EU / UK Youth

Stronger Together for social action

Resource pack
Breaking Gender Stereotypes in Education

Introduction

The **EU / UK Youth Stronger Together** is a two-year project (2023-2025) implemented in co-operation with the **European Movement International** and co-funded by the **European Union** . It offers young people aged 15–30 from the EU and the UK opportunities to connect, co-operate, influence and implement change together on issues of common interest.

The project aims to facilitate close and sustainable relationship between young people in the UK and the EU for Europe's collective benefit. We work with various groups of young people through different strands of the programme.

As part of the Social Action strand of the programme focusing on schools, we organise thematic events, workshops, and a competition to facilitate partnership building between schools in the UK and EU.

We aspire to highlight the role of young people aged 15–18 as changemakers, active global citizens and leaders at local, national and European level. You can find out more on:
https://www.britishcouncil.be/programmes/education/stronger-together/social-action

Let's get started!

This additional Stronger Together resource will focus on breaking gender stereotypes in education, with strategies for understanding gender equality, tackling gender stereotypes, and encouraging awareness and solidarity for access to education for all in the international context. The resource is aimed at inculcating the skills and values of being kind, thoughtful, non-judgemental, open-minded and aware of the issues to do with gender equality. This is a huge and somewhat daunting topic. This resource touches on some of the main themes and issues raised by considering how the world is, locally, nationally and globally for females and males.

As a quick reminder this project is based on collaboration between students in different countries working together. It is designed to be student-led, with support and facilitation from your teacher(s). For the very best results international collaboration is vital. However, the ideas can work well within an individual school too.

There are two main support documents relevant for the 'Breaking Gender Stereotypes in Education' topic. Stronger Together Teacher Facilitator Notes are for the teacher facilitators supporting your project. The other is this one, for you, the students, the most important people in the project. The intention is that your teacher facilitators pass over responsibility for this project to you, the students, as soon as possible. Encourage your teacher facilitators to read this document - their role is to support you to lead the project.

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Both documents contain more information than you need. The internet has hundreds of thousands more pages. Be realistic. You can't do it all. You do not have to read everything or do every activity! You have other subjects to study! You will have to be selective in consultation with your partners in the other schools and colleges.

The project writers have suggested that you make a journey, in stages, with three focal points. These are Learn, Explore and Act. Now that the Stronger Together project has evolved and entered its final topic, you, the students, will almost certainly find new aspects which the project writers and your teachers hadn't considered. You will probably put more emphasis on some sections rather than others – making your project as a whole unique.

Remember that working together is the aim. We would suggest that you take an early look at the final section 'Actions'.

1. Learn: 'Breaking Gender Stereotypes in Education'

Background information

The World Health Organisation sees gender as 'the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women.'

Women and girls represent half the world's population and therefore, half the world's potential to develop, live well and make the world a better place. However, women and girls face huge barriers to participating fully in society and reaching that potential. Gender inequality persists everywhere, but the degree may be very different in different contexts.

Across the world around 129 million girls are not in school. Of these children, 32 million are only primary school age. Much evidence shows that girls' education is central to thriving societies and educating girls is fundamental to a healthy, stable society, it reduces poverty and promotes the wellbeing of girls and boys. Girls who go to school and finish their education are less likely to marry young, will earn higher incomes and are much more likely to participate in decisions that most affect them. This enables them to lead more stable and productive lives, building better futures for themselves and their families.

Achieving gender equality could improve all areas of society – from healthcare, education, reducing poverty – regardless of where in the world you live. On average, women still earn 23% less than men globally and women spend around three times as much time in unpaid domestic and care work. This may be looking after children and the elderly, cleaning the house, cooking, doing the laundry or serving the wider family through social and practical support. All these tasks are required for society and families to operate well, but are not paid.

Women and girls face barriers to gender equality, ranging from unequal division of unpaid labour, discrimination in the workplace, societal expectations to sexual violence and exploitation. All these issues of inequality have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

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Political leadership, financial investment and policy reforms are needed to realise gender equality and reach parity of future life chances between a girl and a boy born today.

Here are some definitions we'll encourage you to use as you explore this topic:

Gender: The World Health Organisation defines gender in the following way: The socially constructed characteristics of women and men – such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed.

Gender equality: Equality is when everybody is treated in the same way and has the same rights and opportunities, regardless of who they are, what they do, or where they are born and live. It is when everyone has the same rights and opportunities regardless of their gender, and girls and boys are valued equally by everyone.

Gender parity: This is when an equal number of girls and boys or men and women are represented in a particular situation. For example, a school where there are 100 girls and 100 boys would have gender parity, and a country where equal numbers of girls and boys are enrolled in school is said to have achieved gender parity in education.

Social Constructs: This is a concept that exists not in objective reality, but as a result of human interaction. It exists because the status quo of influential voices agree that it exists. One example of a social construct relating to gender would be the prevailing idea that only men can be engineers.

Biological Sex: The World Health Organisation defines sex in the following way:
Sex refers to "the different biological and physiological characteristics of males and females, such as reproductive organs, chromosomes, hormones, etc."

Multiple Genders: Biological and genetic factors typically define a person's sex (boy or girl), but gender refers to how some people identify on the inside. Some examples of gender identity types include nonbinary, cisgender, genderfluid, male, female, transgender, gender neutral, agender, and pangender, while some people do not believe that they have a gender identity.

1a.   Global Goals and gender.

At the turn of the 21st Century the world agreed on the Millenium Development Goals, a global programme to solve problems, defeat inequalities and improve the lives of the world's poor. In 2015 the Sustainable Development Goals (https://sdgs.un.org/goals) continued this mission to 2030. Goal 5 is to 'Achieve Gender Equality and empower all women and girls'. As a result, most countries have made primary education free. However, there is a mismatch between policy and reality meaning full primary school attendance, particularly for many girls, remains an aspiration.

Possible activity:

Let's also look at this in the context of the European partners in this project. Do some research in your own schools and families and then share it.

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In your school:

- do male and female pupils have the same curriculum at ages 9 and 15?

- where there are differences, are these determined by gender or personal choice?

- what is the proportion of male and female pupils? And teachers? And school leadership?

In your family:

- at what age did your mother and father leave school? and your grandparents?

- are / were your parents and grandparents able to take their state pension at the same age? Or is it different for males and females?

- does anyone in your family own a business? Male or female?

Now share this with the partners. What similarities and differences are there?

1b.   Climate change and gender equality.

The links between climate change and gender equality mean steps to improve girls' lives can be undermined by the effects of climate related events. At least 200 million girls globally live on the frontlines of the climate crisis. Girls who are already facing the challenges of marginalisation, poverty, disability, or displacement as refugees will be the worst affected. In 2021 the Malala Fund (https://malala.org/) estimated that at least 4 million girls were prevented from completing their education by climate change. Disadvantaged pupils suffer most, girls especially, who when not in school face higher risks of child marriage and gender related exploitation.

Possible activity:

One of the writers of this resource is working with a primary school in Uganda for pupils aged 5 to 14. There is no well in the school, so pupils have to walk to a pond which is also shared with wild animals. It is 4 to 5 kms from the school. They make two journeys each day and bring back 50 x20 litre jerry cans each time (1000 litres = 1000 kilo or 2200 pounds)

In school, and with families and friends prepare a list of household tasks and then find out:

- who does what to keep the home running smoothly?

- is everyone happy with this?

- has anything changed since your parents and older relatives were young?

- what might be done differently?

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Share your findings with your partner school.

1c.   Girls feeling supported.

Education for girls is a wider issue than simply access to school. It's also about girls feeling safe and comfortable in classrooms and being supported by their teachers and by boys to pursue their interests, the school's subjects and careers they explore and ultimately choose. Subject teachers can consider and adapt their teaching methods and interventions directly with students. This can all have an impact. However, these changes are limited by society's implicit bias and gender stereotyping. Only by tackling gender equality at a whole school level can fundamental shifts take place.

Women remain under-represented in many areas of the workforce, such as science, doctors, pilots, and soldiers. Through learning opportunities, such as this resource pack, all pupils – girls and boys – can be inspired to take action to question norms and bring about greater gender equality. Together girls and boys can increase meaningful access to education for girls worldwide.

Possible activity:

At a very personal, and perhaps uncomfortable, level, there is the issue of support for girls during adolescence. In Uganda the lack of separate, private toilets in school means that many stay at home during menstruation, perhaps missing a week's education each month.

Discuss provision in your school e.g.

- can girls have privacy?

- is there a member of staff who can provide sympathetic support?

- does the school have supplies to support girls?

- do boys and girls attend lessons on health and sex education together?

- do boys and girls have separate or combined sports lessons between the ages of, let us say, 11 to 16?

Share these ideas with your partner school.

1d.   Questioning Gender.

In recent years, an increasing number of children have been questioning their gender. This is why the Department for Education in the UK is in the process of publishing new guidance for teachers on how best to support students in schools and colleges. The draft guidance is clear

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that schools and colleges have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children. The guidance recommends that a cautious approach should be taken when responding to requests to social transition (changing names or pronouns for example). You can see the draft guidance here: https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2023/12/19/gender-questioning-children-guidance-schools-colleges/

2. Explore: Breaking Gender Stereotypes in Education

In this section you will find several suggestions for student-led activities, supported by your teacher facilitators. Please adapt the materials according to your school context, and, importantly, the needs and dynamics of the groups in the partner institutions. Flexibility and adaptability are highly recommended. One size does not fit all!

2a.   How have things changed?

Over time things have changed a lot for women in many places in the world. What was it like for girls one, two, three or more generations ago?

Carry out some research. For more recent generations you could try talking to your Aunties, Mother, Grandmother or even Great- Grandmother. You could use the following guidance questions to take a deep dive into understanding their lives when they were a girl/ young woman of your age:

- What were you doing when you were my age?
- What were your hopes and dreams for the future? What did you want to be when you grew up?
- Did you go to school? What age did you leave school?
- Did you have any qualifications when you left school? If so, what were they?
- What subjects did you learn at school that the boys didn't do? What did the boys do that wasn't open to you? How did you feel about that?
- Did anyone talk to you, when you were my age, about the type of job or career you'd like to have?
- What options were open to you when you left school?
- What did you do?
- How did things change when you had children?
- Did you feel that being a girl, rather than a boy, limited your options in any way?
- Any other questions you wish to add.

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For longer ago, further back in history, you could research in books, on the internet, visit a museum or examine historical documents. Adapt the same questions to a more historical perspective and explore how things have changed for girls and young women over time.

Draw up a short list of three key changes you can identify from your research. Share and exchange these key points with your classmates and your partner school. Can you identify common themes?

2b. **Everybody wins when girls can stay in school**

Adapted from: https://worldslargestlesson.globalgoals.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/19-Everybody-Wins-When-Girls-Can-Stay-in-School.pdf

Read the case studies in Appendix A: Case Studies, at the end of this resource. In small groups compile a list of barriers that prevent girls from completing their education and a list of interventions that changed this for the better.

Use a Solution Tree to analyse the issues. On a large piece of paper (e.g. flipchart paper) draw the outline of a tree. On the trunk write 'What are the barriers to girls' education?'

Consider the causes or roots of these barriers and list them on the roots. Possible solutions or interventions are made into leaves. You can continue adding new thoughts as you find out more in this project.

Take a photo of your Solution Tree and share it with your partner school. Compare and contrast ideas – you can even add ideas to your Tree that your partner school identified!

Keep your Solution Tree as this can be used later in this pack.

2c. **Gender Equality in STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths)**

Taken from 'Girls into Global STEM', an Erasmus+ project.

We already know that girls and women are underrepresented in STEM subjects at school, in college and university courses and in most jobs which require STEM qualifications. Why might this be? In small groups list your ideas about the causes. What can you identify as the key drivers/issues that are either encouraging and/or dissuading girls from STEM subjects. Boys are also prescribed gendered roles by society – for example, possibly steering them away from

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the caring professions such as health and education. How does this hinder their choices? Exchange your first thoughts with your partners.

A great exploratory activity is to ask some younger students in your school to draw a scientist. Do their sketches confirm the stereotypical view of a scientist as being male? Here is some research from a school in the USA which helps to widen the picture?

https://ed.fnal.gov/projects/scientists/index.html

What are the statistics in your own school or college for the take up of STEM (after compulsory study ends)? Do you think visits to a science, technology or engineering location would help? Does this already happen in your setting?

Why don't some girls like science and technology?

https://news.microsoft.com/europe/features/dont-european-girls-like-science-technology/#W3R2xCWJmcHeAkSH.99

Have a look at this article and then develop your own questions about attitudes to STEM using an online questionnaire or paper equivalents. You can do this in your own school or jointly with partner schools.

Now try out your questions on some younger students. See if you can discover when their opinions change and why. What seems to be encouraging or dissuading girls from taking up STEM subjects?

2d.   Feeling Safe

Do different genders have a differing perception of the world around them?

In your own schools carry out a survey of whether there are areas either within school or in your own towns/cities where people feel less safe. It will be important to indicate gender on this survey and then compare the results.

Depending on your results you might be able to draw up a map or chart to show real or perceived unsafe areas. What can be done about this? Is it because of the physicality of the place or is it because of the attitude of other people?

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A second survey might help understand this, perhaps asking the question - 'Are there places where you are treated differently?'

Think of ways that you can help combat newspaper headlines such as 'Over 50% of girls don't feel safe.' How could sensational scaremongering headlines or knee jerk press reactions be more nuanced and accurate?

Take this safety idea further. The online space is one where people can also feel unsafe. See https://intenta.digital/perspectives/gaming-gender-stereotypes-discrimination/ for further information. Find groups of students that are involved in online gaming. Find out if they use male or female avatars. Are these treated differently? Are you more likely to receive abusive messages if you have a female avatar? Are there any female players in your school who use male avatars – if yes try to find out why? Depending on your findings and results you might be able to set up a campaign / poster to counteract this behaviour.

3. Act: Breaking Gender Stereotypes in Education

3a.   Thinking critically about Gender Equality

Gender stereotypes affect both girls and boys as they are growing up. The mechanisms for influencing the way girls and boys think about themselves, present themselves to society and shape their future hopes and dreams are in place from the first moments of life. Is it a boy or a girl? This is often the first question parents are asked about their new arrival.

Although girls and boys are both subject to stereotypes and expectations the differences in these pressures can lead to different outcomes. Stereotypes of girls can lead to expectations to be quiet, passive, caring and thoughtful. Stereotypes of boys can lead to expectations to be strong, active, dominant and stoic. All of these attributes have their place in a balanced society, but to expect them of one gender and to discourage them in another places pressure on girls and boys to mould themselves to fit these 'ideals'.

How were your attitudes to gender shaped? How are they evolving? These questions, and the questions below, are just as relevant for boys as girls.

Start by working your way through the following personal questions quietly and by yourself:

Individual private questions: what do I think about this personally? Why do I think like I do? To what extent am I open to changing my point of view?

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- How have your attitudes to gender been shaped?
- Who has influenced your thinking in regard to gender?
- Has that influenced or restrained your own aspirations?
- How have cultural, religious or geographical factors played a part in your hopes and dreams for the future?

Group Dialogue questions: What do other people think about this? How can I find different perspectives to my own? Analyse assumptions, implications and contradictions. And how can I engage with complexity, conflict, uncertainty, and difference with integrity?

Discuss these group questions in small groups in your school setting first and then with partners:

- Think about the personal questions above and share any thoughts that you are completely comfortable to share.
- How can we best develop positive attitudes towards removing gender stereotypes? Share your Solution Tree findings from Activity 2b. as a starting point.
- How are cultural, religious or geographical factors playing a part in your school and community contexts?
- How can we engage constructively with different attitudes to our own to better bring about positive change?

Deeper questions for further discussion, more generally and /or in collaboration with the international partners:

- How can we develop open-mindedness and empathy to allow ourselves and others to explore, define and develop gender identities?
- What assumptions, implications and contradictions have we uncovered in these conversations?

3b.   The benefits of girls' education.

CAMFED is a pan-African, grassroots-led movement tackling poverty, inequality and injustice through girls' education and women's leadership. https://camfed.org/

In small groups explore the Camfed website, whilst at the same time listing the many ways that girls' education brings benefits, both to themselves and society. Consider what would have happened if the girls featured had not found support to complete secondary school. What would have been the impact on her, her family, her community and her country?

Share your findings with the groups in your own school and with your partner school.

According to Camfed educated girls will:

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• Earn up to 25% more, start businesses, and reinvest 90% in their families.

• Be three times less likely to become HIV positive.

• Have fewer, healthier children, who are 40% more likely to live past the age of five.

• Tend to be less vulnerable to violence and exploitation.

• Become role models for the next generation of children, driving change from the local to

the global level.

In small groups or pairs, design a creative way to explain to other students the difference girls' education can make. You can use any media you choose to do this – from art works to zines – the choice is yours. The most important factor to consider is how to engage your audience and reach people who might not have been interested in these issues before.

3c.   Planning to make a difference.

Adapted from: Schools Connect Gender Equality
https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/gender_equality.pdf

In this activity you will be asked to identify issues of gender inequality in your school or community and consider planning to act on one of those issues. It is often easier and makes more sense to focus on one of the causes of an issue rather than trying to tackle the big issue itself head on. You could choose one of the issues identified in your Solution Tree (Activity 2b). Consider the best actions cards below.

Using the nine cards, and any others you wish to add, arrange these in a Diamond Nine like the image below. Talk it through and try to reach consensus. In the 1 spot put the card your group considers the best action, followed by the second-best actions in the 2 spots, right down to the action your group least wants to take in spot 5.
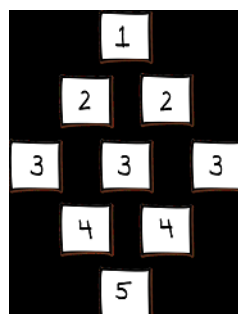
Compare your Diamond Nine with other groups, both in your school setting and with your partner school(s). If your group feels sufficiently motivated to take action and work together outside the classroom, ask a teacher to be your mentor and support you in your chosen action.

The best action is to:

Put our arguments to someone in a powerful position.	Find out which organisations can help us and join their campaigns.	Perform a play about how the issue affects people.
Invite a guest speaker into school to talk about or debate the issue.	Make a leaflet, poster or collage on the issue to display in a prominent place.	Make different personal choices and set an example.
Make a video, photo or audio presentation and upload it on social media.	Raise money and donate it to a charity working on your issue.	Work with the press. For example, talk on local radio or invite a journalist to an event.

Appendix A: Camfed Case Studies

Case study 1: Jesca

When she was just 12 years old, Jesca was left to fend for herself, along with her 15-year-old sister. Their father and stepmother left Rufiji in the coastal region of Tanzania to seek work in another district. As the months went by, it was heart-breaking when the girls realised their parents weren't returning. "We found ourselves like living in the darkness, even in the daylight time … Because of the difficulty of daily life, we lost hope and our commitment to school was lost completely," recalls Jesca.

Evicted by their landlord, the girls sought help at the police station. Moved by their story, one of the police officers, Mr. Rashid, asked his wife if they could take the girls in. She agreed – and she also petitioned the school's management committee for bursary support from Camfed.

With full bursaries from Camfed, Jesca and her sister both completed secondary school. They were able to focus on their studies without worrying about how they would get by day-to-day. Their bursaries included all their school-going essentials: uniforms, books, school supplies, room and board, and sanitary supplies, too.

Case Study 2 – Diana

My mother died in the year 2007, and I lost my father a few years after. I have three sisters and three brothers. I eventually dropped out of school because I had no one to support me. After staying with my grandfather for a while, I later decided to leave my village for Accra (the capital city of Ghana) to explore other ways of earning some income. I ran away without telling anybody.

I began selling water for a lady with a shop. I was still interested in school but I had no means. My dreams of becoming a medical doctor were fading away slowly. I sold the water for some months and had no decent sleeping place. I slept at the lorry stations with other girls in similar situations.

I later came across a lady who offered me work as a house help. After eight months in this job, I made some money and decided to return to the Upper East Region to continue with my education. I purchased some basic school items and had to enrol into Class Five since I dropped out in this class.

In Junior High, things got tough for me again. I struggled through this stage and finally wrote my BECE exam. While waiting for my results, I travelled to Winneba to work for my aunty and make some money in preparation for Senior High. When my results came out and I got placement into Senior High, I wept every day since I could not afford the fees and get the school items.

I later heard about Camfed's support and approached the District Education Committee who assisted me. When I got selected, I was so happy that my sad days were over because I knew I would not lack items such as books and school fees again. I want to become a medical doctor in future to take care of the sick in my community.

Case Study 3 – Chisanga

During her first two terms at secondary school in Zambia, Chisanga – who was brought up by her great grandmother – was unable to pay her fees, she had little to eat and shared a bed with a friend because she had no bedding of her own. Chisanga explained her situation to the school's teacher mentor and head teacher and was immediately chosen to receive Camfed bursary support.

"From this time, my life changed. I no longer worried about fees, about having food to eat. Camfed gave me everything I need."

Now Chisanga – who used to sell charcoal to survive – wants to study law, economics and business at college. "I have become stronger and am a peer counsellor to the girls. I have passed through a lot of difficulties. By being a prefect and deputy head girl, I have learnt how to react to different issues."

Of her group of eight close friends from primary school, Chisanga says she is the only one still in school and doing well. The other girls, all aged 17-18, have children and are struggling to find work and stay safe. "I feel bad going home and seeing them. I prefer being at school. Before school, we used to drink together, to forget certain things that had passed through our lives. My friends have remained in the same behaviour, in bad situations. When I finish school I want to start working so I can help my friends' children as well.

As a prefect, Chisanga works with the school administration to give advice to fellow pupils, identify problems, and follow up with girls who fall ill. When they find girls who are being abused they report it to the headteacher. She is also learning business skills, having taken part in a business challenge run by her school. Through the project, the group learnt how to manage their funds and assets and over the year they ran the enterprise, they made a 1.15 million kwacha profit (£140/$226), which was shared equally amongst the group's seven members. Her

group's hair salon business won the school's award for being the most successful that year. Chisanga took her share of the profit home to her great grandmother so she could use it to expand her own charcoal business to support her cousins to go to school.

Useful links

British Council

https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/gender_equality.pdf

https://www.britishcouncil.org/exploring-gender-equality-education

Camfed

https://camfed.org/

Camfed_World's largest lesson - UN's Global Goals for Sustainable Development

https://worldslargestlesson.globalgoals.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/19-Everybody-Wins-When-Girls-Can-Stay-in-School.pdf

UN Women

https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/feature-story/2023/09/global-gender-equality-in-2023-urgent-efforts-needed-to-reach-2030-goals

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