited and less comprehensive. For example, the **Latvian** government had initially prioritized substantial changes in its legal system over gender equality policies. The process of accession to the EU and the adoption of the *Acquis Communautaire* contributed to the promotion of gender equality in Latvia's national policy agenda. As a result, the Ministry of Welfare became the body responsible for the development of gender equality policy. Unlike Sweden, however, Latvia takes an *integrationist approach* to gender mainstreaming, which means that the principles of gender equality are taken into consideration while developing policies; yet, it does not necessarily challenge existing policy paradigms or involve a fundamental rethinking of gender relationships. Similar to Armenia, more female students enter higher education institutions than male students, yet gender segregation exists in the choice of their fields of study. Women tend to dominate in traditionally female fields of study such as education/teaching and nursing, which eventually leads to lower paying jobs in the future (European Commission, 2012). Traditional gender stereotypes are reproduced in school curriculum and media. Latvia made significant steps towards alleviating gender stereotypes in schools by introducing state education standards for all levels and subjects,

which include a non-discrimination clause and specifically reference gender. The next step will be to incorporate these standards in teaching materials and textbooks. In fact, the National Development Plan of Latvia 2014-2020 and the Education Development Guidelines 2014-2020 envisage a complex support system to address gender equality goals which includes the task of incorporating gender equality issues in curriculum and teaching materials.

In addition to explicitly addressing the principles of gender equality in standards and curriculum, it is important that these principles are reflected in textbooks. According to the Eurydice report (2010), official guidelines on gender issues for authors of educational texts and teaching materials exist in such countries as Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Austria, and Iceland. Furthermore, many countries require school textbooks to be evaluated for gender sensitivity.

Beyond teaching materials, it is necessary to ensure that the process and teaching and learning itself reflects gender equality principles. As the Eurydice report (2010) states, however, guidelines for schools and/or teachers in this area are not yet very widespread. In some countries, this is the responsibility of the government bodies, while in others it is developed by NGOs. In Finland, for example, teachers have access to a guidebook, which advises how to prepare the plan and how to highlight the importance of developing teaching methods and creating learning environments which will benefit both genders at a high school level. In the Czech Republic, the Open Society NGO published a handbook for teachers and students of pedagogical universities, describing the risks of gender stereotyping in various areas of school life (Eurydice, 2010, p. 58). Within the project “Equal opportunities for men and women in educational practices” (supported by the European Social Fund and state budget), a manual for teachers at primary and secondary schools was published in 2007 (Eurydice, 2010, p. 58). In Ireland, the resource packs prepared for schools include model lessons that demonstrate “how all subject areas can be inclusive of the perspectives, interests, and experiences of both boys and girls” (Eurydice, 2010, p. 58). However, the Eurydice report (2010) concludes that more attention should be paid to “the development of suitable gender-specific teaching methods and guidelines which could play an important role in counteracting the gender stereotyping which influences students’ interests and learning” (p. 59).

To summarize, the cases discussed above – which represent a range of experiences with gender mainstreaming policies and practices in the area of education – illustrate that adoption of the gender mainstreaming approach has a direct impact on policy processes and outcomes. Yet, gender mainstreaming is a challenging concept, which requires not only time (sometimes decades), but also systemic effort and financial investment to adopt and institutionalize a gender perspective into all aspects of policy processes. Although policies and practices cannot be changed overnight, evidence suggests that a gradual introduction of gender mainstreaming into the education system has the potential to transform the national culture – including the discourses, policies, procedures, and participants – to the mutual benefit of both women and men.

### III. GENDER ANALYSIS OF ARMENIAN STANDARDS, CURRICULA, AND TEXTBOOKS: ON OVERVIEW

The integration of principles of gender equality into the educational system of Armenia has been articulated as a priority area for the government. This commitment has been reflected in the adoption of the *Gender Policy Concept Paper* in 2010 and the *Law on Securing Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men* in 2013, which identify priority areas for education reform to promote gender equality. In particular, the *Gender Policy Concept Paper* (2010) clearly states that education reform efforts should be focused on (1) creating optimal conditions to maximize the creative and intellectual development of both sexes by further improvement and democratization of the education sphere; (2) educating socially active and responsible citizens, shaping an egalitarian gender culture, supporting gender equality in society, social justice and enjoyment of social freedoms; and (3) establishing gender balanced representation at all levels of the education sphere (pp. 17-18). More specifically, the *Gender Policy Concept Paper* (2010) identifies the primary directions of gender policy in the education sphere, which include:

- Forming an egalitarian notion of gender relations, drafting new education curricula and manuals directed at the creation and implementation of principles of gender equality, as well as at overcoming traditions that encourage patriarchal gender stereotypes, and
- Integrating gender education into the curricula as a mandatory component at all levels of the education system.

While the articulation of gender policy is an impressive step towards promoting gender equality in the education sector, this commitment has not yet been fully translated into education practice. For example, the Law on the Adoption of the State Program of Educational Development (2011-2015) and the second draft of the State Program on Educational Development for 2016-2025 do not identify gender equality as an explicit principle of the state program. Similarly, evidence from existing studies suggests that the principles of gender equality have not been consistently translated into education standards, curricula, and textbooks in all subjects and levels of the educational system. In particular, an analysis of recent studies of school curricula and textbooks identifies the following issues that warrant immediate attention:

- (1) Inconsistent reflection of gender equality principles in state policy, education standards, programs, teacher guides, and textbooks.
- (2) Imbalanced gender representation in school textbooks.
- (3) Traditional and stereotypical representation of gender roles in school textbooks.
- (4) School textbooks predominantly written by men.
- (5) Gender stereotypes in the broader school culture.

(1) Inconsistent reflection of gender equality principles in state policy, education standards, programs, teacher guides, and textbooks

While policy documents explicitly identify gender equality as a priority, state education standards, programs, teacher guides, and textbooks do not consistently reflect the principles of gender equality across all subject areas. For example, standards for some subject areas (e.g., social science) promote a human rights-based approach to gender equality, presenting clear guidelines for raising gender awareness among students and making course syllabi more gender-sensitive. As noted in the study commissioned by the World Bank (Osipov & Sargizova, 2015), some sections of the social science standards – especially the sections related to Aesthetics, Psychology, Political Science, and Philosophy – contain specific instructions for not only introducing gender perspective into curriculum and textbooks, but also to equip students with adequate gender knowledge. For example, the *Standard for Aesthetics* states that gender issues should be addressed through such topics as ‘masculinity and femininity as specific manifestations of beauty,’ ‘the issue of communication styles and rules of conduct of men and women,’ and ‘embodiment of feminine and masculine beauty in arts.’<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the *Standard for Psychology* focuses on gender in the ‘Family’ theme, highlighting the topic of ‘gender relations in the present-day Armenian family.’<sup>5</sup> And the *Standard for Political Science* specifies addressing ‘the issue of women’s and men’s engagement in political processes.’<sup>6</sup> Importantly, the standards also identify the importance of shaping a particular (gender-sensitive) mindset that would contribute to the elimination of gender stereotypes still prevalent in the Armenian society, promote political participation of both women and men, and consider changing identities and social roles of both sexes under the impact of globalization.

However, education standards for other school subjects (e.g., Armenian language and literature; Armenian history) focus exclusively on subject area content and generally remain gender-blind. For example, the high school Armenian Language and the Armenian Literature subject standards mention the importance of developing the student as a personality and citizen by promoting a particular value system, but do not contain a reference to gender equality, which is one of the core democratic values. In the standards for Armenian history, a gender perspective is entirely missing from the subject’s mandatory core content. As the textbook study (Osipov & Sargizova, 2015) points out, the standards for Armenian history do not reference women’s issues and achievements in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, including the origins of the women’s movement and the gender equality discourse. In both of these subject areas, gender equality – and the principles of non-discrimination more broadly – is neither stated as a goal nor explicitly manifested in the state standards.

While state standards provide a general framework for education content development, they play an important role in setting the direction for a more concrete elaboration of the actual curricula, syllabi, assessment, teacher guides, and textbooks. If state standards do not reference gender equality – either explicitly or in the context of human rights as equal rights and opportunities that are free from biases and discrimination – it is unlikely that these principles would translate into educational materials and school practice. On the one hand, gender equality principles are not referenced in the state standards for Armenian language,

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<sup>4</sup> *Social Science. Standards for high schools*, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

literature, and history at the secondary level and they are subsequently absent in curriculum content, syllabi, teacher guides, and textbooks. On the other hand, standards for civic education demonstrate a human-rights based approach to equality (specifically referencing gender equality), which then appear – although briefly and inconsistently – in the corresponding program curricula, syllabi, teacher guides, and textbooks.

The issue of the disconnect between key policy documents and processes (e.g., standards, syllabi, teacher guides, and textbooks) could be explained by the fact that various documents were developed and revised at different time intervals, rarely following a linear process. In particular, most of the school curricula and textbooks currently used in schools were developed and published *before* these policy commitments were made and therefore did not undergo a gender analysis during or upon their production.<sup>7</sup> As Armenia continues to reform its education system, especially in the area of school curriculum and textbooks, it is important that the principle of gender equality is reflected in state standards – either explicitly or in the context of human rights – followed by a careful mapping of this goal into educational materials and practices at all levels.

## (2) Imbalanced gender representation in school textbooks

Numerous textbook studies conducted in Armenia reveal that school textbooks give a strong preference to men in all forms of representation, including texts and illustrations. In the social science and Armenian literature textbooks, for example, male characters and personalities are represented over 4 times more frequently than female ones (82.4% versus 17.5% in social science and 80.5% versus 19.5% in literature). In Armenian history, women represent less than 5% of all historical figures and characters (see Table 1). Furthermore, textbook authors predominantly quote men in epigraphs, which is clearly visible across social science, history, and literature textbooks at the secondary level. In some textbooks, not a single quotation is attributed to a woman (e.g., 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade social science textbooks).

While some may argue that the disciplines of social science and history derive from philosophy, which has been historically dominated by men, it is important to acknowledge the contributions of women – from the Middle Ages to the 21st century – in advancing a wide spectrum of ideas in religion, metaphysics, philosophy, and political theory.<sup>8</sup> Alongside Plato and Aristotle, for example, textbooks can feature the contributions of Diotima, Perictione and Theano. Textbooks should also acknowledge Mary Wollstonecraft (alongside Rousseau), Anna Maria Van Schurman (alongside Kant), Hannah Arendt (alongside Heidegger), Simone de Beauvoir (alongside Satre), and many other female philosophers for their contributions to advancing the Western thought.

In Armenian history, textbooks can highlight the contributions of Armenian queens and princesses to public life, charity, and political struggle over different historical periods. Textbooks can also include the discussion of the birth of the women's movement in Armenia in the context of Western Enlightenment, highlighting the contributions of Srбуhi Dussap, Zabel Yesayan, and others. Finally, women's contributions to various aspects of life

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<sup>7</sup> For example, the state educational standards were developed in 2010 and were revised in 2012.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Warren's book (2012) *Unconventional History of Philosophy*, which is an excellent example of re-discovering the names, lives, texts, and perspectives of women philosophers.

during national awakening and the Soviet periods could be more presented in more adequate and meaningful ways.<sup>9</sup>

**Table 1.** Frequency of Representation of Female and Male Personalities and Characters in Textbooks (text and illustrations combined)

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
<b>Social Science</b>	<b>17.5%</b>	<b>82.4%</b>
Social Science (10 <sup>th</sup> grade)	18.4% (120)	81.6% (531)
Social Science (11 <sup>th</sup> grade)	16.4% (53)	83.6% (269)
Social Science (12 <sup>th</sup> grade)	17.9% (103)	82.1% (472)
<b>Armenian History</b>	<b>4.2%</b>	<b>95.8%</b>
Armenian History (10 <sup>th</sup> grade)	5.8% (28)	94.2% (450)
Armenian History (11 <sup>th</sup> grade)	2.5% (20)	97.5% (769)
Armenian History (12 <sup>th</sup> grade)	4.5% (29)	95.5% (625)
<b>Armenian Literature</b>	<b>19.5%</b>	<b>80.5%</b>
Armenian Literature (10 <sup>th</sup> grade)	18.9% (316)	81.1% (1358)
Armenian Literature (11 <sup>th</sup> grade)	19.9% (342)	80.1% (1376)
Armenian Literature (12 <sup>th</sup> grade)	19.8% (744)	80.2% (596)

Similarly, the Armenian language and literature textbooks do not highlight the creative legacy of Armenian female writers and do not include a presentation of the works of Armenian female writers and poets of recent years. For example, the contributions of Sybil and Srbouhi Dussap, who were involved in a theoretical discussion on the use of the vernacular as a written Armenian language in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are only briefly mentioned in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade Armenian literature textbook. The 11<sup>th</sup> grade Armenian literature textbook does not mention any female writers at all. In short, the contributions of many female writers are not appropriately acknowledged in school textbooks. Among them are Zaruhi Galemkiearian, Vittoria Aghanoor, Iskuhi Minasian, Haykanush Marrk, Hermine Hovian, Armenuhi Tigranian, Anayis, Mariam Khatisian, Marie Beylerian, Shushanik Kurghinian, Mannik Berberian, Sybil, and Zabel Yesayian. Furthermore, textbooks do not present the work of a new generation of Armenian writers and poetesses such as Arpine Grenier-Konyalian, Tina Demirdjian, Lola Koundakjian, Armine Iknadossian, Alene Terzian, and Lory Bedikian<sup>10</sup> who have dominated the Armenian poetry scene of the 21st century. The omission of noteworthy works of Armenian literature in textbooks serves to devalue the collective worth of Armenian writers by limiting the scope of the country's literary accomplishment to the work of men only. Adding diversity to the teaching materials

<sup>9</sup> For a more detailed discussion of female historical figures omitted in Armenian history textbooks, see section V in Osipov & Sargizova (2015), which provides a detailed review of history textbooks for grades 10-12.

<sup>10</sup> Lory Bedikian is a winner of the 2010 Philip Levine Prize in Poetry, for her manuscript, *The Book of Lamenting*.

and curriculum by including significant literature regardless of the authors' genders will overcome the simplistic and limited portrayal of women in submissive and passive roles, while providing a more complete picture of Armenian talent in the field of literature.

### (3) Traditional and stereotypical representation of gender roles in school textbooks

In many Armenian textbooks, women are not only less visible than men, but they are also presented in stereotypical ways, often appearing as passive, submissive, and dependent on men. In most textbooks, for example, women and girls are principally linked to their family status, particularly to being a mother, wife, daughter, and grandmother. In the 10<sup>th</sup> grade Armenian literature textbook, for example, the images of women frequently appear in the context of motherhood, highlighting their modesty, beauty, humility, propriety, and readiness to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their husbands and homeland. In particular, the depiction of the Armenian pagan deities is presented only from the perspective of their reproductive function: "*Anahit – the golden mother, the nurturing mother,*" "was depicted *in the image and clothes of an Armenian woman with a child in her lap* and was considered to be the mother of all virtues and benefactor of the entire mankind...", "*Nane – patron of motherhood*" (quoted in Osipov & Sargizova, 2015, p. 101, emphasis added). In the 12<sup>th</sup> grade social studies textbook, authors discuss gender equality achievements in the western countries in relation to "a significant decrease in the birth rate," implying (fairly explicitly) that women's main mission is to ensure the population growth through their reproductive function, thus undermining women's aspirations to become fully integrated members of the society (Society without Violence, 2014). Similarly, the 10<sup>th</sup> grade social science textbook generally portrays women through the lens of motherhood (as care-givers and child-bearers), often showing women in the context of their families and children (Osipov & Sargizova, 2015).

Furthermore, some textbooks (e.g., 10<sup>th</sup> grade Armenian history textbook) present women as unnamed victims who are in need of protection, as well as passive creatures who are kidnapped, taken hostage, or married off for diplomatic reasons such as forging closer ties between different kingdoms. The World Bank commissioned study (Osipov & Sargizova, 2015) also points out that some textbooks include content that normalizes gender violence. For example, a 10th grade Armenian history textbook includes the following commentary on the Armenian legend about Artashes and Satenik: "Having been rejected by Satenik's father, Artashes solves the problem in line with the *Armenian custom and with self-esteem worthy of the brave man: he crosses the river, ties up Satenik with a rope and kidnaps her*" (p. 153, emphasis added). This commentary seems to suggest that girl kidnapping is a lawfully accepted Armenian custom and behavior worthy of the brave man. While such explicit normalization of gender violence is rare, textbook content should be carefully reviewed to eliminate instances of gender-based violence, discrimination, and bias that are counterproductive to the attainment of a gender egalitarian society.

Across all textbooks and grade levels, women are less frequently identified in their professional capacities compared to men. When they are, the range of professions and occupations is generally limited to that of teachers and nurses. In contrast, men are presented as decision makers, shapers of political history, political and religious figures, advisors, generals, heroes, and cultural figures. They appear to occupy prestigious



professions such as scientists, civil servants, doctors, governors, war participants, persons of arts, writers, clergymen, philosophers, and others. It is clear that textbooks would benefit from a more balanced and fair representation of gender roles across the different subject areas. Importantly, the 11<sup>th</sup> grade social science textbook acknowledges the issue of women's underrepresentation in politics, yet stops short of discussing multiple barriers (other than traditions) preventing women from political participation and decision-making. As Osipov & Sargizova (2015) highlight, to address the issue meaningfully, multiple dimensions of moving towards gender equality could be discussed in social science textbooks, including economic empowerment of women, development of democratic gender culture, elimination of gender stereotypes, as well as the use of temporary special measures and efforts to combat gender-based discrimination and violence against women.

#### (4) School textbooks are predominantly written by men

School textbooks in Armenia are predominantly written by men and only a few textbooks are written by teams of men and women. As evidenced by the data from the analysis of the secondary school textbooks in social science, history, and literature, the most gender-balanced textbook author teams worked on the social science textbooks for Grades 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, which also appear to be more gender-sensitive compared to other textbooks. Textbook author teams for history and literature at the secondary school level were written entirely by men, without representation of a single woman. Furthermore, there are no females among the editors of the secondary textbooks in social science, Armenian history, and Armenian literature.

The gender composition of textbook author teams may be a significant factor in developing a more balanced and gender-sensitive textbook content by bringing the diversity of perspectives and life experiences of male and female authors, while decreasing the dominance of male authors. While the inclusion of women does not automatically secure a more gender equal perspective in school curricula and textbooks, it nevertheless can ensure a symbolic representation, which is an important step towards a substantive representation.

#### (5) Gender stereotypes in the broader school culture

Although an official gender assessment study in the area of education has not yet been conducted in Armenia, several studies collected data on gender stereotypes that exist in the education system and the broader Armenian culture. For example, a survey by NGO Society without Violence (Andresson, 2013)<sup>11</sup> gave some indications of the types of gender inequalities that exist in the broader school culture. In particular, the survey found that traditional gender stereotypes exist among high school teachers and students. Approximately half of the teachers believed that “women and men should keep traditional professions” and “there are some professions that women should not have” and 56% of teachers felt that a man can have any profession that he wants. These findings suggest that many teachers subscribe to stereotypical views about gender, which in turn impacts the opportunities that are presented to girls (Asian Development Bank, 2015). Indeed, the same survey confirmed traditional gender stereotypes among high schools students themselves. In particular, only 43% of surveyed students believed that “a woman can pursue any

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<sup>11</sup> The survey included 283 high school students and 50 teachers from three schools in Yerevan.

profession she wants,” while half of the respondents stated that “there are some professions that a woman should not have.” Of all respondents, the majority of surveyed boys (73%) believe that there are some professions that a woman should not have.”

The survey also found that teachers treat male and female students differently. In particular, 54% of teachers believe that boys and girls are essentially different and should be treated differently, while only 28% responded that they are different but should be treated equally. Students confirmed that they face different treatment and discrimination by their teachers. Furthermore, the survey also revealed that teachers lacked an understanding of what constitutes a gender-equality approach to teaching and learning. The results indicated that 57% of teachers believed that they can change traditional stereotypes and that they do it in their work, while 14% responded that they can change traditional stereotypes in their teacher role but that they do not attempt to do it in their classrooms and 27% stated that their role is simply educational. When asked about the possibility of integrating gender perspective in the curriculum, 32% of surveyed teachers responded that they would eagerly do it, while 33% responded that they would not like to teach it and 36% did not know. These survey findings indicate that teachers may lack knowledge of and skills in integrating gender perspectives into curriculum. However, the findings also suggest that teachers may be victims of traditional gender stereotypes themselves. This may have serious implications for transforming the school culture:

When teachers – or any other professional that has the ability to make a difference – accept inequality as something natural within Armenian culture, they project a mindset to the students that is not encouraging the critique of [existing] norms, but acceptance of existing norms. (Andresson, 2013)

In higher education, where women constitute the majority of all students, traditional gender roles persist. A 2013 survey of male and female students at Yerevan State University, (Center for Gender and Leadership Studies, 2014)<sup>12</sup> revealed that the majority of young people (over 90% of men and women) think “a woman should have a good education.” However, a considerably smaller percentage of surveyed students agreed that it is important or very important “for a woman to have a successful career” (46% of men and 62% of women respectively). As the Asian Development Bank (2015) suggests, these findings may indicate that young women “lack self-confidence and do not have career aspirations and that women fear that being successful in a career could compromise their family life and challenge their traditional roles as wives and mothers” (p. 40). In other words, gender stereotypes inside and outside the education system continue to shape educational and career choices among Armenian young men and women.

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<sup>12</sup> The survey included responses from 205 female students and 173 male students between the ages of 16 and 25.

## IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

The articulation of gender policy in Armenia has been an important step towards promoting gender equality in the education sector. However, this commitment has not yet been fully translated into education practice. The existence of imbalanced gender representation in school curriculum and textbooks and the prevalence of patriarchal stereotypes has been acknowledged in the *Concept Paper on Gender Equality*, which highlights the need to develop “an egalitarian gender culture to overcome patriarchal stereotypes and promote positive public perception of the concept of equal participation of men and women” in various aspects of social life. Similarly, the *Law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women* prohibits the reproduction of gender stereotypes in the media, education, and general culture. As the analysis of the Armenian secondary school textbooks revealed, however, serious efforts are necessary to ensure a more balanced and fair representation of gender roles across the different subject areas and teaching/learning materials. In this context, the following recommendations should be considered:

### (1) Policy/program level

Gender equality should be identified as a goal in state programs and education standards, either explicitly or in the context of human rights. It is not sufficient for it to be implicit, as it is currently. For example, gender equity has not been identified as an explicit principle in the drafts of the State Program on Educational Development for 2016-2025. Since the Armenian government has already made a commitment to the attainment of these goals by adopting the Gender Policy Concept Paper in 2010 and the Law on Securing Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in 2013, it is necessary to reflect these commitments in the state program, standards, and related policy documents in order to consistently address the goals and their implementation in practice.

### (2) Textbooks and teaching/learning materials

Textbooks and teaching/learning materials are powerful tools for conveying and mainstreaming the principles of gender equality. Thus, it is important “for textbooks to be covered by policies which respect and include the rights of girls and women for their full enjoyment of a good-quality education” (UNESCO, 2009, p. 67).

- The principles of gender equality should be consistently translated into educational materials and practices at all levels, including state educational standards, curricula, syllabi, teacher’s guides, and textbooks through a careful mapping exercise.
- Women’s representation in the textbook content should be more balanced in terms of visual and textual representation in order to gain more visibility and appropriately acknowledge women’s contributions to all areas of life, including history, politics, economics, science, arts, culture, literature, etc. This representation should be carefully reviewed and monitored to eliminate gender bias and stereotypes.
- Specific and clear gender guidelines should be developed to inform the work of textbook authors in translating gender-sensitive standards into textbooks and teaching

materials to include more gender-balanced and sensitive representation of women and men, as well address the existing gender bias and stereotypes. Gender diversity in teams must be encouraged, as strongly endorsed by UNESCO (2009) and other organizations.

- All textbooks should undergo a careful review for gender-sensitivity before they receive a state approval for use in schools. Specific standards and criteria should be developed for the textbook review process. More specific guidelines for developing these tools are available in *Promoting Gender Equality: A Methodological Guide* (UNESCO, 2009).

### **(3) School culture and teachers**

Research suggests that investing adequate resources to implement gender mainstreaming at different levels of the education system is important for embedding a concern with gender in educational institutions (Unterhalter et al., 2014). Therefore, in addition to curriculum and textbook reform, gender awareness should be mainstreamed into the broader system of education and school culture.

- The principles of gender equality should be reflected in the vocational career guidance to address traditional career choices among young women and men. Career advice services should ensure they are not reproducing gender stereotypes in their work.
- Gender awareness should be raised among current and future school teachers and administrators through in-service and pre-service teacher education programs. This will not only improve teachers' overall levels of qualification but will also enable them to engage explicitly with ideas around gender equality.
- Gender awareness should be raised among parents through brochures, posters, mass media (including social media), and specific projects.

### **(4) Research/evaluation/monitoring**

Implementation of gender mainstreaming policies and practices in the education system should be carefully monitored and research should be undertaken to guide policy implementation.

- Research on gender representation in textbooks and teaching/learning materials should be conducted periodically to examine efforts made to eliminate gender stereotypes and biases.
- Qualitative studies at the classroom level should be conducted to examine how and why teachers and teacher trainers use gender-sensitivity training in their own teaching practice, as well as how students respond to and are affected by these interventions.
- Government, local authorities, and schools should collect and analyze performance data (such as patterns of under-achievement, dropout, exclusions, or truancy) to identify factors contributing to gender difference.

- At the high school and higher education levels, further research should be conducted to examine factors that shape gender differences in the choice of field of study.

**(5) International agencies**

Coordination among various international donor agencies for the collective endeavor of eliminating gender disparity in education should be encouraged.

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## **APPENDIX I: INTERNATIONAL CASE STUDIES**

### **Gender Mainstreaming in the Swedish Education System**

Sweden, which is currently one of the most gender egalitarian societies in the world, has been addressing gender equality in national policies since the 1970s (Numhauser-Henning, 2015). Non-discrimination policies are in place to promote gender equality both at the societal level and within the Swedish education system. The current government has declared itself a “feminist government” and considers gender equality and non-discrimination based on gender to be central concerns (Numhauser-Henning, 2015). The most recent legislation protecting against “discrimination based on gender, transgender identity or expression, ethnic origin, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age” is the Discrimination Act (2008:547), which applies to the workforce as well as the education system (UNESCO, 2012).

Within the decentralized education system in Sweden there is a dedicated taskforce, the Ministry of Education and Research (MOER), for the promotion of gender equality. Additionally, the Swedish government, which is responsible for developing the national curriculum and guidelines for its implementation, has created the Education Act (2010:800) establishing non-discrimination in the national curriculum (Båvner, Barklund, Hellewell, & Svensson, 2011). Curricula at the pre-school, compulsory school, and upper secondary school levels reference the Education Act (2010:800) in the development of non-discrimination guidelines, and the act applies to public and independent schools (Båvner et al., 2011). Standard non-discrimination clauses can be found at each level of the national curriculum. At the upper secondary level, the statement reads:

The school should promote understanding of other people and the ability to empathise. No one in school should be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnic affiliation, religion or other belief system, transgender identity or its expression, sexual orientation, age or functional impairment, or to other forms of degrading treatment. All tendencies to discrimination or degrading treatment should be actively combated. Xenophobia and intolerance must be confronted with knowledge, open discussion and active measures. (Skolverket, 2013, p. 4)

This sweeping non-discrimination clause is further developed in the subjects detailed in the national curriculum at all levels. At the pre-school level, a central concern is the counteraction of traditional gender patterns and roles. The curriculum calls for pre-schools to provide opportunities for students to explore their abilities independently of gender-stereotyped roles (Skolverket, 2011b). These activities serve the fundamental task of the pre-school to engender the understanding of human life as inviolable and deserving of freedom, integrity, and equality (Skolverket, 2011b).

The national curriculum at the compulsory school level acknowledges, “The way in which girls and boys are treated and assessed in school, and the demands and expectations that are placed on them, contributes to their perception of gender differences” (Skolverket, 2011a, p. 10). As at the pre-school level, the guidelines thus promote opportunities for ability and interest to be developed without affiliation to gender. The compulsory school curriculum not only addresses the promotion of gender equality as an overarching goal of education, but also details how critical thought and consciousness can be developed in each subject. In religion courses, for example, the curriculum stipulates, “teaching should help pupils to develop their knowledge of how different religions and other outlooks on life view questions concerning gender, gender equality, sexuality and relationships” (Skolverket,



2011a, p. 176). As a result of the national curriculum standards aimed at promoting gender equality, Blumberg (2007) has observed that the textbooks used in Sweden have been written to promote gender equality and reduce gender stereotypes. Given the explicitly stated guidelines for the reduction of gender stereotypes in the national curriculum at all levels, it is not surprising that textbooks and teaching materials in Sweden are more likely to promote gender equality and prevent the perpetuation of gender stereotypes.

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## Emerging Gender Mainstreaming Policies in Latvia

Latvia's experience with gender-mainstreaming is much more limited and less comprehensive compared to other EU countries like Sweden. Having regained its independence in 1991, the Latvian government had initially prioritized substantial changes in its legal system over gender equality policies. The process of accession to the EU and the

adoption of the *Acquis Communautaire* contributed to the promotion of gender equality in Latvia's national policy agenda. As a result, the Ministry of Welfare became the body responsible for the development of gender equality policy, hosting a Gender Equality Unit at the Department of European and Legal Affairs. Line ministries are responsible for coordinating the integration of the gender equality principles into policies, normative acts, programs, and information campaigns (Novikova, 2014). In May 2010, it was reorganized into the Gender Equality Commission, which coordinates gender equality policy and promotes cooperation between Ministries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social partners, municipalities, and other bodies. The Gender Equality Unit is the main executive institution for gender equality policy within the Latvian administration. The Gender Equality Commission has a consultative role and also a role in co-ordinating gender equality policy between different stakeholders (Rastrigina, 2015).

Unlike Sweden, Latvia takes an *integrated approach* to gender mainstreaming, which means that the principles of gender equality are taken into consideration while developing new policies in any area and at all levels. However, this approach does not directly and explicitly challenge *existing* policy paradigms or involve a fundamental rethinking of gender relationships. Compared to other European Union countries, Latvia scores lower on gender equality related indexes. As a result, after the 8th Parliamentary elections (2002-2006), the sub-committee on gender equality of the Committee on Human Rights and Public Affairs was launched to promote the gender equality agenda in politics. The first strategic document for gender equality policy in Latvia, the Concept Paper on Gender Equality Implementation (2001), became the basis for the action plans and policy documents. Major policy documents include the Program for the Implementation of Gender Equality and the Gender Equality Action Plan 2012-2014. The program focuses on four major action areas: (1) reduction of gender roles and stereotypes; (2) promotion of healthy and environmentally friendly lifestyles for men and women; (3) promotion of economic independence for men and women and their equal opportunities in the labor market; (4) monitoring and evaluating gender equality policy. However, gender equality policy efforts in Latvia have been seriously challenged by the recent economic crisis. Because of the lack of financial resources and budget cuts, the implementation of the *Program* only includes policy measures that do not require additional financial or human resources.

Similar to Armenia, female students demonstrate comparable (and sometimes higher) academic achievement compared to male students and more female students enter higher education institutions than males. Yet, gender segregation exists in the choice of their fields of study. Women tend to dominate in traditionally female fields of study such as education/teaching and nursing, which eventually leads to lower paying jobs (European Commission, 2012). The 2013 survey confirms that the stereotypes concerning gender roles are strong and most striking in terms of the labor market dividing professions into "female" or "male" professions rather than according to each person's individual abilities (Government of Latvia, 2014). In 2004-2007, extensive public awareness campaigns were carried out. These campaigns were aimed at different groups in society, including men, to break stereotypes about "masculinity" or "masculine" behaviors, while promoting and encouraging men to get involved in caring for children and household duties (Government of Latvia, 2014).

Various studies suggest that traditional gender stereotypes are reproduced in school curriculum and media. To reduce educational stereotypes and occupational segregation, the Gender Equality Committee established a Working Group, which, in 2013 developed recommendations "On the integration of gender equality aspects into process and content of all educational levels until 2020." In 2013, Latvia made some significant steps towards alleviating gender stereotypes in schools by introducing state education standards for all levels and subjects, which include a non-discrimination clause and specifically reference gender. In particular, gender equality in educational content is viewed in the context of human rights as equal rights and opportunities which are free from stigma and discrimination. For example, one of the goals articulated in the state standards of primary education is to foster students' responsible attitude and awareness of the physical and mental safety, growth, development, relationship, sex, family planning, social norms and traditions, etc. Gender equality issues are also explicitly addressed in standards for such subjects as geography, history (including world history and history of Latvia), foreign language, Latvian literature, social studies, and politics and law.

The next step will be to incorporate these standards in teaching materials and textbooks. In fact, the National Development Plan of Latvia 2014-2020 and the Education Development Guidelines 2014-2020 envisage a complex support system to address gender equality goals which includes the task of incorporating gender equality issues in curriculum and teaching materials.

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