

Gender in the Curriculum: Analysis of National Curricular Documents of Czechia, Estonia, Ireland, and Sweden

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Abstract: Currently, equality is one of the most debated topics in education and in the process of national curriculum revisions. Drawing on policy borrowing theory, this study examines how global trends on gender issues are integrated into the national curricular documents of four countries: Czechia, Estonia, Ireland, and Sweden. Using both qualitative and quantitative content analysis, the study explores how gender issues are embedded in the curricular documents and creates categories to help map their presence within the curricular documents, as well as frequency analysis to allow comparison and more detailed presentation of the data. The findings reveal notable differences. Sweden's curriculum addresses gender issues comprehensively and in considerable detail. Ireland shows moderate integration of gender issues, setting them mostly within the broader context of equality. Estonia represents a concentrated approach, with gender issues primarily integrated within only a few subjects; however, they are listed with a similar degree of specificity as in Ireland. Czechia, in contrast, lags significantly behind the other nations, with minimal attention to gender issues. The study fills a gap in the research that deals with gender issues in the curriculum. The developed categories provide a framework for analysing different curricular documents, offering valuable insights for future revisions.

Keywords: gender, gender equality, education, curriculum, document analysis

Gender issues influence the entire educational process (Křišová, 2019). They begin at the systemic level with the organisation of education (Taylor, 2013) and the composition of teaching staff (Colvin et al., 2019; Lassibille & Navarro Gómez, 2020). These and other factors shape the school environment and climate (La Salle et al., 2021;) and can affect communication within the school (Kilby, 2023; Vad'urová, 2011). Gender issues come through in the content of education (Kerkhoven et al., 2016; Lee, 2018) and should be reflected in the methods and forms of teaching employed (Gluzman et al., 2020; Namaziandost & Çakmak, 2020). They contribute to different expectations of students (Muntoni & Retelsdorf, 2018; Sneyers et al., 2020) and affect the composition of students in individual classes (Gaer et al., 2004) as well as in specific areas of study (Jarkovská et al., 2010). These issues lead to differences in the evaluation of students (Münich & Protivínský, 2022) and can result

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- 2 in disparities in school results (Oakley et al., 2024; Levine et al., 2019). It is important that education reflects these influences, and that gender topics and issues are presented, debated, and understood as part of the educational process.

Taking into account and integrating the gender dimension into the content of education is one of the priorities of the European Research Area (ERA) (European Commission, 2020a) and while it focuses mostly on higher education, the effort is relevant to all levels of education. It is also part of gender mainstreaming, which includes the integration of the gender perspective and gender dimension into the entire process of education (preparation, implementation, evaluation) (Krišová, 2019). During implementation of these educational priorities and policies from a global (or supranational) level to a local (national) level, the policies usually go through changes that adapt them to local political, cultural and economic conditions. Implementation of policies connected to gender is linked to willingness of different actors to promote this topic (Unterhalter & Northcote, 2018).

This study analyses national curricular documents from four countries: Czechia, Estonia, Ireland and Sweden. For the selection of these countries the Gender Equality Index (GEI), “a tool to measure the progress of gender equality in the EU” (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.-b), was mainly used. The GEI measures not only the overall level of gender equality in the country, but also its level in six core domains, one of which is Knowledge, which covers education. The GEI is viewed as a reliable and scientific source of data (European Commission, 2020b). The selected countries score across the GEI ranging from the best to the worst, as such an approach has the potential to include more diverse attitudes to integrating the topics of gender and gender equality into the curricular documents.

The different attitude of the countries towards gender issues may be reflected in the way they adapt them in the educational policies and practices. To interpret how global emphasis on gender equality translates into local curricular frameworks, this study adopts policy borrowing theory (Steiner-Khamisi, 2012, 2014), emphasising how international educational directives are received and recontextualised by national actors. By examining curricular documents through the lens of policy borrowing, this article seeks to illustrate how supranational gender norms are integrated in each country’s official curriculum.

The analyses of the current situation of gender issues and their inclusion in the national curricular documents can inspire the future revision of national curricula. It also contributes to the adoption of the topic into school-level curricula through the comparison of the documents from different countries and can identify possible next steps in the inclusion of this topic.

This study aims to answer these research questions:

- 1) How do national curricular documents conceptualise and address gender and gender equality issues? What categories and classification emerge from analysing the curricular documents?
- 2) How do the selected curricular documents compare to each other in the context of gender and gender equality issues?

1 Gender Equality in the Curriculum

According to Jarkovská and Lišková (2008), research on gender issues in education can be categorised into three areas: research focusing on the influence of education on society and vice versa, as well as the impact on the school system, societal structures and inequalities; research examining relationships and interactions within the classroom; and research addressing educational content. The third area encompasses research on inequalities in the curriculum, such as textbooks, the language used and syllabi.

This study analyses curricular documents developed at the national level (Dvořák, 2012). Gender and gender equality topics can be introduced in schools through the intended curriculum expressed in official national curricular documents. This study relies on Lawton's (1975) concept of the curriculum as a selection from culture and society, in which not everything can be included, and employs the theory of policy borrowing (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012) as its theoretical framework.

Policy borrowing explores the interplay between global educational trends (e.g., focus on gender equality and other aspects of gender issues in education – OECD, 2022) and their adaptation to local contexts. The theory of policy borrowing and lending explores the process of transfer of educational policies across borders and their adoptions within local contexts (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012). This process involves “reception and translation”, where global trends are interpreted through the lens of national priorities and sociocultural dynamics (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014). Part of the process is also the selection of parts of policies that resonate with local discourse (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012). As some of the global or supranational policies become priorities, some countries may commit to them rhetorically, but not implement them in actual practise, which creates a discrepancy in policies and practices (Unterhalter & Northcote, 2018). Applying this framework to gender equality in curricula, the study investigates how international discourses on integrating gender into curricula are reflected and adapted in the educational policies of the selected countries and aims to uncover how global educational trends concerning gender are reshaped within diverse national contexts.

Elwood (2016) looked at the relationship between a curriculum and gender from a broader perspective, explaining that curriculum is not “neutral”; quite the opposite – it contains inequalities that affect educational experience. She suggested considering the cultural and social contexts and structures of both gender and the curriculum and taking these into account within the curriculum to create a more effective learning experience.

Integrating a gender perspective not only leads towards real changes when it comes to its effects on students but also increases awareness of the conveying of curricular knowledge (Palmén et al., 2020). For example, a gender-sensitive curriculum, i.e., a curriculum which integrates perspectives and examples of people of all genders as well as integrates gender issues within its content, “can enhance the cultivation of knowledge, skills and values” (Manchenko et al., 2022, p. 6049).

Transforming educational policies and societal discourses connected to gender issues is not an easy process. The integration of gender issues into the curriculum faces much resistance, not only externally but also within schools. Teaching staff sometimes perceive these issues as trivial and feel that their integration into the curriculum will not have any effect and that gender issues are not relevant to their field of expertise (Verge et al., 2018).

Looking specifically at curricular documents, a comparative study of three European countries (Austria, Hungary and Czechia), which analysed gender in curricular documents in the context of legislative and strategic documents dealing with education, presents the first results of such analysis in the European context. The study performed a critical examination of if and how the curricula of the selected countries follow the country's policies and if it integrates gender issues within the curricula. The attitudes of the three countries varied significantly, and the study shows that the policies often do not correspond with the form of the curricular documents, highlighting prevailing inequalities in education in all three countries (Krišová, 2019; Rédei & Sáfrány, 2019).

While gender topics and gender equality issues in education are covered quite heavily in academic literature, less attention has been paid to systematic research on gender issues in curricular documents. The focus is mostly on analysing textbooks and other educational materials (Çela, 2016; Sadeghi & Maleki, 2016), or the curriculum in the broader sense of a study programme (Dvořák, 2012), in the context of integrating gender issues (Banegas et al., 2020; Gaida et al., 2020). More comprehensive research and analysis of different curricular documents could help not only to further research on gender equality in education, but also to support different actors in education when designing and implementing curricular documents.

The position of this study falls on the premise that education systems benefit from explicit attention to gender issues, which corresponds with feminist and critical policy perspectives (Marshall, 2018). The interpretation of the results reflects an assumption that addressing gender roles, stereotypes and inequalities is necessary for fostering inclusive learning environments.

2 Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods methodological approach that allows a complex understanding of a phenomenon, provides additional perspective and allows for comparison (Doyle et al., 2016). The type of the research is document analysis, which involves skimming, reading and interpreting documents (national curricular documents) to yield data and insights. It provides background information and context, identifies key issues and supplements other research methods (Bowen, 2009). After setting criteria for document selection, the documents were collected, and key areas of analysis were formulated before the process of coding and analysis (Wach & Ward, 2013). In this study, quantitative and qualitative content analysis was used

to present both comparable quantitative data and in-depth qualitative analysis. The qualitative content analysis was employed to make replicable and valid inferences by interpreting and coding textual material (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), allowing for the analyses of the documents in the context of terms or phrases that were used to present and describe gender issues and equality issues in the documents. The instances of gender issues were categorised in order to understand how they can be integrated (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). In addition to the qualitative analysis, frequency analysis was employed to quantify the number of occurrences of specific gender-related terms and phrases within the curricular documents (Neuendorf, 2002) to formulate statistical results of the analysis to better map out the occurrences and to allow for the comparison of the chosen documents (Franzosi, 2008). All instances of gender issues were coded on the same level (see chapter 2.3 Data analysis). This provided a measure of how often gender issues were explicitly mentioned, helping to reveal differences in how each country addresses these topics and to compare the curricular documents with each other. This step provided quantitative data to complement the qualitative data.

2.1 Data Selection

Purposive sampling was used when selecting the documents to be studied, which provides for a selection of cases because of the specific qualities that it possesses (Etikan, 2016). The hypothesis, based on previous research, was that countries with different levels of gender equality measured by the Gender Equality Index (GEI) would also approach curriculum development differently. Furthermore, two practical criteria were added. Thus, the criteria for the selection of the national curricular documents were the following:

- a) placement of the country of origin at different positions across the whole Gender Equality Index (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023),
- b) availability of an official English translation,
- c) full-text format with open access.

Four countries were selected based on these criteria. According to the GEI by the European Institute for Gender Equality (2023), Czechia ranks 25th overall (third from the bottom) with a score of 57.9 and ranks 16th in the Knowledge domain (i.e., the domain encompassing education), presenting the biggest difference between its overall score and its score in the Knowledge domain. Estonia appears in the lower half of the index, ranking 22nd overall with a score of 60.2 and ranking 22nd in the Knowledge domain. Ireland ranks ninth overall with a score of 73 and ranks sixth in the Knowledge domain. Sweden ranks first in the Gender Equality Index overall with a score of 82.2 and also ranks first in the Knowledge domain.

6 Table 1 Brief characteristics of analysed documents (Dvořák et al., 2018)

Country	Document	Date	Total No of pages	Main features
Czechia	<i>Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education</i>	2004–2007 Various versions of original document 2023 Version after “minor” revision (analysed)	164	Representative of the “new curriculum” oriented towards outcomes and general competences with considerable autonomy of schools. The so-called “minor” revision updated the teaching of digital skills, to be followed by a “major” revision of other domains.
Estonia	<i>National curriculum for basic schools</i>	2014 Introduction and subject curricula	317	The latest (so far) in a series of reform curricula following the country’s restoration of independence from the Soviet Union. Considered as a successful balance between ensuring access to equally high-quality general education for all and, at the same time, autonomous space for schools, as well as one of the reasons for the Estonia students’ success in international comparisons.
Ireland	<i>Primary School Curriculum</i>	1999 Introduction and subject curricula	1079	The primary education curriculum has only undergone modernization in the area of language teaching since 1999 and is currently undergoing a review and redevelopment. The lower secondary education curriculum, published gradually in the 2010s, has brought an emphasis on literacy, key competences, flexibility, choice and pupil wellbeing.
	<i>Framework for Junior Cycle</i>	2012, revised 2015 Introduction 2017–2023 Subject curricula		
Sweden	<i>Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and school-age educare</i>	2008 First version 2018 Updated version (analysed)	303	The result of a neoconservative curricular reform, implemented in schools since 2011 (known as Lgr11), seeking to hybridize global competency and traditional continental content focus.

2.2 Documents Analysed

The national curriculum for compulsory education in Czechia (Table 1) consists of one document covering all the subjects taught at elementary school plus a general introduction to the educational system and to the Czech school as an institution. The Estonian national curriculum consists of a general introductory curricular document for elementary school and 13 individual curricular documents, each for a specific

subject.¹ The Irish national curriculum consists of a general introductory document and an individual document for each subject taught at the given level of education. On the primary education level, this study analyses the introductory document and curricular documents for ten curriculum areas, while for lower secondary level it analyses the introductory document and curricular documents for five “core” subjects that are compulsory for all students (Department of Education, n.d.).² The Swedish national curricular document consists of one document encompassing general information about the school as an institution and individual subjects.³

2.3 Data Analysis

Both deductive and inductive coding were used to systematically examine the documents. The deductive coding was based on theoretical sensitivity through which it was possible to draw concepts and apply them to the data that were analysed (Glaser & Holton, 2004). Inductive coding allowed the emergence of new themes and categories from the data and identified the structural components of the curriculum that were not predetermined but surfaced during the analysis (Williams & Moser, 2019). The documents were analysed through preliminary coding to allow for the refinement of codes before applying them to the entire dataset, ensuring greater accuracy and consistency in the subsequent analysis.

For this study, national curricular documents were analysed to find all instances that deal with the topic of gender, gender equality, and specific aspects of gender issues. Together with specific instances of phrases containing the term “gender”, other terms and phrases that were analysed were those connected to equality (only in cases where it was clear it also concerned gender equality), instances that mentioned men and women (boys and girls) and instances that mentioned sex (only if it was mentioned as a sociological concept).

One instance means each individual gender and/or equality issue regardless of the number of words. For example, one instance can be: *gender*; *gender stereotypes*; *men and women*. In cases where more of these issues are listed one after another, each one is coded as one instance, for example: *explain the nature of gender roles and describe gender-stereotyping attitudes* contains two instances (gender roles; gender stereotypes). When citing the excerpts from the curricular documents, the incidences can be presented in the sentences or parts of sentences for context.

¹ Estonia's subjects are: *language and literature*; *foreign languages*; *mathematics*; *natural science*; *social studies*; *art subjects*; *technology*; *physical education*; *religious studies*; *informatics*; *career education*; *entrepreneurship studies*; *descriptions of cross-curricular topics*.

² Irish subjects for primary school are: *visual arts*; *drama*; *music*; *primary language*; *mathematics*; *history*; *geography*; *science*; *physical education*; *social, personal, and health education*. Irish core subjects for Junior cycle are: *English*; *Irish*; *mathematics*; *history*; and *wellbeing*.

³ For the purposes of this study the analysis did not include the parts of the documents that covered the *Preschool class*, so the text that is analysed is comparable for all four countries.

3 Results

This chapter presents an introductory analysis of each curriculum, the overall attitude towards gender issues within the curriculum of each country and the four main categories that were created to map the presence and organise how gender issues appear in the curricula: 1) *terms and phrases*, 2) *subject*, 3) *structural components of the curriculum* and 4) *the gender dimension in educational content*. The first category analyses the terminology and specific language each curriculum uses to address and discuss gender issues and helps identify how the curricular documents choose to integrate, describe and present gender in the educational framework. The second category maps where gender-related topics appear across educational areas and subjects, revealing possible gaps (e.g., limited coverage in STEM subjects). The third category organises gender issues into structural components of the curriculum, encompassing broader pedagogical approaches, as well as educational goals and values of the curriculum. The fourth category addresses instances of the gender dimension in educational content which aims to eliminate or limit inequalities (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.-a), enhance critical thinking, improve learning outcomes, or address gender stereotypes (Korsvik & Rustad, 2018).

3.1 Gender and Curricular Documents

The Czech curriculum uses a binary view of gender, focusing on male/female dichotomy. It does not explore intersectional or spectrum-based views of gender, and it does not elaborate on gender identity or diverse expressions beyond male/female roles. It follows traditional division of gender roles and conveys a conservative message – the importance of men and women treating each other politely – while it does not explore gender as a category, power balance or gender diversity. It uses outdated terminology for issues connected to gender identity which may suggest that the curriculum either implicitly assigns a negative connotation to the issues or that it does not consider the issues important enough to update the content of the curriculum.

The Estonian curriculum also references the male/female dichotomy and does not contain any mentions of gender identities. It highlights the importance of gender equality and discusses gender stereotypes, gender differences or gender roles, but all of these are mostly focused on the conventional dichotomy of men and women and do not recognise a broader gender spectrum.

The Irish curriculum mostly references gender issues as men/women issues, but this binary is transitioning to a broader understanding of gender in some of the newly published curricular documents for individual subjects. When addressing gender issues, the curriculum in some cases promotes critical thinking and reflection of gender relations, gender identity and stereotypes.

The Swedish curriculum addresses gender in its complexity and encourages both teachers and students to critically analyse the binary norms, relationships and identities. In the curriculum, gender is understood as a spectrum more than a binary. The

document promotes a proactive approach in exploring, analysing and understanding gender issues, which are embedded across the whole curricular documents, not as a standalone topic, but as one of the key principles of education.

3.2 Terms and Phrases

The Czech curricular document contains 13 instances of terms connected with gender issues (Figure 1). The document mostly uses generalised language, and potential gender issues are to be found in broader topics such as equality. The document does not diversify its terminology, and it does not contain a single use of the term *gender*. Instead, the Czech curriculum replaces this term with the term *sex* (in some cases the term *gender* would be better suited for the documents, e.g., “forming positive relationships with the opposite sex at school and outside school”, Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, 2023, p. 53). The curriculum contains a phrase “sexual identity disorders” (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, 2023, p. 93), which, from the context, refers to gender dysphoria (Claahsen-Van Der Grinten et al., 2021), previously called gender identity disorder. The term was changed in 2013 to align with other terminology and to remove the connotation of the word disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Retaining this term can stigmatise individuals experiencing gender dysphoria and produce stereotypes about this diagnosis.

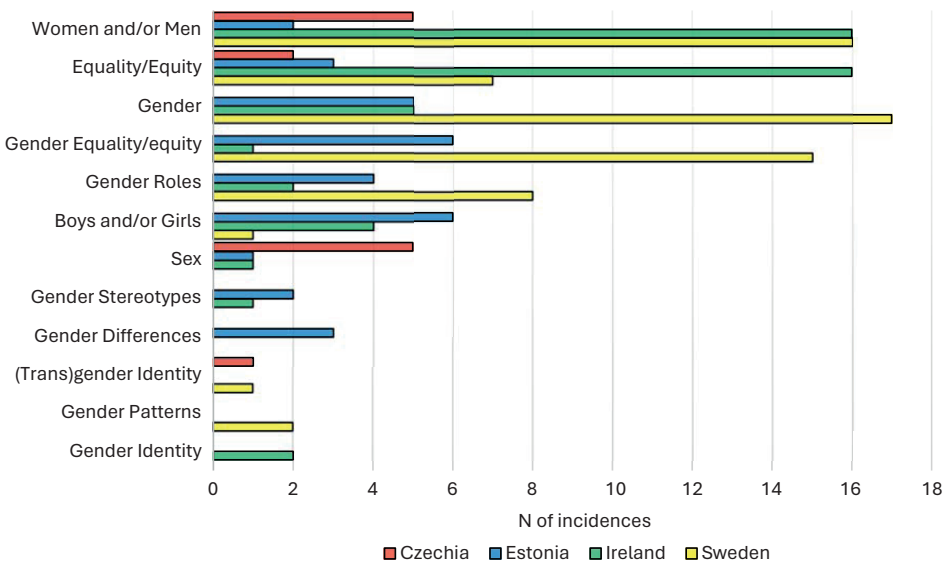


Figure 1 Incidences of terms and phrases in curricular documents by country

Note. The numbers presented in Figure 1 are absolute, they represent the total number of all incidences found in each country's document(s).

The Estonian curricular documents have a total of 32 instances of terms related to issues of gender and gender equality. Estonia's curriculum reflects a diverse but moderate use of gender-related terms. The actual number of instances is not very high, but the documents contain a range of different aspects of gender topics, e.g., gender differences, gender roles, gender stereotypes ("name and value positive traits in themselves and others and understand the peculiarities of individuals, gender differences and special needs of people", Ministry of Education and Research, 2014, p. 16).

The Irish curricular documents feature 31 instances of gender-related terms. While there are some instances of terms detailing specific gender issues (i.e., gender roles, gender identity), and the overall set of terms and phrases used in the curricular documents is diverse, most of the instances in the Irish curricular documents are localised within two general groups – women and/or men, and equality ("A central aim of education is to ensure equality of opportunity for all children", Ireland & National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999c, p. 28). The documents show a considerable emphasis on addressing issues related to both women and men.

The Swedish curricular document stands out with a total of 67 instances of various gender-related terms. The curriculum uses a wide range of phrases, both general (women and/or men, gender, gender equality) and specific terms for aspects of gender issues (gender roles, gender patterns, transgender), reflecting a nuanced approach to gender topics. Sweden's use of diverse terms indicates a comprehensive integration of gender issues into the curricular documents ("developing students' ability to critically examine gender patterns and how they can restrict people's life choices and living conditions", Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018, p. 7).

3.3 Subjects

The Czech curricular document covers in total seven subjects or educational areas (Figure 2) and each contains only minimal instances of terms concerning gender. Most instances are found in social science subjects or areas as well as in physical and health education, where the document several times mentions "respect for the opposite sex" during sport activities but does not specify what that entails (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, 2023, p. 98).

Despite the higher number of instances on the topic of issues of gender and gender equality, the Estonian curricular documents accumulate most of these instances in one subject: social studies. In total, these topics can be found in four subjects. One of these subjects is technology (career and technical education), which focuses on the equal distribution of knowledge and skills to both boys and girls, highlighting that technology and STEM subjects are often accompanied by stereotypes and prejudice leading to low participation of female students (e.g., "The division into study groups is not gender-based", Ministry of Education and Research, 2014m, p. 2).

The Irish curriculum mostly integrates topics relating to gender or gender equality into subjects within social studies and the humanities & arts. In history (humanities

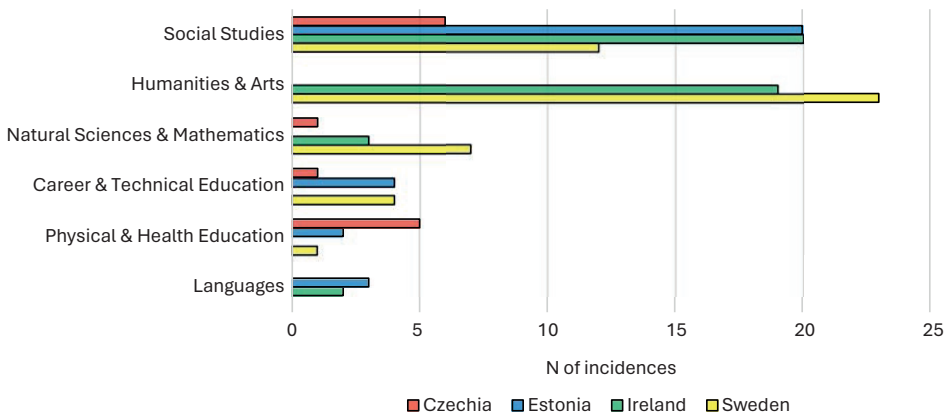


Figure 2 Subject areas containing gender issues by country

Note. The numbers presented in Figure 2 are absolute, they represent the total number of all incidences found in each country's document(s).

& arts), the content of education analyses the different conditions and life journeys of men and women while also opening a space for discussing gender aspects of historical events (“explain how the experience of women in Irish society changed during the twentieth century”, Department of Education and Skills, 2017b, p. 17). Gender issues and topics are integrated into six subjects in total.

The Swedish curriculum mentions gender equality as one of the cross-disciplinary areas that should be integrated into different subjects (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018, p. 17), but also specifically includes these topics and in several subjects (10 subjects in total). Most instances are found in the social sciences and humanities and arts subjects, but there is also an example in music, which contains an instance of the gender dimension in education, demonstrating that most if not all subjects have room to integrate this topic (“The functions of music to signify identity and group affiliation in different cultures, with a focus on ethnicity and gender”, Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018, p. 162).

3.4 Structural Components of the Curriculum

In the Czech curricular document, gender issues are primarily addressed within learning outcomes (“forming positive relationships with the opposite sex in the school environment and outside school”, Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, 2023, p. 54). Gender issues also appear in the structural components encompassing the educational content and description of a school subject. Gender issues are not present outside the parts of the curriculum that deal with school subjects/educational areas (Figure 3).

The structural components that are covered are quite diversified in the Estonian curricular documents, spreading throughout the educational process. The documents

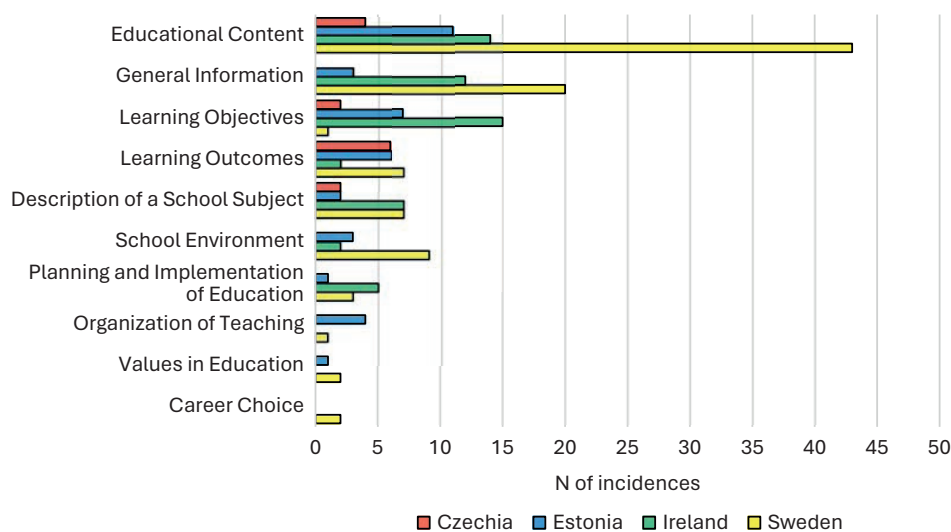


Figure 3 Structural components of the curriculum by country

Note. The numbers presented in Figure 3 are absolute, they represent the total number of all incidences found in each country's document(s).

mostly integrate the issues of gender and gender equality into educational content and learning outcomes and objectives. The curricular documents focus on the values of equality in education, highlighting this need not only in the school environment but also in the planning and implementation of education (“study is organised according to a project-based format, incl. projects that connect different subjects and areas of life, cooperation with businesses, and cooperation between boys and girls in home economics, handicraft, and technology studies”, Ministry of Education and Research, 2014m, p. 8).

The Irish curricular documents mostly integrate gender issues into the educational content and focus on them as an objective of learning (“Changing roles of women in the 19th and 20th centuries”, Ireland & National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999c, p. 55). Integrating gender equality into the planning and implementation of education also appears in curricular documents. As with previous categories in the Irish curriculum, gender issues are present only in a portion of the structural components of the curriculum.

The Swedish curricular document mostly integrates gender issues and topics into the educational content, specifically topics concerning gender and gender equality. 20 instances of gender issues can be found in the part of the curricular document that contains general and introductory information. Other instances relate to the school environment (e.g., promoting the principles of gender equality, cooperation between students, etc.), learning outcomes and within the descriptions of school subjects. Most instances of gender and other connected issues appear in the in-

troductory part of the document, where they present values, the principles and function of the school, describe the ideal planning and organising of education and address the responsibilities of school employees (“The school should therefore organise education so that pupils meet and work together, and test and develop their abilities and interests, with the same opportunities and on equal terms, regardless of gender”, Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018, p. 7)

3.5 The Gender Dimension in Educational Content

Czechia offers one instance of the gender dimension in educational content, which is very generally phrased (“equal opportunities within the labour market”, Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, 2023, p. 110 and similarly to the previous examples, may not be construed as an opportunity to teach about different perspectives if the teacher does not consider that there are, in fact, different opportunities for women and men.

Two of the subjects in the Estonian curricular documents that contain gender issues integrate the gender dimension into educational content, which in most cases is presented very generally and without a specific context of explanation (“relations between boys and girls”, Ministry of Education and Research, 2014f, p. 32).

Irish curriculum illustrates an effort to incorporate the gender dimension into educational content. It offers substantial examples of gender perspectives within the curriculum. The Irish curricular documents present the gender dimension both in a broad context and in specific examples (“recognise unequal treatment of sexual roles and other issues in literature, advertising, drama, magazines and other media”, Ireland & National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999h, p. 66).

The Swedish curricular document integrates the gender dimension and offers different views and experiences throughout several subjects, with some instances going into great detail (“How cultural attitudes towards technology have an impact on men’s and women’s choice of occupation and use of technology”, Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018, p. 300).

4 Discussion

The *Czech Strategy for the Education Policy of the Czech Republic up to 2030+* (Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, 2020) focuses on gender being considered, eliminating gender stereotypes and incorporating gender topics into education content. Estonia’s *Education strategy 2021–2035* (Ministry of Education and Research, 2021) promotes gender being considered in the education process. Similarly, Ireland indicates equality as one of the key components to tackle in the following years in its *Statement of Strategy 2023–2025* (Department of Education, 2023). The *Gender Equality Policy in Sweden* (2024) specifically mentions the curriculum for compulsory education, stating that all schools should “actively and consciously further equal

14 rights and opportunities” as well as “counteract traditional gender norms”. The education strategies, or equality strategies that also focus on education, of all the countries that were analysed place the emphasis on the importance of equality.

All four countries integrate some topics and issues connected to gender into their national curricular documents, but they vary across all the categories presented here, as well as in the overall attitude towards integrating gender issues and topics into the curricular documents. While Sweden, Ireland and Estonia follow their educational or equality strategy policy documents and show an effort to incorporate gender, Czechia’s curricular document, despite its educational strategy specifically mentioning gender in educational content, avoids the term ‘gender’ and dealing with gender issues. Sweden’s results in this analysis correspond with its score in the GEI, leading in all the categories and overall presenting a comprehensive approach towards integrating gendered content into curricular documents. Ireland scores high in the GEI, but the results in this study, especially compared to Sweden, do not correspond as it displays only a moderate effort at integrating gender and gender equality issues, mostly in the general sense of equality. The Irish curricular documents also match the results for the Estonian curricular documents in some categories. While Estonia ranks low in the GEI, both overall and in the Knowledge domain, it also shows similar efforts to the Irish curricular documents, lacking significantly only in the category of subjects in which gender issues are present. Czechia scores the lowest in the overall GEI, but ranks 16th in the Knowledge domain, which does not correspond with its results in this study. Czechia’s curricular document falls behind in all the categories, and the analysis shows that it could contribute to sustaining or even reproducing gender stereotypes. The Czech curricular document underwent a major revision, and the new Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education was accepted in December 2024. The new curricular document integrates gender issues into the content, using more diverse terminology (gender identity, gender roles) and integrating these issues also within the learning outcomes (Národní pedagogický institut České republiky, 2025), although the integration of these issues remains limited both in the total number of incidences and in the diversity of presented gender issues.

The results illustrate that the incorporation of global educational trends concerning gender equality of each country into their curricular frameworks happens selectively and in ways that reflect local discourses that can also be seen in the results of the different domains of the Gender Equality Index. With its extensive and explicit references to gender equality, Sweden exemplifies substantive borrowing, which corresponds with Sweden’s top ranking on the Gender Equality Index and its longstanding national focus on equality. Sweden integrates gender issues both into its educational policies and strategies, as well as its curricular documents. Ireland adopts a selective policy borrowing and/or partial translation, framing gender issues in a more general context, despite its high ranking within the GEI, which suggests a strong focus on gender equality. It is possible that this gap will be reduced within the new curricular documents. Estonia also expresses selective borrowing, in this case the result suggests strategic translation – gender issues are covered but contained

within a small number of subjects. This corresponds with Estonia's lower results in the GEI, which suggest a deficient interest in gender issues. Czechia illustrates a rhetorical adaptation of trends concerning gender issues in education. While Czech policies and strategies mention these issues in some detail, the curricular documents integrate them in a very limited and narrow way. This suggests that actors in Czechia realize that trends connected to gender issues are being highlighted as priorities supranationally, but they are not priorities locally and they do not resonate with local discourse.

The methods employed in this study offered a robust framework for exploring how gender issues are integrated into national curricular documents using both qualitative and quantitative methods for in-depth understanding and measurable comparison. The methods are limited, focusing only on the intended curriculum, while the teaching practices may differ significantly. The frequency analysis provides quantitative data on the occurrence of gender-related terms, but it does not consider the context or the lengths of the curricular documents of each country. A high frequency of specific terms does not necessarily indicate a deep or positive engagement with gender issues. The study does not analyse the actual implementation of the curricular documents – such analysis would be a recommended next step in the research concerning gender in curriculum. The qualitative content analysis inherently involves the researcher's interpretation, which introduces a degree of subjectivity, and while this study employed methods to ensure its validity, the choice of methods does carry a risk of lower validity.

5 Conclusion

Gender equality is a priority for education policies at the supranational level and an important topic for all the selected countries, yet the approach towards the integration of gender issues into the curriculum varies widely, with some of the analysed countries falling behind in both their national educational or equality strategies and their ranking in the Gender Equality Index.

Sweden's curriculum demonstrates the most comprehensive integration, addressing gender issues across various subjects and through detailed thematic aspects, which aligns with its high ranking in the Gender Equality Index. In contrast, Ireland, despite its strong overall performance on the Index, adopts a more generalised approach, often addressing gender in broader equality contexts. Estonia's curriculum, although it covers fewer subjects, highlights a commitment to addressing gender issues within social studies and technology, reflecting some alignment with Estonian education strategies. Czechia, however, presents a contrast, with minimal inclusion of gender issues and a tendency to maintain gender stereotypes, diverging from its national education policies.

The results illustrate that the integration of gender issues in education from a supranational level to a local level to a practise does not happen in a vacuum, but

- 16 rather within country's sociocultural backdrop, aligning with arguments that the contents of curricular documents are never neutral. Rather, they reflect local conceptions of what knowledge and values should be prioritised. Gender mainstreaming is amongst the global trends that gain resistance, remain under-realised or only symbolically referenced.

Future curriculum development should focus on ensuring that gender issues are not only acknowledged but deeply embedded across all subjects and within all the aspects of the curriculum, fostering a more inclusive and equal learning environment for all students. Further research could explore how the curriculum that is implemented reflects these gender-sensitive policies and identify best practices for translating policy into classroom reality.

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21

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