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# Comparative overview of the capacity of the education systems of five Central Eastern European countries to adapt to changing gender roles

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

The “**Future Challenges to Education Systems in Central Eastern European Context**” (EDUC, <https://cps.ceu.edu/research/educ>) is a two year comparative research project aiming at assessing the ability of the education systems of five Central-Eastern European countries to adapt to various ongoing changes, such as technological changes and their impact on labor markets, demographic changes, populist politics and autocratic governance, old and new inequalities, changing gender roles, globalization, etc. The research focuses on the adaptability of education systems determined by the interplay between governance and the institutional operation of schools in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Serbia and Romania. This report was supported in part through a grant from the Open Society Foundations.

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COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW OF THE CAPACITY OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEMS  
OF FIVE CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES  
TO ADAPT TO CHANGING GENDER ROLES

Dorottya Redai

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## INTRODUCTION

The second part of the twentieth century brought a lot of changes in gender relations globally. Women obtained basic political, economic, and social rights in most countries in the world, and progress was especially great by the 1990s in the fields of education and health (UNDP, 2020). However, despite these enormous global changes, the latest Human Development Report of the UNDP (2020) reveals that gender inequality is persistent in all countries, and progress towards gender equality has slowed down in the past years. As an example, the report points out that “based on current trends, it would take 257 years to close the gender gap in economic opportunity” (2020, p. 1). The general trend can be described by a “gender inequality plateau”, which means that “disadvantaged groups [are] catching up with basic achievements, but trailing in more empowering enhanced achievements” (ibid.). For example, “[i]n the 50 countries where adult women are more educated than men, they still receive on average 39 percent less income than men – despite devoting more time to work” (ibid). This pyramidal structure of empowerment in education is not only visible in the gender pay gap, but also in the decreasing proportion of women at higher levels of the academic scale and in decision-making positions, and in women’s share of STEM subjects and careers (EC, 2019), which are more highly valued in the labour market in current developed societies (see Sections 3.2. and 3.3. for further discussion). The gaps have been slightly narrowing in the past few years (EC, 2019), and in order to progress further towards gender equity in the labour market, schools and education policy-makers need to do their share as well.

This paper is one of three thematic comparative studies prepared for the “Future Challenges to Education Systems in Central Eastern European Context” (EDUC) project, which is an OSF/ESP funded comparative research project of the Center for Policy Studies at the CEU – Democracy Institute. The project aims at mapping out the capacity of educational systems to adapt to the challenges of ongoing and future changes by enabling students to individually adapt. The three thematic comparative studies focus on gender, Roma children, and digital preparedness in order to further conceptualize the required changes and to assess the actual preparedness of the education systems of the region. This thematic comparative study conceptualizes the characteristics of education systems and schools which are able to handle gender inequalities and assesses the state of the art of the educational systems in five CEE countries in this respect. The study relies on the concept paper “The Adaptability of Education Systems to Future Challenges in Context: an Analytical Framework” by Péter Radó (2020). A review of international education scholarship and comparative content analysis of available sources is applied in the study, including texts of policy documents and statements issued by the government, governmental agencies, EU agencies and stakeholder organizations, policy evaluation reports, statistical data sets of student achievement and other education data, and relevant opinion poll data. Where possible, consultations were carried out with domestic experts from relevant fields.

There are many differences between the gender regimes of capitalist democracies in Western Europe and North America and the state-socialist and then post-socialist countries of Central Eastern

Europe (CEE), but there are also general social phenomena and trends that have affected both regions. In Section 2, I briefly summarise these changes in order to contextualize gender relations in education, and I provide an overview of attitudes towards gender roles and gender movements in general and in the CEE countries in particular. In Section 3, I review international scholarship on gender socialisation, and gendered differences in learning outcomes and in educational pathways, with the aim of showing that, despite equal access to public education for girls and boys, along with numerical parity in participation and narrowing performance and achievement gaps, gender inequalities still prevail in schools, thus it is important to consider this aspect in the analysis of the adaptability of education systems to social changes. In Section 4, I attempt to define the characteristics of schools which are capable of solving gender-related problems and meeting gender-related expectations by drawing up a set of criteria for school-level capabilities for tackling gender inequalities, and a broader policy framework which can assist schools in tackling gender inequalities. In Section 5, I apply the policy framework defined in Section 4 to the education systems of Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia, in order to answer the question whether and how much schools and education systems in Central Eastern Europe are capable of tackling gender inequalities. In Section 6, I make some preliminary reflections on the gendered aspects of the forced digitalization of education which have happened in CEE due to school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021. In the Conclusion, I reflect on the commonalities and differences between the gender-sensitivity of the education systems of the five countries and their responsiveness to changing gender relations.

## 1. ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER ROLES AND GENDER MOVEMENTS IN GENERAL AND IN THE CEE COUNTRIES

### 1.1. Attitudes towards gender in the past decades in the Global North

In the second part of the twentieth century, strong feminist movements grew in liberal democracies in Western Europe and North America, while in Central Eastern Europe state-socialist systems suppressed all sorts of social movements but promoted ‘women’s emancipation’ (see: Ghodsee & Mead, 2018). Feminist movements and the evolution of gender studies as a scientific discipline have led to the adoption of gender mainstreaming policies and ‘state feminism’, and then ‘market feminism’ (Kantola & Squires, 2012) in the older member countries of the EU, while the formal adoption of but simultaneous political reluctance or resistance to gender equality measures can be perceived in post-socialist CEE countries that joined the EU in the 2000s, but these processes coexist in a complex manner with forms of market feminism in the region as well. In the current neoliberal regimes of the Global North, women (i.e. young, white, middle-class, heterosexual women) have become the ideal citizens who are individually responsible for pursuing their ambitions, have access to marketable goods, and use them for self-improvement and empowerment, and cultivate free choice while also embracing some aspects of traditional femininity (Budgeon, 2015). In this context, gender parity or equity is taken for granted by most education systems, but, as the following review will show, gender parity and equity are masking other institutionalized aspects of gender inequalities in education (Wiseman 2008, p. 197).

Gender inequality is associated with discriminatory social norms, which are “operationalized through beliefs, attitudes and practices” (UNDP, 2020, p. 6). Gender norms determine gendered roles and gender-biased behaviours and produce unequal power relations between women and men. In order to measure the impact of gendered beliefs on social equality, the UNDP has created a “gender social norms index” (GSNI), based on data from the World Values Survey waves five (2005-2009) and six (2010-2014) (2020, p. 6). The index measures biases along four dimensions: political, economic, educational, and physical integrity.

In general, women demonstrate slightly less gender bias than men, but still in significant proportions: 86% vs. 91% respectively (2020, p. 8). In a number of countries, bias against gender equality slightly grew in the sixth wave of sampling compared to the fifth (2020, p. 9). Gender biases positively correlate with gender inequality: in societies with a higher degree of gender bias, women tend to spend significantly more time on housework and carework than men. Also, biases seem to be more intense when they concern women’s higher-level participation in economic and political leadership, as opposed to their basic political rights and economic participation (2020, p. 11). According to the data, biases in the education dimension are generally much lower in most countries than in the other three dimensions (2020, pp. 20-25).

The formation of children and young people’s gender attitudes have been researched from a constructivist perspective since the 1980s. Kågesten and her colleagues (2016) systematically reviewed thirty years of research literature (1984-2014) on young adolescents’ (age 10-14) gender attitudes. Unfortunately, there were no studies from the five CEE countries in our study among the 82 reviewed articles, and only one CEE country, Bulgaria, was part of a comparative study with Italy and the USA, which shows how scarce English-language literature about the topic is in CEE. Although most studies are from Western Europe, North America, and Australia, and a smaller number are from other parts of the world, the reviewers found some uniformity in terms of results, and the few studies that exist about our region (e.g. Rédai & Turai, in press; Osad’an et al., 2018; Zawistowska & Sadowski, 2018; Cviková & Filadelfiová, 2008) correspond with these patterns.

Regarding the role of education, the review finds that “schools are important institutions when it comes to both regulating and upholding gender norms through different traditions and cultures” (Kågesten et al., 2016, p. 21). Mechanisms that reinforce gender norms include policing girls’ appearance and sexuality, disproportionately favouring boys’ activities and performances, and teachers reinforcing stereotypical gender norms (2016, pp. 24-25). The reviewed studies also reveal that gender norms and attitudes are to be considered in intersection with class, race/ethnicity and immigration history, as these factors influence social norms and inequalities (2016, p. 26). The review concludes that “[p]rograms to promote equitable gender attitudes thus need to move beyond a focus on individuals to target their interpersonal relationships and wider social environments. Such programs need to start early and be tailored to the unique needs of sub-populations of boys and girls” (2016, p. 2). This argument is especially relevant when we think about how to promote gender equality in schools.

The European Gender Equality Institute (EIGE) conducted a qualitative study in which they collected and analysed narratives about stereotypical gender perceptions in the 27 EU countries in 2013. Regarding respondents’ ideas about women and men’s skills and aptitudes, opinions were highly binary – i.e., views about what men and women are capable of and skilled at were seen as oppositional and strongly determined by gender. As the study argues, “[t]his dimension of stereotypes plays out significantly in the educational and professional choices of girls and boys, women and men, resulting

in (horizontal) gender segregation both in educational institutions and in the workplace” (2013, p. 49). The stereotypical belief that girls are ‘naturally’ better at languages and humanities/social sciences and boys at natural sciences, mathematics, and technical fields produces gender norms that orient girls and boys, from a very early age, towards different school subject specialisations and occupational choices that are considered a better fit with their ‘natural’ aptitudes (2013, pp. 50, 79). The study highlights the huge intergenerational change in views about women’s and men’s education, which is obviously connected to the expansion of education for women both in terms of numbers and in the professional fields that have opened up to women in the past decades. The study highlights the finding of many other studies that more highly educated women tend to have more egalitarian views about gender roles, which, in turn, can initiate social change (2013, p. 160; see also Fodor & Balogh, 2010).

## 1.2. Attitudes towards gender in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe

After the fall of state socialism in the region in 1989-1990, a conservative turn occurred concerning women’s participation in the labour market and ideology about women’s role in society. “The emphasis communist elites had placed on paid work as an important arena for women’s contributions to society was replaced by arguments about the need for women’s presence in the home and women’s natural difference” (Fodor & Balogh, 2010, p. 292). This conservative gender ideology contrasted with developments in Western Europe, where a liberal trend towards the increased participation of women in the labour force was occurring, as opposed to a significant decline in post-socialist countries in CEE. In a comparative analysis of data from 13 CEE countries, Fodor and Balogh found that countries where people had more conservative views about gender roles included Moldova, Hungary, Lithuania, Russia, and Bulgaria, whereas in the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, and Ukraine gender views were more liberal in 2007 (see also: Scharle, 2015). Cross-country variation was minor, however, and there was a very small difference between women and men with respect to opinions about gender roles, with women having slightly more liberal views (2010, pp. 298-299). Similarly to in Western European countries, in CEE “employment is associated with more liberal opinions among women but not among men” (2010, p. 302). Also, “marriage seems to move women into [a] conservative, men into a more liberal direction”, which “may be explained by the level of dependence marriage sometimes produces for women, while men may become more liberal as they encounter themselves the problem of domestic work and childcare in their own families” (ibid). “Finally, going to church regularly seems to push women towards more conservative values (or more conservative values seem to push women towards going to church), while the same impact cannot be discerned for men” (ibid). Fodor and Balogh conclude that, regarding views of gender role opinions, “Eastern Europe does not seem to form a unique region on the European continent but fits the general trends found elsewhere” (2010, p. 302).

However, if we look at the data from the European Values Survey 2017,<sup>1</sup> with data from a decade later, it seems that people in all five countries are much more conservative in terms of gender roles than the EU average, with Slovakia being the most conservative and Serbia the least. According to a study by the Pew Research Center (2019), in which public opinion 30 years after fall of communism was surveyed in the USA and in 13 European countries, including Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland, there is a difference in the degree of liberal/conservative views about gender equality in Western vs. Eastern European countries, but in general there seemed to be more support for gender equality in all countries

1 European Values Survey 2017: <https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/methodology-data-documentation/survey-2017/>



in 2001 than there was in 1991 (2019, p. 90). If the three datasets are comparable, it can be argued that after the fall of state socialism there was a conservative turn regarding gender-related values in CEE countries in the 1990s, while in the 2000s attitudes became more liberal and egalitarian, but by the end of the 2010s conservative values had become more dominant again.

One of the most significant changes in opinions concerns the preference for an egalitarian marriage – although the proportion of people supporting traditional marriages is still high in comparison to those in the surveyed Western European countries. While in 1991 54-60% of people in Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland expressed a preference for a marriage where the husband is the breadwinner and the wife is the home-maker, 30 years later only 25-29% did so, and there is a large gap between generations – for example, in Poland 40% of people aged 60+ supported traditional marriage, as opposed to 16% of people aged 18-34 (Pew Research, 2019, pp. 92-94). The report finds that education matters: “[p]eople with lower educational attainment in these countries are significantly more likely than those with higher educational attainment to prefer a traditional marriage” (2019, pp. 92-94). Although citizens of Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary responded similarly to most statements, there was one question in relation to which Slovakia stood out among all the surveyed countries. This item was the following statement: “when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women”: only in Slovakia did the majority of respondents (59%) agree, while 37% disagreed (2019, p. 95). In Poland, 42% agreed and 51% disagreed, in Hungary 35% agreed and 60% disagreed (ibid.), which suggests that gender discrimination in hiring and employment is widespread in these countries, but is not equally accepted. There is a gender gap in views about gender equality: more women than men think that gender equality is very important. The gender gap is largest in Slovakia: 57% of men and 76% of women find it important that women and men have the same rights (2019, p. 97).

One measurement tool applied in the EU is the Gender Equality Index (GEI), which measures progress in gender equality in EU countries in six core domains, including ‘Knowledge’, which is comprised of attainment and participation (i.e. % of graduates in tertiary education and % of people participating in formal and non-formal education), and segregation in education (i.e. % of women and men as tertiary students in education, health and welfare, humanities and arts). The GEI in 2019 was 67.4 (out of 100) for the EU28, with CEE countries performing under the EU average. Hungary’s score was 51.9, Slovakia’s 54.1, Romania’s 54.5, and Poland’s 55.2. In the domain of Knowledge, the results were: EU28: 63.5, Romania: 51.5, Poland: 56.5, Hungary: 56.9, Slovakia: 60.4. The report points out that progress in the EU has occurred at a snail’s pace – the respective score has increased only by 1.2 since 2015 and 4.5 since 2005.<sup>2</sup>

While there seems to be growing support for gender equality in public opinion in CEE, democratic backsliding is happening in the region (Greskovits, 2015), and, as part of this process, gender equality is suffering attacks from a political level, as Krizsán & Roggeband (2019) argue:

*(...) regimes moving towards illiberalism and authoritarianism are often led by governments expressing nativist and nationalist ideologies in which gender equality and sexuality rights are depicted as values externally imposed on them, for instance by the European Union, threatening national values, identity, and state sovereignty. (...) Gender equality processes and institutions that were in place are now de-funded and marginalized, which leads to the erosion of policy arrangements and turns existent policies and legislation into empty vessels. (2019, p. 6)*

2 Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2019>

In fact, Grzebalska and Pető (2018) point out that this illiberal transformation process in some countries of the region (they focus on Poland and Hungary) is a “deeply gendered political transformation which is reliant on a certain gender regime – constructions of gender as well as institutionalized relations of power between them – and which transforms the meanings of human rights, women’s rights and equality in a way which privileges the rights and normative needs of families over women’s rights” (2018, p. 164; see also Kováts & Póim, 2015). Research shows that “issues related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, sexual education, regulations around parenthood and care and family rights are particularly sensitive to contestation by conservative and religious actors who see these issues as ‘private’ and as a matter of morality or religious doctrine” (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2019, p. 14; see also: Balogh, 2020; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017).

Although a thorough discussion of the anti-gender phenomenon (see: Dietze & Roth 2020; Krizsán & Roggeband, 2019; Korolczuk & Graff, 2018; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017; Kováts & Póim, 2015) goes beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to contextualize the latter within the framework of education. It is not only sex education that is contested by anti-gender discourses and policies, but other aspects of education as well, and this is important to consider when reflecting on the readiness of education systems in the CEE region to address gender inequality. Kuhar and Zobec (2017) claim that knowledge production, public schools, and the education system are a major target of anti-gender movements (2017, pp. 31, 37). Parents and churches protesting against the inclusion of certain topics (especially gender equality and sexuality) has been widespread in Europe since the early 2000s (2017, pp. 31-32, 37-39). However, in some CEE countries the anti-gender movement is interfering with education on the level of state policies. Hungary, where gender equality was never on the political agenda since the democratic transition, but has nonetheless been strongly targeted by the Fidesz regime (Krizsán & Sebestyén, 2019), is a case in point (Rédai, 2020).

As regards scientific knowledge production and higher education, the Hungarian government obstructed the education of specialists in gender equality by banning gender studies MA programs in 2018 (Pető, 2018). As for public education, references to gender and gender equality were always scarce in school curricula (Rédai, 2020), but the Hungarian education government deleted all remaining references to the concept of gender, gender equality, sexuality, and the critique of gender stereotypes first from the kindergarten curriculum in 2010 (see: Krizsán & Sebestyén, 2019; Rédai, 2010), then from primary and secondary school curricula, and replaced them with learning content that emphasizes biological and psychological differences between the sexes; stereotypical depictions of women and men; the positioning of the normative nuclear family as the only ‘right’ kind of family; reproduction-focused and anti-abortion stances on sexuality; and completely erased reference to non-normative sexualities (Rédai & Sáfrány, 2019).

Anti-gender political discourses and policies obviously shape public opinions and educational institutions and have an impact on academic research about gender inequalities in education. Lénárd and colleagues (2020) approached 341 Hungarian public schools to inquire whether they would host a gender-themed research project: only 6.19% of the schools responded positively to the inquiry. Rédai and colleagues had a similar experience when trying to find three partner schools for a project exploring gender inequalities in Hungarian secondary schools (see: Belgeonne et al., in press).

## 2. GENDER SOCIALISATION, GENDERED DIFFERENCES IN LEARNING OUTCOMES AND EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS

In this section I discuss the impact of changing gender roles on contemporary expectations about education, focusing on three dimensions of gender inequalities in schooling: gender socialization, learning outcome gaps, and different educational pathways. I explore how the three dimensions are interconnected, how and to what extent schools – as they are currently operating – are reproducing gender-based social inequalities, and what the broader social impacts are.

### 2.1. Gender socialization

Childhood socialization in the family, among peers, and in education and other social and cultural spaces is an integral element of the reproduction of gender inequalities. What being a woman or a man entails is largely framed by the given historical period, cultural and religious environment, and the social and political context of the given society. In educational settings, gender socialization happens through the official and hidden curriculum, the latter including teacher-student and peer relations and interactions, and the physical space and arrangements of the given institution. Children are not passive recipients of socialisation; they are active agents in the construction of gender relations in schooling (Thorne, 1993). Despite quite rapid socio-cultural changes in current societies which largely affect gender relations, research in the past four to five decades has revealed persistent patterns in gender construction and the reproduction of gender inequalities in schooling (EURYDICE, 2010).

The process of gender socialization itself in schools is a highly complex phenomenon because of its interrelatedness with other socialization scenes, its implicit aspects, its intersectionality with other axes of social identity construction, and because of the almost unshakeable belief in its ‘naturalness’ by practically all actors involved in education. Numerous qualitative studies have explored various aspects of gender socialization in education since the 1980s, especially in Anglophone contexts. For the purposes of this paper, I summarize some of the main findings of this scholarship and review the scarce literature available that is about this topic in English in the CEE region.

Research focusing on the gendered aspects of the official curriculum shows that, despite decades of scholarship on the gendered content of the school curriculum, it is still male-biased, regarding both the subjects and objects of learning and knowledge production (see e.g. Warren, 1989; Martin, 1994; EURYDICE, 2010). Similarly, numerous studies have shown that the representations of gender in textbooks and learning materials are mostly male-biased and stereotypical: for example, in terms of the illustrations in textbooks, or the content of texts of mathematical problems (Abraham, 1989; Blumberg, 2008; Tang et al., 2010; Biemmi, 2015). In the CEE region, the few studies that are available come to similar conclusions (see e.g. Kereszty, 2005; Trifunovic & Petrovic, 2014).

The hidden curriculum is defined by Apple as “the tacit teaching to students of norms, values, and dispositions that goes on simply by their living in and coping with the institutional expectations

and routines of schools day in and day out for a number of years” (2019, p. 13). The hidden curriculum is gendered, raced, and classed (Apple, 2019) and transmits messages to children which reinforce the gendered division of labour within schooling (EURYDICE, 2010). Studies about relationships and interactions in school have revealed that teachers tend to interact with girls and boys differently, paying differing types and amounts of attention to them in class, rewarding and disciplining them differently, projecting gendered stereotypes and beliefs on students, and assessing their performance differently (see e.g. Younger et al., 1999; Garrahy, 2001; Jones and Myhill, 2004; Bašaragin & Savić, 2019).

Peer interactions, such as forming groups and friendships, also rely on gender differentiation (Thorne, 1993; Markovits et al., 2001; Martin et al., 2013). It has been observed how girls and boys, especially between the ages of 9-10 and 12-13, separate themselves into same-gender groups and refuse to mingle in the classroom and other school spaces. Schools and teachers can both reinforce this separation by arranging children by gender for disciplinary and management purposes, or disrupt this separation by consciously mingling girls and boys for classroom activities (Thorne, 1993; Rédei & Turai, in press). Research has also found that children and adolescents in school are very active at policing gender boundaries in peer groups and reinforcing normative gendered behaviour (Youdell, 2005; Pascoe, 2007; Rédei, 2019).

The design and usage of school space – including the usage and decoration of classrooms and corridors, gender-separated spaces such as playgrounds or the football ground, seating arrangements within classrooms, etc., – is also part of the hidden curriculum, and it has a significant role in manifesting and sustaining the culture and symbolism of the school’s gender regime (Connell, 2006; Rédei & Turai, in press). The EURYDICE report points out that gender is regularly used as a tool for the management of daily school life (e.g. separating boys and girls for different classroom activities and team sports) (2010, pp. 28-29). Scholarship that analysed the role of the school space in terms of gender socialization shows that even though girls perform better in schools, boys tend to dominate the school space, both in the classroom and in the playground or football ground (Francis, 1998; Clark & Paechter, 2007).

When considering the role of education in gender socialization, it is important to take into account the influence of parents and other family members, which is very significant and inseparable from school socialization. Research shows that parents often impose their own stereotypical ideas and attitudes about gender on their children, including what girls and boys are supposed to study and what career choices they should make (e.g. Lawson et al., 2015; Medved et al., 2006). In fact, teachers often externalize responsibility for reproducing gender inequalities by blaming parents for socializing their children in gender-stereotyped ways, the impact of which schools are believed to be incapable of ameliorating (see: Rédei & Turai, in press; Tsouroufli, in press).

School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) is part of the hidden curriculum (EURYDICE, 2010), and it is the most problematic and detrimental manifestation of the strict gender norms and their policing and sanctioning in schools. SRGBV is defined by UNESCO and UN Women (2016) as “acts or threats of sexual, physical or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes, and enforced by unequal power dynamics” (2016, p. 20). It “includes different manifestations of physical, sexual and/or psychological violence, such as verbal abuse, bullying, sexual abuse and harassment, coercion and assault, and rape”, which often overlap (ibid). Girls and boys may experience different forms of it: “girls are more likely to experience psychological bullying, cyber-bullying, sexual violence and harassment. On the other hand, boys often face higher rates of corporal punishment than girls, and are expected to take it ‘like a man’”. Also, there

is “a growing body of evidence that indicates that most LGBT (...) students report having experienced bullying or violence on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression” and that “children and young people who are perceived as resisting, or as not fitting into traditional or binary gender norms, are at high risk of violence” (2016, p. 21). Cyber-bullying is a relatively new form of violence, which is especially difficult for schools to handle, because it does not happen in the real physical space of schools where teachers have the authority to intervene (Burns, & Gottschalk, 2019).

The academic achievements of young people who are subjected to SRGBV tend to be weaker (UNESCO & UN Women, 2016, p. 22), and SRGBV has severe consequences for the physical and mental health of young people (ibid., p. 29), thus it is the responsibility of both individual schools and education policy-makers to implement policy and practical measures against SRGBV. It is also important to mention that not only children but also adults can be both victims and perpetrators of SRGBV, so in school policies against GBV it is important to address abuse based on gendered power relations among adults as well.

## 2.2. Learning outcome gaps

Unlike gender socialization itself, its impacts (including gendered gaps in performance and learning outcomes, and gendered differences in subject and career choice), can be accurately measured and quantified. A lot of research has been conducted on these differences, some taking biological or cognitive or psychological differences between the sexes as foundational elements and as justification for differences in achievement, others considering gender socialization to be responsible for trends in achievement and career choice. This study focuses on the impacts of gender socialization.

Some studies that have analysed gender differences in learning outcomes conclude that there are more similarities than differences between male and female cognition and behaviour, thus it is difficult to justify the claim that gendered educational differences are based on biology (EURYDICE, 2010, pp. 23-24). Meinck and Brese (2019) conclude that even though there are persistent gender gaps in mathematics and science achievements between girls and boys, these gaps are decreasing, which shows that “(...) no general favourable genetic disposition of male students towards mathematics and/or science exists. Otherwise, patterns would be consistent across countries and time” (2019, p. 20; see also: OECD 2015, p. 64). Studies also highlight variation in the data across countries (with opposing trends being found in some countries) and the influence of socio-economic status and learning cultures (EURYDICE, 2010; OECD, 2019b).

Factors influencing achievement gaps may include streaming, falling behind, gender, socio-economic status/class, and immigrant background (Hadjar & Buchmann, 2016; EURYDICE, 2010). Some studies call attention to the institutional aspects of gender gaps and argue that these are influenced not only by social factors. Based on comparative analyses of large cross-country datasets, Hadjar and Buchmann (2016, p. 173) and Hermann and Kopasz (2018, pp. 8-9) argue that in highly stratified education systems with early tracking there is greater gender (and racial/ethnic) differentiation in learning performances. Hermann and Kopasz (2018) also find that grade retention is disadvantageous for girls, whereas more student-oriented teaching methods help girls perform better.

In general, analyses of different cohorts in different data sets show that girls outperform boys in reading comprehension, whereas boys outperform girls in mathematics and science – with the gap being the smallest in science (Hermann & Kopasz, 2018; EURYDICE, 2010; OECD, 2019b). Studies



which looked at the extreme tails of the distribution (Baye & Monseur, 2016; Marks, 2008) have found that male variability is greater (i.e. there are significantly more males than females among the weakest performers in reading and the strongest performers in mathematics). Baye and Monseur (2016) point out that whereas a lot of attention has been paid recently to improving girls' participation in STEM subject specialisation and making STEM subjects and careers more attractive for them, the weaker reading ability of males has been less researched and there are fewer initiatives for improving male reading performance. Regarding policies, Marks argues that

*(...) the size of the gender gaps in reading and mathematics reflect the implementation and success of policies which improve the performance of girls. Policies that promote girls' educational performance decrease the gender gap in mathematics but also increase the gender gap in reading. Correspondingly, countries that have not implemented such extensive policies to improve the educational outcomes of girls, or where the policies have been less successful, show larger gender gaps in mathematics and smaller gaps in reading. (Marks, 2008, p. 105)*

Two points are important to make in relation to these arguments. First, such cross-country analyses usually work with large-scale national databases which do not specify social factors other than gender. As Epstein et al. (1998) argue, it is important to ask *which* girls and which boys are being referred to; i.e., to consider intersectional aspects of social inequalities. School performance is also race/ethnicity- and class-related and may be influenced by cultural and faith-based attitudes to schooling. Connolly shows in his analysis of GCSE grade attainment in three consecutive cohorts in the UK that class and ethnicity have a larger impact on performance than gender, but whereas “gender differences remain relatively small compared to ethnic and social class differences, they do appear to be relatively stable and constant across all social class and ethnic groups” (2006, p. 15). Analysis of the 2018 PISA results also highlights the fact that performance is “more strongly associated with socio-economic status than with gender” (OECD 2019, p. 149). For example, “in all PISA-participating countries and economies, socio-economically advantaged boys outperformed disadvantaged girls in reading” (ibid). The fact that other gaps are larger than those caused by gender does not imply that gender is an unimportant aspect of student performance in secondary schools, but that it is important to contextualize gender and socio-economic status or class and race/ethnicity when conducting more specific analyses of educational inequalities.

Another reason why gender gaps are important to consider is that, in current societies, skills and knowledge related to reading, mathematics, and science are not equally appraised regarding their socio-cultural recognition and their labour-market value (Eden, 2017; Hadjar & Buchmann, 2016). Rédai and Turai (in press) found that there is a strong belief among teachers in gender complementarity. This perspective implies that boys' better performance at and greater interest in STEM subjects vs. girls' better performance in reading comprehension and greater interest and humanities and social sciences is considered to be fairly balanced, because the areas complement each other. People with this view do not acknowledge the fact that the skills and interests boys have are more highly valued on the labour market than girls' skills and interests, which results in gender inequalities on the labour market. Rédai and Turai (ibid.) argue that when a belief in gender complementarity is coupled with a liberal attitude towards 'free choice' in schools (i.e. the perspective that everyone is free to choose any subject specialisation and career they want to, and that this choice is supported without reflection on

gender stereotypes by teachers), the given schools will not do much to challenge gender inequalities in education and outside the school walls.

Besides differentiated acknowledgement of the areas where boys and girls tend to perform better, research has shown that performance assessment procedures are also gendered (EURYDICE, 2010, p. 29). Hadjar and Buchmann claim that the standardisation of testing “tends to reduce social class inequalities in achievement” (2016, p. 174) and stipulate that this “equalising effect of standardisation may also work for gender inequality” (ibid). However, it has been found in many studies that gender socialisation has the impact that teachers exhibit gender bias not only in interaction with pupils, but also in performance evaluation (Lavy & Sand, 2018). Among others, Jones and Myhill (2004) have found that the teachers in their sample polarized girls as compliant and boys as troublesome, and evaluated their performance accordingly. The researchers’ observations of the same pupils did not support this polarization.

Research has shown that girls’ and women’s interest and performance in maths is influenced by stereotypes about women’s inaptitude in relation to mathematics, and that their maths test performance may be particularly undermined by stereotype threat (see: Kiefer & Sekaquaptewa, 2007). According to PISA 2006 and 2012 data (OECD, 2015), there is a larger gap between boys and girls among the best performing students than among average and low performing students in most countries. This difference is not cognitively based, but can be explained by institutional factors in gender socialisation, including parents’ and teachers’ projections of their own gender stereotypes (OECD, 2015; Zawistowska & Sadowski, 2019; Goetz et al., 2013; Gunderson et al., 2012). Based on PISA data and other studies, it is argued that “gender disparities in drive, motivation and self-beliefs are more pervasive and more firmly entrenched than gender differences in mathematics performance” (OECD, 2015: 68). The study reports that girls have lower levels of self-efficacy and self-concept in both science and mathematics, but the gap is larger in maths, even among girls and boys who perform at the same level. Girls, even high performing ones, are more likely to have feelings of anxiety and a lower level of self-confidence. The conclusion is that “when comparing high-achieving boys and girls who reported similar levels of science self-beliefs, there is no performance gap” and “when comparing boys and girls who also reported similar levels of mathematics self-efficacy, self-concept and mathematics anxiety, there is no performance gap” (OECD, 2015, p. 78; see also: OECD, 2019).

According to the OECD (2015), in countries with greater gender equality, the gender gaps in maths performance are narrower, because girls perform better and boys’ performance is little or not affected. However, in these countries the gaps are wider in reading, in favour of girls (2015, p. 147). The explanation for the narrower gap in maths may be that when women are more integrated into the labour market and see the benefit of learning maths they have higher motivation to do so. However, greater gender equality also means that women spend less time at home. PISA 2012 data shows the importance of parents reading for their children at an early age. As boys are less motivated to read, especially in the early school years, they benefit from more parental encouragement to do so. As long as men do not take over some part of this task from women (who spend less time with caring activities when in full-time employment), boys are at risk of performing more weakly in reading. Therefore, in order to achieve gender equality in education, boys and girls need to be equally encouraged both to read and do maths, which, in turn, requires more equal sharing of childcare responsibilities in the family between women and men (2015, p. 148).

### 2.3. Gender differences in educational pathways

Despite girls' and young women's growing success in education, gender gaps persist in school subject specialisation and career choice. As Flabbi (2011) and many other researchers have found, the largest differences between young women and men's educational decisions lie in the choice of field of education, not in the total amount of education they acquire.

Gender stereotypes regarding male and female skills, 'appropriate' male and female occupations, and fields of study are strictly binary. These ideas feed into the belief that

*(...) there are certain tasks and occupations, and hence also orientations in education, that are better fit for women and others that are better fit for men. Girls and boys (as from a very young age), as well as women and men, therefore, tend to be steered towards these occupations and roles that are deemed as corresponding more to their aptitudes. (EIGE 2013: 50)*

Hadjar and Buchmann (2016) explain that inequalities in education can be grouped as vertical and horizontal. Vertical inequalities include gaps in grades, test scores, and educational credentials, which can order students hierarchically. Horizontal inequalities are related to heterogeneity and include aspects such as fields of study. "Horizontal inequalities, such as gender differences in fields of study, may be closely related to vertical inequalities, since fields of study are often related to gender segregation in occupations, which in turn is related to vertical inequalities in status and pay" (2016, p. 160). Whereas vertical gender inequalities in education have significantly changed in the past decades, horizontal ones have been changing much less rapidly (ibid).

Subject and career choice is strongly interconnected with gendered performance gaps, as discussed in the previous section. Stereotypes about masculinity and femininity include those about the kind of jobs considered suitable for each gender. These choices tend to be strongly influenced by parents, peers, and teachers (Legewie & DiPrete, 2014; Kollmayer et al., 2018). Francis (2002) found in the UK that even though girls have become much more ambitious in their education and career plans, their (and also boys') subject and career choices are based on strong dichotomous beliefs about which jobs are 'feminine' and 'masculine'. Van der Vleuten and colleagues (2016) examined how upper-secondary school students' gender ideology influenced their career choices in the Netherlands, and found that boys' choices were more strictly gender stereotyped than girls' (i.e. it was more characteristic of boys to choose careers that are considered 'masculine' and to avoid areas considered to be 'feminine'). However, some professional fields – for example, economics – are not considered to be 'masculine' fields anymore, and an increasing number of girls choose the latter field for further study (Van der Vleuten et al., 2016). Nevertheless, girls' career expectations seem to be of a narrower range than those of boys: in the PISA 2018 survey "amongst the top ten occupations that girls reported to expect for themselves when they are around 30 (...), seven were health-related occupations; the remaining three were 'teaching professionals', 'lawyers' and 'policy and planning managers'. Boys reported a wider range of occupations, including athletes, engineering professionals, motor-vehicle mechanics and police officers" (OECD, 2019, p. 123). There was a large gender gap in interest in ICT occupations (OECD, 2019, p. 168), which is particularly important when considering the gendered aspects of digitalization.

In the PISA 2012 survey, parental expectations about subject and career choice were tested in 11 countries, including Hungary. In all the 11 countries, parents expected their sons more than their



daughters to choose an occupation in a STEM field, even when boys' and girls' performance in reading, maths, and the sciences were the same (OECD, 2015). Literature shows that peers and friends may also influence career choice differently for boys and girls, as peers also share the same gender socialisation and have their own notions about gender-appropriate behaviours and choices in school (see: OECD, 2015, p. 141).

There are school-level factors that influence gendered career choices. For example, Legewie and DiPrete (2014) analysed how the strength of high schools' math and science curricula and the gender segregation of extracurricular activities affected the gender gap in studying STEM subjects. They found that schools supportive of girls' STEM orientations with strong math and sciences curricula reduce the gender gap in choosing STEM careers, and so do gender-integrated extracurricular activities, which may mitigate gender stereotypes by de-emphasizing "gender as a basis for making choices about interests and activities" and "diminish its influence on the formation of aspirations for occupational careers" (2014, p. 263).

Another school-level factor can be career guidance. As mentioned in Section 3.2, the acceptance of stereotypical career choices by teachers or other career advisors, even if this involves a supportive attitude, and a lack of the offer of non-stereotypical options and support for non-stereotypical further learning or career interests of students, does not help eliminate gender inequalities (Rédai & Turai, in press; Roger & Duffield, 2000). Gender-sensitive career guidance initiatives – if they exist at all – most often targets girls and aim at raising girls' interest in STEM careers. Encouraging boys to choose non-stereotypically 'masculine' professions is not common (EURYDICE, 2010), despite the fact that the above-mentioned and other studies have found that boys' career choices more strictly correspond with their notions of masculinity.

There are also relevant issues concerning gendered career choice at the structural and policy levels of education. In most OECD countries, boys are more likely to study in vocational and technical schools than girls (OECD, 2015; EURYDICE, 2010). In many education systems, these schools do not offer upper-secondary qualifications. Such early career choices tend to reinforce gender segregation on the labour market (Bieri et al., 2016). Smyth (2005) argues that although countries with a higher level of gender segregation in education have higher gender segregation in occupations, gender has a significant divisive effect in both tracked and comprehensive education systems. Smyth does not provide an explanation for this, but it is quite obvious that the above-discussed factors explain this fact.

### 3. CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOLS CAPABLE OF RESPONDING TO GENDER INEQUALITY ISSUES

In our analytical framework (Radó, 2020), changing gender relations are considered as one of the major challenges for future schools. It can be overwhelming for schools and education systems to tackle all such large-scale challenges one by one. Therefore, a shift in the emphasis on the goals of education, "from expecting education to adapt to all individual external challenges to improving the adaptability of individuals to any changes, and the strategy of realigning education to foster adaptive skills in a personalized way during a lengthier period of general education" (Radó, 2020, p. 15), is more accessible for educationalists. Nevertheless, some of the challenges need to be analysed one by one in order to

create an integrative framework which can lay the foundation for strategies for improving the adaptive skills of individual learners to enable them to get ahead in this changing environment. In the following two sections I use an analytical framework to inquire first at the level of school and then the level of governance and broader policy-making to help map what may enable schools in the CEE region to face the challenge of changing gender relations and what governmental drivers are required to accomplish that aim.

### **3.1. School-level capabilities related to tackling gender inequality in education**

In this section, I present a list of characteristics that enable schools to respond to gender inequalities. As such schools are, to my knowledge, not present in reality yet, this section envisions future schools. I consider school-level adaptation regarding changing gender relations in section 4.1, and governmental policy drivers in 4.2. The categories in the framework for assessing schools from a gender equality perspective are ordered and named differently, but they are in conversation with the categories that traditional and new schools are assessed by in our analytical framework: the fundamental goals of learning; the school program; the organization of learning; the planning of learning; the context of learning; a focus on individual learning; the type of teaching; and the physical space for learning (Radó, 2020, p. 18).

Present gender equality assessments, toolkits, etc. are mostly designed for developing countries where access for boys and girls is not always equal yet (see e.g. UNICEF, 2018; GPE & UNGEI, 2017; UNESCO, 2009). In CEE educational systems, this is not an issue anymore (except for in Romania), but there are other issues that would benefit from an institutionalized assessment framework. The collection of characteristics of capable schools is based on the product of a European pilot project called the Gender Equality Charter Mark (GECM) (see: Tsouroufli & Rédei, in press). GECM assesses individual schools' performance in terms of gender equality through inquiry into all aspects of the operation of schools on the levels of leadership/management, teachers, and students. There are four grades: Emerging, Bronze ('Working Towards'), Silver ('Developing Practice'), and Gold ('Embedded Practice'). GECM was first designed for secondary schools, developed by teachers and gender and education experts, and was piloted in three schools per country in the UK, Hungary, and Italy. Then, at a second stage, it was adapted for kindergartens and primary schools in nine European countries (the UK, Hungary, Italy, Finland, Austria, Croatia, Poland, Slovakia, and Greece).<sup>3</sup>

Any lasting and sustainable change within schools requires a whole-school approach (see: Mathar, 2015, p.26). According to the whole-school approach, "schools are autonomous institutions, the professionalization of individual teachers is part of a full-fledged human resource management regime in schools, and the system of ensuring professional accountability is based on a combination of all of the contemporary instruments of quality evaluation" (Radó, 2020, p. 25). As the research and piloting showed in the GECM project, if only individual teachers work on gender issues in a school, whole-school improvement will not happen. However, there are many obstacles to introducing a whole-school approach, including internal ones such as structural/management issues, varied levels of commitment of teachers and school leaders, a lack of knowledge/training for teachers in relation to engaging with gender issues, a lack of awareness of gender inequalities, the varied views and attitudes of school staff towards gender inequalities, and external ones such as curricular constraints, public views

3 <https://genderequalityinschools.org/>

about gender and political discourse on gender inequality, a lack of publicly available gender-related resources and teaching materials, external control over schools and repression of their autonomy (as in the case of Hungary) (Tsouroufli & Rédai, in press). The application of government drivers for change, to be discussed in 4.2, is preconditioned by the existence of “decentralized professional” and “highly decentralized” educational governance models (Radó, 2020, pp. 25-26).

GECM encompasses five main areas of school life: Leadership, Curriculum, Physical Environment, Attitudes and Relationships, and Community.<sup>4</sup> The Gold Award is received by schools in which a whole-school approach to achieving gender equality has been developed. Each of the three Hungarian pilot schools in the GECM project received a Bronze award, showing that there were some attempts to include gender perspectives into the life of the school, mostly by individual teachers or by leadership, but not on a whole-school level. Criteria for Gold depict an ideal school, but they show the directions in which schools could progress. Below are the slightly adapted categories of the Hungarian GECM, which I propose for use in the analysis in Section 5, with the aim of reviewing what is known about CEE schools’ capabilities in relation to addressing changing gender relations.

## 1. LEVEL OF LEADERSHIP/SCHOOL AS AN INSTITUTION

- Degree of **integration of notions of gender into subject areas** in the local curriculum/ syllabus.<sup>5</sup>
- Degree of **integration of notions of gender into the pedagogical and vocational training programme** of the school.
- The school leadership’s **sensitivity towards the realisation of gender equality** within the school.
- The **design and usage of school spaces** (classroom and corridor decorations, segregated spaces etc.) in a gender-balanced, inclusive and non-biased way.
- **Critical usage of textbooks and resources**; regulation of the selection criteria for teaching materials in the pedagogical programme of the school.
- Regulation of forms and content of **family engagement** with regard to the perspective of gender equality.
- Balancing gender inequalities in **career education/ guidance**.
- Supporting gender-related and gender-balanced **extracurricular activities**.
- Clarification of issues of **hidden curriculum and language use** in the school procedures.
- Balancing gender differences in **student achievement and evaluation**.
- Balancing gender differences in the **choices of school subjects and specialisations and career counselling**.
- Deliberate inclusion of a gender perspective in the **external communication** of the school.

4 Although identical in approach and assessment categories, the English, the Italian, and the Hungarian GECMs are somewhat different in structure and in some of the subthemes and criteria. Because of its relevance for our regional context, I use the Hungarian version with some minor modifications. The Hungarian GECM (NEM) for secondary schools and for primary schools and kindergartens is available at <http://nem.hu.anthropolis.hu/>.

5 Local curricula are especially important in Hungary, where the notion of gender and gender-related content has been erased from the core subject curricula. For a detailed analysis, see: Rédai & Sáfrány, 2019.

- **Cooperation with local and national institutions and organisations** working with gender equality.
- **Gender-sensitive reviewing and assessing of institutional documents** (incl. operational regulations, leadership applications, equal opportunities plan).
- Strategies and training to tackle **gender-based violence and bullying** among students, among teachers, and between students and teachers.

## 2. LEVEL OF STUDENTS AND LEARNING

- Representation of issues of gender balance, inclusiveness and no bias in the **design and usage of school spaces** (classroom and corridor decorations, segregated spaces etc.) by student bodies.
- Organizing **extracurricular activities** which deal with gender issues.
- Organizing interactive workshops or presentations for peers about the **hidden curriculum and language use**.
- **Student initiatives** related to gender issues.
- Taking action against **sexist language use, gender discrimination and stereotypical or prejudiced communication or behaviour** within peer relations.
- Awareness of gender differences in **student achievement**.
- Awareness of gender differences in the **choices of school subjects and specialisations and career choice**.
- Peer support group for victims of **gender-based violence and bullying**.

## 3. LEVEL OF TEACHERS

- Degree of **integration of notions of gender into subject areas**.
- The notions of gender **taught explicitly, independently of subject areas**, and in **form teacher curricula**.
- Integration of critical gender approaches into the **usage of textbooks and resources**.
- Participation in supervising the **design and usage of school spaces** (classroom and corridor decorations, segregated spaces etc.) in a gender-balanced, inclusive and non-biased way.
- Handling issues of **gender stereotyping and discrimination by parents**.
- Good practices of gender-related and gender-balanced **extracurricular activities**.
- Reflecting on **gendered practices and language use** as part of the **hidden curriculum**; following regulations and good practices.
- Good practices of balancing gender inequalities in the **choices of school subjects and specialisations and in career choice and counselling**.
- Good practices of balancing gender inequalities in **student achievement and evaluation**.
- Application of school strategy for handling cases of **gender-based violence and bullying** among students, among teachers, and between students and teachers.

The GECM and similar charters in other areas (e.g. the Eco-School programme, see Breiting & Mayer, 2015) are useful tools for initiating and tracking school-level changes. However, schools are embedded in larger systems and are connected to other spheres of social life (e.g. family, work, etc.). School-level changes towards gender equality are easier to implement in a gender-sensitive policy and social environment, even though when an appropriate legal and policy framework exists and political commitment is present, it may still be difficult to translate this into school-level action, as the findings about the introduction of Sustainable Development Education (SDE) in Hungary show (Réti et al., 2015).

### **3.2. The broader policy framework that enables schools to tackle gender inequalities**

It is necessary for education governance to invest effort into school-level adaptation to changes by introducing external drivers for schools (Radó, 2020, p. 23). “The drivers are governance instruments that convey external expectations in a way that is capable of defeating path-dependencies by overwriting old institutional routines” (2020, p. 23). However, such initiatives usually have the life-span of a governmental term, which is shorter than the time-span of educational adaptation processes, therefore it is important to consider the systemic environment that education governance creates (2020, pp. 23-24).

In Europe, equal access to education is granted in most countries, although access to girls from minority and disadvantaged groups is a problem in some countries (EP, 2013). Nevertheless, mainstreaming gender equality into education and training remains a crucial area for improvement, because, despite the fact that girls and women currently have a higher rate of success at completing compulsory education, accessing and graduating from higher education, and participating in lifelong learning, data on employment rates, job quality and social inclusion, and on women’s participation in research and academia indicate that women are still at a disadvantage in terms of turning their education capital into financial and social capital.<sup>6</sup>

Education is one of the responsibilities of the Member States in the EU. General policy recommendations regarding gender equality for Member States have been issued by the European Commission and the European Parliament, and there are EU-level support schemes for public and higher education (especially within the Erasmus+ framework). However, there is no binding legislation or a common policy framework for allocating specific tasks to education stakeholders. On the national level, there are different legislative framework models that provide a legal basis for gender equality in education (EURYDICE, 2010). One model includes the field of education in general equal treatment and equal opportunities legislation. In the second model, education acts include a reference to gender equality. In the third model, gender equality is defined as a goal of the education system. In countries where this model applies, the revision of legislation from a gender perspective is also part of the framework. In several European countries equality framework laws specify obligations for educational institutions to develop their gender equality policy (EURYDICE, 2010, pp. 47-50). The priorities of EU countries’ gender equality policies include challenging traditional gender roles and gender stereotypes, combatting gender-based violence, enhancing the representation of women in decision-making, and addressing gender-based attainment patterns (EURYDICE, 2010, p. 51). Most of these policy measures cannot be considered drivers for change because they do not contain accountability systems or financial incentives that would support the adaptation process in schools.

6 EIGE, Policy areas of gender mainstreaming: Education: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/policy-areas/education>

The policy framework I propose below is a mixture of these models and is based on current gender inequality issues identified in gender and education scholarship. The elements of the framework include national-level governmental legal and policy measures, and ones for governance bodies which maintain schools. These may be local governments, or in the case of Hungary, for example, a centralized management agency which controls all state schools. General gender equality legislation is included in the framework, because this serves as the starting ground and reference point for gender equality policies in education. The proposed policies can only be drivers for change if they include tools for supporting the adaptation of schools and whole education systems to changing gender relations, thus in the specific policy analysis by country it is important to consider not only whether such policies exist, but also whether they can be considered drivers.

### 1. GENERAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK

- Prohibition of gender-, sexual orientation- and gender identity- or expression-based discrimination in fundamental national documents, such as the Constitution.
- Existence of general equality policies (e.g. an Equal Opportunities Act).
- Prohibition of gender discrimination and the active promotion of gender equality in education laws.
- Legal institutions and procedures to deal with cases of gender discrimination.
- Inclusion of obligations for schools to develop their own policies in general education legislation.

### 2. KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND TRAINING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

- Inclusion of gendered areas and gender scholarship in the different scientific areas, especially in the humanities and social sciences.
- Recognition of gender studies as a scientific discipline and supporting gender research in education.
- Existence of gender studies BA/MA/PhD programs and/or research centres at universities.
- Institutional framework and funding for gender research in education.
- National/institutional strategies for the advancement of women in academic careers.
- Inclusion of gender as a major aspect of initial and in-service teacher training.

### 3. CURRICULUM DESIGN

- Inclusion of the concept of gender and gender equality in the national core curriculum as an overarching democratic value and a feature of pedagogy, learning content, and skills development.
- Inclusion of the concept of gender and gender-related topics in the subject curricula.
- Consultations with academics, especially in the humanities, social sciences, and education science, about the latest gender-related developments in their fields (e.g. inclusion of female authors in the literary canon, re-examining women's roles in history, etc.) during the design and revision process of subject curricula.



#### 4. TEXTBOOKS AND OTHER TEACHING MATERIALS

- Inclusion of a gender perspective in book accreditation regulations, with well-described criteria for preventing the dominance of gender-stereotypical and biased representations in textbooks and other teaching material.
- Inclusion of gender experts in the accreditation procedure.
- Legal guarantees for a free textbook market from which teachers can select a range of textbooks, including gender-sensitive ones.

#### 5. LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CAREER CHOICES

- National policy aimed at the elimination of gendered labour-market segregation by increasing the attractiveness of non-stereotypical educational and career choices.
- Policy tools for schools to support girls' performance in STEM subjects and boys' performance in the arts and humanities.
- Policy tools for gender-sensitive career guidance in schools.

#### 6. SCHOOL-RELATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (SRGBV)

- Existence of general legislation that sanctions gender-based violence.
- Legal institutions and procedures for dealing with cases of gender-based violence.
- Policy tools for supporting schools in tackling SRGBV and training school staff in SRGBV.

### 4. SCHOOL-LEVEL AND POLICY-LEVEL CAPABILITIES OF ADAPTATION TO CHANGE IN GENDER RELATIONS IN HUNGARY, SERBIA, POLAND, SLOVAKIA, AND ROMANIA

In this section, I apply the two frameworks presented in Section 4 and use literature to assess and compare how schools and the educational governance in Hungary, Serbia, Poland, Slovakia, and Romania are capable of resolving gender-related problems and responding to changing gender relations. School-level information should be collected through school-based qualitative and quantitative research on a much larger scale, and this is a task for the future. The little available literature in the five CEE countries based on school-level research will be presented, along with an analysis of each country's relevant policy measures. To assess each country's school-level capabilities for adaptation to changes in gender relations, I use the checklist in 4.1, and for policy-level capabilities, I use the checklist in 4.2. I do not discuss all the headings but highlight those in relation to which sufficient information is available.<sup>7</sup> There are gaps in the comparison due to lack of data, but a general picture emerges. A comprehensive table of all policy measures in all five countries is available in the Appendix.

7 I would like to thank the following persons for providing me with relevant information about their respective countries: Magdalena Czarnecka and Maciej Jakubowski, Poland; Ivana Klimentova and Ondrej Kaščák, Slovakia; Lucian Ciolan, Romania; Vitomir Jovanovic, Serbia.

Regarding Hungary, there is very little data available about school-level gender inequalities in Hungarian educational institutions, even in Hungarian. This is not very surprising, as gender has never been a priority in educational discourses, research, and policy-making in Hungary (Rédai & Sáfrány, 2019), and critical gender research in education is conducted only by a handful of scholars in a not very supportive academic environment. Moreover, school-based qualitative research is rare; it is much easier to find large-scale quantitative studies, in which gender is usually one of the variables rather than an analytical category.

In Serbia, gender discourses in education policy are very different from those in Hungary. Making national policy-level efforts to achieve gender equality is required as part of the EU accession procedure, and these are monitored by EU and international agencies. Educational gender equality goals are defined in the *National Gender Equality Strategy 2016-2020* (NGES). Information about policy-level gender-awareness comes primarily from an evaluation report of the *National Action Plan (NAP) 2016-2018* (Evaluation Report /n.d./, hereinafter), which is part of the NGES, and from the CEDAW Shadow Report of 2019. The Evaluation Report assesses a two-year period, therefore it records the development of a short timespan within which the impact of the NGES cannot be measured yet. The efficiency and impact of measures taken so far to achieve gender equality is assessed to be medium or low by the Evaluation Report. The Shadow Report was submitted to CEDAW by women's NGOs, which have broader insight into gender issues in Serbia, and over a longer time range.

Attitudes to gender issues in Poland are heavily politicized, with gender policies strongly influenced by conservative governments and the Catholic Church. After a progressive period in Polish legislation concerning gender equality, severe democratic backsliding started in Poland in 2015. Similarly to in Hungary, attacks on gender equality in the name of protecting the country from “gender ideology” have been at “the forefront of the process of de-democratization” (Szczygielska, 2019, p. 124). The Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment appointed in 2015 declared that gender equality was not among his priorities, and he was recorded announcing his preference for “family mainstreaming” instead of gender mainstreaming (Juhász & Pap, 2018, p. 52). In 2014, a parliamentary group called “Stop Gender ideology” was formed, and, since 2015, populist governmental rhetoric has positioned gender equality issues within the framework of a “gender ideology” that is said to threaten society and traditional Catholic Polish family values (Szczygielska, 2019; Juhász & Pap, 2018, p. 52). However, there is a strong feminist movement and a great deal of academic work in the various fields of gender studies. Like everywhere in the region, little scholarship on gender in education is available in English, although there seems to be more in Polish than in the national languages of the other four countries, and more studies are published in international journals.

In Slovakia, political commitment towards achieving gender equality in education exists, at least on the level of policy objectives. There is little literature available in English, therefore it is difficult to see whether and how these commitments are translated into school-level action. Nonetheless, Slovak society seems to be the most conservative one among the five countries in terms of gender attitudes and stereotypes (Beijing 25 Report, 2019; EVS, 2017), perhaps because there is an increasingly influential anti-gender movement with a strong Catholic influence (Beijing 25 Report; Kováts & Póim, 2015).

While it can be claimed in general that CEE countries do not have gender equality issues regarding access to education, primary and secondary enrolment rates both for boys and girl, especially in rural areas, are lower in Romania than in other EU countries. As in other countries, school-level research studies available in English are scarce, and there are many gaps in policy-level information as well.



Many policy concerns regarding gender equality in education are raised in the *National Strategy for the Promotion of Equal Opportunity and Treatment between Women and Men for 2018–2021*, but there is no information available about the implementation process yet.

#### 4.1. General legal framework

##### 4.1.1. National Constitutions

Concerning the general legal framework, the *Fundamental Law of Hungary* declares that men and women have equal rights (XIV/3) and that basic rights are granted to everyone without discrimination based on “race, gender, disability, language, religion, political or other opinions, nationality or social origin, property- or birth-related or other situation” (XIV/2).

The Serbian *Constitution* guarantees the legal equality of women and men and prohibits discrimination on “any direct or indirect discrimination on any grounds, including sex” (Krstic, 2018, p. 8), but not on grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression (Dokmanovic, 2016).

Article 32 of the Polish *Constitution* provides that all persons are equal before the law but does not contain a list of grounds for discrimination. Article 33 declares the equality between men and women “in family, political, social and economic life”, and in “education, employment and promotion” in particular (SEJM, 1997).

The Slovakian *Constitution* bans discrimination on the basis of “sex, race, colour of skin, language, faith and religion, political or other thoughts, national or social origin, nationality or ethnic origin, property, descent (...) or other status” and also offers special protection and preferential treatment in certain cases for women (or men) (Magurová, 2019, p. 10). It is unclear whether sexual orientation- and gender identity- or expression-based discrimination belongs under sex-based discrimination.

The Romanian *Constitution* does not specify gender- or any other category – as potential ground for inequality, but declares the equality of all citizens before the law and the equal right of women and men to take up public positions (World Bank, 2018, p. 44).

##### 4.1.2. Equality Acts and legal institutions

The Hungarian *Equal Treatment Act* (2003/CXXXV) has 20 protected categories, including gender, motherhood (pregnancy) or fatherhood, sexual orientation, and gender identity. The Equal Treatment Act applies to all public and higher education institutions. There is no specific gender equality legislation. Besides regular court procedures, discrimination cases have been also handled by the Equal Treatment Authority, which was an independent institution until January 2021, when it was subsumed under the office of the Ombudsman for Fundamental Rights, appointed by the government.

In Serbia, a general *Anti-Discrimination Act* exists, prohibiting discrimination on 24 grounds, which is an open-ended list including gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Also, there is a specific Gender Equality Act (GEA) (Krstic, 2018, p. 8). The GEA contains passages related to gender equality in education and training, including affirmative measures to balance gender representation. It is stipulated that the “public authorities in charge of education may also take other special measures, especially measures to encourage education of the less-represented gender in the field of information technology, engineering and technology” (Krstic, 2018, p. 20). The civil legal procedure in case of gender-based discrimination is prescribed in the GEA (Art. 43-51; Krstic, 2018, p. 48).

General equality policies exist in Poland: the *Act on the Implementation of the Regulations of the European Union in the Field of Equal Treatment* (generally referred to as the *Antidiscrimination Law*) was adopted in 2010 (Zielinska, 2017). The Act offers protection against gender discrimination in the area of employment and access to goods and services; but “explicitly excludes protection against gender discrimination in access to educational services, including higher education” (Zielinska & Cybulko, 2019, p. 10). National Action Plans are required to be implemented by this law, but the last NAP was for 2013-2016, and there has been no subsequent NAP introduced since 2016.<sup>8</sup> The Commissioner for Human Rights is responsible for assisting those who file complaints about discrimination, and regular court procedures apply (Zielinska, 2017).

Slovakia has an *Anti-Discrimination Act* which prohibits discrimination on grounds of “sex, religion or belief, race, nationality or ethnic origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, marital or family status, colour, language, political affiliation or other conviction, national or social origin, property, lineage (...) or any other status”, in the areas of “employment relations, social security, healthcare, provision of goods and services and education” (Magurová, 2019, 11). There is no specific gender equality legislation (Magurová, 2019). Discrimination cases are handled by civil courts (Magurová, 2019, p. 6), and the Slovak National Centre for Human rights provides legal assistance.<sup>9</sup>

Romania has an *Anti-Discrimination Law* that prohibits discrimination in employment and education on ten grounds, including “sex or sexual orientation” (Iordache, 2019: 38). This law also “provides that the Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for co-ordination, monitoring, and assessment of the promotion of equal opportunities at all levels. Its responsibility is to supervise the publication of educational materials that do not contain discriminatory elements and do not promote negative stereotypes concerning social roles” (Miroiu, 2004, p. 87). Besides the general Anti-Discrimination Law, the *Law 202/2002 on Equal Opportunities between Women and Men* was adopted in 2002. Among other areas, this law grants equal access for women and men to education. Legal institutions and procedures for dealing with cases of gender discrimination are the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (ANES), and the National Council for Combating Discrimination (NCCD). Each county has a local government body, the County Commission for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men, which has a consultative and informative role and no legally provisioned position in the local government (EIGE).

#### 4.1.3. Education Acts

In the Hungarian *Public Education Act* and *Higher Education Act* the principle of equal treatment is mentioned a few times, but only with reference to ‘disadvantaged students’. Equal opportunities are not mentioned in the former, and in the latter, “equal opportunities refer to disadvantaged, disabled and ethnic minority students and to those on childcare leave” (Rédai & Sáfrány, 2019, p. 29). There is no obligation for schools to develop their own policies in these Acts, but the Equal Treatment Act obliges all public institutions, including schools, to have an *Equal Opportunities Action Plan*.

8 Source: EIGE / Gender mainstreaming / Country specific information / Poland: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/countries/poland>

9 Source: EIGE / Gender mainstreaming / Country specific information / Slovakia, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/countries/slovakia>

In Serbia, the *Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System* (2017) “contains the provisions regarding the prohibition of discrimination based on all personal characteristics, including sex, gender identity and sexual orientation of school students, and the prohibition of all forms of violence, abuse and neglect of all persons in the institution” (Ignjatović et al., 2019, p.48). However, as the Shadow Report claims, “the majority of education documents are either ‘gender-blind’ or just mention sex/gender as a personal property that is banned from discrimination and requires development and respect for equality, without a more detailed explanation” (ibid).

The Polish *Education Act* does not include any explicit references to gender equality, and, consequently, obligations for schools to develop their own policies in general education legislation are not included.

In Slovakia, the *Education Act* and the *Higher Education Act* prohibit discrimination based on all the categories listed in the Anti-Discrimination Act (Magurová, 2019). Equality between women and men is declared to be a fundamental principle in the Education Act (Cviková & Filadefiová, 2008), and “according to this law elementary and secondary schools are required to incorporate gender equality and human rights topics into syllabuses” (Juhász & Pap, 2018, p.74), but schools are not required to develop their own gender equality policies.

In Romania, the *1/2011 Law on National Education* replaced the list of grounds on which discrimination is prohibited from the previous Education Act (1995) with a general granting of equal access to education (Iordache, 2017, p.73), i.e. the prohibition of discrimination was replaced by a “vague principle of equity defined as absence of discrimination”, and the active promotion of gender equality is not included (Iordache, 2017, p.73). Legal cases of discrimination described by Iordache (2017) focus only on access to education and educational segregation (of Roma students in particular).

#### ***4.1.4. National strategies for gender equality***

In Hungary, the *National Strategy for the Promotion of Social Equality of Women and Men – Directions and Goals 2010-2021* was adopted by the socialist-liberal government in 2010. The document, which includes education among its priorities, “declares the commitment of the government to the realization of gender equality and it binds every ministry to report to the government on the progress made in their areas biannually” (Rédai & Sáfrány, 2019, p.36). However, soon after its adoption, the currently ruling Fidesz came to power and since then the Strategy has only been in force nominally; references to it appear only in “the government’s reports that they are obliged to produce under international conventions” (ibid).

In Serbia, one of the three main objectives of the NGES is to “promote culture of gender equality and changing traditional gender patterns”, by, among other measures, “gender sensitive formal education” and the “development of knowledge and increased visibility of academic outputs of gender studies” (Dokmanovic, 2016, p.25). Gender Responsive Budgeting was introduced in 2015 by the Serbian government, which means that “budgets must be gender-sensitive and allocate some resources for improving gender equity” at the local level in public institutions (UNICEF in Serbia, 2019, p.34).

There have been several *National Action Plans* (NAP) in Poland for gender equality and several responsible institutions since 1997, but they were all disrupted or discontinued or not evaluated due to changes in politics. Currently, there is no NAP in effect. The Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment, established in 2010, is the body responsible for implementing government policies concerning equal

treatment, including gender equality. It belonged to the Chancellery of the Prime Minister,<sup>10</sup> and has recently been relocated under the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy.<sup>11</sup>

‘Education, science and research’ are one of the strategic areas and priorities of the *National Strategy for Gender Equality in the Slovak Republic 2014-2019* (NSGE), but the document mainly focuses on higher education and gender equality in research careers. The NSGE is complemented by the *National Action Plan for Gender Equality in the Slovak Republic 2014-2019* (NAP),<sup>12</sup> which names more specific tasks and actors responsible for implementation and budget lines for given tasks, but it does not include sanctions for lack of implementation and concrete indicators of implementation. An evaluation of the NAP is not available yet, thus there is no information about how the related objectives have been implemented.

The Romanian government adopted a *National Strategy for the Promotion of Equal Opportunity and Treatment between Women and Men for 2018–2021*. This strategy “has three general objectives (promoting universal access of girls and women to sexual and reproductive health; reconciliation of professional life with family and private life; encouraging women’s participation in the decision making process), and five domains of intervention: education, health, the labour market, balanced participation in decision-making processes, and gender mainstreaming” (EIGE). Education objectives are defined as (1) increasing the awareness of children and young people about the legal provisions concerning equal opportunities between women and men, and (2) combatting gender stereotypes among young people.<sup>13</sup> These rather general objectives are complemented by – also rather general – directions for action, including the inclusion of the concepts of gender-based violence and gender equality; integrating a gender perspective into textbooks; organizing awareness-raising campaigns for students; organizing an awareness-raising campaign about gendered career choices and encouraging career choices in STEM areas; and organizing awareness-raising campaigns for the elimination of stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination against women and girls, including multiple discrimination against disabled girls (Roma girls are not mentioned). There is a list of expected indicators, but monitoring, accountability, responsible bodies, and sanctioning are not defined precisely.

## 4.2. Knowledge production and training in higher education

### 4.2.1. Inclusion of gendered areas and gender scholarship in different fields of science; recognition of gender studies as science; existence of gender studies programs

Regarding the academic background for the presence of gender issues in education in Hungary, the picture is not very positive. Gendered areas and gender scholarship have been included in different fields of science, especially in the humanities and social sciences. However, this happens mostly on an individual basis – there are a few professors in the humanities and social sciences faculties of most Hungarian universities who are interested in and knowledgeable about gender studies and offer courses and do research on gender topics related to their academic fields. In the course of the increase in “gender

10 Source: EIGE / Gender mainstreaming / Country specific information / Poland: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/countries/poland>

11 Source: European Equality Law Network: Poland: <https://www.equalitylaw.eu/country/poland>

12 This document is only available in Slovak, thus I used the English text produced by Google Translate to review it.

13 This document is only available in Romanian, thus I used the English text produced Google Translate to review it.

ideology” propaganda in Hungary, the accreditation of gender studies MA programs was revoked in 2018 by the education ministry. Two such programs existed; one at Central European University, the other at the Social Sciences Faculty of ELTE University, which was accredited in 2016, so the program had only two cohorts of graduates. At other Hungarian state universities, there are gender studies specialisations within various master programs, and there are gender studies research centres at ELTE Social Sciences Faculty, Corvinus University in Budapest, Szeged University, and Miskolc University. There are also gender studies scholars working at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, within various research institutes.

In Serbia, there are gender courses in many study programs, but “education on gender equality among professionals (policy makers, professionals in education, social protection, health care, etc.) is not systematically integrated into basic study curricula” (Evaluation Report, p.34). The NGES recognizes the importance and achievements of gender studies in improving gender equality and the status of women, but it acknowledges that the “institutionalization of gender studies in universities was not provided adequate state support thus far regarding the provision of infrastructure, research, publishing and scholarships” (pp.21-22). One of the strategic goals to reach in education is the “[d]evelopment of knowledge and increased visibility of academic outputs of gender studies”. There is a gender studies PhD program at the University of Novi Sad and a master program at the University of Belgrade, but the Evaluation Report points out that enrolment numbers are not increasing due to accreditation problems, a lack of openness about gender studies courses from students from other study programs, and the insufficient financing of gender studies lecturers (p.61).

In Poland, “[g]ender studies are not listed as a discipline in the national science registry”, therefore gender studies “faculties or departments cannot be established” (Mrozik, 2016). Nevertheless, there are several gender studies master programmes at major Polish universities, mostly at social sciences and humanities faculties, there are also elective gender courses available on various study programs, and there are formal and informal interdisciplinary gender research groups (ibid). Although the Minister of Education J. Gowin attacked gender studies and called it a “pseudoscience” in 2016, the Polish government has not interfered with university autonomy so far, unlike the Hungarian government (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018).

In Slovakia, academic activity is not as extensive in the field of gender studies as in Poland. The Centre for Gender Studies at Comenius University, Bratislava, was established in 2001, and offered a few gender courses on BA and MA levels and conducted research about gender topics. However, the Centre has been inactive since 2013. Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica has an informal, multidisciplinary gender team with members in faculty and university level management positions, aim[ed] at implementing structural change at the university.<sup>14</sup> There are no gender studies BA, MA, or PhD programs in Slovakia, but despite a strengthening anti-gender discourse (see: Valkovicová & Madarová, 2019; Madarová, 2015), gender studies has been acknowledged as a discipline in Slovak academia. One of the educational objectives (3.1.27) of the NAP 2014-2019 is to support and motivate universities in the accreditation process of gender studies programs.

Gender studies courses and study programs were partly successfully included in curricula of Romanian universities from the mid-1990s to early 2000s, despite scepticism or outright rejection by the academic environment (Vacarescu, 2012). The first master program in gender studies was introduced at Bucharest University in 1998, and two more master programs with a main focus on gender were

14 Source: <https://www.umb.sk/en/research/international-research-priorities/gender/team/>



established at Cluj and Timisoara in 2003, but they were discontinued in 2006 and 2008, respectively, due to the lack of funding and the heavy reliance of the programs on the personal commitments and voluntary (i.e. unpaid) work of the founding scholars. Nevertheless, the professionalization of gender studies teaching staff continued, and there have been a number of elective courses and undergraduate and graduate modular courses, therefore gender studies has become academically acknowledged and embedded in some scientific areas (Vacarescu, 2012).

The existence of gender studies in university curricula and university autonomy were attacked in June 2020, when the Romanian Parliament accepted a legislative change banning educational institutions from teaching ‘gender theory’ (Tidey, 2020; UNICEF Romania, 2020). Justifications for the ban include curious explanations like “[t]he reason behind my amendment is to stop a Marxist ideology toxic to the development of children. According to this ideology the biological sex you have at birth can’t define a child as being man or woman, each child being left to choose from the 114 invented genders concocted by the supporters of this theory” (Vasile Lungu, Senator, quoted in Gherasim, 2020). This is another radical act related to the currently spreading anti-gender movement in CEE. The act defies university autonomy and the above-described legislative assurances of gender equality. The proposal was vetoed two weeks later by the President, who declared it unconstitutional and referred it to the Constitutional Court (Transindex, 2020). In December 2020, the Constitutional Court declared that the proposal was unconstitutional (Cabrera, 2020).

#### ***4.2.2. Institutional framework for gender research***

The Hungarian institutional framework and funding for gender research in education is lacking. Funding for gender research can be secured for individual researchers’ projects and for research teams, but gender in education is an under-researched area in Hungarian academy. Many gender-related research projects are funded by European Council grant schemes, and are carried out through multi-national consortia. Publications from such projects in Hungarian are scarce. The institutional framework and funding for gender research in education seems to be lacking in Slovakia, judging from the few English publications about topics related to gender and education, most of which date from between 2000–2010 (e.g. Cviková & Filadefiová, 2008). The NSGE (3.4) aims to enhance “the knowledge on existing forms of inequalities between women and men by strengthening the research in this area as well as up-to-date gender statistics”. No comparable information on this issue is available about Serbia, Poland, or Romania.

#### ***4.2.3. Supporting gender equality in academic careers***

National strategies for the advancement of women in academic careers do not exist in Hungary. Apart from general equal treatment legislation, there is no national policy that specifically targets gender equality in research and higher education. All state universities have an Equal Opportunities Plan, within most of which the issue of women as a disadvantaged or prioritised group is mentioned, and in some of them concrete measures aimed at supporting gender equality are included.

In Serbia, the NGES requires that measures be introduced to “support and promote the achievement of women in science and technology, eradicate discrimination against women in these fields and provide measures for the advancement of women in science” (p.48). A recent study of women professors’

experiences in reaching leadership positions at Novi Sad university (Mišić Andrić & Markov, 2018) finds that women’s career advancement is slower, that women are underrepresented in senior academic positions, and that the university lacks a policy or tools (such as mentoring) to promote women’s career advancement. No such policy is available at the website of the University of Belgrade, either, where the Rector is a woman.

The Antidiscrimination Act in Poland, as mentioned earlier, does not prohibit gender-based discrimination in higher education. Women are underrepresented in university leadership positions, especially at state universities, and their numbers are especially low in strongly masculinised areas, such as theology, and in the maritime and national defence academies, and higher than average at schools of medicine, pedagogy, and economics. When they acquire decision-making positions, these are usually at the level of deputy. The data show similar characteristics to the OECD averages (Sulkowski et al., 2019). Although not advertised on its website, the Foundation for Polish Science<sup>15</sup> claims to have been supporting female scientists for 10 years (Zachariasz-Podolak, 2019). Apart from this mention, I have found no trace of policies supporting the advancement of women in academic careers to date.

Data indicates that there are gender imbalances regarding academic careers and management and decision-making positions at Slovak universities and research institutions (NSGE). It is an objective of the NSGE (3.3) to create “a suitable environment and effective mechanisms for the implementation of gender equality in the field of science, research and higher education”, and the NAP 2014-2019 lists two objectives in relation to this aim: encouraging universities and research organizations to adopt institutional gender equality strategies, and promoting the increased representation of women in management and decision-making positions.

There is no national strategy for the advancement of women in academic careers in Romania; their low level of representation and unequal chances of promotion are not mentioned in the *Strategy 2018-2021*. The European Research Area Roadmap 2015-2020 (ERAC, 2015) is mentioned in relation to addressing gender imbalance in research institutions and gender mainstreaming in research projects, but it is not followed up by strategic objectives. The situation is similar to elsewhere in CEE countries and the EU: women are overrepresented in humanities and social sciences, and underrepresented in STEM areas; they are also underrepresented in leadership positions, and their proportion among academic staff decreases by rank following a pyramidal structure (Vacarescu, 2012).

#### ***4.2.4. Gender in teacher training***

The limited Hungarian data suggests that educational actors, including teachers and other school professionals and school leadership, have very little awareness of gender inequalities and their broader embeddedness in the social fabric. As Rédai and Turai (in press) argue, the attitudes of school staff towards gender issues are often characterized by a strong belief in gender complementarity. This essentialist belief does not consider the fact that not all boys and not all girls are the same, and does not critique the fact that characteristics (especially in relation to learning styles and achievements) attributed to boys become more highly valued on the labour market – where, curiously, gender inequalities are much more widely acknowledged than in education. In a large-scale study with the participation of 344 teachers, Szabó and colleagues (2014) found that most teachers had no awareness of gender inequalities in education, and strongly resisted the idea that they may not treat girls and boys

15 <https://www.fnp.org.pl/en/>

the same. The same teachers painted a very binary and stereotypical picture of girls and boys, and girls received a lot more comments – especially negative ones – about their physical appearance than boys. Girls were characterised as having high social skills, better adaptability, and superior performance in the arts and humanities. Boys were characterized as having high competence, behaviour problems, and better performance in STEM subjects. Szabó et al. argue that such stereotypical beliefs distort teachers' perceptions about which fields they allow boys and girls to succeed in, and in which fields they expect to give academic support to boys and girls (2014, p.66). Gender issues in education are not included in mandatory teacher training courses, although a few elective courses on the subject are available at most teacher-training faculties.

In teacher training in Serbia, the principle of educating for “a tolerant and anti-discriminatory environment for each individual, as well as [the] prevention of violence, prevention of discrimination and inclusion of children from socially marginalized groups” is one of the priorities, but only one out of the 19 teacher-training programs refers to obtaining competencies in gender equality (Evaluation Report, p.59). In 2017-2018, 1700 teachers and other school staff received accredited further training in gender equality, gender-based violence, and gender discrimination (Evaluation Report, p.84), which is approximately 2% of the total number of primary and secondary teachers in Serbia.<sup>16</sup> Bašaragin and Savić (2019) recently studied teacher-pupil classroom interactions from a gender perspective in Serbian and Hungarian language classes in a bilingual primary school in Vojvodina. They found that male pupils in both language classes received more teacher attention and more positive feedback than girls. In the Serbian class, negative feedback was given only to girls, and the omission of feedback also occurred in both classes more often in the form of non-responses to girls. The latter involved small-scale research, but it reinforces similar research findings of a different scope and in different contexts.

No information is available about the inclusion of gender as an aspect of initial and in-service teacher training in Poland.

In the Slovakian report prepared by the Department of Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration (Beijing 25 Report, 2019), it is claimed that “gender equality and human rights training for teachers and other education professionals” were provided in the previous five years, but no information is available about the scope of this training and how it was integrated into pre-service and in-service teacher training. One of the educational objectives (3.2.28) of the NAP 2014-2019 is to provide systemic training for teachers in the field of women's human rights and gender equality in order to eliminate gender stereotypes from education. There are NGO initiatives for providing gender-sensitising training for teachers (Juhász & Pap, 2018), a current one being designed in the framework of the GECM 2 project.<sup>17</sup>

The *Strategy 2018-2021* in Romania does not mention the training of pre- and in-service teachers for gender equality. As mentioned earlier, the majority of teachers were found to be unprepared in relation to the subject of gender equality (Popa & Bucur, 2014), and Vacarescu (2012) claims that gender perspectives were not included in the curricula of education studies, and they are likely not to be included systematically now, either. However, according to the *Strategy 2018-2021*, Romania has taken the step of creating two new occupations: equal opportunity expert, and equal opportunity technician. It is expected that 70% of national public institutions will have such experts and technicians by 2020, and the state will organize courses for them. As of 2017, 1100 gender equality experts and

16 Data source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, [www.stat.gov.rs](http://www.stat.gov.rs)

17 <https://sccd-sk.org/projekty/rovnopravne-skoly-gecm/>



4000 technicians had been trained (World Bank 2018). Regarding teachers' awareness of gender inequality, Popa and Bucur (2014) found that it was difficult for Romanian teachers to define what gender discrimination meant, even though 60% of respondents thought gender discrimination was common in Romania. Respondents ranked school education as one of the six most important factors causing gender discrimination, and they listed education as one of the three most important agents responsible for promoting gender equality. The authors recommend that a module on gender equality is integrated into pre- or in-service training, as teachers first need to be educated about gender equality in order to be able to include a gender perspective in their educational practices.

### 4.3. Curriculum design

In Hungary, the concept of gender equality appears among “Social and Citizenship competences” in the section “Key competences” in the current National Core Curriculum (NCC, 2020). Despite its declared importance, gender equality does not appear anywhere else in the NCC, as opposed to the concept of family, which is present in almost every section. In most of the frame curricula for lower and upper primary schools and secondary schools (except for with physical education and biology), subjects are presented as if there were no genders; and when gender is mentioned, it is always in the framework of biological or physiological differences between women and men or in reference to the existence of traditional gender roles or the aim of internalizing these traditional gender roles (for example, through folk dance). Family, on the other hand, is very frequently mentioned in nearly all subject curricula. The content of the latest curricula and analyses of earlier curricula (Rédai & Sáfrány, 2019) suggest that curriculum designers, instead of consulting with academics about the latest gender-related developments in their fields during the design and revision process of subject curricula, actually go against the latest scientific developments and aim to indoctrinate pupils about outdated traditional gender relations rather than reflect on changes in gender relations. The authors of the new curricula have eliminated even those few references to gender, gender equality, and gender relations in society that were contained in the 2012 NCC and frame curricula (see: Rédai & Sáfrány, 2019).

Regarding Serbia, one of the objectives of the NGES is to implement “gender-sensitive formal education” (p.73), with an “[i]ncrease [in] gender-sensitive teaching content in primary and secondary education” as an expected result by 2018, and to ensure that “educational programmes and contents at all levels of formal education are gender-sensitive” as an outcome by 2020. According to the Evaluation Report, the “preparation of the new curriculum and syllabus oriented towards those outcomes [was] underway” in 2018. “Programmes for the first, second, fifth and sixth grade of the primary school and the first grade of [...] high school have been adopted so far, and programmes for other grades will be successively developed” (p.60). The impacts of these developments are probably too early to assess. According to the CEDAW Shadow Report of 2019 (Ignjatović et al., 2019), the curricula for secondary schools that were analysed “mostly do not contain contents within the scope of gender equality/discrimination and gender-based violence (...). Proposals on where and how this topic could be included in regular secondary school subjects and teaching units remained unsupported during the reform of the first grade secondary school curriculum” (Ignjatović et al., 2019, p.47).

In Poland, according to the CEDAW Shadow Report (Pocheć & Popławska, 2014), there is a “lack of interest” in including a gender equality perspective in school curricula. This report was prepared before the conservative-populist government change in 2015, therefore – although no information is available about further curriculum changes – it can be expected that a gender perspective has still not

been integrated into school curricula. This claim is emphasised by discussions about the curriculum and textbooks for the subject Family Life Education, which suggest content influenced by Catholic doctrine with gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles, the invisibility of sexual diversity and anti-abortion stances.<sup>18</sup> This subject is very similar to the Hungarian school subject with the same name, which clearly represents the approaches and content of the whole school curriculum. Along with the Church, parents seem to be actively involved in the education process as actors and stakeholders in response to changing gender roles – although not exactly on the side of adaptation to changes. In Catholic Poland, school-based sex education has been a highly contested issue, and in 2015 parental grassroots organisations managed to mobilize a huge number of people for a mass rally in Warsaw against the proposed introduction of comprehensive sex education in schools and kindergartens. Protests against comprehensive sex education are part of the anti-gender movement, whose representatives claim that ‘gender ideology’ equals the ‘sexualisation of innocent children’ and ‘homosexual propaganda’ (Graff & Korolczuk, 2017).

In Slovakia, the principle of equality between women and men is included in the national curriculum, and schools are required to include gender topics in their local curricula. Cviková and Filadelfiová (2008) argue that the inclusion of this principle does not guarantee that it will also appear in educational programs and that, even if it does, it might be treated on a superficial level, much depending on “the good will and interest of individual teachers, since the gender perspective is inadequately anchored within the system” (2008, p.88). They also point out that there are school subjects that are problematic from a gender perspective: Religion, Ethics, and Marriage and Parenthood Education, because learning content in these subjects reinforces gender stereotypes. Marriage and Parenthood Education is not a subject on its own but part of Civic Education and Religion, and the content of Religion cannot be regulated by school inspectorates – it is up to the Church what is taught there. Marriage and Parenthood Education is similar to the subject Family Life Education in Poland and Hungary, and content that is taught tends to be heteronormative, anti-abortionist, and insist on the dichotomy between genders and traditional gender roles. This study dates from the year of the introduction of the new Education Act, and there is no more recent analysis available in English about the subject. However, the educational objectives of the NSGE and NAP 2014-2019 suggest that there is still work to be done on this issue, although working with the curriculum to make it more gender-inclusive is not explicitly mentioned as an objective. According to the Beijing 25 Report, Slovakia has “strengthened educational curricula to increase gender-responsiveness and eliminate bias, at all levels of education” (p.23).

In Romania, the long-awaited secondary school curriculum reform in 2017 is seen as a “missed opportunity” by gender experts, as it does not “include content on human rights, gender equality, gender stereotypes, discrimination, women’s rights, LGBTQI rights, or sexual and reproductive rights” (Juhász & Pap, 2018, p.64). The *Strategy 2018-2021* declares the necessity of including notions of gender equality in the curriculum but does not specify this any further, and does not allocate tasks and responsibilities. Religious Education is part of the general curriculum (Iordache, 2017, p.83), and the Orthodox Church has a significant influence on public opinion regarding traditional gender roles: a recent study by Pew Research found that among Orthodox-majority countries in CEE, 72% of Romanians agreed or strongly agreed that “a wife must always obey her husband”. By comparison, in Serbia the proportion was ‘only’ 34% (2017, p.29).

18 See: Grupa Ponton: Sex Education in Poland. <http://ponton.org.pl/en/sex-education-in-poland/>

## 4.4. Textbooks and other teaching materials

### 4.4.1. Gender representations in textbooks

Hungarian studies that have explored textual and visual gender representations in school textbooks have found – similarly to international studies – that women and men, girls and boys, are depicted very stereotypically (Kereszty, 2005). In the past few years, so-called ‘experimental textbooks’ have been produced which are compatible with the NCC and the frame curricula. Binder and Pálos (2016, pp.33-35) found very problematic content regarding women and men, homosexual people, and racial minorities in their analysis of the representation of Roma in frame curricula and experimental textbooks. In her detailed analysis of recently published primary school history textbooks, Szabó (2016) found that these textbooks ignore the latest achievements in women’s historiography. “Women’s appearances are typically brief and scattered, women mostly appear isolated from the main topic of the given lesson, often as additional material or illustration[s of] the given period. [Women usually] appear in supporting roles to famous male historical figures, or as victims of historical events” (Rédai & Sáfrány, 2019, pp.14-15). One of the recent experimental mathematics textbooks for year 4 (OFI, 2018)<sup>19</sup> features a class with six girls and ten boys and a female class teacher. The boys are active, they do sports, the smart child in the class is a boy. There are either more boys than girls or the same number in images depicting a larger number of children. If there are three children in a picture, two are boys in most cases. Adult men are represented undertaking a number of activities, such as fishing, mountain climbing, etc., while women are mothers who bake or cook at home, or teachers. Girls in the class go to a dance camp and boys go to a football camp in summer, and both can go to a swimming camp. Nearly all the mathematical problems include male names. Images of families usually include three children. The textbook was authored by five women and illustrated by a woman.

In Serbia, earlier analyses of school textbooks from a gender perspective found a similar pattern: gender representation is imbalanced and boys and girls / women and men are represented in stereotypical ways (see e.g. Trifunovic & Petrovic, 2014). Despite the declared aim of reforming textbook content in order to increase gender-sensitive content (NGES), there has been criticism about the lack of such content in textbooks, similarly to the curricula, and it has been pointed out that even if certain gender-related topics are included, they may not be represented in a positive way (Ignjatović et al., 2019, p.47).

With reference to a number of Polish studies, in the following quote Zamojska (2016) reflects on how textbooks address the contemporary world and represent genders. Similar critiques could be formulated about the most recently produced Hungarian ‘experimental textbooks’.

*The image of the contemporary world that dominates the handbooks is characteristic [of] a traditional, patriarchic [sic!], stable society confined by its national borders. Its structures do not change and it does not reflect the dynamism of the contemporary multicultural and globalized world (...). [S]uch a world is idealized (free of conflicts, poverty, death or violence), inbred, concentrated on the matters of its own nation and sustaining traditional hierarchies. Only the form of handbooks has been improved – better paper, better print, full-color images, sometimes multimedia. (...) Gender differences are essentialized and*

19 Eszterházy Károly Egyetem, Oktatókutatató és Fejlesztő Intézet (OFI) (2018). Matematika 4. osztályosoknak [Eszterházy Károly University, Education Research and Development Institute: Mathematics for year 4]. Downloadable at: [https://www.tankonyvkatalogus.hu/site/kiadvany/FI-503010401\\_1](https://www.tankonyvkatalogus.hu/site/kiadvany/FI-503010401_1)

*burdened by stereotypes; most texts depict women and men in accordance with the traditional model of their social functioning, based on gender inequality: women dominate the private sphere, while men prevail in the public sphere and in the prestigious role of cultural practitioners; androcentric language is commonly used. (...) [I]t is LGBT people that are the most invisible and ignored in handbooks and school communication, and thus they are excluded from the public sphere as a group. (Zamojska, 2016, pp.671-673)*

Osad'an and colleagues (2018) analysed Slovak maths textbooks and readers for primary school years 3 and 4. This was the first study to analyse primary textbooks from a gender perspective in Slovakia; secondary textbooks had been analysed before. In the maths textbooks, they found that women were primarily portrayed in mathematical problems as mothers and shoppers – procurers of food and clothes for the family. Mothers were also more skilful and spent more time doing work around the house and were the only ones who cooked. Boys were depicted as active and better at sports, fitter and stronger than girls, as builders and as better at computer games. Girls were represented as active readers (unlike boys), played with dolls, arranged flowers, and sorted and recycled waste and saved their pocket money. In the readers, boys were depicted as lazy and incompetent, unable to memorize things, distracted and restless, and bad at singing. Girls and women did activities which represented the comfort of home for boys and men (e.g. grandma making a birthday cake for grandson). Girls were submissive, docile, and did not fight – except for one girl who got into a fight with a boy to protect her brother. Boys were attracted to girls because of their looks and expressed their attraction aggressively.

#### **4.4.2. Textbook accreditation**

In Hungary, textbook accreditation is the responsibility of the Education Bureau (a governmental institution). It is unclear from the information website how the process happens, but a pedagogical and a technical expert is invited to evaluate each manuscript on the basis of a set of criteria. The pedagogical criteria includes “general ethical criteria”, one of which is that the manuscript “does not contain contents which offend the requirement for equal treatment and gender equality, and strengthen inequality in opportunity (statements, graphs, photo, graphics etc.)”.<sup>20</sup> The fulfilment of these general criteria has to be marked with a yes/no, and the latter seem to play a minor additional role compared to the detailed professional criteria that are scored using points. In theory, a manuscript cannot be approved if it does not fulfil the general ethical criteria, but to my knowledge, gender experts are not invited to be pedagogical experts for these manuscript assessments, therefore gender representation remains a side issue in textbook accreditation.

Regarding textbook accreditation in Serbia, the Evaluation Report states that gender equality and anti-discrimination are points of consideration in the accreditation process, with experts involved: “some textbook manuscripts were rejected or returned for additional corrections and amendments because they lacked gender equality. In these activities, the Institute [for the Improvement of Education] asks for expert opinion from the Office of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality and UNICEF” (p 60). Apparently, not all gender-related topics receive the same evaluation during the accreditation process. According to the CEDAW Shadow Report 2019, in some textbooks the introduction of same-sex sexual

20 Oktatási Hivatal (OH): Tankönyvvé nyilvánítási útmutató szakértők részére [Education Bureau: Textbook accreditation guidelines for experts]. [https://www.oktatas.hu/koznevelas/tankonyv/tankonyvve\\_nyilvanitas/utmutato\\_szakertoknek](https://www.oktatas.hu/koznevelas/tankonyv/tankonyvve_nyilvanitas/utmutato_szakertoknek)

orientation included “pathologisation and supporting negative stereotypes and prejudices”. However, as a result of “complaints of LGBT organisations, the Ministry of Education and the Institution for Textbooks withdrew from sale six secondary school textbooks” (Ignjatović et al., 2019, p.47).

In Poland, according to the CEDAW Shadow Report (Pocheć & Popławska, 2014), no standards are provided by the Ministry of Education for assessing the gender content of textbooks under accreditation. The CEDAW Committee urged the Ministry to eliminate stereotypically gendered representations from textbooks and teaching materials, but there has been no information about any governmental action in this direction since then.

Osad'an et al. (2018) argue that equal gender representation is not a priority in the textbook accreditation process in Slovakia. Objective 3.2.29 in NAP 2014-2019 responds to this problem by prescribing the analysis of textbooks from a gender and human rights perspective and taking this perspective into consideration during the creation of textbooks and their accreditation process, but no further concrete steps are suggested. Whether gender criteria for evaluation have been developed and gender experts have been involved in the accreditation procedure is a question that may be answered when the NAP 2014-2019 is assessed.

Concerning Romania, I have no information about the textbook accreditation regulations and procedures, but it is likely that policy regarding the appearance of gendered content is non-existent or is not monitored. Similarly to previous gender equality strategies, integrating a gender perspective into textbooks is an educational objective in the *Strategy 2018-2021*, but no specific actions and responsibilities are prescribed.

#### **4.4.3. Freedom of textbook market**

In Hungary, there are no legal guarantees of a free textbook market from which teachers could select from a range of textbooks, including gender-sensitive ones. The government monopolized the school textbook market in 2013, restricting schools' and teachers' choice of textbooks. Schools are supposed to use only those textbooks which are recommended by the Ministry of Human Capacities, which means only one or two textbooks per subject per year (Rédai & Sáfrány, 2019, p.14). In 2015, they expanded the list of recommended textbooks, but only the purchase of the state-sponsored ones was financially supported, therefore in many schools parents could only afford these governmental textbooks. In any case, the state bought up the two largest textbook publishing companies in 2014. Such monopolisation is not usually beneficial in relation to developing critical content, and does not provide real opportunities for the introduction of teaching materials that do not follow the governmental gender ideology. This problem does not seem to arise in the other four countries, or at least it is not mentioned in the literature that is available.

#### **4.5. Learning outcomes and career choices**

Regarding Hungary, Rédai and Turai (in press) found that girls' and boys' different performance in maths and reading comprehension were rarely problematized by the teachers they interviewed, most of whom assumed that this was a natural tendency, and that girls' and boys' skills complemented each other. Most teachers did not acknowledge the role of secondary schools in gender socialisation or the reproduction of gender inequalities, but claimed that gender socialisation happened within the family and in primary school. Nótin (2015) found in her study of two forms in a secondary school that girls' performance anxiety was higher in every school subject than boys'. Some teachers in Rédai and



Turai's (in press) study also observed that girls had higher performance anxiety and stress than boys and the former had less self-confidence, even when their performance was the same or better than boys'. Concerning career choices, Hungarian schools are obliged to provide career orientation to young people but legal regulations do not contain strategies and do not provide sufficient funding for this (Hegy-Halmos, 2018). As national policy for the elimination of gendered labour-market segregation and a general strategy for career guidance is lacking, it is not surprising that there are no policies for gender-sensitive career guidance in schools or policy tools for supporting girls' performance in STEM subjects and boys' performance in the arts and humanities. The gender-sensitive career orientation programs that do exist are offered by NGOs and companies, such as the annual Girls' Day organized by the Women in Science Association, when girls from secondary schools can go on organized visits to companies, universities, and research centres working in STEM areas, to encourage them to choose STEM careers. While this is a positive program that has reached over ten thousand girls since 2012,<sup>21</sup> a similar program for boys who are talented and interested in the arts and humanities is lacking.

According to the PISA 2018 results, Serbian students' reading performance was below the OECD average, while the gender gap in favour of girls was above the OECD average (OECD 2019). Dokmanovic (2016, pp.47-48) points out that there are no significant gender differences in educational participation and attainment, but subject and career choice reflects a traditional gender division. The NGES defines two educational measures for achieving the objective of improving the economic and labour market status of women: encouraging and supporting girls and women in education related to professions such as engineering and new technologies; and increasing the involvement of girls and women in STEM areas (p.48). Improvements in line with these measures are not discussed in the Evaluation Report. Schools are responsible for career counselling (UNICEF in Serbia, 2019), but no information is available about whether career guidance is regulated or carried out in a gender-sensitive way.

In their study of the gender gap in pursuing mathematics in high-stakes matriculation exams in Poland, Zawistowska and Sadowski (2018) found that when the maths skills of women and men and the effects of school are the same, women are still much less likely to take the advanced mathematics exam that is necessary for entering STEM fields at university. The results imply that non-cognitive, cultural, and attitudinal factors play a key role in choosing the advanced level mathematics test, and that STEM programs lose more talented women than talented men. The CEDAW Committee (2014) expressed concern over the lack of non-traditional educational and vocational choices for girls and recommended the development of support programmes for this purpose. There is no national policy for supporting girls' performance and career choice in STEM, but there are two state-managed initiatives, *Girls as Engineers!* and *Girls Go Science!*, and there are initiatives by private companies in the rapidly growing ICT sector and by NGOs in Poland.<sup>22</sup> There is no mention of encouraging boys' non-stereotypical subject performance and career choices. Career guidance is available in all schools and the related curriculum is prepared by teachers responsible for career guidance (EACEA, 2019).

In Slovakia, the NAP 2014-2019 promotes the elimination of vertical segregation in education, especially regarding girls and women and STEM subjects. There are governmental initiatives for making

21 Girls' Day: <http://lanyoknapja.hu/>

22 Source: EIGE: Girls as Engineers and Girls Go Science! Motivation and support for girls in IT and STEM. <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/good-practices/poland/girls-engineers-and-girls-go-science-motivation-and-support-girls-it-and-stem>

STEM subjects and careers more attractive to girls. These include *You Too in IT*, and *Veda-Technika*,<sup>23</sup> the latter by the Ministry of Education. According to the Beijing 25 Report, these initiatives have provoked “mixed and emotionally-charged feedback”, especially from Catholic organizations “[who have claimed] that [the] active motivation of women and girls in favour of entering science, technologies and IT is artificial and unnatural” (2019, p.15). Career education and guidance in Slovakian primary and secondary schools is provided by school staff, including school counsellors, career counsellors, school psychologists, and other trained staff.<sup>24</sup> There is no information available about whether career counsellors are trained to deal with gender issues in career choice or whether counselling practices are gender-sensitive.

Unlike in the other four countries, access to school is an unresolved issue in Romania. Enrolment rates for both genders in rural areas are lower than in urban areas (World Bank, 2018, p.23), and among Roma girls and girls in rural areas, secondary enrolment rates are lower than among males in the same groups (World Bank, 2018, pp.19, 23). The rate of young people who are NEET, especially girls, is much higher than the EU average and is increasing among girls (World Bank, 2018, pp.21-22). Girls outperform boys in reading, and, unlike in most OECD countries, also in science, but underperform boys in maths, but the gap in reading is much larger than the gap in science and maths (OECD, 2019, p.26). Gender segregation by field exists among tertiary graduates, but over 60% of science, maths, and computing graduates are female, and 35% of graduates in engineering, construction, and manufacturing are female (World Bank, 2018, pp.21-23). In *Strategy 2018-2021*, one of the directions of action (also included among the indicators) is organizing campaigns to encourage high school students to choose careers in the STEM fields, but it is not specified whether girls or boys or all students should be encouraged, and boys’ performance in the arts and humanities is not defined as a goal to be encouraged.

Romania joined the UN Women global initiative *HeForShe* in 2015, which invites men to express their solidarity with women and contribute to gender equality.<sup>25</sup> Among other male heads of state, Klaus Werner Iohannis, the President of Romania, is one of the Impact Champions. The initiative includes a school campaign, the activities of which are monitored and reported by the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men. How this program would work towards promoting gender equality in career choice is unclear. The other proposed program in the same framework is organizing career discussions for young people, whereby women with successful careers in various fields would present their careers to serve as role models and highlight issues of inequality in the world of work. It is unclear how these events would be organized and for whom in schools, and it is arguable whether picking individual women ‘who have made it’ is a favourable approach to sensitising students about gender inequality, which involves structural power imbalance.

#### 4.6. School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV)

With the recent rejection of the ratification of the Istanbul Convention (Kovács, 2020), the Hungarian government declared that they would refuse to adapt policies addressing gender-based violence to an internationally agreed standard. There is no unified national legislation for addressing GBV, but some types of GBV are sanctioned under criminal laws. This legislative framework is heavily criticised by

23 <https://www.ajtyvit.sk/> and <http://www.veda-technika.sk/>

24 Source: <https://www.euroguidance.eu/guidance-system-in-slovakia>

25 HeForShe, United Nations Global Solidarity Movement for Gender Equality: <https://www.heforshe.org/en>

GBV experts for its inconsistency and lack of sufficient deterrent effect (PATENT, 2019). There is no specific law or national policy for addressing school violence, let alone SRGBV, and, as a consequence, there are no policy tools for supporting schools to tackle SRGBV, and the development of anti-bullying school programs and the training of school staff in SRGBV is mostly done within the framework of international or EU projects in collaboration with NGOs. Regarding individual schools, Rédai and Turai (in press) found ambivalent attitudes towards GBV. Boys' violent behaviour was relativized by discourses of 'boys will be boys' and 'adolescent hormonal outbursts'. Even though there were various school-level mechanisms to deal with GBV, victim-blaming attitudes were identified among teachers, with girls held responsible for being victimized and boys' responsibility downplayed, similarly to with the seriousness of homophobic verbal harassment. Acts of SRGBV were treated as individual behavioural problems, without problematizing gendered power relations which re/produce patterns of violence. In a recent survey (Sándor, 2019) that focused on homo- and transphobic violence in upper-primary and secondary schools, over 80% of LGBT\*-identified respondents were found to have experienced verbal harassment and every fifth respondent had been subjected to physical violence. Half of the victims did not receive a supportive teacher response. Being subjected to such violence correlated with weaker school performance, depression, lower self-esteem, and less of a feeling of belonging to the school. Respondents whose school had an anti-bullying strategy were more likely to experience a more active teacher response to violence and more efficient handling of their case.

Serbia ratified the Istanbul Convention in 2013. There are no specific policies on SRGBV, but several nationwide programmes have been carried out with the cooperation of ministries, international organisations (esp. UNICEF), and local NGOs (GREVIO 2018). SRGBV is not mentioned specifically in the NGES or the Evaluation Report, but teachers receive accredited further training in gender-based violence (Evaluation Report).

Poland ratified the Istanbul Convention in 2015, but anti-gender politicians have launched several initiatives aimed at pursuing withdrawal from the ratification since then (Szczygielska, 2019; Juhász & Pap, 2018). The CEDAW Shadow Report notes (Pocheć & Popławska, 2014) that the notion of SRGBV is not recognized by the state, that no research has been conducted to assess SRGBV, and that gender-based violence is absent from the governmental campaign that addresses school violence. Different forms of violence against women are addressed by diffuse pieces of legislation – there is no comprehensive law or national strategy concerning violence against women (Krizsán & Pap, 2016). The NAP 2013-2016 addressed GBV in school, but only sexual violence, without addressing the general context of gender inequality and violence against women. In a study about gender-based violence in junior high schools, Chmura-Rutkowska (2014) found that peer violence, gender discrimination, and sexual violence in schools are taboo topics, and that Polish adolescents lack trust in adults' (parents' and school professionals') ability and willingness to help. Reasons for the lack of trust include a lack of "authentic bond or trust, feeling ashamed (...) to discuss gender- and sexuality-related problems, fear of psychological exposure, expected escalation of the problem due to unprofessional actions undertaken by adults focusing on the victim, blaming the victim, negative labeling of the victim and/or ignoring the problem", and the difficulty of teachers acting as students' allies (2014, p.122). Chmura-Rutkowska argues that this is the result of a lack of school protocols and procedures for treating GBV, a lack of education about SRGBV for teachers, and a widespread belief in "‘natural’ male and female features, needs and sexual behaviors" and that "many forms of men's and boys' acts of violence against women and girls are considered an inherent element of man-woman or boy-girl relation[s]. Adolescents are perfectly familiar with these norms and choose not to break them lest they should face negative sanctions" (2014, p.123).



Similarly to Hungary and Poland, the ratification of the Istanbul Convention has been a contested issue in the past decade (Magurová, 2019; Juhász & Pap, 2018) in Slovakia. Opposition to the ratification was led by the Catholic Church and there was no agreement between the different ministries. Eventually, the Slovak Parliament rejected the ratification of the IC in February 2020.<sup>26</sup> As far as national legislation is concerned, the Coordination Methodological Centre on Violence against Women and Domestic Violence was established in 2014 to coordinate national GBV policy-making (Juhász & Pap, 2018). Individual acts of violence against women and domestic violence are sanctioned in amendments to various laws; there is no comprehensive legislation about GBV (Magurová, 2019). Besides the NAP 2014-2019, the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women 2014-2019 (NAPVAW) was introduced. NAPVAW does not mention SRGBV as an issue; the only mention of schools is made in objective no. 39, which prescribes the incorporation of “the problem of violence against women and domestic violence into teaching materials for subjects in primary and secondary schools” and the application of “education to promote respect between people, respect for the other sex and self-respect, and present the risks of the virtual world and its influence on tolerance of violence” (NAPVAW, p.21). Bullying and sexual harassment is mentioned only in relation to the workplace. SRGBV is not mentioned in the Beijing 25 Report, either. As SRGBV is not thematized in policy documents, policy tools that could support schools in tackling SRGBV and training school staff in SRGBV do not exist in Slovakia.

Romania ratified the Istanbul Convention in 2016. According to the most recent governmental report (GREVIO, 2020), which the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men submitted to the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), legislative and policy steps are being taken to combat GBV in accordance with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention, both in terms of harmonizing national legislation sanctioning GBV and legal institutions and procedures to deal with cases of GBV. Preventing and combating domestic violence is one of the pillars of the *Strategy 2018-2021*, but school-related measures are not emphasized. SRGBV is mentioned in the GREVIO report, where it is declared that steps have been taken to complete curriculum and textbook reform in a way that the topic of GBV and the broader issues of gender equality are included. According to the report, educational staff and school administrators receive neither pre-service nor in-service training about detecting and preventing violence (2020, pp.64-66), which means there are no policy tools for supporting schools to tackle SRGBV or train school staff in SRGBV.

## 5. GENDER AND THE DIGITALIZATION OF EDUCATION

The COVID-19 pandemic, which hit the region and the rest of the world in the first half of 2020, has forced schools to suddenly adapt to digital education. In this last section, I briefly discuss the gender aspects of this forced digitalization and reflect on the intersection of gender and digital literacy in terms of the preparedness of education systems for changing gender relations.

26 <https://www.novinite.com/articles/203342/The+Slovak+Parliament+Rejected+the+Istanbul+Convention>

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how education systems that do not take gender relations both in school and the broader community into account are unable to successfully adapt to rapid change. In-depth analysis is still in the making, but even anecdotal evidence by teachers and parents, newspaper articles,<sup>27</sup> and some preliminary reports (e.g. PLAN International UK 2020) about how the pandemic has impacted women reveal a lot about the relationship between gender and education. Teachers – the majority of whom are women – had to switch over to online teaching mode overnight, which has significantly increased their workload, especially those who are not so accustomed to teaching with digital tools. Specialist teachers who work with SEN children and children with disabilities may have special difficulties adapting to online teaching. Data suggests that the gender gap in digital competencies is greater among older people and decreases by age group (e.g. OECD, 2018). However, according to Martínez-Cantos (2017), the size of the gender gap does not differ simply by age, but the intersection of age, gender, and the level of digital skills has to be considered: “when looking at the higher levels of digital skills, [...] gender disparities usually become greater, not only especially among [...] higher educated people but also among the middle-aged and younger strata” (2017, p.434). Additionally, women are more exposed to cyber violence than men (OECD, 2018, p.23), therefore the risk of gender-based violence may increase for girls (PLAN International UK 2020) and female teachers: “[w]ith cyberbullying and online harassment already a serious issue for teachers and education staff, it is a real concern that quarantine measures and online teaching might expose women to new risks of gender-based violence while working” (ETUCE, 2020).

Women teachers who are also parents simultaneously have to take care of teaching from home and of their own children’s education and care from home. In the case of single parents (most of whom are mothers) the situation is even more difficult to handle. Paid carework is hardly affordable to underpaid women such as teachers, and, in a pandemic, even for those who could afford it, carework may be unavailable due to restrictions on free movement. Teachers who work from home and care for their children have been in a similar situation as other people who have had to switch to use of a home-office and simultaneously take care of their children, and help them with their online schooling. This is also a class issue: poor people whose children are entitled to receive free meals in school have struggled to feed their children. Low-educated parents cannot help their children with learning, even if they have the necessary technical equipment – which often they do not. Fodor et al. (2020) found that among people with a secondary or tertiary education and good access to internet, men took on more childcare, elderly care, and housework tasks than before the pandemic, but five times more women than men in Hungary said they would need more help with such tasks from their partners. There is no European or regional data available about this at the time of writing this study, but it can be expected that in more traditional households girls may have to help more with housework than boys in such a situation, allowing them less time to study. Another related speculation is that in households based on traditional gender roles where there is a shortage of digital devices for learning, boys may be unfairly advantaged in terms of access to those devices. All in all, it can be argued – although little research data is still available –, that sudden changes in education burden women more, thus education systems that do not consider gender to be a relevant factor (e.g. when introducing measures that respond to changes, or having mechanisms that reflect an awareness of gender inequality in education and society) are likely to exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities, and not only within the school, but in the related social environments (families and workplaces) as well (see also: Korolczuk, 2020; ETUCE, 2020).

27 UNESCO has a list of international articles on gender and COVID-19, updated daily until May 2020, but not since then: <https://en.unesco.org/news/mapping-online-articles-covid-19-and-gender>

## CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, I have attempted to show why it is important to pay attention to gender relations and gendered inequalities in schooling, and to evaluate how prepared schools and education systems in five CEE countries, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia, are for adapting to changing gender roles. There are a lot of gaps in the data presented here due to a shortage of English language publications and of experts available for consultation, but some general conclusions can be drawn.

General gender equality legislation exists in all five countries, even though approaches are different and they are not necessarily considered sufficient by stakeholders. The scale of the appearance of the notion of gender equality in education policies varies across the five countries, and can be considered a marker of the commitment of education policy-makers to gender equality. As such policies are patchy and inconsistent, it is challenging to assess and compare them.

I have tried to establish whether general national-level gender equality policies are complemented by governmental-level drivers for schools, but it seems that there no policy measures have been introduced to support school-level adaptation in any of the countries, and the pieces of legislation that do exist cannot be considered drivers for change, because they do not include incentives for implementation, accountability mechanisms, or support schemes for schools. Instead, policies tend to be vague and general, even when there is a national strategy and/or action plan for their implementation, and in most cases it is unclear how the implementation is monitored, or the lack of implementation sanctioned. The only exception is Serbia, where the current gender equality strategy and action plan (NGES 2016-2020 and NAP 2016-2018) includes objectives, indicators, verification indicator sources, and outcomes for 2020, along with implementing agencies, the required funds, and deadlines.

The explanation for why Serbia seems to be the most progressive country in terms of gender equality goals seems to lie in the fact that Serbia is working towards EU accession, and one of the conditions for accession is the improvement of gender equality in the country, thus the policy-making and implementation of measures is monitored. For the other four countries, the implementation of gender equality policies was also a precondition for EU accession (Magno & Silova, 2007), but after joining the EU, and after conservative governments came to power, this progress slowed down, stopped, or even reversed.

All four EU member countries have endorsed or ratified a number of international agreements, conventions, and EU directives which are relevant in terms of gender equality policy-making, but the attitudes to such agreements are different across the countries. In Hungary, populist political rhetoric is now openly anti-EU. Slovakia, Romania, and Poland seem to be more pro-EU and more compliant regarding EU directives, but in all countries there seems to be a rather bureaucratic attitude towards gender equality.

The data in this paper show the relatively low level of institutionalization of gender studies in the region. Among other things, this has an impact on the lack of systematic teacher training about gender

issues in education, and on the training of scholars who could pursue and publicize gender research in education and other fields, and who could work as policy and pedagogical experts in the field of gender and education and support schools to adapt to changing gender relations – instead of letting schools hold on to outdated patterns of gender socialisation, and gender-blind or discriminative ways of treating children and young people in schools.

The anti-gender movement is present and growing everywhere in CEE, but it affects policy-making to different extents. In Hungary, educational governance is directly involved in anti-gender propaganda; gender content has been gradually eliminated from school curricula over the past 10 years. In Poland and Slovakia, it is rather the Catholic Church and parental groups that are actively protesting against what they refer to as “gender ideology”. Whereas in Polish politics there seems to be little interest in gender and education, in Slovakia the National Strategy and Action plan for Gender Equality 2014-2019 applies to the field of education, science, and research. In Romania, gender issues were depoliticised until very recently, and were affected by governmental malfunctioning rather than open ideological opposition (Turp-Balazs, 2020; Chiritoiu, 2019), but rhetoric and action against “gender ideology” seems to be gaining ground in politics. In Serbia, the anti-gender discourse has mainly been represented by the media and some conservative academics since 2017, but the government has tried to stifle these voices in an effort to be seen as pro-European (Zaharijević, 2018). While institutional inertia and empty policy declarations that lack substantial action and accountability are a much more complex phenomenon and can be explained by various reasons in different countries, conservative public attitudes may be partly responsible for the lack of action in relation to including a gender perspective in education.

Anti-gender movements are important from the perspective of schools’ adaptation to social changes, because they are, in fact, one kind of response to changing gender relations, and the outcomes of the clash between such neo-conservative movements and progressive political forces will determine whether the respective societies go along with and adapt to changes, or move backwards. Obviously, supportive policy-making and implementation cannot be expected in a hostile political environment, and attitudes and actions that support gender equality in individual schools are likely to be discouraged by this hostility as well.

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APPENDIX

	Hungary				Serbia				Poland				Slovakia				Romania			
	Yes	No	Partly	ND	Yes	No	Partly	ND	Yes	No	Partly	ND	Yes	No	Partly	ND	Yes	No	Partly	ND
<b>General legal framework</b>																				
Prohibition of gender-, sexuality orientation- and gender identity-based discrimination in Constitution			x				x			x					x				x	
Existence of general equality legislation (e.g. Equal Opportunities Act)	x				x				x				x				x			
Prohibition of gender discrimination, active promotion of gender equality in education laws		x					x				x		x					x		
Legal institutions and procedures to deal with cases of gender discrimination	x				x				x				x				x			
Obligations for schools to develop their own policies included in general education legislation		x						x		x				x				x		
<b>Knowledge production and training in higher education</b>																				
Inclusion of gendered areas and gender scholarship in different scientific areas	x				x				x				x				x			
Recognition of gender studies as scientific discipline, supporting gender research in education		x			x				x						x			x		
Existence of gender studies BA/MA/PhD programs and/or research centres at universities			x		x				x				x				x			
Institutional framework and funding for gender research in education			x				x				x			x						x



	Hungary				Serbia				Poland				Slovakia				Romania			
	Yes	No	Partly	ND	Yes	No	Partly	ND	Yes	No	Partly	ND	Yes	No	Partly	ND	Yes	No	Partly	ND
National/institutional strategies for advancement of women's academic careers			x				x				x		x					x		
Inclusion of gender as major aspect of initial and in-service teacher training			x			x				x						x		x		
<b>Curriculum design</b>																				
Inclusion of concept of gender and gender equality in national core curriculum as overarching democratic value and feature in pedagogy, learning content and skills development			x					x		x			x							x
Inclusion of concept of gender and gender-related topics in subject curricula			x		x						x			x						x
Consultations with academics about gender-related developments in their fields during design and revision process of subject curricula								x		x									x	x
<b>Textbooks and teaching materials</b>																				
Inclusion of gender perspective in textbook accreditation regulations			x		x					x									x	x
Inclusion of gender experts in accreditation procedure		x			x					x									x	x
Legal guarantees for free textbook market		x						x	x										x	x
<b>Learning outcomes and career choices</b>																				
National policy aiming at eliminating gendered labour-market segregation by raising attractiveness of non-stereotypical educational and career choices		x				x					x					x				x

	Hungary				Serbia				Poland				Slovakia				Romania			
	Yes	No	Partly	ND	Yes	No	Partly	ND	Yes	No	Partly	ND	Yes	No	Partly	ND	Yes	No	Partly	ND
Policy tools for schools to support girls' performance in STEM subjects and boys' performance in arts and humanities		x					x			x					x				x	
Policy tools for gender-sensitive career guidance in schools		x						x		x						x		x		
<b>School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV)</b>																				
Existence of general legislation sanctioning GBV			x		x						x				x				x	
Legal institutions and procedures to deal with cases of GBV	x				x						x			x				x		
Policy tools to support schools in tackling SRGBV and training school staff in SRGBV		x					x			x				x				x		