

Gender in secondary education: Experiences in Romania

Overview¹

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An important issue to address in Romania as Member of the European Union is related to the country's capacity to meet people's fundamental right to education. This includes the equal opportunities in accessing education and vocational training, and is an essential component of equal rights. The evaluation and monitoring of access to education must include quantitative and qualitative information. Education is a national priority in Romania, which should be open to all citizens, regardless of gender. However, existing statistics show that girls have a disproportionate rate of illiteracy, mainly functional illiteracy, and there has been a recent decline in the net rate of girls' enrolment in secondary schools. There has been recent improvement in the statistical system to collect information on the educational process. This is partially due to Romania following the international educational reporting requirements, in such guides on producing national reports as "Education for All," which includes a chapter on gender indicators.

The gender equality dimension is covered by most of the national sectoral action plans. The National Development Plan for 2004 – 2007, the National Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Plan contain objectives and guidelines on gender equality covering the field of education and professional training.

However, it is to be highlighted that more detailed and specific information is needed in order to highlight, monitor, and evaluate negative trends in the Romanian educational system. Romanian non-governmental organizations, as well as academic representatives and independent experts contributed over time to indicating the areas affected by potential gender discrimination in the educational system, which should be examined, either qualitatively or quantitatively, such as:

- The quality of education process, in terms of gender equality standards and the quality of curricula;
- The enrolment rate, at appropriate ages;
- The drop-out rate;
- The gender disparity of teachers' and staff's promotion within the educational system;
- The gender disparity in specializations of post-graduate university students;
- The gender disparity and consequences in vocational training;
- The disparity, including consequences for women and men between demand and supply of education and vocational training on the labor market; and
- The gender disparity in administrative and managerial positions within the educational system.

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The available current statistics issued by the National Institute for Statistics have not addressed the gender dimension of most of the above mentioned topics. Therefore, it may be implied that data gathered strictly regarding access to education without providing information on the content of classes and the quality of instruction, can create a too optimistic image. In this scenario accurate illustration of the implicit gender discrimination in education is left aside. Such a reality may jeopardize the needed state reform measures meant to address the gender based inequalities present in the educational system, as well as the identification of the most appropriate measures to establish the balance.

Moreover, it is important to state that gender inequalities in education and afterwards in the employment are closely related to each other. They are not measuring the same thing, however, and thus are important to investigate separately. For one, it might be the case that the two issues are largely driven by institutional factors that govern education and employment access and do not therefore greatly depend on each other. For example, one might think of an education policy that strives to achieve universal education and thus reduces gender gaps, while there continue to be significant barriers to employment for females in the labour market.