

Women may choose to enter certain occupations or change occupations when they anticipate having children, because of their need for more flexible working arrangements, which are more readily available in some sectors (Gregory and Milner, 2009). For example, in the United Kingdom, women in medicine opt for general practice, which is viewed as a clinically inferior specialty, because it is considered more family-friendly. Women doctors who start off in hospital medicine often switch to general practice in their late twenties and early thirties as they contemplate having children (Crompton and Lyonette, 2010). In male-dominated sectors where flexible working arrangements are less feasible because of an expectation that staff will work long hours, mothers tend to leave the workplace entirely, which reinforces occupational segregation (Cha, 2013). As further discussed in Chapter II, women who wish to reduce their hours of work are limited to a very narrow range of occupations.

Sex segregation in the subject of study chosen by students, as opposed to the level of educational attainment, is a major factor in occupational segregation. At the same time, the decision to pursue a specific field of study and work is heavily influenced by culture and society (Favara, 2012; Barone, 2011; Mastekaas and Smeby, 2008). As such, combating gender stereotypes and norms from an early age is crucial in encouraging girls to break into male-dominated subjects. Initiatives, such as those presented in box 2, that involve educational programmes, training, mentorship and exposure can encourage more young women as well as young men to make choices that may challenge gender norms by bringing them into non-stereotypical fields of study and work.

Box 2 Programmes that combat stereotypes need to target boys as well

Countries such as Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, the Netherlands and Sweden have adopted initiatives to address gender stereotypes through educational programmes with a view to promoting choices that do not fall in line with gender norms. Historically, such initiatives have targeted young girls, aiming to bring them into male-dominated fields of work (Bettio and Verashchagina, 2009). Several European countries have also adopted initiatives that target both young girls and boys and aim to encourage them to make choices that are non-stereotypical. In Austria, the Ministry of Social Affairs sponsors “Boys’ Days”, in which boys between the ages 14 and 18 spend a day participating in work in schools and hospitals. The event aims to encourage boys to enter into social and educational professions, as only three in ten workers in this sector are men (Council of Europe, 2015).

2. Offering training to women and men to enter into non-stereotypical fields

One way to recruit more women into male-dominated sectors and occupations and more men into female-dominated sectors and occupations is to provide training that actively encourages employment in a specific field. In particular, training programmes that are fully funded and are directly tied to employment opportunities are particularly effective in targeting women and men who are beginning their studies or are entering the labour market. This is of particular importance for fields in which women and men are traditionally overrepresented.

As a study on men in childcare services has shown, enrolment in a well-structured training programme, receiving advice from those working in the field and, above all, internship experiences encourage men to enter such traditionally female-dominated fields as childcare (Pirard et al., 2015). In this way, training programmes that actively recruit men in female-dominated occupations may increase men’s employment. For instance, since 2001, the Men in Childcare Scotland Group has successfully trained 1,200 men and has increased men’s employment in early childhood care and education by offering at least a one-year funded training course exclusively to men (Cameron, 2013; Cameron and Moss, 2007). Such schemes have the additional benefit of exposing children – and their parents – to male caregiver role models, thus further eroding gender stereotypes (Peeters, 2007). In addition, the promotion of decent work in highly female-dominated occupations would not only encourage men to enter into these professions, but also reduce the existing inequalities between women and men deriving from the concentration of women in certain lower paid occupations (see Chapter II).