

# Masculinities and care: Analysis of needs for gender sensitive early childhood education

*National report of the Early Childhood Education and the Role of Men (Ecarom) project – Slovenia*

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## 1. Introduction: gender equality, masculinities and care work

Gender stereotypes do not harm only women but men as well. Narrow definitions of masculinity can lead to physical and emotional harm and hold men back from, for instance, fully engaging in parenthood or forming close emotional bonds, depriving them of nurturing and caring relationships (2021 Report on Gender Equality in the EU: 15). Reducing gender stereotypes, particularly those that influence young people's perceptions and valuation of care work, is one of the important goals of achieving gender equality.

Like other EU countries also Slovenia faces high gender segregation in education, health and welfare (EHW sector) which employ 27% of all women and only 6% men in employment (30% and 8% respectively at the EU level) (EIGE 2018). Occupations in the EHW sector are culturally burdened by gender stereotypes of these being 'women's jobs' and associated with low social and economic status, which have been identified as the key reasons why boys avoid these occupations (Simpson 2009; Dill et al. 2016). Studies show that sectoral gender segregation is an important determinant of the gender pay gap and highlight that the socio-economic status of an occupation improves when a greater number of men enter it (Acker 1991; Boll et al. 2016). In ageing European societies, some occupations (e.g. nurse, elderly carer) are becoming scarce (OECD 2020), with studies showing that gender-segregated occupations are more affected by labour shortages than gender-neutral occupations (Williams 1995; Bettio and Verashchagina 2009). Research shows that in caring professions men are popular, desirable and privileged; they are given priority in promotion and training, and organisational rules are adapted in their favour. Their caring work is more valued, they are perceived as more self-sacrificing, heroic and having more authority, and the 'glass elevator' takes them to management and leadership positions and higher pay grades faster than their female counterparts (Williams 1995; Simpson 2009). Yet, the proportion of men, particularly in elderly care and childcare, remains extremely low.

Promoting an equal sharing of caring responsibilities, such as caring for children, the elderly, the sick and household chores, between women and men also in private life is another priority for achieving gender equality. The slow pace of change towards a more gender-equal division of unpaid family care is an obstacle to women's equal participation in the labour market, their equality in career advancement and their access to economic resources. According to the OECD (2020), women in Slovenia spend on average just over 200 hours more per year on housework than men, and just over 500 hours more than men on caring for children. Slovenia has a high gender pension gap (16.4% in 2019). The gender pay gap has been growing markedly in recent years, reaching 9.3% in 2019. The 30.5% at-risk-of-poverty rate for women aged 75+ is among the highest in the EU (Eurostat 2020). Inequalities in women's unpaid care work in private life, which lead to inequalities in other areas of life, are also identified in research as a consequence of gender stereotypes that it is 'women's work' and the social marginalisation of care work. These are all reasons why overcoming gender stereotypes associated with private and professional care work and its higher social valuation is an important social objective. The crisis in care work associated with the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the central importance of this work for society.

The project *Early Childhood Education and the Role of Men* (ECAROM) starts from the premise that the educational system, especially the part of it that relates to the earliest period of gender stereotyping, i.e. preschool education, is crucial on the one hand for its reproducing gender stereotyping, and on the other its reducing and overcoming it. Therefore, the aim of the project is to explore the pedagogical practices of the official and hidden curricula in preschool education that influence the formation of gender stereotypes about care work and to develop and disseminate gender-sensitive innovative pedagogical strategies and tools that promote children's perception of care work as a gender-neutral and socially relevant activity. Gender equality in the division of private and/or professional care work presupposes a loosening and changing of existing gender roles and social norms, not only for women but also for men. In the ECAROM project, we use the term 'caring' in a broad sense, including the following aspects:

- Individual aspect: taking care of oneself, one's personal health and well-being.
- The relational aspect: the rejection of hierarchical, dominating and privileged relationships between people and rejection of violence.
- Family and social networks aspect: care work necessary to ensure the daily physical, social and emotional well-being of family members and other close relatives; care for people in need (children, elderly, sick, people with disabilities), including household maintenance (cleaning, shopping, cooking).
- Occupational aspect: occupations in education, health and social care (kindergarten and primary school teachers, nurses, carers, social workers).
- Social solidarity: concern for the community and society in general (e.g. voluntary work; social movements; empathy and solidarity towards excluded and marginalised social groups).
- Ecological perspective: care for nature and the planet we live on.

The involvement of men in care work is complex and can be summarised in three main dimensions. The first relates to the social regulation of masculinity in hierarchical and competitive relations between men, which are expressed in the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and multiple masculinities (Connell 2012). The status and power associated with a position in paid work and the ongoing maintenance of difference from femininity are central sources of hegemonic masculinity. When men engage personally or professionally in feminised care work, which is also associated with low social and income status, they find themselves in conflict with the norms of hegemonic masculinity and risk marginalisation in their social networks and wider society. The second dimension relates to the fact that the economic support of the family continues to be perceived as the dominant model of male care work, which limits the scope and types of care that men provide. The third dimension concerns the symbolic association of care work with femininity, weakness, subordination as antitheses of hegemonic masculinity (Hanlon 2012). Men receive little attention in the existing gender equality policies, programmes and projects. However, the project starts from the recognition that the success of gender equality efforts also depends on the involvement of men, and therefore changing gender stereotypes related to masculinity and care work is a project's central focus.

This report presents the findings of a survey on the current state of masculinity and care work and the related stereotypes in early childhood education in Slovenia. In the first part, we look at how relevant national policies in the fields of education and gender equality address this topic, what findings are emerging from current national research, and what programmes and projects are aimed at improving the situation. In the second part, we present findings from individual and group interviews with kindergarten teaching staff and professionals in the

fields of education and gender equality, which provided insights into everyday pedagogical practices and existing strategies that address gender stereotypes related to masculinity and care work in preschool education. The analysis of the current situation provides the basis for identifying needs for the development of innovative didactic tools, guidelines and educational content that will enable teaching staff to address gender stereotypes related to boys, men and masculinities in a gender-sensitive way and that will promote children's perception of care work as a gender-neutral and socially relevant field. In the absence of clear guidelines and gender-sensitive didactic tools and content teaching staff may inadvertently develop approaches that can reinforce stereotypes. The report, therefore, addresses the questions: whether and to what extent official and hidden curricula break with stereotypical images of men and women; whether they go beyond 'common sense' assumptions about gender; whether they are self-reflexive, including in terms of going beyond gender stereotypes associated with masculinity and caring work; and whether they are proactive in the direction of gender equality.

## 2. Policies, research and projects in early childhood education in Slovenia

### ***2.1. The early childhood education system***

Since 1991, when Slovenia reformed its public services, early childhood education has been an integral part of the education system, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. By law, education is a public good. Although preschool education is not compulsory and is chosen by parents, the number of children in kindergartens has increased by 13.5% over the last ten years. In the school year 2020/21, 93.7% of children aged 4 and 5 and 67% of the youngest children (1 to 3 year olds) attended kindergartens. In the school year 2020/2021 early childhood education was provided by 975 kindergartens, of which 861 were public and 114 private. The vast majority of children, 94.5%, attended public kindergartens (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia 2021a).

Children are entitled to a publicly subsidised place in kindergarten after the age of 11 months. The main tasks of kindergartens are to support parents to care for their children in a holistic way, to improve the quality of life of families and children, and to create the conditions for the development of children's physical and mental abilities and competences. Early childhood education is a complement to family education, where children gain experience and knowledge that cannot be acquired in the family. In Slovenia, the level of full-time employment of both parents is high, and many parents are motivated to include their children in kindergartens to provide childcare while they are at work.

Private kindergartens can operate with or without a concession. A concession means full co-financing by the state and operation under the same conditions as public kindergartens. A concession can only be granted when there is a lack of places in public kindergartens. Private kindergartens have to meet the requested conditions in terms of programme, facilities and education of employees. A private kindergarten determines its programme which may be the same as the public kindergarten programme or may be an internationally accredited educational programme based on specific pedagogical principles (Steiner, Decroly and Montessori) or its own programme, but in the latter case, it must be approved by the Council of Experts of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education. Accredited educators may also deliver the ECEC programme at home.

## ***2.2 Gender segregation in young people's choice of further education***

Data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia for the academic year 2020/21 shows that 58% of all enrolled students are women. Gender segregation of university education remains very high. According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (2021b), information and communication technology programmes are male-dominated, with 82% of enrolments being male. In engineering, production technology and construction, 74% of enrolments are male. On the other hand, in educational science and teacher education, 87% of the enrolled students are women, and in health and social security, 77% of all enrolled students are women.

## ***2.3. Policy documents in education, gender equality and children and youth***

The fundamental documents in early **education** are the Kindergartens Act (1996), the White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia (2011) and the Curriculum for Kindergartens (1999). The Kindergartens Act sets out the norms for early childhood education in kindergartens by defining its basic tasks, objectives and principles, the organisation and content, financing, data collection and protection. Early childhood education is defined as an integral part of the education system and is run according to the principles of democracy, pluralism, autonomy, professionalism and responsibility of employees, equal opportunities for children and parents, respect for the diversity of children, the right to choice and difference, and maintenance of a balance between the different aspects of children's physical and mental development. The objectives of early childhood education include the development of the ability to understand and accept oneself and others, respect diversity and cooperate in groups, the development of the ability to recognise emotions and to encourage emotional experience and expression, the nurturing of curiosity, the spirit of enquiry, imagination and intuition and developing independent thinking, fostering language development for the effective and creative use of speech and, later, reading and writing, encouraging the experience of works of art and artistic expression, promoting physical development and developing independence in hygiene habits and self-care. The law specifically highlights the rights of minorities, the Roma community and children with special needs.

In addition to kindergartens, The White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia addresses also primary and secondary schools, education of children with special needs, education in ethnically mixed areas, music schools and adult education. The document is written in the male grammatical form as a neutral form, with a note that it applies to women and men. The four general principles of education include *human rights and duties* (where gender equality is understood as "*respect for non-discrimination in gender difference*" and positive discrimination by creating equal opportunities for all), *autonomy* (of teachers and the education system), *justice* (in the context of equal educational opportunities) and *quality*. The document states that it is necessary to ensure equal educational opportunities regardless of gender, social and cultural background, religion, nationality, and that there is a need to support immigrants from culturally and socially disadvantaged backgrounds and children with special needs (White Paper 2011: 16-17). The need to "*develop gender equality awareness and equal opportunities for both genders*" is also emphasized (ibid.: 17). Gender equality is recognised as a fundamental right and as an integral part of education, which also involves self-reflection about the practices and values of pedagogical staff.

In 1999, the Curriculum for Kindergartens was adopted in Slovenia, which introduced a reform and aimed towards the democratisation of the educational system (Kroflič et al. 2001). The Curriculum sets out the principles, basic objectives and specific objectives for each area of kindergarten activity. The activity areas defined in the Curriculum are movement, language, art, society, nature and mathematics. The principle of 'open curriculum' delegated a greater role in the detailed planning of activities to the kindergarten and to the individual teacher, which increased the need for awareness-raising and training of teachers to prevent the emergence of unreflected ideas and practices, including gender stereotypes embedded in the hidden curriculum. The White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia defines the hidden curriculum as "a network of social attitudes, observations, appeals and actions" that might open the way for discriminatory practices (White Paper 2011: 37). Daily routines in which a hidden curriculum can be put into practice in kindergartens, such as communication, interaction with and between children, praise/scold and rules of controlling space and time are identified as equally important to the content and defined objectives of early childhood education as written curriculum. Daily routines include many elements of "educational influence on the child which is not defined anywhere, but which is often more effective in the form of indirect education than the direct educational activities defined in the written curriculum" (Curriculum for Kindergartens 1999: 11).

Respecting and taking into account the diversity of children, parents and multiculturalism is presented as crucial in the selection of content, activities and materials, as well as in the provision of group and individual activities. Space is identified as an important element of the curriculum, and it is stated that permanent thematic corners should be equipped with a variety of toys, books, pictures, unstructured materials, etc., which should be within the child's reach. The document explicitly points out that kindergarten teachers should respect and allow children's choice in sleeping, resting and feeding (ibid.). The revised Curriculum for Kindergartens requires kindergarten teachers to be aware of the importance of the hidden curriculum, which is expressed in the daily routine and to reflect on it. Self-reflection on one's knowledge of the child, society, gender and one's personal values is, therefore, a prerequisite for recognising the possibility of positively changing gender stereotypes too.

The document also includes examples of content and activities for each of the activity areas (movement, language, art, society, nature and mathematics), which are divided for the first (1-3) and second (3-6) age groups of children. The example refers to the acquisition of experience through changing roles "linked to gender difference", e.g. through play and activities such as housework, childcare, different occupations, etc. In the area of movement activities, for example, the importance of involving girls and boys in different activities of this kind is highlighted. In social activities, e.g. children aged 1 to 3 years get the experience of changing roles, get to know the kindergarten environment, learn about and talk about things, etc., while children aged 3 to 6 years get to know the local community (excursions, visits to different institutions like the fire brigade, the theatre), learn about different occupations and acquire social skills.

Kindergarten is recognised as a place that enables "*the development of a sense of security and social belonging based on the idea of equality and non-discrimination (concerning gender, social and cultural origin, religion, physical constitution, etc.) ...*" and at the same time as an environment that enables gender stereotypes to be broken down (Curriculum for Kindergartens 1999: 32-33). The Curriculum (36) states that the kindergarten is "*an environment in which children can form a secure gender identity.*" The Supplement to the

Curriculum for Kindergartens for Working with Roma Children (2002) is intended for ensuring the rights of Roma children to equal opportunities.

The role of teachers, as stated in the document, is to facilitate equal opportunities for children to participate in activities regardless of gender, physical and mental constitution, nationality, cultural background and religion.

*"They teach children about sexism and racism or nationalism and do not tolerate comments, appeals and actions that stereotype people. They accept differences between people without exaggeration and avoid comparisons when observing an individual child. They avoid sexist language. ...Books, periodicals, pictures, babies of both sexes and different races are always available in the playrooms..." (Curriculum for Kindergarten 1999: 37).*

The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport publishes a Catalog of further education and training programmes for professionals in preschool, primary and secondary school education for each school year. A review of the catalogues of programmes for the period from 2005/2006 to 2021/2022 shows that training on gender equality, stereotypes and prejudice and the hidden curriculum is not offered systematically and continuously in every school year, but only in certain years and as a peripheral topic. In the last two years, these topics have been included in training courses for primary and secondary school teachers (Every Day 8 March: Teaching materials and methods for equal opportunities for upper secondary and vocational schools). Two trainings for kindergartens are available in the 2021/2022 school year (Developing Toys - Girls' and Boys' Play: Same, Similar, Different, and School and Preschool Through the Looking Glass on the hidden curriculum as part of the City of Women 2021 festival). The catalogue for the 2021/2022 school year for the first time includes LGBT topics for primary and secondary schools, with a focus on transgender. The *Step by Step Centre for Quality in Education*<sup>1</sup> has been operating under the auspices of the Educational Research Institute since 1997. The professional development of kindergarten and primary school teachers is promoted through the *Step by Step Quality Change Network*, continuing education and training programmes, and research in the framework of various initiatives and projects. In trainings for kindergarten and primary school teachers, they cover the topics of stereotypes and prejudices (on awareness and overcoming one's stereotypes and prejudices, on understanding power relations in society and inequalities) and the topic *Modelling observation in the class and reflective interview after observation* which enables tools for self-reflection of own professional practice for teachers.

The strategic document in the field of **gender equality** is the Resolution on the National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2015-2020: 15-20), with eight priority areas, including a society of knowledge free from gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes and prejudices affect decision-making, educational and professional choices. Gender equality affects both women and men and, as the document states, *"the fight against gender segregation must start early, focusing not only on women but also on the choice of the studies of boys and men and on those fields where they are under-represented. Both are faced with seemingly equal but in reality limited choices of study and occupations"* (ibid.: 30). The education system is identified as the one that reproduces gender stereotypes, but also as the one that can transcend them. Therefore, the Resolution highlights among its objectives both *"the systematic inclusion of gender equality content in curricula, teaching materials and*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.korakzakorakom.si/>



*professional development programmes in the field of education and training" and "increasing the proportion of girls and boys in educational programmes and orientations where they are strongly under-represented" (ibid.: 33-34).*

Strategic documents in the field of **children and youth**, such as the Programme for Children in the Republic of Slovenia 2020-2025 identifies the importance of inclusive preschool and school education, promoting children's active citizenship and integrating global learning into preschool and school education. It is important to promote gender equality in education, including career counselling in further education and career choices:

*"It is important to promote equality between girls and boys. Gender equality should also be ensured in career counselling, including methods and tools that help children to choose the careers and orientations that best suit their aspirations and abilities."* (The Programme for Children in the Republic of Slovenia 2020-2025: 22).

Inclusion in early childhood education is recognised as crucial for children from marginalised social groups (Roma children are mentioned), as it increases their social inclusion and their chances of escaping poverty.

## ***2.4 Review of existing national research on gender stereotypes and early childhood education***

There is no systematic and comprehensive national research on gender stereotypes in early childhood education in Slovenia. The evidence and analysis is fragmented and produced mainly at the level of diploma and master theses:

*Gender Differentiation and Stereotypes in Preschool (2020).* The author explores the areas of differentiation and stereotyping in kindergartens and the role of kindergarten teachers in reproducing and loosening gender stereotypes. Based on empirical research, the author finds that gender stereotypes and gender-based differentiation are expressed in verbal and non-verbal communication between teachers and children, with the interviewed female teachers expressing a low level of awareness and reflection of their stereotypes. Gender stereotypes are an unaddressed topic in kindergarten, but they have a significant impact on the work with children.

*Gender stereotypes in preschool children (2019).* The aim of the study was to find out whether gender stereotypes occur in preschool children and whether differences are observed according to their age and gender. The results showed that gender stereotypes are already formed in preschool period in both, boys and girls. The results showed that both younger and older preschool children show stereotyping. Boys are more stereotyped than girls, but there is strong stereotyping in both genders, which is particularly evident in the comments made by the children. Children of both genders are more stereotyped towards boys than girls, as they are less likely to approve of boys doing things that are socially defined for girls than vice versa.

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*Men in a feminised profession in preschool education (2015).* This thesis aims to find out what is the position of male kindergarten teachers in Slovenia. The results, based on interviews with parents, teachers and kindergarten managers, suggest that male teachers are accepted and wanted in kindergartens. The main reasons for the low proportion of male teachers are stereotypical perceptions that it is a female profession and a lack of incentives for boys to take up the profession. More male kindergarten teachers would have an impact on reducing gender stereotypes about gender roles.

*The hidden curriculum in kindergartens (2010).* The author uses empirical research (questionnaires) to examine the opinions and attitudes of kindergarten teachers regarding the qualities that a good kindergarten teacher should have and attitudes related to the hidden curriculum, in particular activities related to daily routines, eating, drinking, resting and sleeping, and to examine the influence of kindergarten teachers and children on different decisions in the kindergarten. The most common desirable qualities of a good teacher are those related to the emotional component (kindness, tolerance of differences and respect for the child), dedication, caring and good cooperation with parents. Most teachers agree with the statements indicating a high level of awareness of children's rights. The author's research confirms the clash between the advocacy of the right to choice and difference with the collectivism and disciplinary orientation of the hidden curriculum. The influence of children and teachers on decisions (e.g. on the selection and purchase of toys, playroom arrangements, etc.) in the kindergarten was observed as low.

*The hidden curriculum and (un)differentiation of children based on their sex (2009).* The main finding of the thesis is that gender differentiation of children in kindergartens is part of the hidden curriculum. Different representations of gender roles stem from gender stereotypes and beliefs of both teachers and parents. Empirical research has shown subtle discrimination against boys who are raised more stereotypically compared to girls and within the confines of traditional gender roles of masculinity. Gender non-stereotypical behaviour of girls is received more positively by teachers compared to gender non-stereotypical behaviour of boys. For example, boys are taught not to show too much emotion, to stand up for themselves, to be more physically active than girls, and not to break out of traditional masculinity frames with their appearance (e.g. long hair). The author also points out that teachers in kindergartens lack knowledge and competence in the field of gender equality.

*Educational and occupational gender segregation in the care sector (2017).* This study was part of the European project *Boys in Care - Strengthening Boys to Pursue Care Occupations* (Boys in Care - BiC).<sup>2</sup> In Slovenia, within gender equality policies gender educational, occupational and sectoral segregation is recognised as a problem and is included in resolutions, strategies and action plans on gender equality. However, policies address mostly women and their participation in new, high-qualified occupations related to new technologies. Despite high gender segregation in the sectors of social and health care and in education where more than 80 % of all employees are women, the absence of men in these fields is not seen as a problem.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.boys-in-care.eu/>

## 2.5. Good practices, projects and didactical tools

Every year, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (MDDSZEM) launches a call for funding of small and short term NGO projects in the field of gender equality. Gender stereotypes and the gender division of labour are a recurrent theme of this call:

- 2016 → Challenging stereotypes and stereotypical roles of women and men in all areas of private and public life;
- 2017 → Equal sharing of care and household responsibilities between women and men in the private sphere; Men and gender equality: how men can actively contribute to equality between women and men;
- 2018 → Challenging stereotypes and stereotypical roles of women and men in all areas of private and public life;
- 2019 → Working with boys to overcome stereotypes;
- 2020 and 2021 → Overcoming gender stereotypes.

The website of the MDDSZEM (<https://www.gov.si/teme/enakost-zensk-in-moskih>) presents the projects funded in the last year. In 2021, the Slovenian Hospice Association's project *The Power of Male Grief*, based on comprehensive support for men in the grieving process, is among those selected. *The Comic Over Stereotype* project, implemented by the Kiš Cultural Association, uses comics, illustration, humour and debate as tools to deconstruct stereotypes, focusing on gender stereotypes and stereotyping in the Covid-19 pandemic.

The selected projects<sup>3</sup> of the past years include project *The weaving of professions for boys = girls*, implemented by the Prizma Foundation in 2016, with the key idea that young people should make decisions about further education and career choices based on their own desires and interests, and not on the expectations of parents and society. Among many activities, the project included a public competition for pupils' artistic entries on the theme *Women in technology, why not?/Men in early childhood education, why not?*.

The project *It's like that!* implemented by the Forum for Equal Development Association (FER) in 2019 offered a card game as a way to reflect on and deconstruct gender stereotypes. The selection of cards shapes stories with elements that contradict traditional societal expectations about the appearance, behaviour and feelings/emotions of women and men. The project has also conducted workshops for boys, girls and education experts.

In the context of the ECAROM project, it is worth highlighting the *LGBT Friendly Certificate* project, which has been awarded by the Municipality of Ljubljana since 2014. It aims to raise awareness by educating the management in organisations which then pass on the knowledge they have gained to employees and ensure that the idea of equal treatment for all and the guarantee of fundamental human rights are taken into account among employees and externally towards clients or users. The training covers topics relating to fundamental human rights and the specific needs of LGBT people. The training for the certificate is provided by

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<sup>3</sup>[http://mddsz.arhiv spletisc.gov.si/si/delovna\\_podrocja/enake\\_moznosti/sofinanciranje\\_projektov\\_nevladnih\\_org\\_anizacij/index.html](http://mddsz.arhiv spletisc.gov.si/si/delovna_podrocja/enake_moznosti/sofinanciranje_projektov_nevladnih_org_anizacij/index.html)

human rights trainers based on the Council of Europe's KOMPAS programme. In the period from 2014 to 2021, 44 organisations, including 9 kindergartens and 2 primary schools in Ljubljana, have been awarded the LGBT-Friendly Certificate.

The European project *STELLA - Improvement and transfer of gender mainstreaming best practices in primary schools between Slovenia and Serbia* (REC-AG-2020)<sup>4</sup> addresses stereotypes and gender equality in schools. The project is coordinated by the University for Adult Education Celje in cooperation with the NGO, the Gender Equality Research Institute - IPES, the University of Maribor and Branko Pesic Primary School and School for Adult Education in Serbia. The *STELLA* project focuses on changing social norms by raising awareness of gender stereotypes and supporting the development of social behaviour that promotes gender equality in the school context, to sensitise male and female teachers in Slovenia and Serbia to recognise and actively combat gender stereotypes.

In 2016 and 2017, the Sector for Equal Opportunities at the Slovenian Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities implemented the *Active. All* project aiming to promote an equal distribution of family and household responsibilities between women and men, and active fatherhood. The project produced a documentary film *Dad in action*,<sup>5</sup> promotional videos,<sup>6</sup> workshops, a manual *Guidelines for eliminating stereotypes and strengthening equality between men and women*,<sup>7</sup> a picture book *Rozagroza and Plavalava*, a performance *Vijolašola*, the Memory game including professions and activities, and developed teaching materials on gender stereotypes for the 2nd grade of primary school.

*The Guidelines for the Elimination of Stereotypes and the Promotion of Equality between Men and Women* highlight the role of individuals, institutions and professionals in the fields of education, training, health, social services and local communities in overcoming and eliminating gender stereotypes. The manual focuses on work-life balance and active fatherhood and encourages awareness-raising and the elimination of gender stereotypes. The manual defines gender stereotypes, highlights the impact of gender stereotypes on individuals in their educational and occupational choices and offers suggestions on how to eliminate stereotypes in language, child-rearing and education, parenting, employment, access to services, etc. Through a variety of content and learning materials, children and young people learn about social roles, expectations, norms and values. The handbook highlights the hidden curriculum "which contains many stereotypes about women and men. These are manifested in a variety of ways: from how female and male characters and their relationships are portrayed, which characteristics are attributed to women and which to men, to through which activities and chores men are represented and through which women" (Guidelines: 19). The suggestion is that teachers working with children and young people should choose literature and content in which men and women are represented in a balanced way, address and discuss stereotyped characters with children and young people, etc.

*The picture book Rozagroza and Plavalava* by Saša Eržen, Maruša Ivančič Kobrowsky was published in 2016 and is available in both electronic (<http://aktivni->

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.lu-celje.si/rights-equality-and-citizenship-programme-h2020/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://aktivni-vsi.enakostspolov.si/dokumentarni-film>

<sup>6</sup> <http://aktivni-vsi.enakostspolov.si/promocijski-spoti>

<sup>7</sup> [http://mddsz.arhiv-spletisc.gov.si/fileadmin/mddsz.gov.si/pageuploads/dokumenti\\_\\_pdf/enake\\_moznosti/AktivniVsiSmernice.pdf](http://mddsz.arhiv-spletisc.gov.si/fileadmin/mddsz.gov.si/pageuploads/dokumenti__pdf/enake_moznosti/AktivniVsiSmernice.pdf)

vsi.enakostspolov.si/slikanica) and print versions. The story is about Neža and Anže, twins, who one night dream that they are attacked by the monsters Rozagroza (Pink Panic) and Plavalava (Blue Lava). The monsters demand that Neža only does things expected of girls and Anže only does things expected of boys. Through the different life situations of the main characters, the picture book presents the problem of social stereotypes in a humorous way and draws attention to the importance of gender equality.



Source: Picture book *Rozagroza in Plavalava*.

The picture book is also the basis for the *Vijolašola* puppet performance (<http://aktivni-vsi.enakostspolov.si/lutkovna-predstava>), which shows in a thoughtful, witty, informative and critical way how children are brought up in stereotypical gender roles. Twins Neža and Anže realise that they are very similar but also very different. Neža likes to climb trees, build Lego blocks, kick a ball, while Anže likes to bake cookies, dress up a doll, etc. Their parents also constantly remind them what is appropriate for a girl and what for a boy. In their dreams, however, the monsters Plavalava (Blue Lava) and Rozagroza (Pink Panic) are chasing them, so Anže and Neža decide to set a trap for the monsters and bring them together. From blue and pink, a new colour, purple, is created. That is when they decide to take their parents to Vijolašola (The Purple School).

The *Active.All* project has also created the *Memory* game including professions and activities, which is suitable for both pre-school and school children. The *Memory* game presents different professions, such as firefighter, teacher, educator, footballer, cook, etc. The game is available in the electronic version (<http://aktivni-vsi.enakostspolov.si/spomin>) as well as in physical form.



Source: *Memory Game*

In addition, teaching materials on gender stereotypes have been developed for the 2nd grade of primary school for Slovenian, Environment and Fine Arts.

In October 2018, the Equal Opportunities Department at the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities organised the international conference *Non-stereotypical about Stereotypes*. The conference was the launch event of *Europe at School* project, which addressed the issue of gender stereotypes and equality between women and men in the 2018/19 school year. The content and materials from the conference presenting projects of NGOs working in the field of gender equality, and workshops on the psychological aspect of stereotyping addressing stereotypes, are available on the website.<sup>8</sup>

*Časoris* (2015)<sup>9</sup>, the online newspaper for children, is aimed at primary school children up to grade 6, parents and teachers. Gender stereotypes are a topic that is often addressed in *Časoris* through practical examples, questions for discussion with children, examples of teaching material, short awareness-raising videos and other materials. Some of the headlines on gender stereotypes are: *Gender stereotypes*, *What are gender stereotypes and how to talk about them*, *Girls don't like dusting either*, *Girls can have short hair too!*, *Girls can drive a tractor too*. And: *Boys can do ballet*, *Girls can run too* and *Boys can have long hair*. The newspaper published *Lučka and Tina* picture book by Nina Jelen and Miha Klenovšek, about a friendship between a girl named Lučka and a boy named Tine. Lučka is interested in science and Tine in dance, and growing up they are confronted with gender stereotypes in terms of their interests and activities. When they grow up, Tine becomes a dancer and Lučka a chemistry scientist. The main message to the children is to follow their desires and goals.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> [http://mddsz.arhiv-spletisc.gov.si/si/delovna\\_podrocja/enake\\_moznosti/tematski\\_posveti/nestereotipno\\_o\\_stereotipih/](http://mddsz.arhiv-spletisc.gov.si/si/delovna_podrocja/enake_moznosti/tematski_posveti/nestereotipno_o_stereotipih/)

<sup>9</sup> <https://casoris.si/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://casoris.si/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/lucka-in-tine.pdf>



Source: *Gender stereotypes*, Časoris, p. 4, 6.

*City of Women - Association for the Promotion of Women in Culture* developed various teaching materials on gender equality and the feminist movement with a focus on women's rights:

- *Every Day 8 March Quiz*: since 2016, on the occasion of International Women's Day, they prepare teaching materials (for a 45-minute lesson) and a quiz that addresses the causes of gender inequality, the history of women's struggle for their rights and the achievements of their struggle, and it also addresses care work. The material is very informative, suitable for young people in the upper grades of primary school and secondary school. In addition to the quiz questions, the material contains the correct answers, explanations of the answers and a proposal for discussion.<sup>11</sup>

- *The Fearless Women* cards (<http://www.cityofwomen.org/sl/content/karte-neustrasne-zenske>) is a board game developed by the Croatian NGO K-zone. Through the game, players learn about women's achievements in different fields. In Slovenia, the Women on Women project has produced an additional deck of WoW Fearless Women playing cards featuring women from Slovenia (2020).

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.cityofwomen.org/sites/default/files/Vsak%20dan%208.%20marec\\_nacrt%20ucne%20ure.pdf](http://www.cityofwomen.org/sites/default/files/Vsak%20dan%208.%20marec_nacrt%20ucne%20ure.pdf)





Source: *Fierce Women*.

- The online version of a *Short Glossary of Contemporary Art Terms* contains explanations of concepts from the history of art that have been brought to the attention of teachers of the last three years of primary school and secondary school teachers who participated at the Mosaic of Contemporary Art workshops (<http://www.cityofwomen.org/sl/content/delavnica-mozaik-sodobnih-umetnosti>).

- Teaching material *What does live art tell us about discrimination?* with a selection of art videos.

- The book *A Path of Their Own: 25 Excursions into Women's History* contains excursions through women's history in Slovenia, Croatia and Macedonia;

- The teaching material and performance *Everything is Alright*. The performance was part of the programme of this year's City of Women festival.<sup>12</sup>

*The Cultural Bazar* – a national cross-sectoral project aimed at promoting arts and cultural education offers a comprehensive list of teaching materials on *Equal in Diversity* on its website, and the Young Pioneer Children's Library developed a *list of Equal in Diversity literature* with quality literature for children and adults on gender equality and equal rights.<sup>13</sup>

The card game *It's Like That!* developed by Ana Kalin (Forum for Equitable Development - FER) aims to raise awareness about gender stereotypes. It is a narrative game in which the players construct a story based on the cards they hold in their hands, which contain a main character, an adjective, an action, a location and a device.

<sup>12</sup> <https://2021.cityofwomen.org/sl/content/vse-je-v-redu>

<sup>13</sup> [https://kulturnibazar.si/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Enaki-v-razli%C4%8Dnosti\\_MKL\\_dopolnjeno.pdf](https://kulturnibazar.si/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Enaki-v-razli%C4%8Dnosti_MKL_dopolnjeno.pdf)



### 3. The view of the experts and teachers

Group and individual interviews with teachers, experts and policy makers aimed at gaining an insight into current approaches, strategies, programmes and, above all, everyday teaching practices in kindergartens. They focused on gender stereotypes related to boys/men/masculinities and the idea of care work in a broad sense but with a particular focus on family and professional care work. We were interested in how experts, policy makers and teachers address gender stereotypes, gender diversity and gender equality in different aspects of their work, and in particular how they perceive and deal with gender stereotypes and norms that address men, masculinities, boys and care work.

#### ***3.1. The experts' view of gender stereotypes in pre-school education***

After a review of national policies, research and programmes, we conducted 4 group discussions. The questions were about progress in reducing gender stereotypes in early childhood education and how strategies for reducing gender stereotyping address boys, masculinities and care work. What kind of training in gender sensitivity and gender diversity is provided to future educators? How to deal with the hidden curriculum? How is lifelong learning organised for educators on these topics? (The questionnaire is presented in more detail in Annex 1). The sample included the following professionals:

*Table 1: Participants in group interviews*

<i>Group interview</i>	<i>Interviewees</i>
1.	Professor at the Faculty of Education - University of Ljubljana, focusing on social justice, education and gender, gender equality in education. Researcher at the Educational Research Institute, Ljubljana, working on the topic of girls in school and women in science at the intersection of feminist epistemology.
2.	Two policy makers at the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Equal Opportunities Sector, involved in the drafting of all relevant gender equality policy documents.
3.	Theorist and activist working at the intersection of feminism and art in the City of Women - Association for the Promotion of Women in Culture. Researcher at the Gender Equality Research Institute - IPES.
4.	Head of the private institution Familylab Slovenia - Manami Institute for Contemporary Family. Director of the public institution Mala ulica (centre for children and family).

This sample included all relevant stakeholders in the field of education and gender equality. An obvious drawback of the sample is that it did not include male interviewees. This is mainly because gender equality in Slovenia is still perceived as a women-only issue, while at the same time the field of education is highly feminised. The interviews lasted from 51 minutes to 1 hour and 25 minutes. With the permission of the interviewees, the interviews were recorded and a summary of the interviews was made for analytical purposes. The summary was accompanied by field diary notes in which we recorded our impressions of the conversations. The interviewees signed a declaration of cooperation and protection of personal data. The interviews were analysed by identifying the key themes raised by the interviewees and summarising their views.

***Gender in pedagogical education.*** Over the last 20 years, gender sensitisation among teaching staff has increased, mainly as a result of curricular changes that have brought greater autonomy to teachers in the organisation of their daily work, and thus increased the awareness of the importance of education. Gender is included in compulsory subjects at the Faculty of Education, but according to the interviewees, not enough. As an independent subject, it is optional, i.e. not compulsory, and there is not enough practice in these topics. The researchers point out (and it was proved also by our desk state-of-the-art research) that in Slovenia there is no national research on gender equality and stereotyping in educational institutions, except for a few bachelor's and master's theses. This points to the need for more systematic research in this area.

The gender concept prevalent in education assumes that boys/men are gender-neutral, universally human, and women are 'other', a derivative of this universal norm. Also, the binary gender conception, which assumes the existence of two complementary genders - male and female - is still prevalent. Gender pluralism and diversity have not yet entered this gender

equation but positive trends in this direction may be indicated by the certification of LGBT-friendly kindergartens.

Sociologists of education see male domination as a problem for all genders and point out that men are also victims of male domination. However, the problem of boys' lower reading literacy in schools is not given the same attention as the problem of girls' lower performance in mathematics, science subjects and sports education. Stereotypically, the problem of violence and discipline is mainly attributed to boys.

***Progress towards greater gender sensitivity in practical work in kindergartens.*** Reports by the interviewees, especially the pedagogues at the Faculty of Education, who have the insight into the situation in kindergartens through student placements and their theses, indicate progress in kindergartens: play areas are more inclusive; teachers offer children a variety of toys regardless of gender; gender-neutral colours are used; biological determinism in explanations of gender differences is the exception rather than the rule. However, in pedagogues' view teachers have little knowledge of sources, such as the production of fairy tales and similar that go beyond gender stereotypes, which points to the need for collecting and disseminating information and knowledge about gender-sensitive didactic tools among kindergarten teachers.

In recent years, progress has also been made regarding the hidden curriculum, with attention being paid to equipping teaching staff with appropriate mechanisms for self-reflection, self-monitoring, establishing stable self-awareness and self-examination in the educational process. The interviewees consider self-reflection to be part of the pedagogical practice, but the question is whether gender is a dimension of this self-reflection. There is a need for supervision as support for teachers to identify and reflect on different situations and to improve problematic practices. The interviewees also highlighted the need for the development of guidelines and identification of dimensions to which attention should be paid when conducting self-reflection and trying to improve pedagogical practice.

Most of the interviewees raised the issue of teacher-parent communication and dealing with gender stereotypes in the family. They consider that teachers lack the expertise, arguments and confidence to advocate for gender equality practices in kindergartens. Examples include role-playing games in which children dress up as the opposite sex or the treatment of gay and lesbian families.

Interviewees point out that the rural/urban distinction is not clear-cut, as kindergartens in rural areas can be very progressive and those in urban areas can be backward. Nor is it possible to say that younger generations of teachers are more progressive and older generations more traditional. In LGBT-friendly kindergartens, also older teachers positively embrace pluralism and gender equality. However, the tendency towards the retraditionalization of gender roles in society can make younger female educators highly stereotyped.

***Gender stereotypes as a problematic and systemically unaddressed topic.*** The interviewees point out that gender ideology discourse is very influential in society. The topic of gender stereotypes is associated with gender ideology and is therefore met with defensiveness and resistance, especially from parents, but sometimes also from teachers. Parents are afraid of girls becoming masculine and boys becoming effeminate or gay. In kindergartens, the topic is perceived as an imposition of ideas, forcing children into roles they do not want. For example, the Cmak association offered one kindergarten a theatre performance based on the picture book *First Love* by Brane Mozetič (about friendship and love between two boys). The

kindergarten's management was in favour of the play, but refused to perform it, arguing that *'it is too early because they have to train the teachers on these topics first'*. They managed to negotiate with the management of one primary school to perform Nataša Živković's play *Sine*, which depicts transgender identity and women's internalised traditional masculinity. The school management allowed the play to be performed in the school hall in the afternoon, but under the condition that the advertisement would clearly indicate that the school was not connected to the organisation of the play. This was to avoid potential accusations of spreading the *'homo propaganda'*, which the interviewee mainly perceived as *'the spirit of the times when parents are potential accusers, and of the discourse of retraditionalisation'*.

Therefore, several interviewees considered addressing gender stereotypes to be a sensitive issue requiring a soft approach which would allow teachers to indirectly address it through themes from everyday life, culture and art, and with topics of gender identity and stereotypes being treated casually. They also considered it important to highlight gender issues in highly stereotyped stories, picture books and toys. They saw highly stereotyped toys as a good didactic tool for addressing gender inequality, but this presupposes that the teaching staff is professionally trained in gender equality. The interviewees suggested that teachers needed training in how to bring gender equality issues closer to children through play, daily activities and everyday life. Examples of good practice from abroad and peer learning are important for such training, in which teachers share their experiences and knowledge and develop new approaches and insights themselves. In 2020, the City of Women organised a consultation on *Equal Opportunities Learning Materials*. At the consultation, some teachers reported that they were aware of these issues and were trying to raise them, but lacked the wider support of their colleagues. They expressed a desire for networking, cooperation and collaboration among teachers which for the time being remains on a voluntary basis and can lead to self-exhaustion. As a theoretician and an activist of the City of Women pointed out, gender equality issues remain at a theoretical-conceptual level, without being translated into practice. There is a lack of cooperation and networking between NGOs and kindergartens/schools to transfer good practice and peer learning. There is therefore a need to integrate gender equality and gender stereotypes more systematically into the training of pedagogues.

### ***Does more male involvement in the education profession lead to greater gender equality?***

The interviewees believe that to reduce gender stereotypes, caring professions (they highlighted the profession of kindergarten teacher) should be restructured, include greater involvement of men and greater social valuation of caring work (not only symbolically, but also financially). Several interviewees pointed to the general social degradation and undervaluing of the kindergarten teacher profession.

The director of the Mala ulica institution, which, among other things, organises holiday childcare, points out that the proportion of male students in holiday childcare is higher than the proportion of female students, which she considers very important *"...because we know that children from kindergarten onwards, practically throughout their schooling, have no contact with adult men. Fathers, we know, are often absent from child-rearing in one way or another, physically or mentally. The increase in the number of male kindergarten teachers, animators in holiday childcare centres has an important message for children, especially boys, that this work can be done by women as well as men."* On the other hand, the researcher points out that the increased involvement of men in the education profession does not necessarily contribute to greater gender equality. It is necessary to pay attention to the gender assumptions behind this. Behind the scenes, stereotypical conceptions of gender (e.g. men are

more active, more physical, have more authority, bring a masculine principle) can lead to a reinforcement of traditional conceptions of gender rather than to greater equality.

The two policy makers point out that there is no clear line of responsibility for gender segregation in the labour market in Slovenia. The responsibility is shared by the Ministry of Education, the Employment Service and the Ministry of Labour, and this fragmentation of responsibilities makes it difficult to implement activities in this area. Gender stereotypes in education remain a priority topic in the *National Programme for Gender Equality*, with a focus on textbooks, women authors and women in science. Themes related to boys, men and masculinities are not mentioned. Men and masculinities are explicitly addressed in national gender equality policies, especially in the area of family policy in the context of active fatherhood, which opens up the possibility of integrating the themes of parenthood, childcare, housework, and presence in family life in a way that also appeals to boys in the educational process.

### ***3.2 Observations, views, practices and needs of kindergarten teachers***

Interviews with teachers were conducted in two public kindergartens which were invited to participate in the project through a written invitation to the headteachers. The selection of kindergartens was based on the principle of diversity - we included a kindergarten from an urban environment (Ljubljana) and a kindergarten from a smaller town which is also attended by children from a rural environment. Both kindergartens are recognised in the public sphere as progressive, socially engaged and sensitive to the themes of gender equality. The Ljubljana kindergarten is certified as an LGBT-friendly kindergarten. In both kindergartens, the management invited three employees to participate in the project, which included an in-depth individual interview, answering a checklist of *Self-reflection questions - are we attentive to boys in the topics of gender equality and care work*, testing innovative didactic tools developed in the project and participating in training.

We conducted 6 in-depth individual interviews. An obvious drawback of the survey is the small sample size which does not allow for generalisation. To overcome this shortcoming we purposively designed a sample that is very diverse and includes male and female teachers and teacher's assistants, senior and junior teaching staff. The youngest interviewee has been working in the kindergarten for 3 years, and the oldest one has been working as a teacher for 25 years. Even though kindergarten work is highly feminised (the proportion of men is approximately 3.8%), we managed to include two male interviewees in the sample. The problem of generalisation is smaller in the Slovenian context, also because the public network of kindergartens is universal and follows the principles and guidelines of a uniform curriculum. Differences in pedagogical practices are largely due to individual differences between teachers.

*Table 2: Participants in individual interviews*

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Workplace</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Location</i>
Nosorog	Kindergarten teacher	M	39	Small town
Slon	Kindergarten teacher assistant	M	?	Small town
Mala vilinka	Kindergarten teacher	F	32	Small town
Ljubezen	Kindergarten teacher	F	?	Ljubljana
Marjetica	Kindergarten teacher	F	46	Ljubljana
Palčica	Kindergarten teacher	F	40	Ljubljana

The interviews lasted from 32 to 51 minutes. With the permission of the interviewees the interviews were recorded and summarised for analytical purposes. The summary was accompanied by field diary notes in which we recorded our impressions of the interview. The interviewees signed a declaration of cooperation and protection of personal data. After the interview, the interviewees responded to checklist *Questions for self-reflection - are we paying attention to boys in the topics of gender equality and care work* (see Annex 3).

Our main research question was how is caring in the broader sense of the word such as caring for oneself, helping each other, family work, social solidarity, caring professions and caring for the environment integrated into everyday life in kindergarten, how is it valued and how are boys involved in caring activities. Indirect questions were asked about the use of toys, the organisation of play and space, and children's autonomy in play. We asked how routine daily activities such as feeding, tidying, resting, disciplining, dressing and personal hygiene, and acquiring social skills are organised and in what ways are these activities gendered or gender neutralised. How are caring professions represented and are men in these professions also exposed? What materials are available in kindergartens to learn about the professions? Do they use gender-sensitive language when addressing the professions? What methods do teachers use to self-reflect on the hidden curriculum? What is the process of cooperation with parents? What role models do teachers use? What training on gender stereotypes and gender equality have the interviewees received in the course of their career and what training needs do they perceive in this area? (The questionnaire is presented in detail in Annex 2). The information obtained in the interviews constitutes a starting point for the development of innovative didactic tools and training content to equip teachers to work on reducing gender stereotypes, especially those relating to masculinities and caring work. The interviews were analysed thematically, according to the predefined themes in the questionnaire, by summarising the responses. The teachers brought up two themes that we did not explicitly ask

them about - the first was related to the differences between boys and girls, and the second to men in the kindergarten teacher profession.

**Toys.** The choice of toys is based on diversity - imaginative, construction, social, movement, maths toys - and sometimes the teachers develop their own toys and games based on the Montessori pedagogy model. They also use real materials as toys, such as real crockery, adult clothing, natural materials such as sand and wood, to encourage creativity. They link toys to specific themes and projects, such as the seasons. The main guiding principles in the selection of toys are the children's interests and desires and a soft guidance in terms of group assessment - the teacher encourages the use of toys in those areas where (s)he perceives a lack of skills in the children (e.g. language, fine motor skills, performing, etc.). They follow the principle of encouraging the development of weak areas and strengthening strong areas. Teachers offer the same toys to boys and girls because they take the view that all children, regardless of gender, need to acquire all the skills prescribed in the curriculum.

The teachers notice that the boys engage in play with baby dolls, like to take the dolls in the pram, change them, play family role-play, etc. Girls also play with cars, blocks, etc., but to a lesser extent than boys play with dolls.

Children can also bring their own toys to the kindergarten, the purpose of which is to develop care and responsibility for their toys and to encourage the exchange of toys. Teachers notice that boys bring more diverse toys (cars, dinosaurs, soft toys, books, board games), while girls bring mainly soft toys.

**Games.** Role-playing games are very popular; the teachers say that they help children develop empathy. They play role-plays relating to caring areas such as school, family, doctors, hairdressers, getting to know the body and caring for the body. Children take turns in different roles, and following the child's wishes, the educators encourage role reversal but do not force the child to do it. Teachers notice that children, including boys, like to dress up, mask, decorate, do hair, work with and on the body. They also like to dress up as the opposite sex. For example, in kindergarten, they put on a play about witches and the boys were happy to dress up as witches. In the hairdressing corner, they do their hair and make different hairstyles. Through body and body work, they dispel gender stereotypes of what 'is/isn't appropriate' for boys and girls.

**The organisation of space.** The playrooms are organised into thematic corners, such as a reading corner, a rest corner, a board game corner, a construction corner with blocks and materials, an art corner, etc. Some corners are permanent (e.g. reading corner, construction corner), while others change according to children's interests and thematic projects (e.g. astronaut corner, forest, hospital, office, etc.). The home and family corner or the permanent household corner is very important for understanding the role of care work in kindergarten pedagogical practices. It contains facilities for meal preparation games, tidying up the home, looking after the children, dressing up, family role-play, hosting guests, etc. The teachers notice that the boys are very involved in the play that takes place in the home and family corner, in cooking, cleaning, vacuuming, changing clothes and taking care of children. They also notice that children who have just got a sibling show more interest in the home and family corner. The teachers encourage the children to change corners - e.g. they would say to a girl: 'Go and help the boys make the blocks', and to a boy: 'Come and have tea in the kitchen'. The themed corners provide an opportunity to introduce children to family care work in a more in-depth and gender-neutral way, through games and didactics designed for this purpose.

The teachers note that whether a child prefers to *play in the playroom or outdoors* is not gendered, but is linked to family habits, the children's background and individual differences. All children, regardless of gender, like to spend time outdoors and, when the weather permits, most play takes place outside. Children have a great need for exercise, and there is not much difference between boys and girls in this respect. However, one of the teachers points out that boys need more exercise, while girls are more calm and able to engage in directed activities.

**Groups.** Children's play groups are gender mixed and are formed on the basis of individual friendships and interests and play in themed corners.

**Differences between boys and girls.** Based on the accounts of the teaching staff, boys at the age of kindergarten children (1-6 years) do not express a preoccupation with gender roles and a distance and reticence towards caring activities. Although they are more likely to engage in games with blocks, cars and outdoor exercise than girls, they also like and often play games relating to the themes of home, family, care, grooming, body care, dressing and decorating. In fact, boys at this age seem to be less determined by gender norms of masculinity and do not yet show the distance from femininity that is so characteristic of puberty. By contrast, according to the teachers, girls at this early age are less involved in construction or car games and have a smaller range of games and toys that appeal to them. Teachers point out that girls in kindergarten are strong and dominant and more organised and structured than boys. It happens that they do not allow boys to play in the home and family corner, or that they organise boys' play in this corner. One of the teachers mentions that boys sometimes move away from girls because they are afraid of them. She thinks that this is because the role of women in the family is very strong, that women make the decisions in the family and that men have no real authority. Several interviewees point out that girls are more problematic than boys in terms of exclusion, manipulation by the absence/inattention of the teacher and verbal violence. Boys are more prone to physical violence. Teachers also observe that girls prefer to help others more than boys.

**Routine care activities in kindergarten.** Routine care activities such as preparing meals, feeding, tidying up after meals and play, dressing and undressing are important didactic moments in kindergarten which are designed to accustom the child to independence, the acquisition of motor skills and social skills, and self-confidence. Already in the younger group of children aged 1-3 years, kindergartens aim at independence in taking care of themselves, e.g. wiping their noses, putting on shoes, dressing, eating, and being able to articulate if they need help. Breakfast is self-service, with teachers helping and encouraging children to set their own place settings, serve their own food and tidy up after the meal. At lunch, the children, regardless of gender, take turns to be the person on duty, who is responsible for distributing cutlery, and after the meal, each child cleans up after him/herself. Children clean up toys independently, boys and girls are equally involved. Children are encouraged by their teachers to help each other with dressing and tying shoes. The teacher encourages a child who cannot dress him- or herself to ask a peer to help him. In this way, they reinforce the awareness that there is nothing wrong with asking for help and encourage mutual help, solidarity, empathy, care for each other, which, as one of the teachers points out, is the antithesis of modern individualistic and competitive society. The teachers encourage and reward these activities through praise and example, and point out that it is all linked to children's self-esteem - the more you know, the more you are valued, the more confident you are. Social skills are further built through morning circles, which aim to make children aware of themselves, each other, the community and belonging to the community, and through social games that promote inclusion. Through different games and convergent pedagogy,



teachers encourage children, regardless of gender, to express and recognise their *feelings and emotions* in other people, to express what they don't like and what they like. Sadness and crying are not rejected, they are allowed emotions and teachers do not differentiate between boys and girls in this regard.

***Presentations of different professions*** are a regular part of kindergarten activities. The teaching staff follow children's interests and wishes. They note that the most popular professions among boys are bricklayer (because of the machines), fireman and policeman, while girls are interested in hairdressers, teachers/kindergarten teachers, florists. Sources for presenting occupations are diverse: mainly children's encyclopaedias and other book sources; tools used in a particular occupation; they often invite parents to present their work; they use situational learning (e.g. when they visit the library, they present the occupation of librarian); they make puzzles; they visit different organisations. Children are the happiest when they can play role-plays representing professions. Role-playing is decided according to the child's preferences; teachers do not appoint roles but encourage their exchange. Teachers note that the visual materials about occupations are gender stereotypical but do not problematise this. They also do not use gender-sensitive language when naming professions - firefighter is usually presented as a man and nurse as a woman. There is a need and an opportunity in this area for more gender-sensitive material and increasing awareness among teaching staff, especially as caring professions are very interesting for children.

***Kindergarten housekeepers and cooks and cleaners*** are in contact with children, children learn about their work and interact with them. In particular, the janitor, a highly masculinised profession, is in contact with the children a lot and represents an important authority for them. The cooks are sometimes invited into the group or children make a tour of the kitchen. Cleaners and laundresses are mostly employed through an agency and work in the afternoon, so the children have little contact with them.

***Discussing the division of labour in the family.*** In both kindergartens, this is a regular annual topic in the older children's group (3-6 years). One of the teachers observes that parents do not involve their children in family work because they underestimate their abilities. She invites the parents to a discussion where she tells them what the child is already doing independently in kindergarten and encourages them to include the child in the work at home, consistently but without correcting. She notes that children from rural backgrounds are more involved in family work. The teachers also point out that children from families where the division of labour between the parents is equal are more receptive to this in kindergarten.

***Cooperation with parents.*** Sometimes grandmothers and parents, especially from rural backgrounds, comment that dolls are not toys for boys, that it is not appropriate for boys to dress up as the opposite sex, to have their hair made or to paint their nails. They express fears that a boy might become wimpy or become gay. When girls play with toy cars and trucks, parents do not express such concerns. This confirms our findings from expert group interviews and shows that stereotypes associated with masculinity may be even stronger and more numerous than stereotypes associated with femininity, but we pay less attention to them. Teachers point out the need for open communication with parents and confident argumentation of their pedagogical practice. It is necessary to show parents that they are professional in their work, to take their point of view into account and to avoid patronage. They express the need for approaches and methods to raise parents' awareness of gender stereotypes and gender equality as they consider that families are heavily burdened with gender norms, while kindergartens are a place where gender stereotypes are loosened.

From the interviews, some good practices can be observed in the area of *involving fathers in the kindergarten life* and thus breaking down gender stereotypes related to masculinities and care work in families - e.g. encouraging fathers to participate in the introduction of the child to kindergarten; encouraging parents to both attend PTA meetings with teachers; organising parties and events just for fathers. A teacher who has been in the profession for 25 years sees major changes in the involvement of fathers in the care of their children, e.g. it is mainly fathers who bring their children to kindergarten in the morning. At the same time, there is also a need to pay attention to the gender assumptions on which these practices are based. Indeed, teachers assume a gender dichotomy according to which they see men/fathers as '*different from mothers, they are more assertive, less emotional, less anxious, spontaneous, unencumbered, relaxed, open, humorous*'.

**Social solidarity.** Children with special needs are included in the kindergarten, which allows for the development of sensitivity and acceptance of difference. The inclusion of migrants, mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina, is not seen as problematic due to the linguistic proximity. The teaching staff do not highlight or dramatise differences between children, but strive for inclusion as a matter of course through activities of daily routine and play. Teachers emphasise that children are inclusive and do not react in an exclusionary way to difference.

Some teachers do not use *role models* in their pedagogical practice because they believe it is necessary to start from the individual personality of the child and a good knowledge of the child's potential and limits. Others use the role model strategy by praising or symbolically rewarding a child who does something good (e.g. helps others, tidies up) in front of the group. Some teachers highlight successful sportsmen and sportswomen as role models to give a message to children that they need to work hard to achieve their goals and that failure is a normal part of life. However, most teachers are aware that they themselves are important role models for children, that they have a great influence on children and that their daily actions have a long-term impact on children. They stress their awareness and sense of responsibility to set an important example for children.

**Attitudes towards gender stereotypes.** The teachers do not think that they differentiate between boys and girls ('*it is the deed that matters, not who does it*'), but point out that wrong reactions can happen in kindergarten because they need to react quickly and because they sometimes react automatically. Most of the teachers feel that they have strong empathy, self-monitoring, vigilance and self-control at work. One teacher gives the illustrative example that when a child gets dirty, she never says: '*Will mommy wash at home*', but always says: '*You will wash at home*'.

**Education.** Teachers point out that sensitivity to gender stereotypes and inequalities is a character trait of the individual, which is expressed primarily in the hidden curriculum. They consider that sensitivity to situations, self-control and self-reflection are a matter of the individual and self-initiative rather than education. Education provides breadth and a starting point, but most knowledge is acquired in practice, through experience and one's attitude to problem solving. This suggests a certain scepticism about the value and benefits of education in this field. The teachers do not think that they have received any specific knowledge about gender stereotypes in the educational process, they consider it has been a peripheral topic. They have regular annual training, they can choose from the catalogue of training courses of the Educational Research Institute (which includes very few topics related to gender as we are stating in the first part of this report), they can invite lecturers, they can self-educate themselves via the Internet. There is regular peer consultation within the team and consultation with the kindergarten counsellors and the kindergarten management. They

practise critical friendship through which they advise each other. They have never been involved in training related to masculinity and gender stereotypes. All the interviewees expressed a strong interest in sharing good practices and reflecting on problematic situations.

***Men as the kindergarten teachers.*** The teachers and the management of both kindergartens expressed very positive attitudes towards the increased involvement of men in the teaching profession. They also say that parents' and especially children's reactions to male teachers are very positive. One of the teachers believes that children need male authority and that modern young men do not have it. Another teacher thinks that there should be more men in the kindergarten because the children need it, because '*men are more realistic, different, and women can more easily get carried away*'. This suggests that positive attitudes towards a greater presence of men in the kindergarten teacher profession stem from traditional gender dichotomies and a tendency to reinforce them. Here there is an opportunity to educate and sensitise pedagogical staff about the importance of including men in feminised professions from a gender equality perspective and to loosen traditional gender norms, especially those associated with masculinities.

Both kindergartens participating in the study have a proportion of male (assistant) teachers on their teaching staff. However, in both kindergartens, a traumatic experience of a male teacher being accused of sexual abuse was revealed in a conversation with the headmistresses. This shows the ambivalent attitude of Slovenian society towards the inclusion of men in the teaching profession: on the one hand there is a desire, even a need, and a positive evaluation of the inclusion of men in the teaching profession, while on the other male teachers are faced with fears, prejudice and the sexualisation of masculinity. Addressing this problem seems important both at the practical level of how kindergartens should include male teachers in their teams in relation to children, parents and female colleagues and at the level of wider social awareness.

***Application of the checklist.*** A checklist filled in by the interviewees pointed to the high gender sensitivity of teachers' everyday pedagogical practice. However, it also revealed gaps and potentials to improve it. The checklist showed that teachers have not received any targeted training on gender equality and male empowerment, they do not use situational pedagogy to raise the issue of gender equality for instance in the discussions about books or conversations about men in care work.

## 4. Conclusion and recommendations

Gender equality is recognised as a fundamental right in early childhood education policies and an integral part of education. The focus is on ensuring equal opportunities for all children in education regardless of gender, social and cultural background, religion, nationality, including support for individuals who immigrate to Slovenia and who come from culturally and socially deprived backgrounds and children with special needs. The general opinion is that there is no gender discrimination in the Slovenian education system and boys and girls are treated equally. However, this very assumption seems to be problematic as there is no systematic research in this area. While documents and policies advocate gender equality and overcoming gender stereotypes at a declarative level, they do not provide concrete guidance on where stereotypes can occur and how to deal with them. The experts are aware of the problem of the hidden curriculum and gender stereotypes within it; for example, the 2011 White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia states that there is a need to develop greater sensitivity to this issue and ensure that teachers understand it as relevant, as well as that they are supported to address it. Kindergartens and schools should thus rethink the values they

communicate through their teaching practices and materials, aim to eliminate gender stereotypes and promote gender non-traditional choices in further education and career orientation. However, at the level of documents, strategies and concrete programmes and projects, there is a lack of a proactive approach.

Policy documents only briefly mention that kindergarten is a space where children develop their gender identity. In the strategic documents on gender equality, gender segregation in education and the labour market is identified as a problem and the solution is cited as increasing the number of girls and boys in educational programmes where they are under-represented. Gender and gender equality issues are still not sufficiently integrated into education for the teaching profession. Also, life-long training for preschool and school teachers on gender equality, stereotypes and prejudice and the hidden curriculum is not offered systematically and continuously but sporadically and as peripheral topics. Various materials, such as examples of teaching materials, picture books and games, have mostly been produced in the framework of projects by NGOs working in the field of gender equality. Compared to school education, fewer materials and contents dealing with gender stereotypes are available for ECEC.

Teachers have not received any training on critical studies of men and masculinity, the social regulation of masculinity, the role of men in gender equality and gender stereotypes related to masculinities. Boys as gender-regulated beings are not visible enough in pedagogical practices. Although some kindergartens are certified as LGBT-friendly kindergartens, the binary concept of gender is still dominant in the field of education, which recognises two genders, male and female, which are equal but different in a complementary way. The scope of gender equality in kindergartens is limited to declarative and apparent gender neutrality.

Nevertheless, experts note that progress can be seen in the area of gender-sensitive pedagogical practice in kindergartens: play areas are diverse and inclusive; children are offered a variety of toys regardless of gender; gender-neutral colours are used; biological determinism in explanations of gender differences is the exception rather than the rule. Two examples of good practice which we have observed in kindergartens are particularly noteworthy. Routine daily activities related to cleaning, tidying and eating are organised as pedagogical practices that, in a gender-universal way, educate children to be independent, to take care of themselves, to take care of each other and to take care of everyday tasks from a very early age. In the distribution of meals, children take on the role of the person on duty, who is responsible for dividing the place settings. Teachers encourage children, regardless of gender, to serve their own snacks and lunches and to clean up after themselves after eating. Children are also involved in putting toys away and helping each other at getting dressed. These activities are positively valued as confidence-building skills. Another example of good practice relates to the organisation of space and play. The playroom is organised in different thematic corners. One of the permanent thematic corners is the home and family or household corner which includes toys for baby care, cooking, tidying up, family role-play, etc. In the interviews, the teachers reported that boys were very involved in this corner and learned about care work through play. However, more targeted addressing of the topics of gender stereotypes and care work still mainly depends on the goodwill, commitment and individual sensitivity of the teachers and the kindergarten management.

Teachers are aware of the role of the hidden curriculum and the need for constant self-reflection, self-monitoring and self-awareness, as well as critical peer reflection. However, the experts expressed doubt about whether currently gender dimension also makes part of critical

self-reflection and highlighted the need to develop guidelines and identify the dimensions that teachers need to pay attention to when conducting self-reflection and trying to improve their practice.

There is a lack of knowledge of didactic tools on gender equality issues; for example, teachers have little knowledge of the production of fairy tales and toys that go beyond gender stereotypes and consequently do not use them in their practice. The use of projects and materials addressing gender stereotypes, masculinities, boys and care work was not found in the survey. We also did not find any pedagogical practices that problematise and dispel the gender stereotypical images present in the materials that introduce children to different professions (e.g. gender-sensitive language in the naming of professions, highlighting examples of women in male-dominated and men in female-dominated professions).

Both the teachers and experts highlight the need for training in how to bring gender equality issues to children's attention through everyday play and routine daily activities. In this area, there is a strong interest in peer exchange of good practices nationally and internationally and in critical friendship. There is a common view that these topics should be addressed indirectly, with a soft approach and with great sensitivity, taking into account the perspective of parents and the family environment which often follows traditional gender norms. There is a need to empower teachers in the area of professional argumentation of gender equality pedagogical practices in kindergartens in the face of parents and the area of parental awareness-raising.

The inclusion of men in the teaching profession is not associated with gender equality, but with diversity for the benefit of children, because, according to teachers, *'men are different from women'* (e.g. *'they have more authority, they play differently, they are more relaxed, they are less complicated'*). The argument for greater male involvement is often interpreted in terms of the need for the presence of a male role model and male authority in kindergartens, i.e. in terms of the reinforcement of traditional and binary gender roles. It is therefore necessary to reflect openly on the gender assumptions behind the positive value ascribed to a greater proportion of men in this profession and to extend these assumptions to the social regulation of masculinity and gender equality. Managers in both kindergartens included in the study reported the traumatic experience of their male teacher being convicted of sexual abuse. Despite parents', kindergartens' and children's wish to have more male teachers, there is a prevailing social prejudice against them, which is linked to the hyper-sexualisation of men in care work. There is a need for concrete guidelines for kindergartens on the inclusion of male teachers and communication with parents.

Based on the analysis of the situation the following ***needs and recommendations*** can be highlighted:

- Gender and gender equality issues should be addressed more proactively at the level of education policies. A systematic national survey on gender stereotypes in education should be carried out, the scope and content of training in the teaching profession and the regular annual training of teaching staff should be expanded, and peer exchanges of reflections and good practices should be facilitated.
- Gender equality in education in Slovenia is focused on the positions of women and girls, and teaching staff lack knowledge about the social regulation of masculinity and concrete strategies to address boys in the direction of gender equality and educational and professional desegregation.

- The mechanisms of critical self-reflection of the hidden curriculum should also explicitly address the gender dimension, which can be done by developing concrete guidelines on what teachers should pay attention to when carrying out self-reflection and trying to improve their practice.
- There is a need for training on how to bring gender equality issues to children indirectly, through play, daily activities, everyday life, art and culture.
- Teachers need knowledge about modern didactic tools that go beyond gender stereotypes (e.g. current production of fairy tales and toys) and how they can be used in teaching practice. Training is also needed on how to proactively approach, pedagogically, the highly gender-stereotyped images that are often present in the media and fairy tales, including information material on professions.
- The complete absence of projects and materials addressing gender stereotypes related to boys, masculinity and caring work points to the need to develop new didactic tools on men's involvement in caring work (e.g. to highlight and positively evaluate men as active fathers, in everyday caring tasks and feminised caring professions).
- There is a need for professional empowerment of teachers in working with parents to raise awareness of gender stereotypes and when parents object to gender equality teaching practices in kindergartens.
- As teachers understand the inclusion of more men in the profession of kindergarten teacher mainly from the perspective of traditional gender binarism, there is a need to shed light on this topic also from the perspective of gender equality and the social regulation of masculinity.

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## ***Annex 1: Ecarom group interview guide***

What's your name? Where do you work?

In your opinion, what is the state of the art in kindergartens/primary schools concerning gender equality? Is there a special focus on boys, masculinities and care? What are the topics? What is the target (violence prevention, widening perspectives and competences of boys, gender equality...)?

What are your experiences with this topic? Please describe actions which you or your organisation have/has conducted related to boys and care. What were the reactions from teachers/parents/children? What were the experiences: what was good, what went wrong? Please also describe actions related to gender equality in your institution.

How (by which practices, discourses, habits, educational mechanisms/tools, organisational atmosphere) do you think teachers (curriculum?) contribute to the reproduction of gender stereotypes about boys, masculinities and care?

How can the reproduction of gender stereotypes about boys, masculinities and care be avoided? Ask first for general principles, and then for concrete examples of practices.

Which training related to gender sensitivity and diversity do professional pedagogues receive in their education (basic education, further education, obligatory or free choice...)? Have there been significant changes to this topic during the last years?

What is needed to properly address the topic of boys/men and care kindergarten/school (training, knowledge, material, methods, support, consciousness-raising)?

## ***Annex 2: Interview guide for teachers***

**Opening question:** Why did you choose to pursue a teaching profession?

### **Use of games and books**

What kind of plays, games, toys, books, fairy tales, activities do you offer to children? How are they offered?

Do you offer boys and girls different activities, books, toys?

Do boys play with dolls? If yes, how are they treated by peers/parents? How do you react in such situations? How do you react when children perform gender atypical activities or have gender-atypical reactions?

Do you encourage boys/girls in gender-atypical activities? Examples?

Do you sometimes organise playing ambulance, school, parenting or is it only up to the children's initiative? How do you assign the roles? Do you sometimes deliberately exchange gender roles in such games?

Are children allowed to bring their favourite toys to the kindergarten? What kind of toys do they bring? Do you observe any differences in favourite toys brought by boys or girls? Are any of the toys forbidden? Which toys and why?

### **Organisation of space**

How is the space for play organised (i.e. is it organised in thematic corners? Addressing which topics? Is there a quiet corner available for rest or conversation?)

Indoor, outdoor playing: is it optional? In your opinion, what is the difference between the two locations with regard to activities and gender?

### **Gender mix in organising activities**

Do children mix according to gender when they play? Or do they form gender-specific groups? Do you encourage gender-mixed groups in organizing activities? If yes/no, how and why?

Do some children (according to gender) engage always in the same activities? Are there any efforts on your part to engage children in different activities? What strategies do you use?

Are there places or activities where only boys or girls are engaged? Which? Do you intervene in such cases? Why? How?

### **Care**

Which care activities do you practice with children on an everyday basis (i.e. tidying up toys or tables after meals, consolation of a friend, gardening, taking care of pets)? How do you engage boys?

Are children involved in the preparation of meals? How? Do they get in contact with a kindergarten cook, cleaning lady/man?

For which activities do you ask the help of children? How? To whom? How is making up a room after playing time, for meals preparation and rest organised?

How do you distribute tasks and assignments among children? Reflect on gender distribution. How much and how are children assisted in getting dressed or undressed? Do they help each other? Do you encourage them to do so? Reflect on gender distribution.

Do you discuss with children about family members (e.g. parents, siblings, grandparents) and roles in the family? Do you sometimes discuss the share of household chores within the family with the children?

How do you encourage the development of social skills like empathy, listening, helping, solidarity, equality? Reflect on gender differences.

Which specific pedagogical activities are related to self-care and care for each other? Are there any differences in carrying out these activities with boys and girls?

### **Occupations and professions**

Are different occupations the topic of conversations or games sometimes? In what way? On which occasion?

Which professions are most often discussed and how?

Do you pay some attention to caring professions: kindergarten teachers, primary school teachers, nurses, social workers, care for the elderly, cleaners, cooks? Do you provide examples of men involved in care professions?

Which materials (pictures, videos, games, toys, books, cartoons) do you use for that purpose? Are these resources sufficient and proper? What do you miss?

How do you deal with the fact that some professions are stereotypically female (nurses for instance) and some male (construction work for instance)?

Use of language: do you use the male and female language when describing professions?

### **Work with parents and families**

How do you relate with parents? Do you relate primarily to mothers? Do you provide different information to mothers and fathers?

Are male relatives of the children involved in the facility and how? Are there special events addressed to fathers?

### **Norms and values on outfit**

Do you pay attention to children's clothing and outfit? Do you comment on it differently for boys and girls? (e.g. *you are very pretty today/what a nice dress you wear today*)

In which fields of your work with children does outfit play an important role (e.g. dancing)?

How is it related to gender and diversity of children?

How do you react if a boy comes to the kindergarten with polished nails or with long hair or in a 'girls' costume? Do you comment on that? What do you say? Do you observe that children react to what you say?

### **Role models**

Do you use any role models in your pedagogic practice?

Who are role models? Why? What do they represent? What do you want children to learn from them?

Do you sometimes use a male role model who performs care: a teacher, a nurse, a male kindergarten teacher, caring father?

Do you place any child as a role model to the others? In what situations?

Do you pay attention and praise the caring attitude/practice/relation of a child in a particular situation as a positive example for others?

### **Diversity**

Do you have children with migrant backgrounds/ ethnic minorities/ from an economically disadvantaged family/ with special needs/ gender fluid in a group?

What are the peculiarities of working with them from a gender perspective?

### **Gender stereotypes**

Do you differentiate between boys' activities/traits and girls' activities/traits?

Do you remember any example where you unintentionally act following gender stereotypes and vice versa: where you deliberately overcome gender stereotypes in your acting/conversation with children?

Are children in kindergartens encouraged to change themselves to comply with gendered expectations of women's and men's roles? How? In what way?

Do you sometimes talk with children about stereotypical ascriptions for girls/boys?

### **Self-reflection on gender stereotypes**

Have you ever reflected on how your own gender socialization has influenced your attitudes with children in your work? (Have you ever video-recorded your interactions with children or kept a gender diary to reflect on your attitudes to gender stereotypes?)

Have you observed whether you react differently to a boy or a girl when some comforting is needed? For example, when a child falls... Have you observed in your work that you allow more aggressiveness to some children, or that some children can be louder than the others, more playful (the play is rougher, more active, etc.)?

### **Training**

Do you think that during your occupational education you were provided with sufficient and adequate knowledge and tools on how to deal with gender stereotypes?

Have you been involved in any additional training about gender stereotypes and how to address them in kindergartens?

What kind of knowledge/tools/equipment/didactical resources do you miss in addressing gender stereotypes in your work with children and parents?

Any final theme we haven't talked about that you think is important to address?

### ***Annex 3: Checklist for caring masculinity supportive ECAC***

1. Are boys offered the same toys/games/books/activities as girls?
2. Do you use books where people are shown working together for a change (rather than acting as individual (male) heroes?)
3. Do you engage boys in tidying up toys?
4. Do you engage boys in preparing tables for meals and cleaning after meals?
5. Do you involve boys in consolation of a friend if needed?
6. Do you involve boys in assisting in (un)dressing to a friend?
7. Do you encourage children to play in gender mixed groups?
8. Do you invite girls to play football and boys to play with dolls?
9. Do you react differently to boys' and girls' behaviours?
10. Do you interpret feelings of boys and girls differently (sadness, anger, joy, fear)?
11. Do you have different communication styles (e.g. tone and volume of voice, body language, words used) when interacting with boys or girls?
12. Do you pay attention that all children are equally involved and receive your attention?
13. Do you involve supporting school/kindergarten personnel like cooks, cleaning ladies/men, janitor in interaction with children?
14. Do you use role models/examples of men in caring role (like involved father, male nurse, eco activist)?
15. Do you discuss/play caring occupations with children?
16. Do you present men examples of nurses, kindergarten teachers, social workers, elder carers in books, videos or other resources?
17. Do you sometimes invite a male care worker in a group to discuss his work with children?
18. Do you visit a nearby eldercare home with kids?
19. Do you invite disabled people in a group to talk with children?
20. Do you offer examples of how children can take care of their grandparents?
21. In your work with families, do you also engage fathers, grandfathers, brothers?
22. In case the child gets sick, whom do you usually call?
23. Do you pay attention to gender equality in the classroom?
24. Do you discuss films, videos, books, cartoons from a gender equality perspective too?
25. Do you foster empathy and solidarity in the group and in society and general?
26. Do you discuss with children the situation of people pushed on the margins of society (Roma, refugees, migrants, living in hard economic situations)?
27. Do you discuss different forms of families (LGBT, single parents, reconstructed, multigenerational, transnational) and how care is divided within them?
28. Have you attended any training on gender equality?  
Did you receive any training on men and masculinities?