



# **ECaRoM – Early Care and the Role of Men**

## **NATIONAL REPORT**

### **ITALY**

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## EcaRom Country Report Italy by



\*This report is the result of the collaboration of the respective authors, however with regards to the allocation of the various sections we specify as follows:

The following chapters are by Antonio Raimondo di Grigoli: chapter 2.2 Research on the state of the art; chapter 3. Results of qualitative Analysis; annex 6.1 Bibliographical table.

The following chapters are by Erika Bernacchi: 2.1. Policy context; 2.3. Good practices.

Introduction and concluding remarks and recommendations were written jointly by the three authors.

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## 1. Introduction

The topic of gender-sensitive education is still the subject of great debate today and considered an international priority. UNICEF's Gender Action Plan (GAP)<sup>1</sup> reports that young and adolescent girls and boys do not currently enjoy the same rights and opportunities, given our social context is sustained by a power structure that produces inequalities between the genders; these impact girls and women to a greater degree, yet boys and men are also involved (GAP, 2017, p. 3). In Italy, recent data from ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics) report that about 7% of people agree with the statement “it is acceptable for a teenage boy or man to hit his girlfriend if she has flirted with other boys or men” or “men are less suited to housework and have a greater inclination toward economic success than women”. This percentage rises as the age of the interviewed people increases (ISTAT, 2019, in Ghigi, 2019, pp 31-32). The strategic actions proposed in the GAP primarily aim to illustrate the consequences of such inequalities on girls and promote educational actions that involve men (for example, in care roles) (GAP, p. 7). It also highlights the importance of implementing practices that do not discriminate on a gender basis starting in early childhood (idem, p. 18).

A question arises at this point as to how it is possible to create a gender-sensitive education from early childhood. Furthermore, how can we educate men, from early childhood, about models of masculinity that find their place in a system of intra- and inter-gender relations free from models of “domination” (Bourdieu, 1998) or “hegemonic masculinity”? (Connell, 1995).

In raising the question of gender sensitive education from early childhood, we must come to terms with a reality dominated by a relationship between masculine and feminine of an opposite and complementary type (Gighi, Sassatelli, 2018), one in which there is a marked asymmetry between the genders, determined by stereotypes which, contrary to popular belief, are reflected in girls and boys from early childhood. Around 18-24 months, children are already able to recognise gender based on external appearance, such as hair and clothing (Katcher, 1955, in Fornari, 2017, p. 65).

Adults provide portrayals of gender in accordance with the double standard model, that is, in keeping with the idea that girls and boys must behave according to gender standards based on a binary model (Thomas, 1959; Bourdieu, 1998). Boys and girls may accept these portrayals to different degrees by virtue of the fact that they are not “cultural dopes” (Garfinkel, 1967) – meaning that from early childhood, boys and girls are not passive agents, but rather actively participate in building their gender identities. For example, we see this occur in their play activities (such as cross-dressing), experimenting with their gender performance, at times adhering to traditional gender roles, while in other cases acting without regard for prescribed social roles (Ghigi, 2009, p. 326).

In such a debate, it becomes more difficult to tackle the question of educating boys beyond the heteronormative model, while looking into the significance of the power dynamics that frame gender relations starting in early childhood (Scott, 1986). Exploring gender sensitive

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<sup>1</sup> The Gender Action Plan (GAP), which is part of the UNICEF Strategic Plan (2018-2021), aims to foster gender equality for girls and women in agreement with the “Convention on the Rights of the Child”. For more information, the document may be accessed at the following address: <<https://data.unicef.org/resources/gender-action-plan/>> Viewed on 10/10/2021.

education models also means including the masculine and the relationship between caring and masculinity starting in early childhood, encouraging a model of caring masculinities so as to develop new inter- and intra-gender relations starting with the masculine (Elliot, 2020).

While the path that led us to reflect on gender from a feminine perspective has encountered a number of obstacles, the processes for deconstructing normative male education are also stymied, and often are not even considered. This is demonstrated by the meagre attention devoted to this matter, at least in the context of Italy, starting with the lack of scientific publications on the subject, or projects that reveal a deliberate intention to deal with the “question of masculinity”. What is more, current legislation on education for children ages 0-6 highlights the importance of educating toward gender equality, but lacks clear instructions for educators, who often find themselves groping in the dark when it comes to a gender-sensitive approach to boys.

On the basis of the findings of the state of the art in relation to gender education in early childhood services and, specifically, to education aimed at caring models of masculinity, the European funded project ECaRoM aims at strengthening the connection between boys, masculinities and care. The main objective of this project is to support egalitarian socialisation environment in kindergartens and primary schools, which could inspire boys to caring practices and attitudes in private life and in society in general, potentially also in their further educational choices. ECaRoM project includes the following partners: Dissens Institut für Bildung und Forschung e.V. – Germany as project coordinator, Verein für Männer- und Geschlechterthemen Steiermark – Austria, The Peace Institute – Slovenia, Istituto degli Innocenti – Italy, Center of Women's Studies and Policies – Bulgaria, Center for Equality Advancement – Lithuania.

This report is composed of two parts: the first is devoted to a desk review in which we have first analysed the legal framework that regulates early childhood educational and care services (ECECs)<sup>2</sup> in Italy, seeking to identify both strengths and weaknesses in gender-sensitive education from a perspective of the relationship between care and masculinity. We have included in the review scientific publications and projects on a national scale that contain good practices relating to gender-sensitive education and the relationship between masculinity and care. In the second part, we carried out qualitative research by conducting interviews with ECEC educators and focus groups with experts in the academic world, community organisations, and coordinators of 0-6 services, to pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses of a pedagogical system that still struggles to accept gender sensitive education programmes, especially for very young children. The work done in the interviews was developed further by distributing checklists among the educators with the two purposes: to observe their actions in the field and to provide “suggestions” of good practices to implement in their everyday work.

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<sup>2</sup> ECECs (Early Childhood Education and Care services) in the acronym used internationally.

## 2. State of the art on gender sensitive education in ECEC services

### 2.1 Policy context

ECEC services emerge as settings that contribute in a significant way to constructing children's identities, especially in a phase of their lives which is considered to be optimal for the development of cognitive, interpersonal, and emotional skills. Compared with previous Italian regulations, which differentiated between ECEC services 0-3 and 3-6, Italian **Legislative Decree no. 65 of 13 April 2017, Guidelines for the Integrated System for Ages 0-6<sup>3</sup>**, consolidated the developmental pathway for children ages 3-6, giving it continuity. This followed an entire series of considerations on the concept of the child as a competent, active, and interactive individual, and not just as an individual in need of protection and care, as was believed until a few decades earlier (Catarsi, Fortunati, 2004).

While services for ages 0-3 and ages 3-6 have kept the differences in their curricula based on the specific needs pertaining to the children's age groups, the introduction of the Integrated System provides that they work within a system of educational continuity (Maggiolini, Zanfroni, 2019, p. 94). Services for ages 0-3 are managed directly and indirectly by local authorities, by other public bodies, or by private individuals, based on the criteria set out in central and regional regulations. The Ministry of Education is generally responsible for allocating financial resources to the local authorities, offering educational guidelines, and promoting the integrated system at a local level. ECEC services 3-6, on the other hand, fall under the responsibility of the MIUR (Ministry of Education, University, and Research).

Regarding the issues of gender and care, in recent years there has been important progress both in the regulatory provision and in the implementation of educational interventions in schools that promote the fight against gender stereotypes and gender-based violence, however these interventions rarely include a perspective explicitly based on masculinity studies and even less so when considering the target audience of ECEC services.

As for the education system as a whole, in recent years regulatory provisions have been introduced that explicitly refer to the theme of gender, declined in different ways (promotion of gender equality, prevention of gender-based violence...). **Law no. 107 of July 13, 2015**, Reform of the national education and training system and delegation for the reorganization of existing legislative provisions - so-called "reform of the good school" - provides that: "The three-year plan of the educational offer ensures the implementation of the principles of equal opportunities by promoting in schools of all levels education for gender equality, the prevention of gender violence and all discriminations" also with reference to **Law 119/2013** on combating gender violence, so-called law on f sarà molto difficile tanteemincide. It is precisely to implement the law that in 2015 the "**Extraordinary Action Plan against sexual and gender-**

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<sup>3</sup> Before the 2017 Legislative Decree, regulations on early childhood education divided services into two systems: nurseries for ages 0-3 and preschool for ages 3-6, which were regulated by regional provisions. The Integrated System for Ages 0-6 has been defined by MIUR (Ministry of Education, University, and Research) provisions.

**based violence"** was adopted, which contains, among others, initiatives for the cultural prevention of sexual and gender-based violence.

Also noteworthy are the **2015 Ministry of Education Guidelines "Educating to respect: for gender equality, prevention of gender-based violence and all forms of discrimination"** where reference is made to gender equality and respect for differences, the issue of masculine and feminine language, and the prevention of violence against women and all forms of discrimination.

As regards attention to gender and care in ECEC services, **Legislative Decree no. 65 of 13 April 2017, Guidelines for the Integrated System for Ages 0-6**, lists dialogue, active listening, and interconnection between the self and the other (otherness) as underpinnings of the paradigm of care, which must make reference to aspects of gender, as they influence all areas of individuals' development.

Among the fundamental purposes of early childhood educational services, in addition to promoting such concepts as "identity", "autonomy", and "skills", the concept of "citizenship" is also included:

Children's first experiences of citizenship include discovering the other on their own and giving progressive importance to others and their needs, gaining greater awareness of the need to establish shared rules; this involves their first opportunity to practice dialogue founded on listening to one another, paying attention to the other's point of view and to **gender diversity**, the first recognition of equal rights and responsibilities for all; it means laying the foundations of behaviour that is ethically orientated and respectful of others, the environment, and nature. (p.8).

The guidelines for the integrated system for ages 0-6 stress the importance of attention to gender, as in point 3, titled "Families as partners in an educational alliance", in which:

The presence of parents from other countries helps to broaden the educational vision when differences come together within a perspective of reciprocal openness and respect. It becomes possible to create a shared vocabulary within a cultural framework that promotes such values as **gender equality**, acceptance, peace, democracy, interfaith dialogue, non-negotiable constitutional values." (p.16).

In the section on suggestions for curriculum planning, "Part IV – Curriculum and planning: organisational choices: 1 - Education in ages 0-6: aims and processes":

The primary purpose of education in services for children ages 0-6 is to foster children's growth while supporting their physical, emotional, relational, social, cognitive, and spiritual lives in a balanced way, ensuring that no one aspect is neglected. The foremost aims of education for children in this age group take into consideration: the formulation of a **gender identity** free of stereotypes; progressive attainment of autonomy, meaning not simply an ability to do things on their own, but as a capacity for self-management, initiative, and self-care" (p. 21).

In addition, under point “8 - Social skills and groups”:

The diverse group, according to various criteria such as age, **gender**, interests, and skill level achieved in specific areas, is characterised as a community that lasts and continues over time, in which children come and go, becoming participants in a history that gradually sees beginners become “big kids” and serve as mentors for the new arrivals (p. 26).

In conclusion, the guidelines for the integrated system for ages 0-6 mention promoting gender-sensitive education in the areas of the family, curriculum planning, and organising activities, spaces, and services, giving attention to the socialisation of gender among the children. These recommendations are aimed at an educational approach that encourages girls and boys to express their identities fully, free from gender stereotypes, within an intersectional perspective that includes disabilities and cultural diversity. However, the topic of gender stereotypes is not made clear by means of examples; rather, the concept is taken for granted in consideration of the general purposes of the guidelines and no manuals or guidelines on how to structure activities with children and caregivers are provided, nor is reference made to the matter of the hidden curriculum as an educational issue requiring intervention.

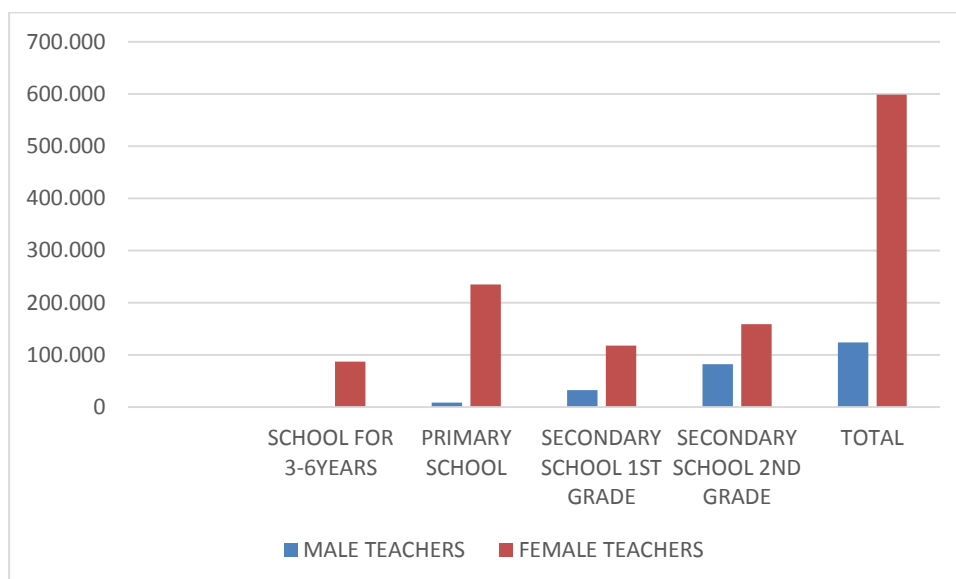
Creating a bridge between the services and families is mentioned as a priority and a primary aim that has led to reflection on how to improve ECEC services both quantitatively and qualitatively. However, the involvement of the children's parents or caregivers by training them on issues of gender and stereotypes is not fully articulated. When they make reference to gender, the guidelines use expressions such as “difference in gender”, “gender equality”, and “gender identity”. Thus, no particular attention is given to the needs of girls (as more disadvantaged than boys) or those of boys. At the same time, no explicit reference is made to non-binary identities. This formulation leaves room for various interpretations which will come up when the guidelines are applied in the services, as our interviews and focus groups have revealed.

To supplement **Legislative Decree no. 65 of 13 April 2017, Guidelines for the Integrated System for Ages 0-6**, the MIUR approved “**National Recommendations and New Scenarios**” in 2018. In this document, at point 5, gender equality is indicated as a goal for the 2030 Agenda, that is, “Achieve gender equality and emancipate all women and girls”.

As for curricula designed for the 0-6 age group, they generally do not envisage any specific focus on gender-sensitive planning. While the legislation lacks regulations regarding explicit attention to gender-sensitive education for boys from early childhood, national- and regional-level projects targeting this goal are in short supply in Italy, with a few exceptions as documented below.

Another important issue is the presence of men in education professions. In line with European trends, this presence decreases exponentially as the age of the children decreases until it becomes almost non-existent in ECEC services. Data collected by the Ministry of Education for ECEC services (3-6 years) indicate the presence of 0.7% of male educators.





## 2.2 Research on the state of the art

In Italy, gender-sensitive education began to carry a certain weight in the 1970s; perhaps the most emblematic date was 1973, which saw the publication of *Dalla parte delle bambine. L'influenza dei condizionamenti sociali nella formazione del ruolo femminile nei primi anni di vita* ("On the side of the girls. The influence of social conditioning on the formation of the female role in the first years of life.") by Elena Gianini Belotti. This book is credited with having revealed processes of gender segregation starting in early childhood, and offered insight into the lives of girls at a time when the feminist movement had placed emphasis on gender-based inequalities, particularly relating to girls. From that emblematic date onward there was a growing interest in schools (and educational systems) in Italy, with a series of analyses highlighting the aspects of educational systems that contribute to constructing gender from a binary, stereotyped perspective (Ulivieri, 1999; 2007) in accordance with what have been defined "gender cages" (Biemmi, Leonelli, 2016).

Before we turn our attention to recent research on a national level, which explores the role of educators and gender-sensitive educational strategies, it will be useful to draw on a brief historical outline of how approaches to gender-sensitive education have evolved.

In accordance with current research and approaches to gender-sensitive education, and given the perspective which the ECaRoM project has adopted, in this report we have taken into consideration the "deconstructionist line of approach". In this approach, individuals are taught to assume a critical stance, such that they begin to view any clichés with "suspicion", such as biased gender distinctions in terms of what is male or female, so as to go beyond stereotyped models (Ghigi, 2019, pp. 61-62).

While the idea of involving men in efforts to fight against the patriarchy has been a concrete reality in the English-speaking world for forty years now (due initially to male pro-feminist activists, and later, through critical studies on masculinity), in Italy it would not catch on until the late 1990s. The first sets of theories were developed from a historical perspective (Vaudagna, 1991; Bellassai, 2004, 2011; Benadusi, 2005) and later, from sociological (Ciccone, 2009, 2020; Fidolini, 2019; Mauceri, 2015; Pacilli, 2020; Rinaldi, 2018; Ruspini, 2009) and philosophical viewpoints (Gasparrini, 2016, 2020). These studies still represent a minority perspective within the field of gender studies, which in itself is a minority in academia. However, in terms of the field of pedagogy, gender analysis is still primarily aimed at analysing situations of social and educational disadvantage among young girls, adolescent girls, and women, with few exceptions, such as the studies by Giuseppe Burgio; these, however, analyse the models through which toxic masculinity is constructed in adolescence in relation to both intra-gender and inter-gender violence (Burgio, 2012, 2021)<sup>4</sup>.

Research on masculinity has been primarily aimed at reflecting on adolescent and adult male identities, while we seem to find a gap in the analysis of male identities in early childhood. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that there is little research on a national level or publications that focus on the concept of caring masculinities, or more generally on the relationship between masculinity and care in a pedagogical approach.

While on the one hand an absence of “gender lenses” has been found in early childhood curricula, we must make note of some signs of attention to the topic, whether found in specific projects run by associations aiming to combat gender stereotypes, within the field of early childhood services (which we will account for below), or as part of children's literature designed for this very purpose. In particular, in response to primary school textbooks presenting a highly stereotyped set of images<sup>5</sup>, we have noted the founding of new publishing companies (e.g. Settenove; EDT Giralangolo (Sottosopra); Lo Stampatello) starting in 2011 specifically to fight against gender stereotypes, eradicate the cultural roots of gender-based violence, and portray a variety of family models. These texts provide examples of anti-stereotypes for both young and adolescent boys and girls. For instance, the anti-princess model is often given for girls, along with promoting STEM subjects, while boys are portrayed in situations where they can finally show their feelings and emotions, play with dolls, and not necessarily be heroes.<sup>6</sup>

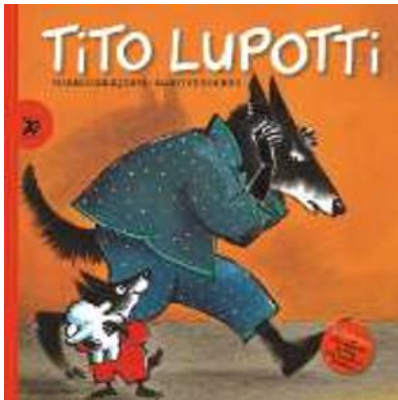
What follows are three examples of illustrated books published by Giralangolo making up the “Sottosopra” Collection, launched in 2014, to offer stories which seek to dismantle a stereotyped image of girls and boys. The first two illustrated books have been produced in France and translated into Italian; the third one has been produced in Italy. The editorial choice focused on the plurality of the different masculinity models.

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4 For a review on masculinities studies in Italy please see: Bellassai Sandro (2004; 2011); Benadusi Lorenzo (2005); Burgio Giuseppe (2012; 2021); Ciccone Stefano (2009; 2019); Di Grigoli Antonio R. (2020); Fidolini Vulca (2019); Gasparrini Lorenzo (2016; 2020); Mauceri Sergio (2015); Pacilli Maria Giuseppina (2021); Rinaldi Cirus (2018); Ruspini Elisabetta (2009).

5 Regarding this aspect, see: Biemmi Irene (2009; 2010); Biemmi Irene, Francis Veronique, Pileri Anna. (2018).

6 For an analysis of the new children's literature, see Bernacchi, Erika (2020).



**Judes, Marie-Odile, Bourre, Martine. *Tito Lupotti*. Giralangolo (Sottosopra), 2014**

The main character of the story is Tito, a wolf that wants to become a florist when he grows up but has to fight against his father's idea who would like to introduce him to the world of hunting.

The story flows along two opposite lines with regard to the role of the main character, i.e. on one hand there are the father's (and society) ideas spurring Tito to comply with the traditional masculine line, on the other hand there are Tito's wishes to follow the aspiration of a 'profession' defying masculine traditions.



**Zolotow, Charlotte, Delacroix, Clothilde *Una bambola per Alberto* [A Doll for Alberto]. Giralangolo (Sottosopra), 2014**

The main character of this second illustrated book is Alberto, a boy who is longing to own a doll but has to come to terms with his brother and his friends who make fun of him and with his father who obliges him to play with a train, as it is more appropriate a toy for boys.

A key role is played by Alberto's grandmother who makes the father consider the fact that the boy could become a good father one day.

This second story highlights not only stereotypes linked to masculinity and the choices of toys - which still cause gender separations- but also on the theme of caring and masculinity.



**Biemmi, Irene, Ferrari Antongionata, Il principino scende da Cavallo [The Little Prince Jumps Off the Horse]. Giralangolo. (Sottosopra), 2015**

This illustrated book narrates the story of a prince who, among the many duties imposed on him by his social rank, there is the one of riding a horse. The boy, however, is ashamed because he is too small compared to the height of the horse and feels uneasy. It will be a little girl who will convince him to jump off the horse and live 'as a child'.

Major ideas on the obligations of masculinity emerge in the book, highlighting how these enclose also men and create a paradox on masculinity, in which on the one hand men enjoy privileges compared to women, and on the other such privileges may crush many male children, boys and men.



**Fierli Elena, Franchi Giulia, Lancia Giovanna, Marini Sara. Reading without Stereotypes. Educationals for children between 0 and 6 years of age to imagine the future. Settenove, 2015.**

By means of conclusion, the SCOSSE Association has engaged in a systematic collection of illustrated book for children between 0 and 6 years of age. The aim is to employ new literary products as a means to show new generations that it is possible to live in a society without having to feel locked into a stereotype.

### Review of existing national research on gender stereotypes and early childhood education

Based on recommendations shared among the project partners, five national-level research projects on the topic of early childhood gender-sensitive education were chosen based on a series of shared criteria: focus (the research primarily centred on issues of masculinity and care in early childhood, and secondly at the broader three-part theme of gender, education, and early childhood); scientific importance and impact; and date (from 2015).

A data sheet has been drafted for each research work, as shown below:

<b>Title</b>	<b><i>Maschilità e cura educativa. Contronarrazione per un altro mondo possibile</i></b> <b>[Masculinity and educational care. Counternarrative for another possible world]</b>
<b>Organization</b>	University of Bergamo
<b>Target</b>	Male educators
<b>Length</b>	2020 (1 year)
<b>Focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absence of male educators in services for toddlers.</li> <li>• Care-giving paradigm as a tool to prevent gender-based violence</li> </ul>
<b>Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlight the importance of the figure of the male educator in toddlers educational contexts</li> <li>• Detect the educator's viewpoint with regard to the their placement as men in care-giving contexts through an autobiographic approach.</li> <li>• Detection of the parent's views on the subject by means of focus groups</li> <li>• Link between masculinity and educational care in the promotion of 'alternative' male models</li> </ul>
<b>Results</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• De-feminization in the care-giving dimension</li> <li>• The construction of a caring masculinity model as an antidote to gender asymmetries and the (non exclusive, yet important) role of a male educator.</li> </ul>
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://gup.unige.it/sites/gup.unige.it/files/pagine/Maschilita_e_cura_educativa_ebook_indicizzato.pdf">https://gup.unige.it/sites/gup.unige.it/files/pagine/Maschilita_e_cura_educativa_ebook_indicizzato.pdf</a>

<b>Title</b>	<b><i>Stereotipi di genere, relazioni educative e infanzie</i></b> [Gender Stereotypes, educational relations and childhood]
<b>Organization</b>	Regione Emilia-Romagna and the Centro Studi sul Genere e l'Educazione

	(CSGE)" of the University of Bologna
<b>Target</b>	Educators, parents and caregivers
<b>Length</b>	2010-2012
<b>Focus</b>	Detection of ideas and representations on gender and on the relations between genders in adults who are educationally (and affectively) significant for boys and girls between 0 and 6 years of age.
<b>Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detection of stereotyped images highlighting the expression of masculinity and femininity in early childhood.</li> <li>• Becoming acquainted with ideas, representations focusing on gender and the relationships between genders of children caregivers (parents, grandparents, educators)</li> <li>• Focus on masculinity and femininity representations of operators/educators of early childhood services</li> <li>• Analysis of the types of educational models responsible for some gender-sensitive approaches.</li> <li>• Educators express their considerations on gender balance in our society.</li> <li>• Analysis of the relation between statements about gender and statements on gender-based education praxis by educators in services for children between 0 and 6 years of age</li> <li>• Knowledge of the types of father and mother roles in children's representations in educational services</li> <li>• Types of gender-based education practised in families</li> <li>• Types of parents masculinity and femininity representations by parents of children with regard to the educators of early childhood services.</li> <li>• Parents considerations of the children in early childhood services on gender balance in our society</li> </ul>
<b>Results</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educators ambivalent attitudes towards stereotyped representations, i.e. on gender-differences and behavioral differences between boys and girls which often surfaced the 'natural' gender dimension or family education as major components (lack of an appropriate gender education which conditions everyday life perceptions)</li> <li>• Identity representations of games and activities. On the one hand educators leave room in the choice of a game based on its symbolic representation or color, while on the other hand parents tend not to be clear and even "unconsciously" direct towards a color or game on the basis of gender.</li> <li>• Lack of educators' training on the issue of gender education for children</li> <li>• Difference in gender expectations on the part of teachers and educators towards children that manifests itself in the choice of games</li> <li>• Considerations regarding the presence of male educators in ECEC services. Some parents emphasize the importance of the female figure, especially in the first years of life (0-3 years); others point out how male educators are often much better prepared than female educators. (counter-stereotype risk)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>management of emotions and aggression: the idea that girls tend to be less aggressive than boys because of a biological issue.</li> </ul>
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://parita.regione.emilia-romagna.it/documentazione/documentazione-temi/documentazione-stereotipi-di-genere/ricerca-201cstereotipi-di-genere-relazioni-educative-e-infanzie201d-1">https://parita.regione.emilia-romagna.it/documentazione/documentazione-temi/documentazione-stereotipi-di-genere/ricerca-201cstereotipi-di-genere-relazioni-educative-e-infanzie201d-1</a>

<b>Title</b>	<b><i>Fammi capire. Le rappresentazioni dei corpi e delle sessualità nei libri illustrati 0-18 anni [Body and sexuality representations in illustrated books for the 0-18 age-group]</i></b>
<b>Organization</b>	Associazione Scosse and Ottomano Bookshop in Rome
<b>Target</b>	Children and teenagers
<b>Length</b>	2016- ongoing
<b>Focus</b>	Representation of the body and sexuality, emotional and affective education in illustrated books for the 0-18 age group
<b>Objectives</b>	Survey on a critical reading of illustrated books and albums for youngsters with the aim of detecting any gender-related stereotypes; workshops with children to dwell upon the meaning of stereotypes regarding the body.
<b>Results</b>	Field work and creation of training and self-training tools such as an extensive commented bibliography, a bibliographical and illustrations exhibit, alongside with the implementation of a documentary film.
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://www.scosse.org/fammi-capire-le-rappresentazioni-dei-corpi-e-delle-sessualita/">https://www.scosse.org/fammi-capire-le-rappresentazioni-dei-corpi-e-delle-sessualita/</a> ; <a href="https://www.scosse.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/BIBLIOGRAFIA_FAMMI-CAPIRE_Aggiornata.pdf">https://www.scosse.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/BIBLIOGRAFIA_FAMMI-CAPIRE_Aggiornata.pdf</a>

<b>Title</b>	<b><i>Lettura ad alta voce e stereotipi di genere nella prima infanzia. Riflessioni su un'esperienza educativa [Reading out-loud and gender stereotypes in early childhood. Comments about an educational experience.]</i></b>
<b>Organization</b>	Scosse
<b>Target</b>	Children 0-6 years of age
<b>Length</b>	2017
<b>Focus</b>	Gender stereotypes also among children in early childhood services
<b>Objectives</b>	Reading our to pre-school age children (0-6 years of age) offers a major tool to tackle the complexity of reality, through a highly participatory work performed with children and including parents and educators.
<b>Results</b>	Experiences of reading out loud (alongside with active and group methods with children) have proven that in the three educational experiences of the research, less gender stereotypes were recorded. The continuity of the approach between the family and educational contexts. If families do not practice this method the child may experience an educational fracture.
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318588983_Lettura_ad_alta_voce_e_stereotipi_di_genere_nella_prima_infanzia_Riflessioni_su_un%27esperienza_educativa">https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318588983_Lettura_ad_alta_voce_e_stereotipi_di_genere_nella_prima_infanzia_Riflessioni_su_un%27esperienza_educativa</a> <a href="#">Reading aloud and gender stereotypes in early childhood Reflections on an educ</a>

As a complement to the research work presented, in the annex we present a brief commented bibliography of the most significant publications (essays, articles, conference proceedings) focusing on a gender-sensitive education for children in the 0-6 age group in Italy.

### 2.3 Good practices (handbooks, manuals, checklists, and projects)

Based on the recommendations shared among the partners, five operational projects on gender-sensitive education in early childhood services were also selected, along with a recently published manual of good practices on activities that could be led with children up to the age of six. Despite careful research, a lack of national-level projects over the last six years has emerged, and as a result, projects of particular substance that took place prior to the required time criteria were also taken into consideration.

In the choice of projects, it was chosen to give precedence to national projects, however we list here some European funded projects that focus on gender and education in ECEC:

- “Diversity, Equality and Inclusion in pre-primary education and care: a gender perspective” to which VMG participates and that has produced checklists that were taken into consideration for the drafting of the checklist in EcaRom project.
- BEE. BOOSTING GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION which is currently on-going
- E4E Education for Equality - Going Beyond Gender Stereotypes (<http://www.education4equality.eu/>) which also includes toolkits.

The chosen projects present an approach to gender-sensitive education for both boys and girls. The common elements that emerged in the projects and the manual involve attention to care and relationships as crucial elements for introducing the value of differences and respect for them. As one may gather from the choices made, there is a lack of projects that focus exclusively on educational work around the masculine (masculinity and care). Attention to the masculine is one of the priorities of gender-sensitive educational work, which at this point cannot be limited to focusing on the feminine from a perspective of changing the uneven dynamics between the genders.

<b>Title</b>	<b><i>PARI lo imPARI a scuola. A project on gender equality carried out in Seregno area schools</i></b>
<b>Organisation</b>	Town of Seregno - Council Office of Social Policies and Equal Opportunities, in cooperation with the Councillor for Equality of the province of Monza Brianza, AFOL Milano, and the Brianza Social Cooperative



<b>Target</b>	ECECs, primary schools and secondary schools; children, adolescents, teachers and educators
<b>Length</b>	2012-2014 (2 years)
<b>Focus</b>	Analysis of gender stereotypes and promotion of gender equality
<b>Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognising the cultural challenge to overcoming gender discrimination (in particular against girls and women)</li> <li>• Supporting young and adolescent boys in consciously developing their ideas of male and female, free of stereotypes</li> <li>• Providing teachers and educators with training on gender equality topics</li> <li>• Making gender-sensitive training more effective (especially with young and adolescent boys) starting with themselves, their personal and educational experience.</li> </ul>
<b>Results</b>	<p>The activities performed with preschool children covered four themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Who am I?</b> With a reflection on themselves and their own gender identities (through such activities as a conversation about themselves starting with their teacher's experience, observing themselves in the mirror and self portraits, interviewing parents, etc.)</li> <li>• <b>Roles in the family</b> with a reflection on the division of roles by gender and on caring roles in the family (through such activities as reading a story or drawing/painting scenes from the story)</li> <li>• <b>Jobs</b> which men and women traditionally hold or are steered towards (with an analysis of typically female or male jobs, a dress-up game in which the boys and girls wore the uniforms of jobs culturally connected to one sex or the other, and role-play around jobs)</li> <li>• <b>Society</b> and the production of binary models in fairy-tales, television, and in general all products of mass culture (through reading a story, group discussion, drawing and acting out the story).</li> </ul>
<b>Materials (toolkits)</b>	<p>The materials produced by the children during the activities relating to the four areas explored by the project (and described in the project aims) can be viewed at the following link:</p> <p><a href="https://www.impariascuola.it/sites/default/files/media/allegati/pariloimpariascuola.pdf">https://www.impariascuola.it/sites/default/files/media/allegati/pariloimpariascuola.pdf</a></p>
<b>Website</b>	Link to the report: <a href="https://www.impariascuola.it/edizione/10/descrizione">https://www.impariascuola.it/edizione/10/descrizione</a>

<b>Title</b>	<b><i>Progetto STEP (STereotipi Educazione Pari opportunità) [STEP Project - Stereotypes, Education, Equal Opportunities]</i></b>
<b>Organisation</b>	Planning, Organization, Union Relations and Human Resources Development Office of the City of Genoa, in cooperation with the Educational Policies Office.
<b>Target</b>	Preschool educators; parents

<b>Length</b>	2010 to 2012 (2 years)
<b>Focus</b>	Gender stereotypes in ECEC services 3-6; focus on educational and cultural models of masculinity and femininity starting with early childhood
<b>Objectives</b>	<p>Starting from the initial hypothesis of the project, that is, that ECEC services 3-6 (like all educational settings) are “gender cages”, the research aimed to investigate the ways in which gender stereotypes are reproduced and rooted in both formal and informal educational settings. Doing this requires:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• shifting attention from the feminine to the masculine</li> <li>• working on the masculine to liberate it</li> <li>• dismantling the deep-rooted idea of femininity as demeaning</li> <li>• increasing our ability to notice the traps we fall into on a daily basis</li> </ul>
<b>Results</b>	<p>On the basis of this research, a research project/action was carried out in Genoa ECEC services 3-6, and the elements that emerged are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the hypothesis of a backlash in educational settings (differentiation, sexualisation, and re-gendering of activities, spaces, games, children's clothing)</li> <li>• attention to masculinity as an agent for change and reflection on stereotypes regarding masculinity (models of premature construction of hegemonic masculinity; stereotypes about masculinity internalised by parents and passed on to children relating to the choice of toys, activities, clothing, etc.; fear of emasculating sons and inducing homosexuality; cultural pressures as fertile ground for the construction of forms of toxic masculinity that are misogynist, sexist, and transphobic).</li> </ul>
<b>Materials (toolkits)</b>	<p>The toolkit designed for both educators and parents provides useful recommendations on gender-sensitive educational work with girls and (also) with boys. It is divided into four major sections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The <b>guiding idea</b>, which lists the aims of the project.</li> <li>• The <b>key terms: (Gender stereotypes; gender difference theory; sexism; gender-based discrimination; feminisms; pedagogy and 'gender school')</b> which are guiding definitions that help educators to understand the aspects of inequality generated by gender stereotypes and the solutions that can be used to combat them. Each item contains photos, bibliographies, figures, etc...</li> <li>• <b>Tips for educators:</b> this section provides some activities (for educators to work with girls and boys with gender in mind). The principle is to offer them without falling into the creation of counter-stereotypes. For instance: interacting with girls and boys in a neutral way, both when reprimanding them and in giving emotional support;</li> </ul>

	<p>proposing gender models from real life or stories (women scientists; female athletes; heroines in fairy-tales) that represent the anti-stereotype; offering non-gendered clothing; encouraging neutral games.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Find out more</b> provides suggestions for further exploring gender, education, and stereotypes. Each item is provided with photos and biographical references (<b>Gender-sensitive education, work, gender and the body, media; work; language; masculinity, homophobia</b>).</li> </ul> <p>The results of the project have been presented with further comments in the book: Abbatecola Emanuela, Stagi Luisa (2018). <i>Pink is the new black. Stereotipi di genere nella scuola dell'infanzia</i>. Torino: Rosenberg&amp;Sellier.</p>
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.arcosricerca.it/Lavori/step/index.html">http://www.arcosricerca.it/Lavori/step/index.html</a>

<b>Title</b>	<b><i>Liberi di essere a scuola (Free to Be at School)</i></b>
<b>Organisation</b>	Equal Opportunities Department and Associazione D.i.Re (women's anti-violence network)
<b>Target</b>	Boys and girls in preschool and primary school, educators and teachers
<b>Length</b>	2018-2020
<b>Focus</b>	Analysis of the concept of power by producing and screening videos to preschool and primary school educators and children.
<b>Objectives</b>	To organise informative and educational pathways that start with a reflection on aspects of "power", so as to prevent violence against young and adult women, with the goal of promoting cultural changes aimed at overcoming gender stereotypes.
<b>Results</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirmation of the initial hypothesis that gender-based training is lacking among educators and children</li> <li>• Recognition of the forms of power and the attributions of gender that girls and boys made based on their imaginations, and implementation of a process to transform the children's initial ideas regarding stereotyped masculine and feminine roles.</li> </ul>
<b>Materials (toolkits)</b>	Videos
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://www.direcontrolviolenza.it/libere-di-essere-a-scuola/">https://www.direcontrolviolenza.it/libere-di-essere-a-scuola/</a>

<b>Title</b>	<b><i>Scosse in Classe. Cross-disciplinary pathways to educate about differences from nursery to secondary school.</i></b>
<b>Organisation</b>	Associazione Scosse
<b>Target</b>	Teachers and educators from early childhood services, primary and secondary schools

<b>Year</b>	2021
<b>Focus</b>	Proposing methods, activities, and tools for working with girls and boys on differences, care, and the body.
<b>Objectives</b>	The objectives of this toolkit are to offer support for educators, who in the wake of Covid-19 are having to work more continuously on helping children to reconnect emotionally after social distancing, on the value of diversity, and on the importance of care.
<b>Results</b>	The text produced a reflection during the period of the pandemic which is aimed across the board at teachers of all kinds and levels, starting from ECECs service to secondary school, proposing specific activities which also take their cue from the lock-down period. A pathway that starts from the self and moves towards external reality, the plurality of family configurations, the appreciation of differences, and that can be followed in its entirety or in individual stages.
<b>Materials (toolkits)</b>	<p>The manual is organised into five topics. The topics and activities are conceived both for educators in year 0-6 services and for primary and secondary school teachers. For the purposes of this report, only the activities addressing the 0-6 age group have been provided here. The topics proposed are offered in both independent and group activities based on the methods and methodologies already being used by such services in line with the children's evolving skillsets.</p> <p>One important characteristic of this manual is the use of <math>\text{\textcircled{a}}</math> (schwa)<sup>7</sup>, in keeping with discussions within Italy on the use of <math>\text{\textcircled{a}}</math> to encourage the use of language that is inclusive of non-binary identities.</p> <p>For each activity, the following elements are presented:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>specific objectives</b></li> <li>• <b>directions for leading the activities</b></li> <li>• <b>materials to use</b></li> <li>• <b>reading recommendations to further explore the topics and the action steps</b></li> <li>• <b>How do I feel? Reflections and repercussions in the age of Covid-19.</b> This part, the only one making explicit reference to the pandemic, seeks to highlight activities that foster approaches to self-care and care for others.</li> </ul>

7 The use of schwa ( $\text{\textcircled{a}}$ ) has become the subject of recent debate in Italian circles as a solution for the declination of certain Italian words which use the ending (a) or (o) to indicate masculine or feminine nouns, adjectives, professions, etc.. The  $\text{\textcircled{a}}$  serves as one of the solutions currently used to promote gender-neutral models of language, along with the ending (u), or the asterisk (\*). For further discussion of the matter, see the linguistics research conducted by scholar Vera Gheno of the University of Florence: Gheno Vera (2019). *Femminili singolari. Il femminismo è nelle parole*. Roma:Effequ; *Lo schwa tra fantasia e norma. Come superare il maschile sovraesteso nella lingua italiana*. La Falla. Blog by Cassero LGBT Center. < <https://lafalla.cassero.it/lo-schwa-tra-fantasia-e-norma/>>; *Brevissima storia dello schwa* < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCx9t2OLOSY>>; *La sfida dello Schwa al maschile e al femminile* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zAFLp\\_qGEaM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zAFLp_qGEaM).

	<p><b>ECEC services 0-3: “Making faces”:</b> recognising the self in others after isolation.</p> <p><b>Preschools: “Reflected mirror”</b> same aims</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Relationships, identity, emotions.</b> This section seeks to propose activities that help children to reflect on the complexity of emotions and identities at a time when they enter into relationship with the other.</li> </ul> <p><b>ECEC services 0-3: “What's your house thinking about?”:</b> this workshop plays on the importance of emotions relating to the place where children feel safest: at home.</p> <p><b>ECEC services 3-6: “At school together”:</b> the aim is to give value to encounters with others and the relationship between the self and otherness, highlighting differences and the complexity of emotions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Making space.</b> This area aims to work with children on how space conditions our experiences, and structures our selves in connection to others. Space also marks out or deconstructs borders and hierarchies.</li> </ul> <p><b>ECEC services 0-3: “Let's join the queue”.</b> The aim is to understand and work on new ways of organising spaces with respect for each person's priorities, individual differences, and needs.</p> <p><b>ECEC services 3-6: “How big is it?”</b> Through an inclusive approach, children are encouraged to develop inductive thought by devising a system of signs that create and divide up spaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Bodies and relationships. Help me understand.</b> This area of inquiry highlights the body as an important aspect of relationships between peers and between children and adults, though often it is a taboo subject. The aim is to provide children with answers to questions about their physicality in relation to their gender.</li> </ul> <p><b>ECEC services 0-3: “I am my shadow”.</b> The aim of this activity is to get to know our bodies, learning to name every single part to give value to the differences between them</p> <p><b>ECEC services 3-6: “I am me”.</b> The same aim is explored.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Educating about differences.</b> The final proposed area seeks to explore the family, culture, society, and the topics of gender norms, discrimination, and lastly, the importance of gender-sensitive education</li> </ul> <p><b>ECEC services 0-3: “So many families”.</b> Celebrating the variety of family models of the children at the nursery by asking the children to display photos of their families</p> <p><b>ECEC services 3-6: “The families in our building”</b> For this age group, an awareness of the various kinds of families (such as same-sex parents, single parents, and different-sex parents) is explored more in depth</p>
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## 3. Results of qualitative analysis

### 3.1 Methodology

The methodology for the second part of the research seeks to survey greater awareness of the topic of gender stereotypes in early childhood educational settings, specifically on caring masculinities and men who pursue these professions.

Along with the desk review, the aim of this part of the field research is to obtain a clear and comprehensive picture of how gender-sensitive expertise is spreading among educators, early childhood service coordinators, and researchers. The work also enables any gaps in educational research and practices to be detected and corrected.

The qualitative tools used are semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and checklists. Based on the recommendations shared among the partners, six interviews were conducted with male and female educators working in early childhood services belonging to the Istituto degli Innocenti. Obviously the methodology followed does not aim at reaching any statistical representativeness, but it can provide with valuable information and suggestions on the state of art on gender sensitive education in ECEC services.

The choice to work with IDI educational services fits into a plan that goes beyond measuring needs through these interviews, and continues with the distribution of in-depth checklists and training in the second part of the project, expected to take place next year. The aim therefore was to establish long-term cooperation.

The **interviews** conducted with educators took into consideration areas of their everyday work with children to determine whether attitudes that are influenced by gender stereotypes arise during such activities, or, conversely, whether they implement strategies leading to gender-sensitive educational actions with particular attention to the relationship between masculinity and care, such that children might learn about models of masculinities beyond the “hegemonic” standard. Information was requested in the following areas (**See attached interview guide**):

- **tools and use of materials;**
- **gender roles in organising activities;**
- **care** (for which the ECaRoM project has provided a definition);
- **occupations and professions;**
- **gender stereotypes;**
- **role models for boys and girls;**
- **gender-sensitive training received by the educator.**

The interviews were transcribed, and each interviewee completed a “field diary” as well as a form with personal information about their age, gender, and years of experience.

**Two focus groups** were also held; the first was attended by both university researchers and people working with organisations that deal with gender, sexuality, and masculinity, along with coordinators of early childhood services. The second focus group was conducted remotely so as to ensure that scholars from various parts of Italy could attend. In this case we primarily chose to involve gender and masculinity studies researchers who belonged to universities, but also some from community groups.

The areas explored within the focus groups were **(See attached guide for the focus groups):**

- **the state of the art on gender-sensitive education in early childhood education services;**
- **the experts' experiences on the topic;**
- **the existence of a hidden curriculum in early childhood services that generates stereotypes around masculinity;**
- **tools to fight against gender stereotypes; the type of gender-sensitive training received during teacher-training;**
- **and strategies for dealing with the matter of the relationship between masculinity and care in early childhood services.**

With regards to the project focus, that is, caring masculinities in early childhood services, no experts were identified in this specific area. Even so, the aim was to reconstruct some meaningful reflections based on the analytical contributions from both scholars of masculinity studies (which primarily focus on adolescents and adults) and those who work from a gender perspective and not specifically in CSMM (Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities).

Both for the interviews and for the focus groups, a description of the project was sent along with privacy consent forms to be signed by the experts involved.

Lastly, checklists were distributed among the educators interviewed.

The areas investigated by the checklists were **(see attached checklist):**

- **tools used in educational practices with girls and boys (particularly books);**
- **aspects of care;**
- **professions as educational activities for working on non-stereotyped gender roles;**
- **clothing;**
- **supporting educational staff;**
- **the role of fathers and other male family members involved in raising boys and girls;**
- **gender-sensitive training received by educators;**
- **self-reflection on the nature and perpetuation of gender stereotypes;**
- **reflections on educational staff (sorted by age, gender, etc.).**

In addition to encouraging further reflection on what emerged in the interviews, the aims of the checklist are to provide tools that enable educators to work with a view toward promoting egalitarian gender models and caring masculinities.

### 3.2 Results about areas of inquiry

**Interviews:** With regard to the areas explored during the formal interviews, in some cases reflections emerged that were shared by all those interviewed; in other cases, different reflections emerged as a result of an interest and specific attention to the topic. One element common to all those interviewed is the lack of further exploration on the specific topic of caring masculinities due to the insufficient circulation of research on the masculine from a gender perspective.

The results of the interviews with educators are listed below in relation to the individual areas in which they were asked for a response.

Table: interviewee information

Interviewee age	Gender	Years of experience	Educational service
70 years	M	30 years	Age 0-3
32 years	M	7 years	Age 0-6
38 years	F	16 years	Age 0-3
40 years	F	18 years	Age 0-3
50 years	F	4 years	Age 0-6
52 years	F	10 years	Age 3-5

- **Tools and materials:** all the educators use tools and materials that are free from gender stereotypes. Their use is connected to the activities they offer, in which there is no gender segregation in relation to a given toy or activity.

All the children play with the same toys both in structured activities and in free play. All the educators have stated that the children (especially those ages 0-3) are not influenced in their choice of tools or materials, given that, according to interviewees, stereotypes are ordinarily constructed from age 4-5. One interview revealed that: *There's a group of boys that especially loves to set the table and carry out an activity that society would assign to girls. And there are girls who prefer to play with Lego blocks. In each section there will always be some little group or individual boy/girl doing an activity that could be defined as stereotyped.*

In the answers given, an important distinction is made between the 0-3 age group and that of ages 4-6. With regards to the former, it is believed that *up to age 2, gender-stereotyped behaviours do not appear when children choose play activities or classmate groups, whereas by the latter age, differentiations are already emerging in terms of choosing activities, clothing, games, and toys.*

- **Care:** When asked how they encourage the sense of care (meaning self-care and care of the other) in services for children ages 0-6, those interviewed respond that structured



activities are the fast lanes they use to promote the concept. Many activities proposed, and they involve looking after shared spaces (tidying up toys, or more generally, tools used during play activities). Gardening activities are also proposed (to increase their sense of care for the environment).

Nearly all the educators confirmed that boys and girls participate in these activities without much resistance, at least for the 2-3 age group. They were also asked for a gender analysis in relation to care, that is, if they have ever noticed different (gender-based) attitudes in response to situations in which children were asked to use “care as a responsible action”. The educators replied that the behaviours of boys and girls who are reluctant to perform this kind of activity cannot be linked to forms of gender stereotypes towards activities that are culturally associated with women, but rather are due to their personal attitude.

Regarding children's acts of care towards their peers, some educators stated that there have been rare cases in which boys demonstrated aggression towards girls. For instance, in an interview one teacher related the following episode: *The thing that I noticed on a behavioural level among the boys with respect to the girls is that when there are activities taking place in the garden, the boys tend to have more “physical confrontations”. The kind of reaction we have to these acts is not to intervene directly; they are allowed to act, obviously in circumstances in which no dangerous situations could arise. When a confrontation occurs between boys and one of them gets hurt, I ask the other boy to take care of him; I don't suggest explicitly, “say you're sorry, etc...”, but for example, I ask him to get the other boy some water. My approach isn't to “manage” them.*

Generally, no behaviours are found between boys and girls in which unequal power dynamics emerge, except in one educator's story about two boys who showed a girl excessive attention, insisting on kissing her. The educator confronted the boys involved in the event in this way: *... the boys said that they felt like kissing her, so we said to them, “what would happen if you were pushed against the wall?” They reply, “we wouldn't be able to move”. She was asked, “Do you like being kissed?” She replied, “not always”. Then she was asked “What do you do when you don't feel like being kissed?” She replied, “I don't do anything; I look down”. I asked the group: what could you do? And for a few days they didn't reply, then another girl suggested to her “I'd push them”... We said: OK... but what about another way? And she said “I'd say no”.*

Later, the educator proposed an activity called “The Circle” which addressed topics such as caring for others and consent. The children's response was wholly positive. Later, a meeting with the parents took place to discuss what had happened.

Additionally, to deal with the subject of care, workshops were held that started with a story in a picture book (fairy-tales are rarely proposed as they often present stereotyped roles). In conclusion, the educators interviewed reported that their activities are not influenced by stereotyped gender roles.

- **Gender roles and mixed activities.** In early childhood services, symbolic play activities such as pretending to be fairy-tale characters are a way to enable children's creative sides to emerge, going beyond rigid societal imagery. Furthermore, games like role-

playing enable them to explore a given situation (such as a conflict with a classmate), thus developing caring attitudes towards others.

The educators were asked whether their pedagogical offerings included activities in which boys and girls have to dress up as a character of the opposite gender, and if such proposals are structured or free. They replied that this kind of activity is offered in both free and structured forms. In the former case, each child chooses their favourite character (both male and female). Usually, up to ages 3-4, children show no gender-stereotyped attitudes when choosing a character, and in any case, if they do arise, the educator rarely intervenes, and only in the event in which a girl or boy continuously and insistently chooses a single role/character that conforms to their gender. In such a case, during the structured activities, they suggest other possible choices.

During the interview, educators were asked if they had ever had a direct experience of sensing, through children's choice of games or costumes, that they embraced and felt a sense of belonging to gender and sexuality models other than the heteronormative standard. One educator replied: *Constantly, because at this age they're very fluid... I often see a boy carrying a handbag (and arguing with a girl in the class about who of the two of them can carry it first) or putting on make-up. But I've never thought of projecting their identity over the long term - it would be a negative form of influence on them... I've reflected on it privately, but obviously I act from a suspension of any judgement.*

In the event that structured activities are proposed, each child acts out both male and female roles. Though these proposals appear to be aimed at furthering a gender-sensitive educational plan, in reality this is not the explicit and declared goal, in that educators believe that children's gender identities are not yet defined at this age.

As previously specified, in all the interviews conducted the educators took an ambiguous stance on the importance of gender-sensitive education in early childhood, and no position on specifically teaching to encourage models of caring masculinity.

The educators believe that all educational work on gender must be conducted with parents, given that they are the first significant adults to give an imprinting to children's early experiences, including their view of them as “gendered” individuals.

- **Occupations and professions.** With regards to occupations and professions, the educators have not noticed boys or girls making particularly stereotyped choices in their games and imagery. In the 0-3 age group in particular, choice is not connected to the introjection of a distinct gender role. Furthermore, at this age children have not yet developed a perception of the future, whereas with children from age four and up, activities are proposed which begin with reading from picture books or hearing stories told by the children in their families, and then they are asked what they would like to be. From this age on, there may be cases in which, for example, a girl chooses to become a ballerina. This could be due to the first signs of influence by the media.

A crucial aspect that emerged during the interviews with all the educators, and especially male educators, involves the possible influence of male educators on girls and boys (particularly boys) in spreading the perception of helping professions as not being exclusively feminine.

Male educators replied that in promoting "caring masculinity", boys could be left with a particular impression of their profession. Often, parents may prove to be an obstacle, and on that matter, an educator related his experience with a boy's mother who, upon seeing him as the educator during the early childhood service open day, had a highly hostile reaction accompanied by a fit of tears. In the end, she did not want her daughter placed with that group of educators.

- **Training.** Teacher training on gender-based subjects is patchy; three of those interviewed (half of the total) have had an academic university education that included gender-sensitive pedagogy. The others had attended some training courses on the job. The educators agreed on the importance of specific training tailored not just to them but also to parents.

In particular, one educator brought up an important aspect concerning gender-sensitive training programmes that could serve as a starting point for future projects.

One educator complained of the fact that most gender training programmes take a primarily theoretical approach, while there was a need for a section tailored to the 0-6 age group that included concrete tools for working with children on activities such as games. This is one of the reasons for the lack of a gender-sensitive approach in working with children in age 0-6 services.

**Focus groups.** Two focus groups were held, the first of which was in person with eight experts taking part, and the second, with five experts, held online.

- **State of the art on gender-sensitive research in age 0-6 services.** Both the first and the second focus groups highlighted the lack of academic research on the topic, for a series of reasons linked to the predominance of classical theories on child development, which do not provide for aspects of gender and sexuality until puberty and adolescence. With regards to the few yet important national projects on gender-sensitive education in early childhood, the suggestions made were entered into the desk review.

- **Gaps in education sensitive to gender and masculinity.** Regarding gender-sensitive education, it emerged first of all that the majority of gender-sensitive education projects are carried out in primary and secondary schools, while they are almost completely absent in ECECs. Furthermore, masculinity is rarely the focus of the project or educational action, probably because gender-sensitive education is still "on the girls' side", or because broader work is done on gender stereotypes, but there is a lack of specific reflection on models and stereotypes of masculinity and on the risks that they pose for young and adolescent boys first and foremost.

Among the reflections that emerged are those of an organisation promoting alternative masculinities, who suggest that based on their experience, curricula should envisage training modules on sexual education and on body awareness from early childhood. These training modules should include training that targets not just educators, but also parents and early childhood professionals.

- **Experiences of working with gender-sensitive education in early childhood services.**  
Another experience that was related in a focus group concerns the opportunity to work indirectly on the topic of gender stereotypes and violence prevention from early childhood by discussing **the topic of power** (meaning the possibility, power to do and to be).
- **Thoughts on the presence of male educators in early childhood educational services**  
In the focus group, it emerged that the shortage of men in the helping professions has been discussed in the international literature, and even in Italy research has highlighted the need for models of caring masculinities to fight against the stereotype of care as a matter of biology and innately feminine. Furthermore, the presence of male educators has an enormous impact on shaping the meaning of masculinity for many boys, helping to deconstruct the order to “be a man!”.  
However, it was also noted that there was a risk of creating a counter-stereotype, that is, excessively shifting care to the masculine (with statements such as “men are better at caring work than women”). The risk is that new stereotypes would be formed, assigning men superiority over women in caring professions, instead of aspiring to an egalitarian view of gender. We also discussed how to increase the number of male educators. One proposal was to improve the level of university training, moving in the direction of greater professionalisation and higher compensation for care, the idea being that by giving this occupation greater prestige, it may attract a greater number of men. However, this proposal was criticised by other members of the focus group for supporting a stereotyped view of jobs, while what would really be needed is a change in society's appreciation for care work in and of itself.
- **Male educators, homosexuality, and paedophilia**  
Another topic that emerged in both focus groups is the risk that parents consider male educators to be potential paedophiles, and as a result are afraid of seeing them working in educational services. However, the experiences of this varied. For instance, one pedagogical coordinator maintained that no particular problems had arisen in her educational services and that the fundamental thing was to establish a relationship of trust, getting to know families personally.  
In other cases, however, it emerged that families would regard the presence of male educators with suspicion, particularly in relation to the child's body, for example when the children are being changed.  
We also discussed the fact that in some families one still finds a juxtaposition of paedophilia and homosexuality, and the perception that male educators working in ECECs are necessarily or primarily homosexual; it was agreed that it would be important to dismantle both these prejudices.
- **Families with migrant backgrounds.** We also dealt with the topic of parents and families from a migrant background, who in some cases can show greater reserve towards male educators, while by contrast, in other cases some fathers have had difficulty interacting with female educators.

- **Stereotypes/counter-stereotypes and reflections on the concept of care:** one interesting reflection that emerged was the proposal of alternative models of femininity and masculinity in picture books. In recent years we have witnessed the founding of publishing companies dedicated specifically to overcoming gender stereotypes. While this sort of work is judged to be particularly useful when beginning to question traditional gender roles, it was noted that there was a risk of simply reversing the stereotype (girls/women who perform jobs that are traditionally masculine and vice-versa) without examining any key concepts, such as care and power. Particularly with regards to care, it is important to discuss its importance as a standard human practice that is essential to our coexistence (Fraser).
- **Training:** as regards training on the topics of gender stereotypes, masculinity, and care provided by universities, it emerged that Italian universities fail to provide this kind of training in a systematic way, but rather the training is connected to individual centres or courses led by professors (or research centres), particularly within the fields of pedagogy and sociology. This results in a highly varied, uneven availability of training, even for those preparing to work with children ages 0-6; alongside exemplary courses, we have observed training curricula in which there is no provision for pedagogy or sociology of gender.
- **Regulations and guidelines for age 0-6 services.**  
Concerning the relevant regulatory framework, and in particular the recent reforms which have led to the approval of guidelines for age 0-6 services, it has emerged that there is first of all a lack of familiarity with the guidelines themselves, and secondly a potential lack of operating instructions for how to apply them, particularly as regards the topic of gender-sensitive education. On this matter, the participants emphasised the importance of spreading knowledge of the contents of the guidelines more widely and providing specific training on applying them.

**Checklists.** To conclude our field survey of the specific needs of early childhood service professionals, we now turn our discussion to the results of the checklists which were distributed to educational personnel in agreement with the ECaRoM project partners.

As previously made clear in the methodology of this second part of the fieldwork, we had chosen to provide the in-depth checklists to the educators we had interviewed. Of the two male and four female educators with whom the interviews had taken place, two male and two female educators agreed to collaborate on this final part of the project.

Based on the areas of inquiry, we shall provide some interesting ideas to prompt reflection below.

- **Picture books as tools for working on gender stereotypes:**

With regards to the picture books available in their educational services, the educators reported that those proposing non-stereotyped stories on male and female roles are no more than **50 %** of the total. There is some variation in the percentages on certain

topics, including stories portraying models of **caring masculinities** or **multiple family models in addition to the different-sex parent model (from 5 to 15 %)**.

This area of the checklist can be read in two ways: the first sheds light on the lack of appropriate “gender lenses” that interpret the narrative aims of the texts proposed (given the reasonable number of gender-sensitive picture books published in recent years); the second, on the other hand, could hinge on the inadequate attention given to the adoption of picture books that feature stories with a non-stereotyped perspective carried out by the direction of ECEC services.

- **Care and the participation of boys in proposed activities:**

In this second area, we asked for an indicative estimate of the frequency at which boys are involved in care activities. With the exception of one male educator's response, indicating that participation was at **40-50%**, the others showed that boys participate at a percentage of **80-100%**.

Generally speaking, in early childhood boys do not refuse to participate based on gender, but rather “out of their inclination towards the request in the moment”. This indicates that both girls and boys participate with enthusiasm or reluctance in care activities depending on their feelings at the time.

- **Professions and occupations:**

As for activities in which professions and occupations are discussed from a gender-based viewpoint, educators report that they take place through books or games chosen by the group that primarily portray the organisation of family roles. Some underline the importance of allowing boys and girls to freely choose the professions that they feel most “belong” to them, given that the educator's role is to serve as the group's “facilitator”.

- **Attention to social issues:**

This area seeks to investigate whether topics such as poverty and migration are addressed in early childhood services, and if so, how the conversation takes place. Of the overall number, some educators did not reply to this question, while others stated that this kind of work is generally done in ECEC services 3-6, starting with stories or their books to spark a discussion on such subjects.

- **Social hierarchies, power dynamics, and violence:**

As concerns the presence of power dynamics in early childhood classes, one educator replied that such an episode has only arisen on one occasion. In those circumstances, he preferred to deal with the matter by speaking directly with those involved. Others, however, replied that episodes of this kind generally do not occur with children ages 0-6, and still others did not respond. As regards the methods with which this issue is

introduced, educators confirmed that readings, games, and activities serve as useful tools for talking to boys and girls about respect and care for others.

- **Clothing:**

In this part of the checklist we asked educators whether their attitude varied when complimenting girls or boys on their clothing. Only one educator claimed that he addressed girls with a more simpering tone when compared to boys; however, this was before he attended a gender-sensitive education training course. Following the course, he effectively no longer engaged in differentiating attitudes of this kind. The others replied that they addressed girls and boys in the same way when making compliments.

- **Attention to and support of staff:**

In this section we asked how educational personnel reacted to the requests for support in regards to children's gender issues. The educators replied that girls and boys were not treated differently, considering that the educator's role is to encourage them and to try, where feasible, to get them to solve their own minor everyday problems, and if possible creating situations in which peers can support one another (for the 3- to 6-year-olds).

- **Families, fathers, and other male family members:**

Asked about their relationships with parents in reference to their sons' and daughters' activities, educators replied that they address mothers and fathers without distinction. However, when problems arise, it is generally the mothers who get involved, the percentage varying between **60** and **80%**. Regarding the involvement of other male family members, only one educator replied that he had noted children's brothers from ages 4 to 6 getting involved. This occurs because parents prefer not to delegate other family members in the 0-3 age group, given that the children are too young.

- **Training:**

When asked about training on gender stereotypes, most of the educators replied that they had taken part in refresher courses. Others, however, had received training while at university.

- **Self-reflection on gender stereotypes:**

This area of inquiry regards the work of reflecting on one's internalised gender stereotypes, which could impact educational relationships with girls and boys. Most of the educators replied that they constantly question themselves, with the aim of understanding if there are any expectations regarding gender in the way they behave towards children. In most of the cases, they tend to take on an egalitarian attitude, but cannot rule out that they may behave differently, though involuntarily, based on whether

they are interacting with boys or with girls. Only one educator claimed to be sure that he did not engage in differential attitudes.

- **Differences between staff members in educational institutions:**

In this last area we asked whether there were any differences among educational staff with respect to gender, age, ethnic origin, or academic training. The educators who work with male colleagues replied affirmatively with regards to gender differences. Few replied that there were educators of a different ethnic origin in the services where they work.

## 4. Concluding remarks and recommendations

The research conducted reveals that a significant reflection has begun on the topic of gender-sensitive education in Italian school settings in recent years, partly due to regulatory changes in this direction, which have supported the creation of projects and actions in schools. The plans for these, however, are not carried out in a systematic way, but rather depend on the willingness and interest of individual schools/teachers. As regards ECECs, only in recent years have we begun to explore the need to train educators and parents on gender stereotypes. Among the educational goals introduced by the new pedagogical guidelines for age 0-6 services is the achievement of gender equality through respect for gender differences and each child's gender identity, but specific strategies in this regard are lacking, starting with a curricular organisation that would further these aims. The analysis we have conducted has revealed no projects focusing on the masculine in general, nor on the relationship between masculinity and care.

At present, literature for early childhood seems to be the sector most aligned with promoting gender equality policies, thanks in part to the work of scholars in university settings and those involved in community groups who have paid attention to new picture books that strive to deconstruct gender stereotypes.

The qualitative research conducted by means of interviews, distributing the checklist, and holding focus groups has revealed some interesting aspects on the impact of gender-sensitive education in early childhood that we list here below.

On the topic of **training**, some of the educators stated that a revision of training programmes with regards to gender would be welcome, making them more actionable for specific age groups. Others emphasised the urgency of providing gender-based training to parents, as otherwise the work done in the early childhood services risks being wasted, incomplete, or ineffective. The focus groups also discussed the topic of training for educational staff and parents in gender issues. This other aspect is linked to the “decolonisation” of educational practices in response to diversity in the children's backgrounds. In these cases, it would be useful for training to take an intersectional approach to education orientated not just to gender, but also to the diverse cultural backgrounds of the families and especially the children. Therefore, education on issues of gender and masculinity must consider different



definitions of gender and masculinity (Fidolini, 2019), to ensure the educational action is effective and free of excessive judgements.

Another topic that has emerged is the **lack of integration of men** within education and workplaces in care professions, which is highlighted, among other things, by the fact that there were only two male educators among those interviewed. We raised the matter of how to educate boys towards models of alternative masculinities, compared to a standard that imposes the principle that virility is antithetical to emotions and empathy. The importance of working on masculinity was also discussed in the focus groups, as otherwise the educational and cultural commitment to achieving gender equality will be incomplete and ineffective. Experts have shown that increasing numbers of male educational personnel could be useful as long as celebrating the counter-stereotype is avoided, so as to have a positive influence on boys' idea of masculinity. Lastly, other matters were identified in the focus groups; one example is the risk of **stigmatising male educators** as potential paedophiles (connected above all to the relationship between the masculine and the bodies of children ages 0-3, given that educators wash the children and as a result see them unclothed).

In conclusion, we wish to highlight some specific recommendations with regards to the central topics that emerged in the interviews and focus groups:

### Training

- **Make training on gender-sensitive pedagogy (including masculinity studies) systematic** within university degree courses that prepare educators to work in early childhood. Include the centrality of the body and body awareness as an essential aspect of training, particularly with nursery-age children.
- Redesign gender-sensitive training for educational staff such that it considers children's age groups and gives **greater support on practical activities** (manuals, toolkits and in general, educational experiences to be put into practice with boys and girls).

### Research

- Greater promotion of **critical studies on men and masculinities in Italy**, both in academic research and in research projects, especially in the field of early education.
- Greater promotion of **dialogue and sharing ideas among researchers and those working in educational settings** (educators, coordinators).

### Care and masculinity

- **Encourage the presence of male educators in early childhood services** by means of gender-sensitive school orientation projects that also address boys. The experience gained as part of the project "Boys in care" may be useful.

- Give clarity to educational activities addressing the **relationship between care and masculinity** (for example, working on the importance of one's emotions and those of others as foundations for a new model of masculinity).
- **Avoid creating a counter-stereotype around the model of caring masculinity.** There is a risk of creating prejudice around male superiority in care (men seen as heroes) and a negative view of the feminine in the profession as well as the risk of naturalizing care as a masculine activity. Instead, the aim is to show the existence of different models of non-violent and non-predatory masculinities to aspire to.

### Educational practices

- **Encourage views that are less stereotyped from a gender perspective** starting in early childhood so as to enable children to express their gender identity more freely.
- **Teach about multiple family models** (different-sex and single-sex parents; single parents; reconstituted families; families formed by grandparents or aunts/uncles, etc...) as an important element in teaching children to respect differences.
- Use an **intersectional perspective** when teaching about non-hegemonic masculinity. Cultural background, disability, social class, and faith are aspects to consider in forming non-monolithic gender-sensitive education strategies.

### Policies

- Promote implementation of the Guidelines for 0-6 services through actionable proposals on the topic of gender stereotypes, among other strategies.
- Encourage **gender-sensitive education projects to be collected** together using a database made available to all teachers/educators, among other strategies.

## 5. References

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## 6. Annexes

### 6.1 Annex 1 Bibliographical table

Year	Typology	Authors	Title	Key topics
2005	Book	Ricciardi Paola, Venera Anna Maria	<i>Giochi da maschi, da femmine e... da tutti e due. Studi e ricerche sul gioco e le differenze di genere</i> [Games for boys or girls..or both. Studies and research on games and gender differences]	The text delves into the relationship between a market which, in most cases, still tends to produce differentiated toys for boys and girls and cultural changes experienced in gender roles. The issue refers to the adequacy of such a differentiation in a society in which are fathers, for instance, are approaching the caring dimension, hence it would be pointless to 'femininize' a male doll.
2009	Article	Ghigi Rossella	<i>Le bambine ancora da una parte? Prospettive e ricerche contemporanee sul genere e l'infanzia.</i> [Are girls still set aside? Prospects and contemporary research on gender and early childhood]	In this article, the researcher analyzes with a gender sensitive and sociological approach, the female discriminatory processes already in early childhood. If an appropriate gender education is not adopted, educational contexts for the 0-5 age group may become the introduction to the construction of harmful gender-based models (especially for girls).
2013.	Book	Cretella Chiara, Crivellaro Francesca, Gallerani Emanuela,	<i>Genere in relazione. Scuole, servizi educative 0/6 e famiglie in Emilia -</i>	The text provides the outcome of a qualitative research entitled "Gender stereotypes, educational relations and infancy", conducted in Emilia

		Guerzoni Giovanna, Lorenzini Stefania, Nardone Maria Rosa, Tarabusi Federica, Truffelli Elisa, Zanetti, Federica	<i>Romagna.</i> [Gender in Relation. Schools, educational services for 0-6 age groups and families in Emilia- Romagna.]	Romagna between 2010 and 2012. The research included 3500 questionnaires and the organization of 36 focus groups. The target was made up of educators (males and females), parents, grandparents and, significant adults for boys and girls.
2013.	Article	Mapelli Barbara	<i>Uomini, educazione e cura.</i> [Men, education and caring]	This article highlights the issue of the relationship between masculinity and caring, as well as the absence of male figures in early childhood services working environments.
2013	Essay	Scardamaglia Cristina	<i>Culture dell'infanzia e costruzione sociale dei generi.</i> [Infancy cultures and gender construction]	By means of a cultural and interactive-symbolic approach, the researcher highlights that the process for identity construction begins in early childhood. This work denies the myth of the lack of adhesion to a gender-role among boys and girls.
2017	Book	Abbatecola Emanuela, Stagi Luisa	<i>Pink is the new black. Stereotipi di genere nella scuola dell'infanzia.</i> [Pink is the new black. Gender Stereotypes in kindergarden services]	The book provides the outcome of a research entitled "Step" (included in the analytic grid of national projects). The decision of reporting also on the book published some years later is due to the fact that, via a theoretical and methodological process, it is meant to be a useful guide not only on the issue of gender stereotypes in early childhood. In fact, an innovation in the scientific literature on gender and infancy is due to the concern for the



				construction of masculinity acknowledged as a category enclosed in the grids of patriarchy.
2017	Article	Biemmi Irene, Satta Caterina	<i>Infanzia, educazione e genere. La costruzione delle culture di genere tra contesti scolastici, extrascolastici e familiari.</i> [Infancy, education and gender. The construction of gender culture in school, extramural and family contexts]	The article contains the editorial of the issue of the Journal <i>About Gender</i> dedicated to the theme of the relationship between childhood, education and gender. The authors highlight how childhood is increasingly an object of contention between adults and between different adults' cultures. They review the role of different socialisation agencies, such as the family, the school and non-formal educational contexts.
2017	Article	Crivellaro, Francesca	<i>Infanzie allo specchio. Bambini e bambine, relazioni educative e pratiche di cura nelle rappresentazioni di insegnanti, educatrici e genitori di origine straniera</i> [Childhood at a mirror. Boys and girls, educational relations, caring practices in representations of teachers, educators and parents of foreign origin]	Stemming from a research carried out in Ravenna (Italy) with migrant parents of different European countries, this work examines, within a gender-based perspective, portraits of childhood emerging from a comparative analysis of adult representations about parenthood, caring and educational relations. Conflicting or alternative interpretations of the child-adult relationship emerge, as well as different views on parenting and care.

2017	Book	Fornari Silvia	<i>Genere e modelli educative. Voci dal mondo dell'educazione e dei servizi.</i> [Gender and educational models]	The book, which came about as a result of a seminar entitled "The concept of gender and educational models" in 2016, reflects on male/female relational transformations and their repercussions in the educational world. New interpretative tools are needed bearing in mind also gender diversity, in order to support education and training of new generations.
2018	Book	Véronique Francis, Pileri Anna, Bolognesi Ivana, Biemmi Irene, Barbosa Valeria	<i>Colori della pelle e differenze di genere negli albi illustrati. Ricerche e prospettive pedagogiche</i> [Skin color and gender differences in illustrated texts. Research and pedagogical perspectives]	The focus offered by this text considers an intercultural education which interprets social and cultural phenomena (gender, ethnic differences) within the framework of an intersectional view. Besides analysing toxic narratives divulged by media, new literary proposals for early childhood are reported, as channels through which new realities may be created, yet based on complexity.
2018	Book	Fink Nadia, Merchàn Cecilia	<i>#Non una di meno sin dai primi anni. Educazione di genere per un'infanzia più libera.</i> [#Not one less from the early years. Gender education for a free childhood]	This book is the product of a series of reflections on the theme of gender -based violence carried out by the Argentinian collective "Ni una màs" (which in Italy bears the name of <i>Non una di meno</i> ). The authors assume that only a gender education from early childhood can de-construct toxic models in male and female relations.
2019	Book	Bernabeo Katia	<i>Gli stereotipi nella storia delle donne: verso</i>	The research which inspired the creation of this book provides a historiographic review on how

			<p><i>l'educazione di genere a partire dalla prima infanzia.</i> [Stereotypes in the history of women: towards gender education from the early childhood]</p>	<p>stereotypes develop, and which solutions may be drawn from pedagogy. The text includes also the “White Ribbon” project which has involved educators, families and boys and girls between 2 and 3 years of age, with the aim of offering them the possibilities of exploring and developing skills and interests, overcoming the model of gender inequalities.</p>
2019	Book	Ghigi Rossella	<p><i>Fare la differenza. Educazione di genere dalla prima infanzia all’età adulta.</i> [Making the difference. Gender education from early childhood to adulthood]</p>	<p>This book reviews the theoretical debate on gender studies in Italy with a gender perspective on educational models in early childhood and beyond. The researcher highlights the importance of gender education focusing also on the male element, and provides useful data on the educational strategies to be adopted to fight against gender stereotypes already in early childhood.</p>

## 6.2 Annex 2

### ECAROM interview guide for Early Childhood education and care services (ECECs)

#### CONTEXT

ECaRoM project is a European funded project (*include website*) which strengthens the connection between boys, masculinities and care in order to support egalitarian socialisation environment in ECECs and primary schools, which could inspire boys to caring practices and attitudes in private life and in society in general, potentially also in their further educational choices. As we all know, it is very common that we all reproduce gender stereotypes in our daily interactions, also in working with children. Gender stereotypes about boys and care are reproduced through images/practices/narratives in which caring activities are mostly related to women and in which attributes such as empathy, emotionality, dependence, affectivity, sensitivity, intimacy are presented as feminine/girlish. On the other hand, men/boys are stereotypically attributed opposite qualities of rationality, instrumentality, violence, autonomy, independence, public sphere etc. Besides families/parents and peers, ECEC/primary school teachers have an important role in reproducing or in unfolding and diminishing gender stereotypes.

ECaRoM project includes the following partners: Dissens Institut für Bildung und Forschung e.V. – Germany as project coordinator, Verein für Männer- und Geschlechterthemen Steiermark – Austria, The Peace Institute – Slovenia, Istituto degli Innocenti – Italy, Center of Women's Studies and Policies – Bulgaria, Center for Equality Advancement – Lithuania.

#### AIMS AND SCOPE OF INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

*Interviews and focus groups with teachers and experts should provide insights in the everyday practices and existing pedagogical strategies/tools in ECECs/schools with regards to gender stereotypes related to boys/men/masculinities and private/professional care. Positive and negative practices as well as expressed and observed needs will be relevant for developing ECAROM innovative didactical tools and educational contents which will facilitate teachers to address gender stereotypes related to boys/men/masculinities and to encourage the perception of care work as gender neutral and socially important area.*

*The **aim** of the guidelines is to collect educators/teachers' views on:*

1. Gendered/non-gendered areas of everyday life in ECECs: playing, meals, making up, rest, communication, disciplining, dressing, toileting, cleaning, exercising, performing, social skills – do teachers perceive these areas of activities as gendered or gender neutral, how does gender appear?

2. Existing pedagogical practices/strategies: how teachers address gender stereotypes, (gender) diversity, equality in different aspects of their work? In particular, how are boys perceived and treated as gendered beings?
3. How is care in broad sense, like self-care, mutual care, family care, solidarity, professional care embedded in everyday life in ECEC? Are caring people seen as role models? Are caring men observed?
4. How do teachers address different professions? Do they talk about caring professions? Do they pay attention to men in caring occupations?
5. Which tools (books, toys, rituals, games, videos) do they use?
6. What kind of tools, games, videos, toys, books do they miss?
7. Positive/negative practices in terms of **caring masculinities and** de-stereotyping of care –

### Use of the term care

In ECAROM project we use **the term care** in a broad sense:

1. Individual aspect: as self-care: maintaining personal health and wellbeing.
2. Family/social networks aspect: as work that is needed to ensure the everyday physical, social and emotional well-being of family members (also friends, neighbours, relatives and other close persons) and in particular dependants (children, the elderly and the disabled, sick), including household maintenance (cleaning, shopping, cooking).
3. Professional/occupational aspect: as care professions (EHW): occupations in the field of education, health and social welfare (ECEC and primary school teachers, nurses, care workers, social workers).
4. Societal aspect: as care for the community and society in general (voluntary work; social movements; empathy and solidarity towards excluded and marginalised social groups).
5. Equality aspect: men caring for gender equality in everyday life
6. Ecological aspect: as care for the nature and the planet we live on.
7. Attitudinal aspect: Rejection of violence and rejection of men's privilege in societies

How can caring practices of children look like?

1. Tidying up toys
2. Preparing for lunch/meals
3. Tidying up after meals
4. Consolation of a friend
5. Gardening
6. Taking care of pets
7. Supporting in settling disputes in a nonviolent way
8. Taking in account the opinion of others and not only their own
9. Including children who are "outsiders"
10. Supporting another child in practical things for example in lacing up shoes

## AREAS TO INQUIRE

### 1. TOOLS: USE OF MATERIAL

- **What kind of plays, games, toys, fairy tales, activities do you offer to children? Do you offer boys and girls different activities, books, toys?**
- If you sometimes offer boys and girls different activities, please explain in which situations, which activities and the reason for it.
- If boys play with dolls or do other activities, which are traditionally feminised, how do others react? (children, parents, colleagues)? How do you react in such situations?

### 2. GENDER ROLES AND GENDER MIX IN ORGANISING ACTIVITIES

- **If you have to allocate roles to children, in which way does gender have an influence? Do you sometimes deliberately exchange gender roles in such games?**
- Do you encourage boys/girls in gender atypical activities? Can you name some examples? How do you react when children perform gender atypical activities or have gender atypical reactions? If people can't think of anything, let them think about the children's costumes on Halloween/carnival.
- **Do some children (according to gender) engage always in the same activities? Is there any efforts on your part to engage children in different activities? What strategies do you use?**

- Are there places or activities where only boys or girls are engaged? Which? Do you intervene in such cases? Why? How?

### 3. CARE

- **How do you distribute tasks and assignments among children? Reflect on gender distribution**
- Which care activities do you practice with children on an everyday basis (i.e. tidying up toys or tables after meals, meals' preparation, consolation of a friend, gardening, taking care of pets)?  
**How do you engage boys?**
- Do you discuss with children about family members (e.g. parents, siblings, grandparents) and roles in the family? Do you sometimes discuss share of household chores and gender roles within the family with the children?
- **How do you encourage development of social skills like empathy, listening, helping, solidarity, equality? Reflect on gender differences.**
- Which specific pedagogical activities are related to self-care and care for each other? Are there any differences in carrying out these activities with boys and girls?

### 4. OCCUPATIONS AND PROFESSIONS

- Are different occupations the topic of conversations or games sometimes? In what way? At which occasion?
- **Do you pay some attention to caring professions:** ECEC teachers, primary school teachers, nurses, social workers, care for the elderly, cleaners, cooks? **Do you provide with examples of men involved in care professions? (caring masculinities)**

### 5. ROLE MODELS

- **Do you pay attention and praise caring attitude/practice/relation of a boy in a particular situation as a positive example for others?**
- Do you sometimes use a male role model who performs care: a teacher, a nurse, male ECEC teacher, caring father?

### 6. GENDER STEREOTYPES

- **Do you sometimes talk with children about stereotypical ascriptions for girls/boys?**

### 7. TRAINING

- **Did you receive any training about gender stereotypes in education in your official training or in any additional courses?**



- **What kind of knowledge/tools/equipment/didactical resources do you miss in addressing gender stereotypes in your work with children and parents?**



## 6.3 Annex 3

### ECaRoM Focus groups interview guide

#### TARGET GROUPS

Experts, policy makers, ECECs/primary schools principals and educators, researchers, students

Size of the focus group: minimum 3 people

#### QUESTIONS

1. What's your name? Where do you work?
2. In your opinion, **what is the state of the art in ECECs/primary schools in relation to gender equality?** (curricula? targeting girls, boys, gender diversity?) Is there a special focus on boys, masculinities and care? What are the topics (fatherhood, men in care occupation, etc.)? What is the target (violence prevention, widening perspectives and competences of boys, gender equality, ...)?
3. **What are your experiences with this topic?** Please describe actions which you or your organisation have/has conducted related to boys and care. What were the reactions from teachers/parents/children? What were the experiences: what was good, what went wrong? Please also describe actions related to gender equality in your institution.
4. How (by which practices, discourses, habits, educational mechanisms/tools, organisational atmosphere) do you think **teachers (curriculum?) contribute to the reproduction of gender stereotypes** about boys, masculinities and care?
5. How can the **reproduction of gender stereotypes** about boys, masculinities and care be avoided? Ask first for general principles, and then for concrete examples of practices.
6. Which **training** related to gender sensitivity and diversity do professional pedagogues receive in their education (basic education, further education, obligatory or free of choice, ...)? Have there been significant changes in relation to this topic during the last years?
7. What is **needed** in order to properly address the topic of boys/men and care ECEC/school (training, knowledge, material, methods, support, consciousness-raising, ...)?

## 6.4 Annex 3

### AIMS AND SCOPE OF CHECKLIST

We encourage you to use this checklist in order to observe issues related to gender stereotypes, masculinities and care in your school/kindergarten. We invite you to observe, monitor and document your work and the work carried out in your facility to answer to the following questions.

#### 1) TOOLS: USE OF BOOKS

Books are a fundamental tool in education and are one of the most important instruments to either reproduce and reinforce gender stereotype or propose more gender equal representations of reality.

Checklist for books (both kindergarten books that illustrate stories/fairy tales and learning books for primary schools) (DEE)

Please estimate the percentage of books which focus on ...	Percentage of books (estimate)
... non-stereotypical representations of gender ...	
... women/girls as strong and adventurous ...	
... men/boys as caring and helpful to others ...	
... other genders than female and male ...	
... diversity of families (e.g. parents, female, single parent, male single-parent, same-sex-parents, patchwork, ...) ...	
... un-typical occupations (boys in care, girls in technic) ...	

#### 2) CARE

EcaRom project focuses on the centrality of care in education and aims at promoting the concept of caring masculinities so that boys are taught about the importance of care for themselves, the others, the environment from an early age. In the next section we ask you to analyse how you and your colleagues develop care activities with children and especially with boys.

Which care activities do you practice with children on an everyday basis? For which activities do you ask the help of children? How? To whom? How is making up a room after playing time, for meals preparation and for rest organised?

Please estimate the percentage of boys participating the following activities ...	Percentage of boys participating
... tidying up toys	
... preparing for lunch/meals	
... tidying up after meals	
... consolation of a friend	
... gardening	
... taking care of pets	

Are there any specific caring activities in which you engage boys? Which?

How do you engage boys? Reflect on you day to day actions.

### 3) OCCUPATIONS AND PROFESSIONS

Occupations and professions are still a gendered area of human activity in a number of cases as some professions continue to be predominantly performed by men (e.g. scientific and technic) and others by women (education and care). Given the focus of the EcaRom project we are particularly interested in how you address care professions.

- which of the learning materials /playing materials (pictures, videos, games, toys, books, cartoons) portray a distribution of work, family roles and occupation in a gender equal way?

Name the resources:

- Are these resources sufficient and proper to provide gender equal examples? What do you miss?

Reflect:

- Which professions are most often discussed and how?
- Please describe examples in which men in caring occupations are addressed in the work with children
- Do you involve supporting school/kindergarten personnel like cooks, cleaning ladies/men, janitor in work with children? How, can you describe examples?



## SOCIAL ATTENTION

Do you sometimes address issues like poverty, migration, social exclusion, minorities in conversations with children? At which occasion? How (do you invite guests in the kindergarten/school, organise thematic days etc.)?

What are your experiences with inclusion of minority (for instance Roma children), migrant, asylum seekers, children coming from disadvantaged socio-economic situation?

## CARE FOR ENVIRONMENT

How do you engage children in ecological activities (do you organise a cleaning day, collecting trash, competition in collecting paper/plastic?) Reflect on gender.

## SOCIAL HIERARCHIES, POWER RELATIONS AND VIOLENCE

Do you have issues with violence in your classroom? How do you deal with it?

Do you practice any specific gender equality game/event/routine/trigger in your group of children?

How do you include children, who are shy or silent or tend to be isolated within the group?

## 4) CLOTHING

Clothing is another instrument of gender socialization and children are confronted since an early age with norms and values about outfit. Social norms generally lead to limited choices for girls and even more for boys in relation to their physical appearance and clothing. Please pay attention to the following items:

- How often do you welcome children with sentences like 'you are very pretty today' or 'what a nice dress you wear today'? Who are these children? How do welcome rituals and sentences differ with different children?

## 5) ATTENTION AND PERSONNEL HELP

Please think about typical situations when children ask for support. In which ways are different children (gender, age) involved in these situations? In which way does the gender of the child matter when pedagogues provide support?

## 6) FAMILIES AND THE ROLE OF FATHERS AND MALE RELATIVES



Families are the first agent of gender socialization as mothers/fathers and other relatives represent the first models for children. In this section we are particularly interested in how you and your colleagues relate to fathers and male relatives as generally information about children is provided mostly mothers. This is related to norms and values around care (mainly linked to women) and also to work models (male breadwinner and female co-earner).

1. How do you relate with parents? Do you relate primarily with mothers? Do you provide different information to mothers and fathers?
2. Are male relatives (grandfathers, siblings, etc.) of the children involved in the school/kindergarten and how?
3. In case, the child hurts himself/herself, whom of the parents or near relatives of the child do you usually call? Think about all children in your facility and estimate the percentage of near relative (e.g. mother, father) you call in case of emergency. Please describe the results.