

Gender and secondary Education: Experiences in Albania Overview¹

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Albania's Education Law guarantees girls and boys equal access to education; basic education is compulsory for all children of both sexes. Education is a high priority in Albanian society, and parents will often make huge sacrifices for their children's education, regardless of whether they are boys or girls.

According to the National Institute of Statistics in Albania (INSTAT), women are more successful than men at all levels of education; and in every academic year. Drop out rates are not significantly different for girls and boys, but there are different contributory factors. Boys largely drop-out of school for economic reasons, while for girls, it is social factors. After finishing basic primary schooling, many male students enter the labor market (fulfilling their productive roles as they are expected to) and a number emigrate abroad. Many girls reaching puberty are expected to get married and to fulfill their reproductive roles, rather than studying, working or becoming financially independent.

The root causes of this inequalities on the education system are related with several factors as well as: traditional existing mentality regarding women and men roles in Albanian society; the fact that the textbooks are mirroring the Albanian reality of some years ago (the textbooks are not updated and they lack at all gender perspective which is a relatively new concept); the authors of the textbook lack knowledge on gender perspective and usually they are not so open towards new things/changes of the Albanian reality, which has happened considerably fast.

Increasing capacities on gender mainstreaming in the sector of education and providing tools on implementing it in practice has been the overall objective of the projects realized Gender Alliance for Development Center (GADC) during the years 2005-2007. The organisation has managed to create a team of trainers and researchers on gender mainstreaming in education.

One of the first attempts to answer the issue of gender in the sphere of education was the translating into Albanian of a *Gender Mainstreaming in Education A reference manual for governments and other stakeholders*². This reference manual has been published as a practical tool to assist governmental structures, policy-makers, planners, field staff and other interested stakeholders for Mainstreaming Gender in the Education Sector, taking into consideration the practice of other countries in this field. This manual is part of a gender Management System Series, which provides tools and sector-specific guidelines for gender mainstreaming. This

¹ The overview is developed under the project "*Educational materials and on-line web-based training module on www.cwsp.bg: Equal at School – Equal in Life*", financed by the European Youth Foundation to the Council of Europe under the framework of the European Youth Campaign for Diversity, Human Rights and Participation "*All Different, All Equal*" and implemented in 2007 by the Center of Women's Studies and Policies (Sofia, Bulgaria), Gender Alliance for Development Center (Tirana, Albania), Center for Partnership and Equality (Bucharest, Romania) and .Social Development and Gender Equality Center (Ankara, Turkey).

² Elsa Leo-Rhynie and the Institute of development and Labour Law, University of Cape Town. Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999.

publication has served especially as a practical guide for teachers and university professors, especially for the staff of the “Center’s for Democratic Civil Education” and their collaborators in the cities that they work.

Reviewing and analyzing the textbooks, curriculum standards and syllabi of each subject in elementary school as well as the legislation and national strategic documents through “gender lenses” is one of the main aspects of that work.

Gender analyses of the elementary school text-books³, was realized for the first time in Albania in 2005. This fact was a challenge even for the experts that have worked in preparing it. The excellent feedback from the people that has have the opportunity to know about it and the importance of the recommendations and findings has make it also as a practical tool in advocating and lobbying for mainstreaming gender perspective in the sector of education;

For the purposes of this research, the following documents have been considered the Albanian law in pre - university education and official documents that screen the education perspective influence the education reform, like:

- curriculum standards of each subject in elementary school;
- syllabi of each subject in elementary school;
- student’s textbooks of each subject in elementary school.

Some of the main findings, but not all, of the elementary school textbooks content analysis include:

- The textbooks mostly teach children with stereotyped gender roles.
- The human behaviour is typically presented as feminine or masculine.
- Women and girls are predominantly found in human caring roles.
- The girls are continuously given messages that remind them of special responsibilities.
- The gender roles growth dynamics is insufficiently and vaguely presented. In the textbooks the dynamics and changes of gender roles of women/girls and men/boys are presented not clearly. They also are not presented in an efficient, which mean that the roles and responsibilities of boys and girls are different and they change through the lifecycle. The fact that these changes are not presented in the text clearly, makes the textbooks not realistic and not reflecting the life dynamics.
- Illustrations in the textbooks mainly represent highlighted masculine figures.
- Male individuals are mostly trusted leadership roles in daily life and social institutions.
- Important others, very frequently presented as powerful, seem to be predominantly males.

The gender analysis⁴ of the National Pre-University Education Strategy found out that the strategy does not include a good articulation of gender education engagements, but it does include space to be interpreted as potentially usable for the gender education of students.

³ *The portrayal of gender characteristics in elementary school textbooks*, Gender Alliance for Development Center, financed by Kvinna till Kvinna., 2005, published in Albanian and English.

⁴ Conducted in 2005 by the Gender Alliance for Development Center in cooperation with OSFA – Open Society Foundation for Albania under the project “Gender Equality and European Integration”.

“Engendering national strategies in Albania”⁵ is an innovative activity including country strategy papers’ analysis in the light of gender perspective and European Integration, guidelines with particular indicators through which documents can be evaluated and monitored via “gender lenses”, the preparation of the guidelines on Engendering National Strategies, including recommendations on how to mainstream gender in policy papers, the creation of a system of monitoring and evaluation of national strategies (on a regular basis), organizing seminars, workshops, round tables with representatives of governmental bodies and organizing a summer school with selected participants from the Ministry of Integration, public servants, professors and NGO representatives. The main findings and indicators, in terms of European Integration and Gender Equality in Albania, have been compared with the indicators of other post-communist countries. This comparative analysis brings national and regional examples.

A positive achievement for the country is the availability of educational materials and training resources such as the first Gender Resource Package⁶ for the future teachers of elementary schools. This is a very achievement in the field of gender mainstreaming in education which acknowledges and addresses gender equity principles in meeting the needs of both girls and boys. It has to be mentioned that the module is a very practical tool and for teachers in providing knowledge on gender concepts and issues.

A number of activities like: training, workshops are focused on providing tools on using Gender Resource Package in order to provide a gender sensitive education.

The emphasis falls on elementary teachers as their role is seen as most important in the process of change. These training are provided as part of the elementary schools curriculum development process to stimulate and improve the process of learning and teaching on gender perspective.

The extensive experience of the Gender Alliance for Development Center proves that, when it comes to the process of gender mainstreaming, the intervention in some focal points is a successful approach. **First**, through providing these training to this target-group we want to address the problem of inequality in Albania, helping people to understand how the system of inequality works, the way it is reflected in the case of education(elementary level) especially text-books and how people, themselves, can become part of a changing process. **Second**, to promote the elementary schools curriculum development processes on gender perspective. **Third**, to provide practical information on the use and implementation of the gender curricula package (modules).

The principles of gender equality need to be incorporated into all aspects of curriculum development and delivery, so that both girls and boys experiences at school are positive and relevant to their future and aspiration. In order to continue the work towards the process of including gender perspective and principles in school curricula, GADC will focus its efforts on elementary and secondary school text authors and curriculum.

⁵ Under the project *European Integration and Gender Equality, 2006*.

⁶ Implemented by the Gender Alliance for Development Center in 2006, supported by Kvinna till Kvinna.