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Caring masculinities in early childhood education - Insights from the ECaRoM transnational report

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Methodology

1) Review of ECEC policy documents, of existing research and of didactical tools

*Each partner selected and analysed **ECEC policy documents** and any other relevant documents for pedagogues.*

*Each partner selected **3-5 relevant national studies** about gender-sensitive education tackling gender stereotypes related to boys/men/masculinities and/or care in early childhood education*

*Each partner checked recent **projects** aimed at overcoming gender stereotypes in early childhood education developed by national authorities or NGOs.*



Methodology

2) Qualitative research

- **In depth-interviews** with educators of ECEC services, teachers of primary schools and experts in field of gender sensitive education.
- **Focus Groups** with policymakers, scholars and experts who deal with gender-sensitive research, and specifically, with caring masculinities aimed at early childhood as well as educators and teachers.
- **Check-lists** were used to collect further data.



Review of ECEC policy documents

- Gender, gender equality, gender stereotypes are addressed in a more general way **without specific and concrete guidelines** for preschool teachers;
- The commitment depends on **individual preschool teacher**, their interest and engagement on how to deal with gender equality and gender stereotypes in their work with children.
- **Men*, care, equality in ECEC - mainly lacking in policy documents and legislation.** Exceptions are found in school education: School Act of Bavaria (Germany) and Austria (“Reflexive gender pedagogy and gender equality”).



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Review of existing research

- **lack of systematic national research**, instead small scale, fragmented research
- less studies exist on early childhood education compared to primary/secondary school because of the **‘too early’ bias**; on the other hand **gender is conflated with sexuality** in older children
- **lack of interdisciplinarity** (prevalent in sociology)
- focus on girls and STEM skills, while **masculinities and EHW skills are backslidden**. Practically no existing research that focus specifically on masculinities and on the gender stereotypes about masculinity and care in ECEC.



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Findings and recommendations: Pedagogical material and didactical tools

- produced mainly by **NGOs in EU projects** rather than systemic national actions
- **lack of cooperation** and networking between NGOs and teachers in kindergartens/schools to transfer materials and good practice
- **lack of comprehensive learning platforms** at national level for teachers with a collection of materials and didactic support
- most of the materials provide information for teachers, while **gender-sensitive tools** such as toys, picture books, games aimed directly at children are rare



Männer- und
Geschlechterthemen
Steiermark



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Findings and recommendations: Pedagogical material and didactical tools

- most materials are based on a **gender binary conception** and mostly address girls* (promotion of STEM skills), while materials introducing boys* to EHW professions are rare
- other **stereotypes about masculinities** (related to body, emotions, invulnerability, health, heteronormativity, competitiveness, violence) are rarely tackled
- **need for pedagogical material that deconstructs care as a feminine trait**; highlight the importance of working with **emotions, human co-dependency, empathy and solidarity**; the creation of a database/repository of already existing materials.

Findings and recommendations: Gender sensitive education

- **Progress in the provision of space, same toys and activities for all children (but still some gender stereotypes)**

Role playing is very common and children (both girls and boys*) like to dress up, wear masks, decorate, etc. They also like to dress up as the opposite sex. Through body and body work, they dispel gender stereotypes of what 'is/isn't appropriate' for boys* and girls*. (Slovenia)*

Findings and recommendations: gender sensitive education

- **Not enough gender sensitive material** available for educators and teachers
- **General lack of focus on masculinities** highlights how gender education is considered to be a dimension linked exclusively to women.
- **Occupation and professions:** area where gender stereotypes often emerge, professions are presented in a **stereotypical** way, lack of gender sensitive **language**

Findings and recommendations: gender sensitive education

- Importance of **self-reflection** by educators and teachers (e.g. Checklists)
- Concerning the relevance of **gender stereotypes for children**, there is a general understanding that these are less pronounced in the age group 0-3 years, while they start to become more visible from the age of 4 years and even more so in the primary school
- *“In the children, the doing gender can be seen, among other things, in the way they dress, in negotiating conflicts, in being in gender-homogeneous groups, in sanctioning deviant behaviour from gender norms, in occupational orientations and in caring practices. The normative pressure on boys* not to behave in a feminine way is already perceptible in early education and upbringing.” (Germany)*



Findings and recommendations: men* in ECEC

- **Male educators are a tiny minority** in all countries involved, and a need is expressed to raise their presence in the classroom
- **Economic and social status of this job:** most partner countries emphasised that the **stereotype of the male breadwinner** is still deeply rooted

On the other hand, in some situations, the demand for male educators or teachers can produce a **counter-stereotype in terms of both social and salary recognition which poses ethical questions**

[...] they offered me so much right away that I immediately earned much more than everyone else, because they absolutely wanted to keep me, as the only man. [...] Which I then found unfair to the others. (Germany)



Findings and recommendations: men* in ECEC controversies

- increased presence of men* as educators can convey the message to children that men* too can perform care, but **the presence of male educators does not automatically equate to a measure that counters gender stereotypes;**
- **devaluation of female professionals** and their performance in pedagogy;
- **the “spectre of child sexual abuse”**: social prejudice against male educators as potential abusers that is linked to the hyper-sexualisation of men* in care work



Findings and recommendations: men* in ECEC

- Promote a reflection on the relationship between the presence of male educators versus the contrasting perpetuation of **gender stereotypes** in education
- Promote the adoption of a **clear concept of child protection** in ECEC that also addresses the issue of the general suspicion of sexualized violence by male educators.
- Presence of **fathers** is on the rise but still differentiated from that of the mother



Findings and recommendations: training

- Concepts such as **caring masculinity** and **gender-sensitive pedagogy** should become part of the training for all educators
- Educators should also be trained in the following areas: **communication skills** and the ability **to involve parents**; how to bring gender equality issues to children **indirectly**, through play, daily activities, everyday life, art and culture; how to **proactively approach the highly gender-stereotyped images in the media**, fairy tales, and information material on professions.
- **Training courses and hand-out materials should also be offered to parents**, potentially before starting activities with children in order to clear doubts and debunk myths of gender sensitive education on one hand and ensuring a more cohesive environment for children.



Findings and recommendations: care and caring masculinities

- **Lack of research and guidelines for gender sensitive pedagogy related to boys*, and to the topic of men* and care** (with some exceptions in school education in Austria and Germany);
- Topics of care are included in ECEC services activities in the context of self-care, getting to know different occupations and activities related to the topic of division of labour in the families
- **Caring professions and activities are presented in stereotypical way:** stereotyped visual materials that are not discussed; lack of use of gender-sensitive language; invisibility of male carers



Findings and recommendations: care and caring masculinities

- Further efforts should be directed into developing an inclusive gender sensitive education system that involves **critical work on men* and masculinities, educational and professional desegregation**, and that takes into account **the spectrum of gender realities** (beyond gender binarism).