

# TEACHING GENDER ISSUES: A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW ON (INEQUALITY IN ACADEMIA IN SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

ENSINANDO QUESTÕES DE GÊNERO: UMA VISÃO COMPARATIVA DA (DES)IGUALDADE EM MEIO ACADÊMICO NO SUDESTE DA EUROPA

## ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine gender issues within the framework of the European Union's primary strategies in its external relations. The European approach, shaped by the multicultural and diverse consortium of member states, emphasizes equality between women and men. It considers factors such as the gender earnings gap in EU countries, job satisfaction, race, immigration, religion, inclusion policies, the feminization of work, work qualifications, and work context. The case studies explore gender topics across various social, political, and religious environments, with a particular focus on former communist countries within the European context. These studies analyze gender misconceptions and prejudices, women's empowerment, and social constructs in academia.

**Keywords:** Gender Studies. (In)equality. Academia. Southeastern Europe.

## RESUMO

Este estudo visa examinar questões de gênero no âmbito das principais estratégias da União Europeia nas suas relações externas. A abordagem europeia, moldada pelo consórcio multicultural e diversificado dos estados-membros, enfatiza a igualdade entre mulheres e homens. Considera fatores como a diferença salarial entre gêneros nos países da UE, a satisfação no trabalho, raça, imigração, religião, políticas de inclusão, a feminização do trabalho, qualificações profissionais e o contexto laboral. Os estudos de caso exploram tópicos de gênero em vários ambientes sociais, políticos e religiosos, com um foco particular nos países ex-comunistas no contexto europeu. Estes estudos analisam equívocos e preconceitos de gênero, o empoderamento das mulheres e as construções sociais na academia.

**Palavras-chave:** Estudos de Gênero. (Des)igualdade. Academia. Sudeste da Europa.

---

### Ramona Mihaila

Dimitrie Cantemir Christian University, University of Bucharest. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2406-7616>. Email: [ramona.mihaila@gmail.com](mailto:ramona.mihaila@gmail.com)

### Isabel Lousada

Investigadora Auxiliar. Universidade Nova de Lisboa: Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas - Lisbon, PT. ORCID : <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7652-8544>. Email: [iclousada@gmail.com](mailto:iclousada@gmail.com)

## Gender as a Historical and Social Construct

Initially, gender studies focused primarily on topics related to women, building on the foundation already established by women's studies in many academic environments, which frequently included discussions of feminism. The early emphasis on women's issues and feminist theory provided a crucial platform for addressing the systemic inequalities and societal roles that had historically marginalized women. These discussions were instrumental in challenging patriarchal structures and advocating for gender equality, both within academia and society at large.

Over time, the field of gender studies evolved to encompass a broader range of topics, including queer studies and men's studies. Queer studies emerged as a critical area of inquiry, examining the experiences, histories, and cultures of LGBTQ+ individuals. This expansion was essential in addressing the diverse and intersecting identities that shape people's experiences of gender and sexuality. Queer studies brought to light the complexities of sexual orientation and gender identity, challenging heteronormative and cisnormative assumptions within both academic discourse and society.

Men's studies also became an important facet of gender studies, focusing on the social construction of masculinity and the various pressures and expectations placed on men. This subfield examines how traditional notions of masculinity can be both limiting and harmful, not only to men but to society as a whole. By exploring men's roles in perpetuating and challenging gender norms, men's studies contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics.

Western universities quickly embraced these new areas of study and research with enthusiasm, integrating them into their curricula and expanding their academic offerings. This enthusiasm reflected a growing recognition of the importance of examining gender from multiple perspectives and the value of inclusive and diverse academic inquiry. The establishment of interdisciplinary programs and research centers dedicated to gender, sexuality, and feminist studies became a hallmark of progressive academic institutions in the West.

In contrast, Eastern universities were slower to develop similar programs. The historical, cultural, and political contexts of former Communist countries played a significant role in this disparity. Under Communist regimes, issues related to gender and sexuality were often subsumed under broader discourses of class struggle and economic equality. While Communist ideology promoted the idea of gender equality in the workforce, it often neglected the nuanced and intersectional aspects of gender studies that had gained traction in the West.

Consequently, many universities in former Communist countries still lack undergraduate or graduate programs in gender studies. The legacy of Communist policies, coupled with ongoing economic and political challenges, has hindered the development of comprehensive gender studies programs in these regions. Additionally, social attitudes towards gender and sexuality in some Eastern countries remain

conservative, further complicating efforts to introduce and sustain gender studies as a legitimate and necessary field of academic inquiry.

Despite these challenges, there are emerging efforts in some Eastern universities to establish gender studies programs and foster research in this area. International collaborations, academic exchanges, and the influence of global feminist and LGBTQ+ movements are gradually contributing to a more inclusive and expansive approach to gender studies in these regions. As these efforts continue to grow, there is hope that gender studies will gain greater recognition and support, ultimately enriching the academic landscape and promoting social justice globally.

The field of gender studies encompasses a wide array of subjects, including literature, linguistics, history, psychology, political science, anthropology, law, media, cinema, and the arts. Within these disciplines, topics such as race, human development, ethnicity, social class, inclusion, and disability are examined, often intersecting with categories of gender and sexuality. This interdisciplinary approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the various dimensions and complexities of gender and sexuality across different contexts and frameworks.

In the book *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe*, editors Shana Penn and Jill Massino, along with the contributors, discuss the state of research on gender issues in the context of Eastern and Central Europe following the collapse of state socialism. They note that although significant research has been conducted on gender and the transition period, there has been comparatively less published in English that focuses specifically on gender politics, policies, and the everyday lives of women and men under state socialism.

The editors and contributors explain this imbalance as somewhat understandable given the initial priority on policy-oriented analysis that concentrated on the effects of the transition on women's civic, economic, and social positions. Despite this rationale, they find it curious that there has not been more research produced on gender and state socialism, especially considering the wealth of documentary and human sources available to scholars since 1989.

Some may argue that the imbalance in research output reflects the perceived illegitimacy of the socialist system. However, the editors emphasize that their conversations with both men and women reveal that socialism has had a significant and lasting impact on how individuals perceive government, the economy, society, and their personal lives. This enduring influence underscores the importance of examining gender dynamics under state socialism to better understand the historical and ongoing effects on people's lives in these regions.

## **Gender (In)Equality and Women's Empowerment**

The 2030 United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development acknowledges the interconnected and indivisible nature of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

These goals include: 1. No poverty, 2. Zero hunger, 3. Good health and well-being, 4. Quality education, 5. Gender equality, 6. Clean water and sanitation, 7. Affordable and clean energy, 8. Decent work and economic growth, 9. Industry, innovation, and infrastructure, 10. Reduced inequalities, 11. Sustainable cities and communities, 12. Responsible consumption and production, 13. Climate action, 14. Life below water, 15. Life on land, 16. Peace, justice, and strong institutions, and 17. Partnerships for the goals. These goals and their respective targets are designed to balance the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

The interconnections between quality education and gender equality serve as a clear example of the integrated nature of these goals. For instance, girls born into impoverished families who are forced into early marriages are more likely to drop out of school, experience early and unintended pregnancies, and face violence compared to girls from wealthier families who marry later (UN Women, 2018). This illustrates how the quality and outcomes of education are both consequences of and influences on gender inequality within society.

UN Women emphasizes that “quality education and gender equality are not only two of the SDGs but are also essential means for realizing the remaining 15 Goals.” Achieving these goals requires addressing educational inclusion and outcomes alongside issues of gender equality, particularly to support those who are most marginalized and left behind.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development urges countries to employ a comprehensive range of resources, standards, tools, and disaggregated data to monitor progress on the intertwined issues of gender equality and education (UNESCO, 2018). The Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report 2018 further highlights the extensive interconnectedness of these issues, encompassing gender norms, values, attitudes, legal and policy environments, and other institutional factors. This holistic approach underscores the necessity of addressing gender equality to achieve sustainable development and underscores the critical role of education in this endeavor.

Issues of gender equality must also be examined in close relation to equity, which is a central tenet of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and is intrinsically linked to fairness and justice. Equity involves ensuring that the education of all learners is deemed equally important and recognizes that inequalities can arise from the education system itself, including its organization, accessibility, learning environment, and methods of teaching and evaluation (UNESCO, 2017). Achieving equity, along with inclusion, requires eliminating barriers for all learners, irrespective of their gender, diversity, social conditions, or opportunities. This should be a focus in all aspects of education sector analysis, policy-making, planning, budgeting, and implementation. By doing so, we can improve educational quality for all learners and enhance gender equality in educational outcomes within society.

Gender equality is realized when “women and men have equal conditions for realizing their human rights and for contributing to, and benefitting from, economic, social, cultural, and political development” (UNESCO, 2017). Therefore, it is essential to evaluate progress towards gender equality both within education and through

education. This evaluation should not only consider gender parity in participation, attainment, and learning outcomes but also focus on equity in social and economic contexts. This includes examining gender norms, institutions, and the entire education system, encompassing laws, policies, practices, environments, and resources (UNESCO, 2019).

This comprehensive approach is encapsulated in the study “From Access to Empowerment: UNESCO’s Strategy for Gender Equality in and through Education (2019-2025),” which is structured around three pillars: better data for informing action; better legal, policy, and planning frameworks for rights; and better-quality learning opportunities. The report investigates multiple issues at the intersection of education and gender equality, functioning as a regional extension of the report “The Intersection of Gender Equality and Education in South-East Europe: A Regional Situation Analysis of the Nexus between SDG4 (Quality Education) and SDG5 (Gender Equality)” (Fuller, 2019).

This approach considers Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets that are critically interlinked, analyzing the state of gender equality in education. This includes examining gender parity in participation, the quality of learning, and policies that impact the predominantly female teaching workforce. Additionally, it addresses education’s role in tackling other related issues such as social norms, gender-based violence, early and unintended pregnancy, and child marriage. By addressing these interconnected issues, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how to advance gender equality through education.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) considers gender equality a core value and strategic priority, as illustrated in its 2023 report, “The OECD’s Contribution to Promoting Gender Equality.” This document reaffirms the OECD’s commitment to advancing policy options that help close gender gaps and ensure that all its analysis, research, and policy advice integrate a gender equality perspective. Achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls are also integral to the commitments made by OECD members to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Despite progress in even the most conservative societies, substantial advancements are still necessary. Gender gaps persist in areas such as education, employment, and public leadership across many OECD member countries. Discriminatory social institutions continue to prevent women from fully benefiting from available opportunities. The current global social context, including the war in Ukraine with its tragic losses among civilians and military personnel, both men and women, as well as immigrants and displaced children, further complicates the pursuit of gender equality. Additionally, the COVID-19 crisis highlighted numerous gender inequalities and gaps, underscoring the need to intensify efforts towards the United Nations’ Women, Peace, and Security agenda.

New threats to gender equality are also emerging, notably in the form of online harassment and gender-based disinformation. The OECD emphasizes that realizing gender equality and removing structural barriers—especially those related

to discrimination and intersecting with other inequalities—remain top priorities. These efforts are seen not only as a matter of basic human rights but also as essential for long-term economic well-being and prosperity. Gender equality is associated with economic growth, stronger democracy, enhanced social cohesion, and increased well-being for all members of society.

To achieve these goals, the OECD is focused on a comprehensive approach that includes developing policy options by accelerating the development of policies to close gender gaps in various sectors; integrating gender perspectives by ensuring all analysis, research, and policy advice incorporate gender equality perspectives; addressing new threats by tackling emerging challenges such as online harassment and gender-based disinformation; enhancing commitments by strengthening the dedication to the UN's Women, Peace, and Security agenda; monitoring progress by continuously assessing the impact of social institutions and global contexts on gender equality. The OECD's commitment to these initiatives highlights the importance of addressing gender inequality not just for the sake of fairness and justice, but also for fostering sustainable economic and social development.

Tanja van der Lippe and Éva Fodor explore whether gender inequality in the labor market increased following the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe (p. 132). Prior to 1988, there was a distinct gender division in the labor market, with women predominantly employed in the service sector and men in industry. The expansion of the service sector has allowed women to leverage their experience and maintain their employment patterns. Conversely, men have notably advanced their positions in sectors related to the burgeoning market economy.

In their comparative analysis of multiple countries, the authors did not identify significant differences in the evolution of gender inequality between 1988 and 1993. Their study utilized data from the survey 'Social Stratification in Eastern Europe after 1989,' conducted in 1993, encompassing Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Russia, and Slovakia. This comprehensive dataset allowed for a detailed examination of the labor market dynamics in the post-communist period, revealing that the anticipated exacerbation of gender inequality was not uniformly observed across the studied nations.

In *Legal Perspectives of Gender Equality in South East Europe*, editor Veronika Efremova and the contributors examine the principle of equal treatment between women and men, grounded in a robust foundation of legal resources. The discussion is centered on the relevant provisions initially found in the EC Treaty (TEC) and now encapsulated within the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

Article 8 of the TFEU articulates the mission of the Union to eliminate inequalities and promote equality between men and women. Article 19 grants the Union the authority to take appropriate actions to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation. Furthermore, Article 153 empowers the Union to adopt directives aimed at ensuring equality between men and women in terms of labor market opportunities and conditions of work and employment. Article 157 establishes the principle of equal pay and authorizes the Union

to implement measures to ensure the application of equal treatment in employment and occupation, which includes the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value.

The contributors meticulously analyze these provisions, illustrating how they form the legal backbone for promoting gender equality within the European Union. The examination covers the legislative and policy frameworks that the Union employs to address and rectify gender disparities, particularly in the labor market. The text delves into the implications of these articles for member states, exploring how these legal instruments are instrumental in advancing gender equality and providing mechanisms to combat discrimination in various facets of public and professional life. By focusing on these legal perspectives, the work provides a comprehensive overview of the EU's commitment to gender equality and the legal mandates that support this mission.

The much-updated report “SIGI 2023: Global Report. Gender Equality in Times of Crisis” presents the findings of the fifth edition of the OECD Development Centre's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI). This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the global results, examining formal and informal laws, social norms, and practices. It highlights significant progress achieved since 2019 and outlines the necessary steps to fulfill Sustainable Development Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda.

Building on the four dimensions of SIGI's conceptual framework and adopting a global perspective, the chapter delves into several critical areas: discrimination within the family sphere, thus the report identifies this domain as having the highest levels of discrimination, evidenced by women dedicating 2.6 times more time to unpaid care and domestic work compared to men; violence against women, the report underscores that violence against women remains a pervasive global issue, sustained by social acceptance. In 2023, nearly one in three women has experienced intimate-partner violence at least once in her lifetime, and one in ten has survived it in the past year; economic empowerment of women, the chapter explores how discriminatory laws and restrictive norms of masculinities hinder women's economic empowerment. The gender gap in labor force participation is 25 percentage points, with men often prioritized over women in the workplace; women's and girls' agency in the public sphere, despite progress, the report notes that women's and girls' agency in the public sphere remains constrained. In 2023, women constitute 27% of members of parliament, and it is projected that achieving parity in national parliaments will take at least 40 years.

The chapter thus provides a nuanced analysis of these issues, building on SIGI's conceptual framework to illustrate the complex interplay between social institutions and gender inequality. It emphasizes the importance of addressing both formal laws and informal social norms to promote gender equality. The findings underscore the ongoing challenges and highlight the critical areas where targeted efforts are necessary to achieve the goals set forth in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## Challenges on Gender in Higher Education

All individuals, regardless of gender, should possess equal rights to education. However, gender-based violence in schools significantly undermines this right and poses a substantial challenge to achieving gender equality in education. The discourse surrounding gender studies in education encompasses two primary dimensions. The first dimension involves analyzing gender equality and gender relations within the academic environment. The second dimension addresses the obstacles that gender studies as a field has encountered over the more than 30 years following the collapse of communism in the highly conservative regions of southeastern Eastern Europe.

In their study presented at the “Advances in Business-Related Scientific Research Conference” in Rome, 2013, Ana Horvat, Jelena Ruso, Marina Dobrota, and Mladen Djuric explored gender disparities in educational achievement within Southeastern European countries such as Serbia, Romania, Slovenia, Croatia, Bulgaria, and Hungary. The research investigated why female educational performance in some of these nations remains at or below average compared to the overall population. They found that men in these countries generally attain higher levels of education than women, including in tertiary education. By comparing these findings with data from Nordic countries and the United States, the authors concluded that Southeastern Europe continues to exhibit educational trends characterized by gender disparities, which are attributed to enduring traditional gender roles within families, insufficient economic development, and income inequality in these regions.

Fiona Leach, in her report “Practising Gender Analysis in Education,” underscores that the impetus for developing analytical frameworks integrating gender perspectives into planning processes arises primarily from two factors. Firstly, there is recognition that previous policy interventions often overlooked gender considerations, resulting in avoidable costs and failures. This realization necessitated the development of new concepts and tools to ensure greater sensitivity to gender issues. Secondly, there is a need to organize and consolidate insights from feminist scholarship and activism. This systematic approach aims to enhance the visibility of gender-related insights within the planning process, particularly for stakeholders less familiar with gender issues (Leach, p. 18).

Martina Viarengo explores gender disparities in STEM fields, highlighting that these gaps manifest early in secondary schooling and persist throughout the educational journey. Research indicates a diverse array of factors influencing these disparities, with varying effects across countries and over time. Given the complexity and varying magnitudes of these gaps at different educational stages, Viarengo suggests tailored policies and interventions are necessary along the educational trajectory to address them effectively.

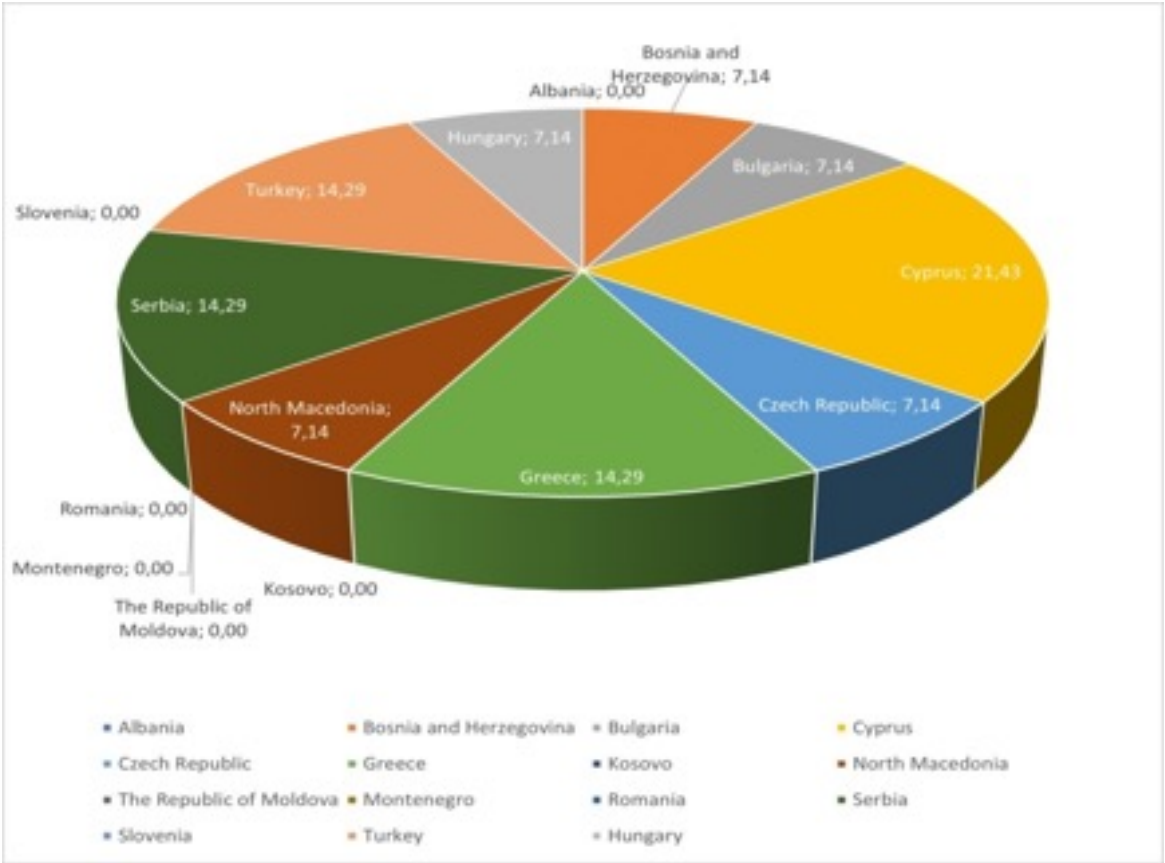
According to the *2022 Global Gender Gap Index*, progress towards gender parity remains slow on a global scale. It estimates that at the current rate, it will take approximately 132 years to achieve full parity and close the overall gender gap



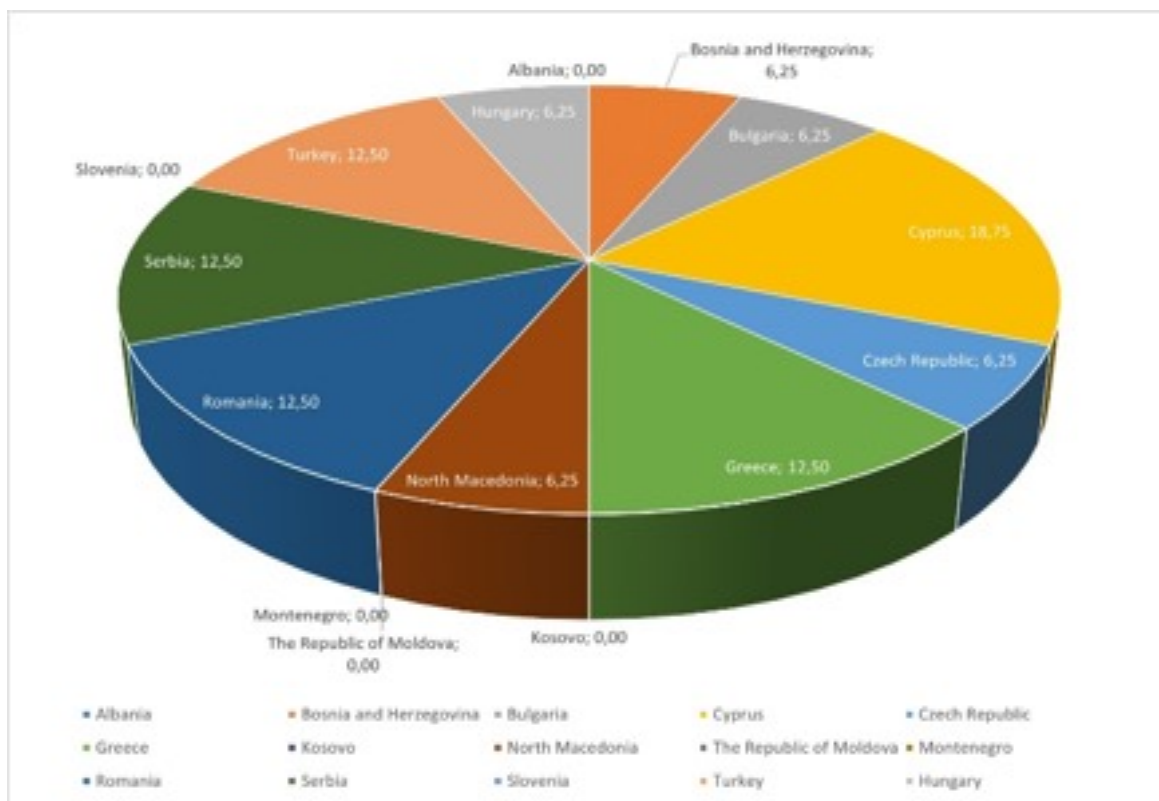
worldwide. This sobering statistic underscores the persistent challenges and the need for sustained efforts to advance gender equality across various domains (Global Gender Gap Index, 2022).

Our comprehensive survey, based on the official websites of universities, provides an overview of academic programs offered in Southeastern European countries. The study examines bachelor's and master's degree offerings across various disciplines (refer to Figure 1 and Figure 2).

**Figure 1.** Gender Studies Programs for Bachelor's



**Figure 2.** Gender Studies Programs for Master's



Over the past two decades, achieving gender equity in education has emerged as a critical focus in global educational reform initiatives. International organizations and political entities have increasingly prioritized efforts to enhance gender equity in education, as evidenced by commitments outlined in several key agreements and declarations. These include the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the UN Millennium Declaration (2000), and the platforms established at significant international conferences such as the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (1994) and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995).

Within the European Union (EU), gender mainstreaming has become an integral policy objective, with commitments to integrating gender issues across all policy areas and making equal gender opportunities a precondition for EU accession and access to European funds. Despite these efforts at the EU level, the *2023 Report on Gender Equality in the EU* highlights limited progress in incorporating gender considerations into education reforms in Central and South Eastern Europe. The European Commission has underscored its commitment to advancing gender equality through its comprehensive strategy for 2020-2025, which serves as a roadmap outlining policy objectives and actions aimed at promoting gender equality across the EU.

The report titled “Open Minds: Opportunities for Gender Equity in Education. A Report on Central and South Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union,” authored

by Cathryn Magno, Iveta Silova, Susan Wright, and Eniko Demeny, provides an in-depth analysis of education policies and practices across the region. Specifically focusing on Albania, Azerbaijan, Poland, Romania, Tajikistan, and Ukraine, these countries were selected to encompass the diverse geographical, economic, and social contexts within Central and South Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. The report acknowledges the intricate nature of the educational issues under examination, emphasizing the challenge of drawing generalized conclusions across the entire region. Instead, the study aims to highlight significant variations and commonalities observed among subregions and within specific countries. It delves into key aspects such as educational access, participation rates, academic achievements, school operational practices, and the formulation of educational policies.

Susan Zimmerman's study titled "The Institutionalization of Women's and Gender Studies in Higher Education in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: Asymmetric Politics and the Regional-Transnational Configuration" examines the evolution of gender studies within the region. Zimmerman highlights that the process has been protracted and ongoing. Scholars have undertaken additional responsibilities to equip themselves with expertise, fostering a community around gender studies through initiatives such as reading groups and conferences. They have navigated challenges posed by university administrations and governmental bodies to integrate gender perspectives into existing curricula. Moreover, they have innovatively devised strategies to enhance the training of scholars in this interdisciplinary field. These efforts persist as dedicated individuals within the region endeavor to establish, expand, or preserve gender studies programs, both within academic institutions and beyond.

The volume titled "The Birth of a Field: Women's and Gender Studies in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe," edited by Krassimira Daskalova, examines the current state of women's and gender studies within educational contexts in Romania, Poland, Ukraine, Serbia, and Hungary. The volume underscores the limited availability of academic programs dedicated to these disciplines across these countries. In contrast, Kornelia Slavova, in her article "The beginnings of gender studies in Bulgarian academia" published in *Aspasia* (5, 2011), explores the two primary strategies implemented in Bulgaria regarding gender studies education. She critically evaluates the advantages and disadvantages of teaching gender studies as independent, standalone programs versus integrating them into existing traditional disciplines.

A recently published book by Anna M. Górska provides a thorough introduction to the gendered dynamics of academic career development. The work synthesizes relevant literature with innovative empirical studies to enhance the understanding of how gender influences academia across various roles and career stages. Focusing on the context of Central and Eastern Europe, Górska's research offers new insights into the gendered nature of academic careers in this region (p. 18).

Currently, both established and emerging academic programs in gender studies should expand their curricula beyond traditional subjects such as philosophy, literature, linguistics, and social sciences. While continuing to equip students for

careers in research and teaching, these programs must also forge connections with the economic sector and provide training that develops professionally oriented skills. This approach is essential to prepare students for careers in gender policy and social reform, where expertise in gender mainstreaming is increasingly in demand. Allaine Cerwonka sees in “Gender Studies in “New” Europe. Reflections on What Lies Beyond.” (*ZtG Bulletin* 34, 2008), ‘Gender Studies’ as a Vocation. She argues that “EU gender mainstreaming and the general rise in minority rights have impacted the job market that gender studies graduates now enter” (p. 88).

## Conclusions

In the context of Southeastern Europe, the field of gender studies has undergone substantial developments over the past few decades, although it continues to confront persistent challenges associated with dynamic political landscapes, evolving societal attitudes, and inadequate institutional support structures. These factors collectively pose significant hurdles to the field’s growth and institutionalization within the region.

Despite these obstacles, there is a discernible trend towards greater recognition of the pivotal role that gender equality and feminist perspectives play in both academic discourse and broader social frameworks across Southeastern Europe. This increasing recognition reflects a growing awareness of the necessity to integrate gender issues more comprehensively into educational curricula, policy-making processes, and societal norms. Nonetheless, ongoing efforts are required to consolidate these gains and further promote the advancement of gender studies as a critical area of academic inquiry and social reform within the region.

Several universities in Southeastern Europe have introduced interdisciplinary programs in gender studies that integrate insights from a wide array of disciplines including sociology, anthropology, political science, history, literature, and cultural studies. These programs are designed to provide students with a multifaceted understanding of gender issues from diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives.

In response to the growing demand for specialized knowledge in gender studies, universities in the region have established dedicated departments or centers focused exclusively on gender research and education. These academic units typically offer both undergraduate and graduate degree programs tailored to explore various aspects of gender, feminist theory, and related social phenomena. Additionally, they provide platforms for advanced research and scholarly inquiry into contemporary gender-related issues.

By incorporating a broad range of disciplinary approaches, these programs aim not only to educate students about the complexities of gender dynamics but also to equip them with the analytical tools and critical perspectives necessary for careers in academia, research, advocacy, and policy-making. As such, they contribute

significantly to advancing scholarly knowledge and societal awareness of gender equality and social justice issues within Southeastern Europe.

Gender studies courses are frequently integrated as elective offerings within diverse academic programs across universities in Southeastern Europe. This approach enables students from a range of disciplines to delve into critical examinations of gender issues and feminist perspectives alongside their primary fields of study.

These courses typically encompass a wide spectrum of topics essential to understanding gender dynamics in contemporary society. Themes explored often include gender identity, sexuality, reproductive rights, gender-based violence, and various strands of feminist theory. By incorporating these subjects into their curricula, universities provide students with opportunities to engage deeply with complex social issues and theoretical frameworks that underpin gender studies.

Moreover, the inclusion of gender studies electives enhances interdisciplinary learning experiences, encouraging students to apply diverse analytical lenses to their academic inquiries and professional endeavors. This educational approach not only fosters a nuanced understanding of gender as a social construct but also promotes critical thinking and informed dialogue on gender equality and related social justice concerns within the educational landscape of Southeastern Europe.

Even if there are universities that collaborate with civil society organizations, government agencies, and international institutions on projects related to gender equality and women's empowerment and these collaborations facilitate knowledge exchange, policy development, and advocacy efforts aimed at addressing gender-based discrimination and promoting social change, the gender studies issues are still debatable in academic environment.

While some universities in Southeastern Europe engage in collaborative initiatives with civil society organizations, government agencies, and international institutions to advance gender equality and women's empowerment, the academic discourse surrounding gender studies remains a subject of ongoing debate.

These collaborative efforts serve as platforms for exchanging knowledge, developing policies, and advocating for initiatives aimed at addressing gender-based discrimination and fostering societal transformation. By partnering with external stakeholders, universities leverage their expertise and resources to contribute to broader social change agendas.

However, within the academic environment, discussions on gender studies continue to provoke debate and scrutiny. Issues related to the scope, methodologies, and theoretical frameworks of gender studies persist as topics of contention among scholars, educators, and students. Despite these debates, universities remain pivotal in shaping intellectual discourse and advancing research agendas that critically examine gender dynamics and contribute to informed perspectives on gender equality within Southeastern Europe and beyond.

## References

CERWONKA, Allaine. Gender Studies in “New” Europe. Reflections on What Lies Beyond. *Zentrum für Transdisziplinäre Geschlechterstudien (ZtG) Bulletin*, n. 34, 2008, p. 85–91.

DASKALOVA, Krassimira. The Birth of a Field: Women’s and Gender Studies in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe. *Aspasia*, v. 4, n. 1, 2010.

EFREMOVA, Veronika. *Legal Perspectives of Gender Equality in South East Europe*. Skopje: Centre for SEELS, 2012.

From access to empowerment: UNESCO’s Strategy for Gender Equality in and through Education (2019–2025). UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, 2019.

GÓRSKA, Anna. *Gender and Academic Career Development in Central and Eastern Europe*. London: Routledge, 2023.

LEACH, Fiona. *Practising Gender Analysis in Education*. Great Britain: Oxfam Publishing House, 2003.

LIPPE, Tanja van der & FODOR, Éva. Changes in Gender Inequality in Six Eastern European Countries. *Acta Sociologica*, v. 41, n. 2, 1998, p. 131–149.

MAGNO, Cathryn, SILOVA, Iveta, WRIGHT, Susan & DEMENY, Eniko. *Open Minds Opportunities for Gender Equity in Education. A Report on Central and South Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*. Open Society Institute, Education Support Program Network Women’s Program, New York, 2003.

PENN, Shana & MASSINO, Jill. *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

The Intersection of Gender Equality and Education in South-East Europe: A Regional Situation Analysis of the Nexus between SDG4 (Quality Education) and SDG5 (Gender Equality). Venice: UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, 2019.

VIARENGO, Martina. *European Expert Network on Economics of Education (EENEE) Gender Gaps in Education: Evidence and Policy Implications*. EENEE Analytical Report No. 46 Prepared for the European Commission, European Union, 2021.

ZIMMERMAN, Susan. *The 2023 Report on Gender Equality in the EU*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023.

\_\_\_\_\_. The institutionalization of women's and gender studies in higher education in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union: Asymmetric politics and the regional-transnational configuration. *East Central Europe*, v. 34, n. 1-2, 2007, p. 131-160.

Recebido em 28/06/2024.

Aceito em 15/07/2024.