

# Addressing Inequality in Vocational/ Technical Education by Eliminating Gender Bias

Eugenia GANEA<sup>1</sup>,  
Valentina BODRUG-LUNGU<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PhD student, Moldova State University,  
Chisinau, Republic of Moldova,  
[ganea.eugenia@gmail.com](mailto:ganea.eugenia@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> PhD, Associate Professor, Moldova  
State University, Chisinau, Republic of  
Moldova, [valbodrug@mail.ru](mailto:valbodrug@mail.ru)

**Abstract:** The present publication is dedicated to the subject of gender-related inequalities in vocational/technical education and how these are influenced by social norms and gender bias. The research problem is determined by the need to develop a theoretical and methodological support for the teaching staff and for other actors responsible for policies on vocational/technical education. The objectives of the research are to discuss the role played by vocational schools as “fuels” for the labor market, develop gender-sensitive competences of teachers in secondary vocational/technical education, eliminate gender bias in the education and teaching process, create a gender-sensitive environment in vocational/technical schools. This opportunity is directly related to the reform of the vocational education system and national policies on gender equality in Moldova.

**Results:** it was confirmed that teachers in vocational/technical schools are important actors capable to educate or to influence the education process by adopting gender-sensitive practices and methodological approaches aimed at reducing inequalities and challenges faced by girls in various circumstances in vocational/technical schools. The teaching methods and practices should be based on gender theories, while school policies should promote equal opportunities for girls and boys, and eliminate gender bias in the teaching and education process. Analysis of macro-systemic elements (curriculum, didactic materials, textbooks), as well as micro-system analysis at the level of the training units (pupils` and students` opinions, teachers` opinions) is an important step for understanding gender disparities and reasons that perpetuate gender inequalities in education, and later - at work and in society at large.

**Keywords:** *Gender inequality; gender mainstreaming; gender bias; education policies; educational segregation.*

**How to cite:** Ganea, E., & Bodrug-Lungu, V. (2018). Addressing Inequality in Vocational/ Technical Education by Eliminating Gender Bias. *Revista Romaneasca pentru Educatie Multidimensionala*, 10(4), 136-155.  
<https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/78>

## 1. Introduction

Social norms related to gender roles (and what the society expects from women and men) have a direct influence on the education systems and the two are interlinked at the same time. Since gender inequality is complex by nature, comprehensive analysis can provide understanding of required approach to address gender inequality in the vocational education system.

Research elsewhere (comparative research on three countries Germany, Norway and Canada) on how institutional settings and their embedded policy principles affect gender-typed enrolment in educational programs identified a different degree of gender segregation in education in the three countries of research. The differences in gender segregation in the education systems of these countries are attributed to the constellations of educational principles and policies in the respective countries (Imdorf, Hegna, Eberhard, & Doray, 2015: 2). This finding fed the reflections of our own research and analysis for subsequent integration of gender education in the vocational/technical education system in the Republic of Moldova.

Therefore, our research dedicated to gender inequalities in vocational/technical education system in Moldova is based on a methodology that employs analysis at the meta level (social norms), macro level (policies), meso level (institutions) and micro level (target groups). For purposes of the vocational/technical education system, this option is particularly suitable for gender analyses, since it tackles and it works within a specific sector and provides a multi-dimensional analysis of the situation in this sector.

## 2. Gender inequality and analysis of the existing context in Moldova

### *2.1. Analysis at Meta level: social norms, traditions and beliefs related to gender roles in Moldova*

Social norms and traditions in Moldova related to gender roles are changing, specifically with changing generations. More men and women at present in Moldova agree on equal sharing of responsibilities for home and children and contribution to household income, especially under existing circumstances of economic harshness and financial constraints faced by families in urban and rural areas.

However, the change is still held back by traditionalist opinions and intra-family norms. Recent and the most conflicting opinions are related to new amendments to the Labor Code and elimination of protectionist provisions on the childcare leave. The divergences argue around the effect

of these modifications on mothers' relationship with the child. Some women and men share the opinion that a mother's employment does not harm the relationship with children and that a job is the best way for independence of women, while others fear that mother's earlier return to work would break her link with the child and negatively affect the child's development.

According to the Gender Barometer „How do Women and Men Participate in Politics and Decision-Making?“, released in 2017, over the past ten years, the perceptions of traditional gender roles have not improved significantly. The results of the opinion poll show that in 2016, 64% of respondents agreed that the man is the one who must earn money and the woman must take care of family and run the home. The share of respondents who agreed with the same statement of a similar poll conducted in 2006 was 68%, which was only 4% higher compared to the 2016 poll.

This demonstrates that Moldova continues to have relatively strong traditional gender roles, which negatively affect women's social and economic opportunities, as well as their involvement in decisions-making processes and political life. Such social norms view women not as capable as men of holding leadership positions and being decision-makers. Women who choose a political career in Moldova are often perceived as unsuccessful in their personal life while the political arena is commonly perceived as a man's world. This results in a lack of self-confidence in women's abilities to participate in economic and social life and it also influences intra-family educational patterns related to the future of boys and girls, including their educational/professional choices.

Women are still expected to have primary responsibility for the household and for children. For many women, this creates a double burden of paid and unpaid care work. Traditional stereotypes are especially more prevalent in rural areas.

The factors that influence these societal norms are inter-related and are determined by intra-family cultural relations and role-models, educational level, ethnicity, religion, access to information – all these being more prominent in rural places.

Social norms and gender stereotypes have a significant consequence on professional choices made by young women and men, according to which they are encouraged to choose traditional fields of study. This is among factors that contribute to occupational segregation, which is a predominant feature in education and the labor market, limiting women's choices and confining them to lower-paid and lower-status jobs than men. Women in Moldova are harder hit by unemployment and on average earn less than men. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics revealed that the

gender pay gap in Moldova was 12.4% in 2016 and even higher in 2018 – 14.5%. The highest pay gap was in the IT and communications sector with a gap of 32.8% (Statistical portrait of women and men in the Republic of Moldova, 2018).

Although Moldova is characterized by a high level of de jure equality, the persistence of discriminatory social norms and practices lead to de facto gender inequality. Inequalities in employment, pay, gender-segregation of jobs and occupations, poor financial situation of women compared to men and their limited access to assets, institutions that are not responsive to gender specifics, including vocational schools – on multiple levels (infrastructure, didactical, school environment, etc.) - are all relevant from research perspectives for the vocational / technical education system. All these provide a comprehensive understanding of the situation related to inequality in vocational/ technical education and the context and should be considered when developing policy interventions or any other action in the field. At the level of the vocational/technical institution, interventions can include development of gender-sensitive curricula that avoids gender stereotypes to be reflected in the material, carrier advice by encouraging women to choose “male” professions, working with educational institutions to ensure that the existing infrastructure and facilities allow for the enrolment of girls in those institutions which traditionally have enrolled only boys.

## ***2.2. Analysis at Macro level: national and sectorial gender policies and strategies***

Moldova has generally a comprehensive national gender policy and legislative framework. The new Strategy for Ensuring Equality between Women and Men in Moldova for years 2017-2021 (Decision no. 259/2017) is aimed at empowering women by achieving five general objectives. The overall objective 1 targets inclusively the education sector through two specific objectives: (1.8) Gender mainstreaming in the initial education process and continuing education of teachers for preventing stereotypes and for developing gender-sensitive attitudes; and specific objective (1.9) Gender mainstreaming in professional and vocational carrier advice aimed at making carrier choices in non-traditional occupations. The new national gender strategy has a comprehensive and cross-sectorial approach, and it tackles the labor market and gender pay gaps under Specific objective (1.2) Adjustment of the legislation to European standards on equal pay for work of equal value.

The Strategy goals set for the next five years reflect the commitments undertaken by Moldova on ensuring the respect of human rights,

democracy and economic growth. Particularly, the text of the Strategy notes: Achieving gender equality in education is one of the necessary factors to ensure sustainable development of the society and for poverty elimination (H.G. no. 259/2017, annex 1: 10). However, gender mainstreaming in certain normative documents is not consistent and often promotes traditional role models, which perpetuates gender stereotypes (Bodrug-Lungu, Ganea, & Triboi, 2017: 12).

Moldova ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1994, and the Optional Protocol on violence against women in 2006. Law No. 5-XVI on Ensuring Equal Opportunities for Men and Women was enacted in Moldova in 2006. The main purpose of this law was to ensure equal rights to women and men in political, economic, social, cultural and other spheres of life – as guaranteed by the Constitution, in order to prevent and eliminate all forms of gender discrimination. This law provides definitions relevant to discrimination of women. It also sets out the responsibilities for gender-based discrimination and identifies state entities responsible for ensuring gender equality.

On September 2015, the Republic of Moldova, along with other 192 members of the UN, committed to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, by adopting the Declaration of the Summit on Sustainable Development (UN, 2015). The Republic of Moldova is well advanced in the SDGs process – its participatory and inclusive approach to the nationalization of the SDGs targets and indicators is recognized globally as the best practice. Moldova's national policy agenda is now aligned with more than 106 of the SDGs targets and it selected 226 statistical indicators to assess progress towards these global goals (UNDP, 2017).

At sectorial level, Moldova adopted a Strategy for the Development of Technical Vocational Education 2013-2020 (Decision no. 97/2013), which presents a coherent vision on vocational education system. One of the strategic objectives of this new Strategy is to develop and pilot implementation of dual vocational education models, explicitly referred to within the new Code of Education (2014). The introductory part of the 2013-2020 Strategy notes that the document takes into consideration the legislative framework, and unanimously recognized principles of human rights, child rights and gender equality.

Another important strategy at the sectorial level is the National Employment Strategy (Decision no. 1473/2016) Among major targets of the new Employment Strategy is to decrease the gender pay gap from 13% in 2017 – to 10% in 2021, which appears to represent a significant challenge, considering the negative trend (gender pay gap was 14.5% in March 2018). A

National Action Plan for 2017 for the implementation of the National Employment Strategy 2017-2021 was approved and provides for a series of measures to increase the level of employment. The actions are focused on achieving the four objectives of the National Employment Strategy: creating formal, non-discriminatory and productive employment opportunities, developing human capital for increased employment opportunities, better labor market governance, capitalizing on the potential of migration for sustainable development. This is also in line with objectives of the UNESCO TVET Strategy, which emphasizes the importance of the acquisition of technical and vocational skills for employment, decent work and entrepreneurship; the elimination of gender disparity and ensuring access for the vulnerable (UNESCO, 2015).

### ***2.3. Analysis at Meso level: existing institutions and organizations working towards improving gender equality***

Republic of Moldova at present has an institutional mechanism, which is well-defined under Law on Ensuring Equality between Women and Men (Law no. 5-XVI/2006), and improved under Law No. 71/2016 on modification and improving of certain legislative acts.

The following structures were established to ensure implementation of policies on gender equality, including (a) Parliament; (b) Government; (c) Governmental Commission for equality between women and men; (d) Ministry of Health, Social Protection and the Family; (e) ministries and other central administrative (through gender focal points); (f) local public authorities (gender units); (g) National Bureau of Statistics; (h) Council for preventing and fighting discrimination and for ensuring gender equality.

At the same time, the well-functioning of the institutional mechanism depends very much by the fluctuation of staff, lack of continued educational support for public servants on issues related to gender equality, insufficient funding and human resources. Moreover, due to the reform of the central public administration, particularly due to the uncertainty related to the status of the Governmental Commission for equality between women and men as a result of liquidation of the position of deputy prime-minister for social issues, it is not clear how the institutional mechanism will function in future.

The issue related to functionality of the institutional mechanism had been raised as part of the dialogue between the Government and civil society. A proposed solution for strengthening the capacity of the institutional mechanism is the setting of a permanent Secretariat. At the same time, strengthening of the Government capacity to act as catalyzer and promoter of implementation of national policies on gender equality remains a priority.

#### ***2.4. Analysis at Micro level: target groups***

The main beneficiaries of education services offered by vocational/technical education schools are the boys and girls enrolled in the system. Research conducted as part of our study through focus-group discussions with participation of the teaching staff and students of vocational/technical schools in Moldova during April – August 2017 had identified a number of constraints faced by boys and girls who are interested in obtaining a profession and study at a vocational / technical school. Accordingly, the findings are relevant and important for our gender analysis of the vocational/technical education system in Moldova. The identified constraints are related to various aspects and include the following:

At the level of the vocational/technical school infrastructure:

- Information and knowledge gaps: due to restricted mobility of girls and lack of exposure, potential female students do not enjoy the same access to information. For example, girls are not always familiar with enrolment conditions and requirements. An example was provided by a director of a vocational/technical school:

*Girls think that our school expects future students to know physics very well; yet we teach physics from the basics.*

- Lack of an appropriate psycho-emotional environment to attract girls: lack of gender-sensitive images on informational boards in vocational/technical schools and websites, specifically those with traditional male professions;

- Concerns related to safe accommodation/hostel facilities, lack of safety on route to school and/or to apprentices;

- Insufficient provisions and facilities to cater to the needs of female students: insufficiency of separate washrooms, change rooms for male and female students, in certain schools' machinery and equipment requires physical strength and thus not suited to be handled by girls, overalls and clothes not always consider physical construction of boys and girls, etc.

At the level of training environment in vocational/technical schools:

- Lack of gender-sensitive teaching and didactic materials: lack of guides, methodological support on mainstreaming gender in the education and training process;

- Lack of gender competencies of the teaching staff;

- Lack of a teaching Curriculum and methodology on gender education;

- Lack of recommended literature for students in school libraries.

At vocational/technical school-level policies and sector level policies:

- School-level charters / regulations do not provide for measures to attract girls and their enrollment in non-traditional trades and sectors, inclusively by setting of enrolment quotas;
- Lack of gender-sensible budgets: for example, students from cooking vocations have to buy ingredients for practical classes;
- Gender blind/ or sometimes gender-discriminatory Classifier of Occupations: for example, “seamstress” (cusatoarea) and “sewer” (cusator) are different occupations and boys refuse to enroll for “seamstress”;

Labor market discriminatory practices:

- Low prospects for decent work and low-paid occupations in certain sectors such as the garment industry, including unpaid apprentice. According to feedback from focus groups with girls from a vocational/technical school in Chisinau, this discriminates against women and it is a serious reason for girls’ dropouts in the vocational/technical sector;
- Even when women opt for non-traditional courses that have high market value, they may run the risk of not being employed due to negative mindsets of employers who do not regard them as suitable enough for the jobs for which they have been trained (mainly related to engineering or traditional “male” occupations);
- There are employers who find women less capable and trustworthy in certain sectors, for example, transport. According to feedback from focus-group discussions with girls, they face “boycotting” attitudes from their male colleagues and employers.

These barriers had been identified through discussions with teaching staff from vocational schools during a training in August 2017, while feedback about discriminatory practices on the labor market were mentioned in focus-group discussions with boys and girls currently enrolled in vocational/technical schools in Chisinau. This feedback is important for the present analysis and is valuable for designing of future actions aimed at tackling gender inequalities in vocational/technical schools in Moldova.

### **3. Empirical research on influence of social norms**

As students in vocational schools are in direct interaction with the teaching staff and are the direct “products” of the teaching process, analysis was conducted of the level of exposure to social norms and gender bias of



teachers themselves. A survey was conducted in the framework of the present research with participation of teachers in vocational/technical schools in Moldova. The survey covered 48 teachers (12 men and 32 women) and the results revealed that teachers are strongly influenced by social norms and gender bias.

The experiment included a training intervention, with measuring the level of gender bias before and after the training event, aimed at determining if there would be change produced by the training. The training course aimed at building participants' understanding about gender equality and its socio-economic effects.

The training course included sessions on conceptual approaches in mainstreaming gender into the secondary vocational education system in Moldova. More specifically, the training course initiated teachers into gender theories, had presented gender-sensitive teaching methodologies, and developed capacities of teachers on how to conduct analysis of didactical materials and textbooks. It also included sessions and discussions on how to identify existing barriers for girls to this stage of education and develop actions that are required to remove these barriers.

However, the main purpose of the training course was to develop basic competences of teachers to mainstream a gender perspective in the teaching process during classes.

For organizational purposes, the teachers were divided into two groups. Every participant received a questionnaire that contained 19 gender-biased statements. The questionnaire was distributed among participants in the beginning and after the training. After having passed the training course, the teachers were asked again to respond to the same questionnaire.

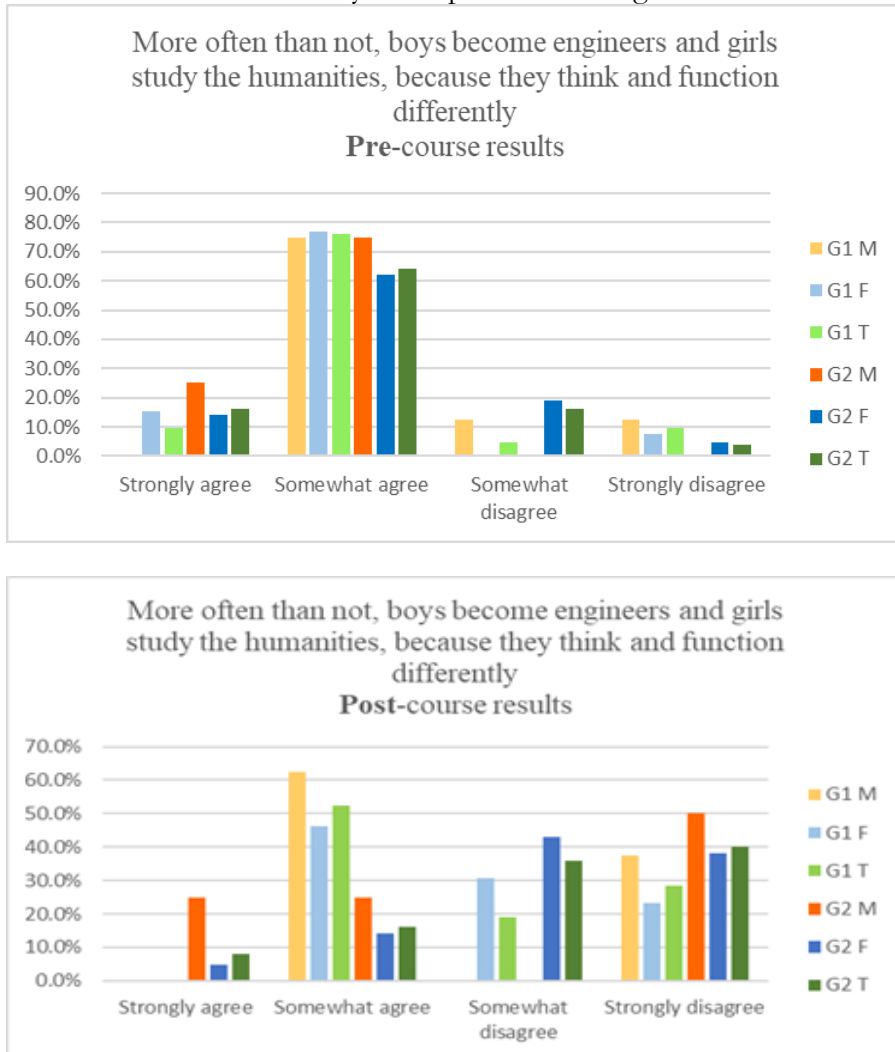
Thus, the teachers were asked to respond to a set of gender-biased statements by choosing among four options of responses on a four point Likert scale: "strongly agree", "somewhat agree", "somewhat disagree", "strongly disagree". Since the statements were selected to express some gender bias, the intention was to verify whether the teaching staff would share those opinions by expressing agreement. Accordingly, it was expected that an unbiased person would strongly disagree with the statement, while biased persons, depending on their level of bias, would "somewhat disagree", "somewhat agree", or "strongly agree with the statement".

### ***3.1. Results of the experiment***

For space reasons, only two statements out of the total 19 were selected for this article; however, this allows us to demonstrate that a

significant change in participants' responses was produced as a result of the training course.

The results of the analysis are presented in Figures 1 and 2 below.



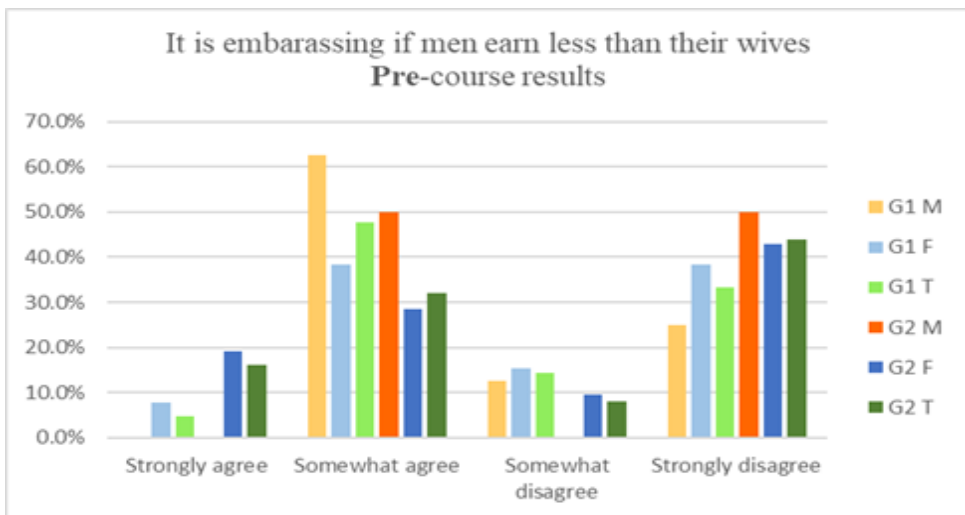
Legend: G1 – Group 1; G2 – Group 2; M-male; F-female; T-total

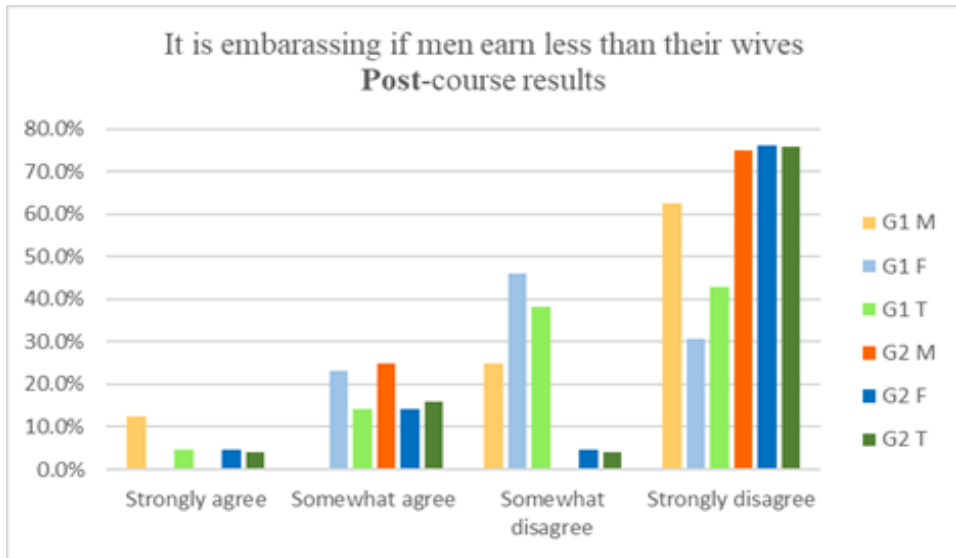
**Figure 1.** Pre-course and post-course responses to biased Statement No. 1  
*More often than not, boys become engineers and girls study the humanities, because they think and function differently. /*

As we can see from pre-course responses, 12.5% of male respondents from Group 1; 7.7% of female respondents from Group 1; a share 4.8% of female respondents from Group 2 and none of the men from Group 2 strongly disagreed with the first statement, which expressed a gender bias. Conversely, the rest of the participants, by their agreement with the biased statement, demonstrated how strongly they are influenced by social norms related to the role of women and men.

The analysis of post-course responses show that their opinion changed significantly. 37.5% of male respondents from Group 1; a share of 28.6% of female respondents from Group 1; a share 38.1% of female respondents from Group 2 and 50% of the men from Group 2 disagreed with the same statement after having passed the training course.

The biased statement More often than not, boys become engineers and girls study the humanities, because they think and function differently is particularly relevant for our group of participants as it provides grounds for afterthought and reflection about their own position, attitudes, practices and actions. It is easy to see the significant difference produced immediately after the training, by observing the big contrast of the column “strongly disagree” before and after the training (see figure 1 above).





Legend: G1 – Group 1; G2 – Group 2; M-male; F-female; T-total

**Figure 2.** Pre-course and post-course responses to biased Statement No. 2:  
*It is embarrassing if men earn less than their wives/*

In the second statement It is embarrassing if men earn less than their wives, in the pre-course questionnaire the proportion of respondents who strongly disagreed was the following: 25% of male respondents from Group 1; 38.5% of female respondents from Group 1; 42.9% of female respondents from Group 2 and 50% of the men from Group 2.

After the training, the responses changed as follows: strong disagreement showed 62.5% of male respondents from Group 1; a share of 30.8% of female respondents from Group 1; 76.2% of female respondents from Group 2, and 75% of the men from Group 2.

#### 4. Comments and survey conclusions

The results of the analysis showed that the teaching staff in vocational/technical schools have biased opinions about the role of women and men. Their opinions and views are influenced by the social norms in the Moldovan society and teachers may not necessarily be aware or act consciously.

It has been determined by scholars that biases are activated on an unconscious level; it is not a matter of individuals knowingly acting in discriminatory ways. Academic research conducted by the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, based at Ohio State University, notes in

a discussion guide that Because biases are activated on an unconscious level, it's not a matter of individuals knowingly acting in discriminatory ways. Implicit bias research tells us that you don't have to have negative intent in order to have discriminatory outcomes. (Staats, 2014: 72).

Although most people are not consciously sharing gender biases, such practices should be eliminated from educational institutions, since this directly influences the educational process and have an inducing impact on prospective choices, which pupils and students will make in the future. From early childhood, children learn to act in accordance with roles prescribed by the society to women and men. When entering formal education institutions, pupils and students continue to learn these roles, while teachers further contribute to it through transposing their own perceptions into the teaching process. This also may be the reason why girls showed such a low confidence in their abilities to find employment in the respective industry or start a small business (entrepreneurship courses exist in all vocational schools in Moldova). As mentioned above, none of the interviewed girls said that they wanted to build a carrier and have an active public life – on the contrary, they thought they would be able to use the skills only in their private life.

Conversely, when teachers realize that gender bias and social norms may have discriminatory outcomes, such practices will be avoided. The group of researchers who developed a Guide for Gender Equality in Teacher Education Policy and Practices have concluded that understanding gender and applying gender mainstreaming are critical foundations for fostering social cohesion that goes beyond teacher education institutions and the school. Teachers are increasingly expected to play crucial roles in preparing young people to face the future with confidence, purpose, responsibility and gender sensitivity (UNESCO, 2015).

Therefore, developing of gender competences of the teaching staff in vocational institutions will eliminate gender stereotypes in the career guidance of young people and create a gender-sensitive environment in the institution. A gender-sensitive environment implies the creation of a comfortable ambiance in the school or students' hostel, safe public space for girls not to become victims of sexual harassment at school or on the way to/from school, a teaching process that does not differentiate among "occupations fit for girls" and "occupations fit for boys". Gender-sensitive environment in vocational/technical schools also includes the provision of information about contents of the knowledge that students will learn, and information about admission requirements.

## **5. Learning and teaching gender in vocational schools and gender competences of the teaching staff**

The results of the post-course questionnaires revealed that teachers significantly changed their opinion, thus confirming that learning of new areas, such as gender mainstreaming in education, has had a positive effect on their mentality. Integration of a gender dimension into the existing curricula and into the vocational/technical education system requires open mindsets, flexible thinking, as well as capacity and willingness to seek or create opportunities for breaking stereotypes.

Learning and teaching gender as an educator is a valuable element for growth as teacher, as well for personal development as an individual. Modern education practices should be based on permanently developing teaching patterns and approaches, since teachers - as professionals - are lifelong learners too. There are many ways how teachers can develop their capacities to mainstream gender in the educational process, one of which is through participation in various learning activities such as seminars and training courses.

It is true that learning “gender” and teaching “gender” as part of classes, during educational activities and practical lessons requires both pedagogical talent, a sense of gender equity and acknowledging that the teaching work in vocational schools will have critical effects on the labor market and on personal lives of the individuals.

On the other hand, the teaching talent, as any other talent, needs unceasing development and lifelong learning is exactly how teachers can develop existing or new skills and competences. Teachers play an important role in creating knowledge and educational value on multiple dimensions. As societies develop and new technology defines the future characteristics of the labor market, teachers are expected to create an attractive, flexible and open learning environment and prepare students to act as citizens of the future who will share the generally acknowledged values.

Modern schools, especially at secondary and postsecondary levels, have an important position and play a crucial role in helping students to clearly define their future carrier. Educational institutions have an important role in providing of workforce and shaping the characteristics of the labor market. The economic and social impact of educational institutions at all levels has been the subject of research for academia and international institutions. Their research and studies revealed that there is significant gender segregation of occupations in the labor market (ILO, 2016), and this phenomenon reflects the gender segregation in educational systems.

At the same time, teachers can be both promoters of learning and actors of learning themselves. In a recent publication of an online journal “Edudemic”, the authors remarked the importance of lifelong learning for teachers, specifying that by taking courses and collaborating with colleagues on creative teaching methods including collaborative learning environments, flipped classrooms, and student-centered learning situations, teachers will reap the benefits of adopting a lifelong learning mindset and being innovative educators. The authors emphasized that with all of the benefits and advantages that lifelong learners accrue, teachers who adopt this mentality are more than excellent educators: they’re excellent models for their students (Edudemic Staff, 2015). Thus, teachers are educators, role models and architects in the classroom for the young minds and have a critical influence through what and how they teach.

Generalizing different approaches regarding the taxonomy of competences and taking into account the suggestions of the European Qualifications Framework (CEDEFOP, 2005) and Moldova National Qualifications Framework (Moldova) (Decision 1016/2017) some authors suggest the following classifications of competences for higher education (Gutu et al., 2015):

1. According to the degree of generalization:
  - generic;
  - specific.
2. According to the degree of specification and hierarchy:
  - generic
    - a) key/transversal/transdisciplinary competences – transferable among different domains of study;
    - b) professional for a wide domain of activity, group of professions, specializations – transferable within the respective profile: cognitive and functionally-active.
      - specific
        - a) professional - specific to a major/to a double major: cognitive and functionally - active;
        - b) subjects:
          - general for the said subject;
          - specific to the unit of learning.

Researcher Melanie Ebenfeld (2018) from Berlin University of Applied Sciences defines “gender competence” as the ability of people to identify gender aspects in their work and to act in ways that produce equitable outcomes for men and women. Gender competence comprises three dimensions – knowledge, willingness and capacity:

- Knowledge: the person is aware of gender relations in society and their importance/effect in their subject area/professional field.
- Willingness: gender stereotypes are perceived as such and the person is motivated to change them.
- Capacity: describes the ability to work in a gender-sensitive manner and use tools to ensure gender equality.

Correlating the notion of competencies with the capability of teachers to integrate a gender dimension into the teaching process, gender competencies appear to have key importance. These competencies are important from the perspective of the fundamental human rights, while teachers in vocational schools should play a leading role in educating their students in the spirit of intolerance to discrimination. They can teach young boys and girls to develop life strategies and adopt behavioral patterns, which would be based on the principles of gender equity and collaborative partnerships between women and men in the private and public spheres.

In practical terms, every specialist, including teachers and future graduates of vocational schools, in addition to professional competences, should have *transferable competences such as communication competencies to be able to communicate with staff, with the population, as well as organizational competencies, to mobilize communities and groups of people and consider the different needs of women and men.* (Bodrug-Lungu, 2016: 43).

In the context of vocational education system, we consider that gender-sensitive competences are specific and transversal competences that cut across and inform all or most of other teaching and education competences. These competences can be developed through participation in training courses and other learning events for teachers. Teachers can adopt self-learning patterns for professional growth.

## General Conclusions

Our research had determined that gender training provided as “one-time event”, as we have done as part of our study for teachers in vocational schools, is associated with the risk of losing participants’ commitment over time. Therefore, for gender mainstreaming to have effective outcomes, a strategic approach is needed at the level of the system of vocational/technical education. Such a strategic approach implies specific actions being developed to target specific problems identified as part of gender analysis, the allocation of budget lines for the implementation of activities in vocational schools, as well as actions at the national level, including gender-sensitive training courses for teachers. The organizing of



gender training otherwise would be more difficult, as it is difficult to allocate time and training resources for bringing the teaching staff from all vocational schools together in continuous learning groups.

Another conclusion that we made in our research is the fact that the Paradigm of development of gender-sensitive competences of teaching staff in vocational education should be based on gender theories, as they provide a “set of knowledge” which teachers need in order to have comprehensive understanding about gender roles, effects of existing gender gaps on the society and individuals. On the other hand, the Paradigm of gender-sensitive competencies should use the concept of adults’ education / lifelong learning concept so that teachers would build self-development perspectives for them as teaching professionals.

Ultimately, teachers that are highly sensitive to gender issues will be aware that they educate new generations for the labor market. Moreover, they will realize that gender segregation in education is among reasons of occupational segregation on the labor market.

Discussions with teachers in vocational/technical schools revealed that it is necessary to develop admission campaigns in a way that targets girls specifically, and ensure that the information reaches out to them. As many schools are known for being dominated by male students and being highly masculinized in what it teaches, girls tend to exclude immediately such schools from their prospective choices. Therefore, the information for the admission campaign should take into consideration these facts, and vocational schools should provide comprehensive information that would encourage girls to enroll.

Thus, along with actions targeted at teachers, effective campaigns are needed to attract more girls to “non-traditional”/ “non-feminine” trades. Existing curricula in vocational schools should be adapted to include sessions for girls particularly, aimed at increasing their self-confidence, assist them to build life strategies and pursue a carrier. Girls in vocational schools need support and guidance during her transition from the school to the labor market. Girls need confidence that they will be able to use the skills obtained in the vocational schools not only in her family/private life, but for public life too.

This is important for many reasons: the investments made in her education will have economic outcomes for her and enable to develop her own lifeline.

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## Acknowledgment

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The article has been presented at The XIX<sup>th</sup> Congress of the AMSE-AMCE-WEAR, 4 – 7 June 2018, Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, Romania.

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