European Institute for Gender Equality

Perception to policy: Dismantling gender stereotypes in the European Union

Executive summary

Even with growing awareness and progress, gender stereotypes still run deep across the EU. They are built into our cultures, institutions, relationships and behaviours, shaping how women and men see themselves and each other. Stereotypes affect the choices people make, the opportunities they get and how they experience life at home and in public. Gender stereotypes influence the way public services are designed and can affect whether individuals seek support and receive the help they need.

The Gender Equality Index reveals persistent gender inequalities in various domains, such as paid work, access to financial resources, education, unpaid care, health, power and decision-making, and gender-based violence. Progress towards true equality is often held back by deep-rooted gender stereotypes. In times of crisis and social instability, the stereotypes can grow even stronger, increasing the pressure on hard-won equality gains.

Perceptions of gender inequality at work are widespread, particularly among women ([1]). Many people still see men as naturally assertive while women are viewed as less competitive. These ideas affect how leadership and merit are judged. Young men are more likely than young women to think men and women are treated equally at work, showing how early biased ideas can take root.

The traditional view of men as the main earners and women as financially dependent is still common. That mindset affects women's income, financial autonomy and career ambitions. Many young men continue to support these traditional roles in relationships. Change is happening, but far too slowly.

Even as young women surpass men in education, bias lingers and subtle inequalities remain. They influence what study areas women and men choose, how confident they feel and how far they go in academic careers.

Women in leadership face a double bind. They are judged more harshly and held to conflicting standards. Many people, especially young men, still think men are more ambitious or better suited to lead. Such thinking dims women's visibility and slows their path to leadership.

([1]) This analysis used data from the 2024 Special Eurobarometer 545 on gender stereotypes, Flash Eurobarometer 544 'Gender stereotypes – Violence against women', the 2017 Special Eurobarometer 465 on gender equality, the 2023/2024 European Social Survey and the 2017–2022 European Values Study, along with other research.

Caregiving remains strongly feminised. While younger generations are more open to sharing responsibilities, major gender gaps remain. The idea that men are less capable at home and the stigma fathers face for taking on caregiving roles show just how deep the double standard runs in balancing work and family life.

Traditional gender norms harm men's health by encouraging them to take risks and discouraging them from seeking help. Gender stereotypes pressure men to hide weakness or vulnerability. Although many people believe that healthcare is equal, younger women often notice bias, especially in areas like reproductive and sexual health, where stigma still exists.

Stereotypes that tie masculinity to power and control are common and dangerous. Young men, in particular, are more likely to excuse controlling behaviour, believe harmful myths and shift blame onto victims. Although to a significantly lower degree, some young women also accept this type of behaviour.

Gender stereotypes in the labour market: unequal treatment and promotion gaps

Despite progress in gender equality, important differences remain in how women and men fare in the labour market in the EU. Gender norms and gender stereotypes influence how people get jobs, how they are treated at work, who gets promoted and how different types of work are valued.

Views on gender equality at work vary widely across the EU, between women and men and between generations. Across Europe, women are consistently more likely than men to perceive workplace inequalities – a gap that is widest among younger generations.

The idea that men should be given priority when jobs are scarce still exists – especially among men and older people. In the youngest age group, 15 % of men compared with 7 % of women agree that men deserve jobs more than women when jobs are scarce (see Figure 1). The views of women and men diverge most in Latvia (15 percentage points (pp)), Lithuania (15 pp) and Greece (13 pp). Notably, agreement with this stereotype has gone down in all age groups over the

Gender inequalities in paid work in the EU: key facts

Employment. In 2024, the employment rate for men was 81 %, compared with 71 % for women. More than three times as many women as men work part-time (28 % and 8 %).

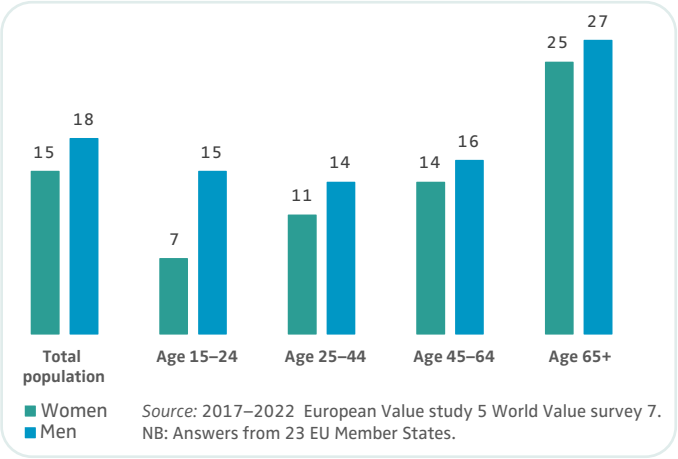
Care burden. 6.1 % of women and 0.6 % of men (aged 15–74) either do not search for a job or work part-time due to care responsibilities or for other family reasons.

Tech sector. Women make up 19 % of ICT specialists.

Women in leadership. Every third managerial position is held by a woman (35 %).

past 10 years, except among young people. In some countries like Romania, Slovakia and Croatia, support for this idea has actually grown by 10 pp or more, showing a step backwards. These attitudes show how traditional roles affect people's perception of women's place in the workforce. Even when women work as much as men, they are still often seen as secondary earners. This shapes how both women and men make choices about jobs and family life ([2]).

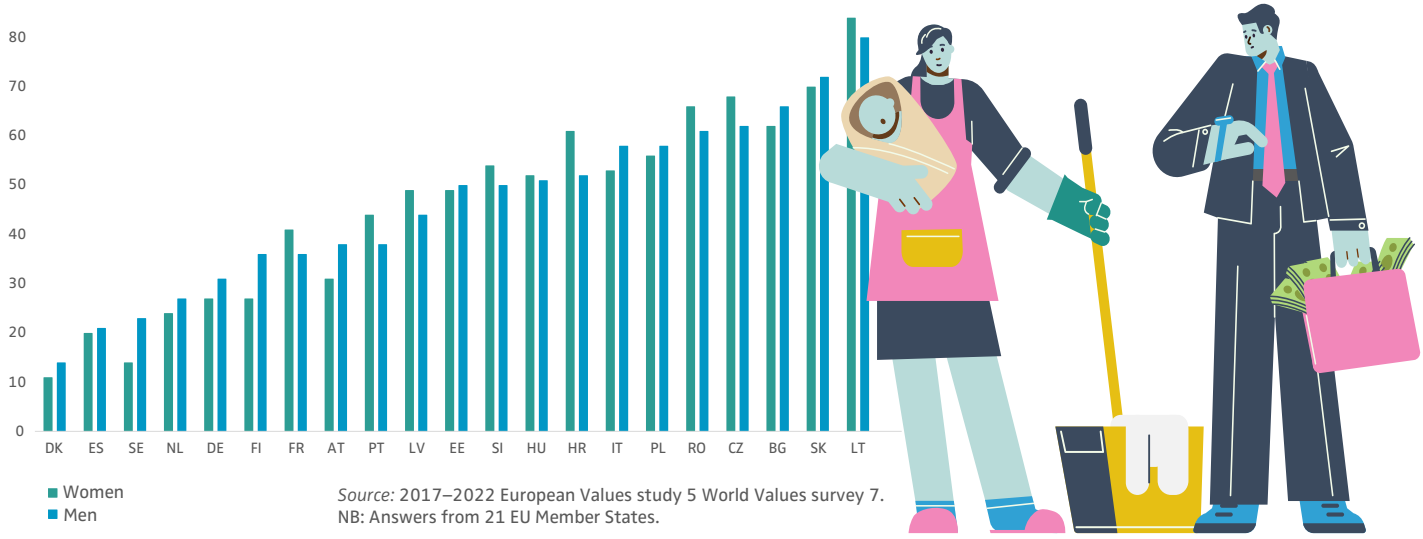
Figure 1: Women and men agreeing that 'When jobs are scarce, men have more right to a job than women' (%)



Source: 2017–2022 European Value study 5 World Value survey 7.
NB: Answers from 23 EU Member States.

Across Europe, many people still believe that a woman's main fulfilment comes from family life. In some EU Member States, women agree with this idea even more than men. Of the surveyed Member States, four out of 10 women and men think that a job may be good, but what women truly desire is a home and children (see Figure 2). This perception varies significantly across the EU, ranging from 82 % in Lithuania to 13 % in Denmark. In most Member States, agreement with this stereotype has decreased over time, except in Slovakia, Croatia, Denmark and Finland. This belief becomes more common with age, reaching 56 % among people aged 65 and over. While it is lower among young people (15–24), it is still high: 35 % of men and 31 % of women hold this view. This shows that traditional gender norms are still strong, even among the youngest generation. It also suggests that women are still being raised to see caregiving as their main role, possibly because there is not enough structural support to combine work and family life ([3]).

Figure 2: Women and men agreeing that 'A job is all right but what most women really want is a home and children' (%, 15+)



Source: 2017–2022 European Values study 5 World Values survey 7.
NB: Answers from 21 EU Member States.

The belief that men earn more because their jobs are more demanding stubbornly endures, with large national differences reflecting broader cultural attitudes. According to data from the 2024 Special Eurobarometer 545 on gender stereotypes (EB2024), 36 % of women and 46 % of men agree with this stereotype. This view is quite widespread in Slovakia (73 %), Hungary (71 %) and Poland (66 %) and much less supported in Sweden (14 %), the Netherlands (17 %) and Finland (23 %), where long-standing policies support work–life balance, publicly

([2]) Barkhuizen, E. N., Masakane, G. and van der Sluis, L., 'In search of factors that hinder the career advancement of women to senior leadership positions', *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, Vol. 48, 2022, a1986.
([3]) León, M. and Pavolini, E., "Social investment" or back to "familism": The impact of the economic crisis on family and care policies in Italy and Spain', *South European Society and Politics*, Vol. 19, No 3, 2014, pp. 353–369, https://ideas.repec.org/a/taf/fsesxx/v19y2014i3p353-369.html.

funded childcare and greater male involvement in care ([4]). Among generations, people aged 65+ have less egalitarian views in this regard (42 % agree) than younger individuals. In particular, people aged 15–24 had the lowest agreement (36 %) among all age groups. Nevertheless, the fact that young men (44 %) agree more than young women (30 %) suggests that, despite generational progress, the internalisation of traditional gender norms still affects young men more strongly. For younger generations of women, gender stereotypes gradually fade, while for young men they become more pronounced, especially during the critical shift from early to middle adolescence ([5]).

Overall, the majority of women (58 %) and a smaller share of men (44 %) believe men are treated better than women at work, with these views especially common in France, the Netherlands and Germany. In contrast, over 60% of the population in Latvia, Bulgaria and Lithuania believe women and men are treated equally. Across all countries, men are more likely than women to perceive equality, and this divide is most pronounced among young people. Only 29 % of young women see treatment as equal, compared with 44 % of young men, suggesting that younger women are more aware of inequalities whereas young men may reproduce or reassert traditional norms, increasingly under the influence of online spaces reinforcing intergenerational cycles of bias ([6]).

Likewise, fewer women, especially younger women, feel they have equal chances of promotion at work. While 57 % of men say promotion opportunities are equal, 47 % of women agree. The gender gap is largest in Finland, Croatia, Belgium and Ireland (around 20 pp). Among young people (aged 15–24), the gender divide is largest: 56 % of men and 45 % of women think promotion opportunities are equal. Traditional stereotypes – associating leadership with masculinised traits like assertiveness – continue to affect promotion practices ([7]). These cultural narratives discourage women's advancement and may explain why younger women report a stronger perception of workplace inequality.

Access to financial resources: persistent norms and emerging trends

Gender stereotypes shape how women and men perceive financial decisions, behaviours and access to resources([8]). Men are often seen as more financially competent, independent and willing to take risks, while women are perceived as cautious, dependent or lacking financial skills. These beliefs affect financial autonomy and resource control, reinforcing income gaps and contributing to greater financial insecurity for women over time ([9]).

Men are consistently more likely than women to agree with the stereotype that a man's main role is to earn money. According to EB2024 data, 39 % of women and 45 % of men agree (see Figure 3). While overall support for this view has slightly dropped since 2017, it has grown in some countries. In 2024, the biggest gender gaps were found in Belgium (14 pp), Luxembourg and Finland (both 12 pp) (see Figure 4). While public policy may shift broad attitudes, it does not fully eliminate gendered beliefs. Implicit biases continue to shape beliefs about financial competence and legitimacy in financial matters, even where structural equality has progressed ([10]).

Gender inequalities in access to financial sources in the EU: key facts

Gender pay gap. 12 %

Gender pension gap. 25 %

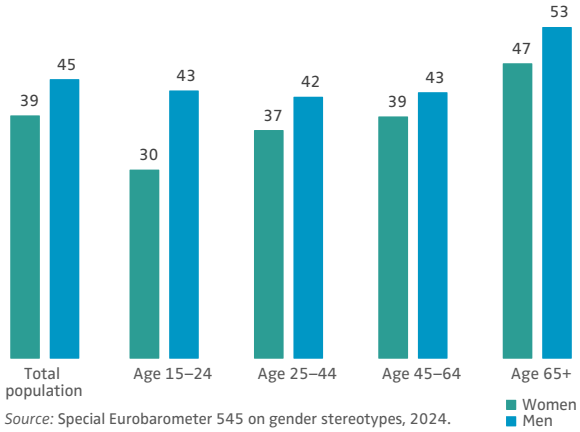
Financial dependence. Women living in couples earn 70 % of their partners' earnings.

([4]) Nordic Council of Ministers, *The Nordic Gender Effect at Work*,2019, https://www.gu.se/sites/default/files/2020-05/The-nordic-gender-effect-at-work.pdf.
([5]) Villanueva Blasco, V. J. and Grau-Alberola, E., 'Diferencias por sexo y edad en la interiorización de los estereotipos de género en la adolescencia temprana y media', *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology*, Vol. 17, No 47, 2019, pp. 107–128, https://doi.org/10.25115/ejrep.v17i47.2184.
([6]) Barkhuizen, E. N., Masakane, G. and van der Sluis, L., 'In search of factors that hinder the career advancement of women to senior leadership positions', *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, Vol. 48, 2022, a1986.
([7]) Tabassum, N. and Nayak, B. S., 'Gender stereotypes and their impact on women's career progressions from a managerial perspective', *IIM Kozhikode Society & Management Review*, Vol. 10, Issue 2, 2021. pp. 192–208, https://doi.org/10.1177/2277975220975513.
([8]) European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), *Financial Independence and Gender Equality: Joining the dots between income, wealth and power*, Vilnius, 2024.
([9]) Angelici, M., Del Boca, D., Oggero, N., Profeta, P., Rossi, M. C., et al., 'Pension information and women's awareness', *Journal of the Economics of Ageing*, Vol. 23, 2022, 100396.
([10]) Filut, A., Kaatz, A. and Carnes, M., 'The impact of unconscious bias on women's career advancement', *Sasakawa Peace Foundation Expert Reviews Series on Advancing Women's Empowerment*, Tokyo, 2017.

Although older generations more strongly support the traditional view about men's primary role, gender gaps exist across all age groups. Young women are the least likely to live with this idea, yet men's views have remained more stable across generations. These findings reflect the deep-rooted idea that men should be the main earners ([11]) and its continued relevance among younger generations. However, stark contrasts between countries highlight both the possibility of progress and growing gender polarisation in views in some countries.

At the same time, EB2024 data indicate that most Europeans support financial independence for everyone (91 % of women and 89 % of men). Support for equal pay is also high: 81 % of women and 75 % of men say it is good for the economy (2023/2024 European Social Survey). Over 85 % of people in Finland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden uphold this view. This strong sense of fairness exists alongside continued support for traditional gender roles, showing that, while attitudes are shifting, the change is not always consistent. Women are still seen as less competent, committed or emotionally suited for leadership – stereotypes that affect how their financial abilities are judged ([12]). As a result, women are more likely to experience pay inequalities and express stronger support for equal pay initiatives ([13]).

Figure 3: Women and men agreeing that 'The most important role of a man is to earn money' (%, EU-27)



Source: Special Eurobarometer 545 on gender stereotypes, 2024.

Figure 4: Women and men agreeing that 'The most important role of a man is to earn money' (%, 15+)

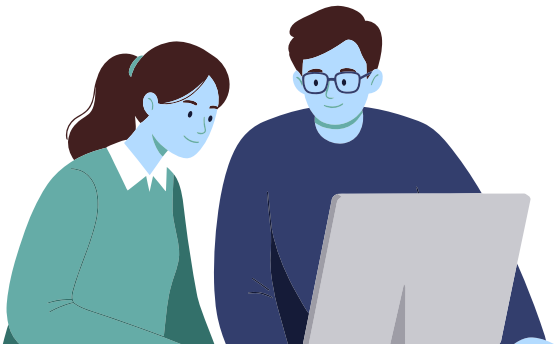
Sources: Special Eurobarometers 545 on gender stereotypes, 2024, and 465 on gender equality, 2017.

([11]) Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Man Enough? Measuring masculine norms to promote women's empowerment*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1787/6ffd1936-en.
([12]) Galsanjigmed, E. and Sekiguchi, T., 'Challenges women experience in leadership careers: An integrative review', *Merits*, Vol. 3, No 2, 2023, pp. 366–389, https://doi.org/10.3390/merits3020021.
([13]) Sandnes, F. E., Örtenblad, A. and Bøhn, E. D., 'For or against equal pay? A study of common perceptions', *Compensation & Benefits Review*, Vol. 55, Issue 3, 2023, pp. 87–110, https://doi.org/10.1177/08863687231162812.

Gender stereotypes in education: subtle inequalities and lasting effects

Gender stereotypes shape what areas women and men choose to study, how confident they feel in their abilities and what careers they aim for – deepening inequalities in the labour market and in society ([14]). Understanding how these dynamics affect young people is key to building more inclusive and equitable education systems.

Over the past decade women have steadily pulled ahead of men in higher education. Across many Member States, men are scored lower in standardised assessments and are more likely to repeat grades or leave school early. Despite young men facing serious educational setbacks, most people in the EU think that girls/women and boys/men are treated equally in schools and universities (66 % of women and 69 % of men; EB2024). However, a quarter of young women (aged 15–24) say men are treated better in education, compared with 15 % of men. This shows that, despite formal equality, bias in teaching, classroom interaction or curricula still shapes how students experience education ([15]).



Today most people do not think that university is more important for boys than for girls. Proportions opposing that view vary by country from 68 % in Slovakia to near total rejection in Sweden (98 %) and Denmark (97 %), highlighting the influence of national education cultures and gender policies on public attitudes ([16]). Moreover, women are usually more likely than men to reject this perception across all age groups (see Figure 5). The gender gap is more pronounced among young people, and a generational shift in attitudes is more clearly expressed among women.

Stereotypes lead the way to study choices. Boys are often encouraged towards science and prestigious fields, while girls are guided towards care-related professions ([17]). These patterns are reinforced by students' own perceptions: girls tend to report higher anxiety and lower confidence in subjects like maths and science, despite performing equally well or better ([18]).

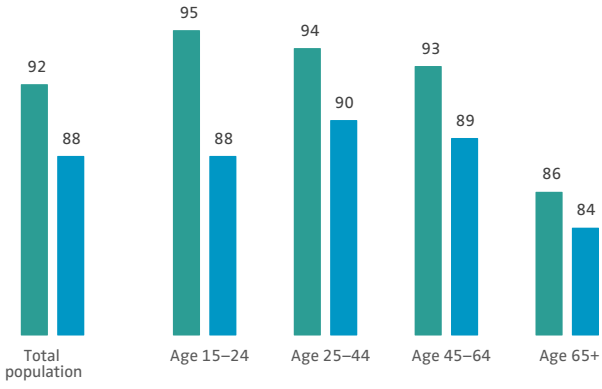
Gender inequalities in education in the EU: key facts

Tertiary education. In 2024, 50 % of women aged 30–34 had completed tertiary education, compared with 39 % of men.

Early school leavers. In 2024, 11 % of men aged 18–24 had left education and training early, compared with 8 % of women.

Gender segregation in education. In 2023, 75 % of tertiary graduates in education, health and welfare were women. In science, technology, engineering and maths fields, 67 % of graduates were men.

Figure 5: Women and men disagreeing that 'University education is more important for a boy than for a girl' (%)



Source: 2017–2022 European Value study 5 World Value survey 7.
NB: Answers from 23 EU Member States.

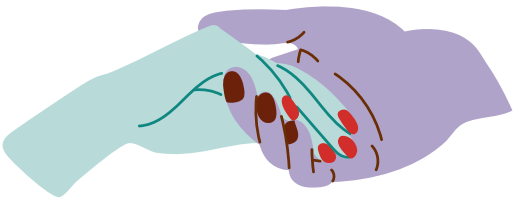
([14]) Nuri, A., Asadova, A., Heyderova, N. and Mammadova, K., 'Gender issues in education', *Universidad y Sociedad*, Vol. 16, No 6, 2024, pp. 272–278.
([15]) Brussino, O. and McBrien, J., 'Gender stereotypes in education: Policies and practices to address gender stereotyping across OECD education systems', OECD Education Working Papers, No 271, 2022.
([16]) EIGE, *Area B – Education and training of women: stereotypes and segregation persist*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020.
([17]) Wang, N., Tan, A.-L., Zhou, X., Liu, K., Zeng, F., et al., 'Gender differences in high school students' interest in STEM careers: A multi-group comparison based on structural equation model', *International Journal of STEM Education*, Vol. 10, 2023, 59, https://doi.org/10.1186/s40594-023-00443-6.
([18]) OECD, 'Do boys and girls have similar attitudes towards competition and failure?', *PISA in Focus*, No 105, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1787/a8898906-en.

What students learn and how they are taught also play a role. Textbooks often show women in passive or caregiving roles, and men in intellectual or technical roles ([19]). Teachers, shaped by their own gender and culture, might pass on these stereotypes without even realising it ([20]). Over time, these subtle cues can influence the subjects students choose and their career ambitions.

Gender stereotypes and time use: care, housework, and persistent expectations

Gender stereotypes shape how time is spent, especially regarding unpaid domestic and caregiving work. Women are widely expected to take on most household and family responsibilities, which reinforces the belief that caregiving is inherently female ([21]). While attitudes are slowly changing, progress has been slow and uneven ([22]).

There is a gradual but slower shift towards more egalitarian views of gender roles at home. According to the EB2024, 36 % of women and 40 % of men agree that a woman's most important role is to care for the home and family (see Figure 6). This is down from 44% in 2017, showing slow-moving progress. However, change is not happening at the same pace everywhere. In some countries more women than men support the traditional view. These trends reveal slower cultural changes in relation to gender roles in the private domain, where caregiving and domestic responsibilities have historically been assigned to women ([23]).



Gender inequalities in time use in the EU: key facts

Care responsibilities. In 2024, 41 % of women were involved in intensive caring for children (aged 0–11) for more than 35 hours a week, compared with 20 % of men.

Housework. 60 % of women do housework chores (cooking, cleaning, laundry) every day, almost twice as many as men (34 %).

Leisure time. 77 % of men are engaged in leisure activities at least once a week, compared with 68 % of women.

Figure 6: Women and men agreeing that 'The most important role of a woman is to take care of her home and family' (%, 15+)

Source: Special Eurobarometers 545 on gender stereotypes, 2024, and 465 on gender equality, 2017.

([19]) Crawfurd, L., Saintis-Miller, C. and Todd, R., 'Sexist textbooks: Automated analysis of gender bias in 1,255 books from 34 countries', *PLoS ONE*, Vol. 19, No 10, 2024, e0310366.
([20]) Andersen, I. G., 'Teachers' gender bias in STEM: Results from a vignette study', *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 49, 2023, pp. 833–851, https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3870.
([21]) Sharma, N., Chakrabarti, S. and Grover, S., 'Gender differences in caregiving among family – Caregivers of people with mental illnesses', *World Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 6, No 1, 2016, pp. 7–17, https://doi.org/10.5498/wjp.v6.i1.7.
([22]) Gimenez-Nadal, J. I. and Molina, J. A., 'The gender gap in time allocation', IIZA World of Labor website, July 2022, accessed 16 July 2025, https://doi.org/10.15185/izawol.497.
([23]) Matud, M. P., Bethencourt, J. M., Del Pino, M. J., Hernández-Lorenzo, D. E., Fortes, D., et al., 'Time use, health, and well-being across the life cycle: A gender analysis', *Social Sciences*, Vol. 13, No 6, 2024, 307, https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13060307.

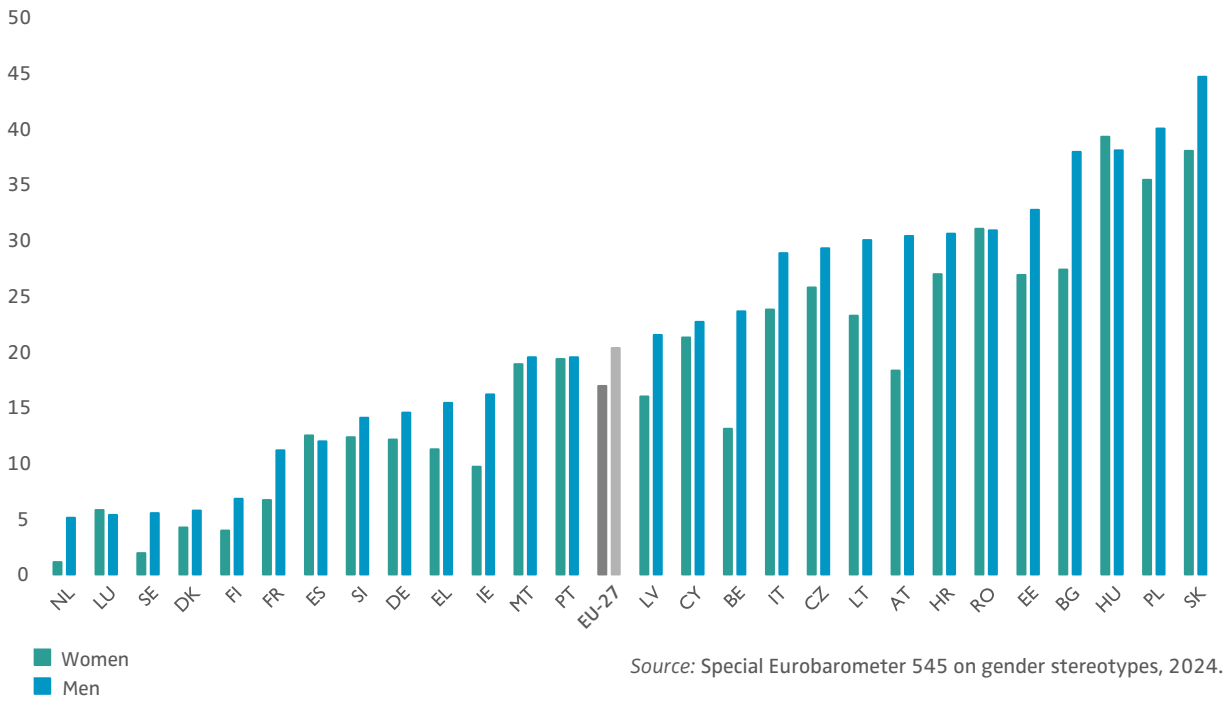
Across the EU, the younger generation is less likely to believe that a woman's main role is to care for the home and family. Views vary widely by country. In Spain, egalitarian attitudes are common, with just 15 % of both young women and young men upholding the traditional view. In contrast, in Bulgaria 71 % of young men and 43 % of young women uphold this idea. In Hungary, the numbers are even higher: 78 % and 66 % respectively. Overall, younger people tend to have more egalitarian views about caregiving, but some traditional ideas still prevail. For instance, around 29 % of young men and 19 % of young women believe that women should put family before their careers. This suggests that some young men may be holding on to, or even returning to, traditional gender roles, despite growing up in a world that promotes equality ([24]).

Almost half of women and men in the EU believe that men are naturally less competent at housework. This belief is especially common in countries like Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Italy and Bulgaria, where over 60 % agree with it. In countries like Denmark and Sweden, fewer than 20 % of people share this view. In several countries, women are more likely than men to believe this stereotype, for example in Latvia (58 % of women versus 48 % of men), Portugal (62 % versus 52 %) and Czechia (53 % versus 43 %).

Most people in the EU disagree with the idea that men should have the final say in family decisions, but a notable share still support it (24 % of men and 16 % of women). In nearly all Member States men are more likely than women to hold this view; the exceptions are the Netherlands and Spain, where women and men hold it to the same extent. The largest gender gaps are found in Bulgaria (37 pp), Estonia (23 pp), and Croatia, Latvia and Austria (all 20 pp), showing that women and men have very different views about decision-making in the family.

The public's perceptions of fathers' engagement in childcare are also quite ambiguous. Although the majority agree it is enriching for fathers, only half of respondents believe fathers should give up work if they earn less than their partners to look after the children if a family decides one parent has to do so. Moreover, around 17 % of women and 21 % of men think taking leave shows a lack of career ambition. This perception varies significantly

Figure 7: Women and men agreeing that 'Men taking parental leave show a lack of ambition for their career' (%, 15+)



Source: Special Eurobarometer 545 on gender stereotypes, 2024.

([24]) Policy Institute at King's College London, King's Global Institute for Women's Leadership and Ipsos UK, 'Emerging tensions? How younger generations are dividing on masculinity and gender equality', 2024 , https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/emerging-tensions.pdf.

across Member States, from 41 % in Slovakia to 3 % in the Netherlands (see Figure 7). In most countries, men are more likely to agree with this statement, though the gender gaps are generally small. These views reflect the lingering stigma around male caregiving roles ([25]), which continues to discourage the equal sharing of family responsibilities. The research shows a persistent double standard: caregiving is expected of women, whereas men who deviate from traditional masculine norms face penalties in the labour market, reinforcing the rigid boundaries of gendered expectations ([26]).

Gender stereotypes and power: barriers to equal leadership

Gender stereotypes shape our idea of what a leader looks like, often favouring traits like assertiveness and dominance, typically seen as masculine ([27]). As a result, women face greater scrutiny, are more often judged on their personal qualities than on their competence([28]) and remain under-represented in politics, business and science.

Nearly half of women and men now believe that men are more ambitious in politics – a jump from 37 % in 2017. This rise is especially pronounced in Poland, Malta, Cyprus, Bulgaria and Slovakia. Men are more likely to hold this view, and in countries like Belgium, Estonia and Lithuania the gender gap has grown. However, in other countries, like Spain, Cyprus, Czechia and Latvia, the trend has flipped: more women than men now agree. This shows how leadership is still tied to masculinised traits, often making women seem less suited for power and limiting their chances to lead ([29]).

Gender inequalities in decision-making in the EU: key facts

Political representation. In 2024, women held 35 % of ministerial posts, 33 % of seats in national parliaments and 32 % of positions in regional assemblies or local municipalities.

Largest quoted companies. 34 % of board members and 9 % of chief executives are women.

Central banks. Women account for every third board member (32 %) of national central banks.

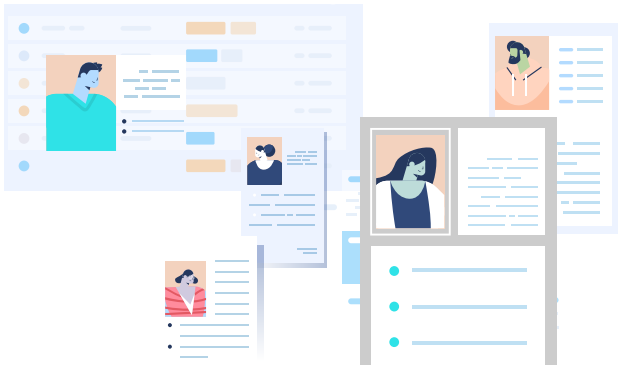
Higher education, research, science. 26 % of institutions in the higher education sector are led by women.

Sports governance. Women make up 23 % of board members in the organisations that govern each Member State's 10 most popular national Olympic sports.

([25]) Biasi, P., De Paola, M. and Gioia, F., 'When mothers out-earn fathers: Effects on fathers' decisions to take paternity and parental leave', *IZA Discussion Papers*, No 17601, 2025, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5093256.
([26]) Grau-Grau, M. and André, S., 'Engaged fathers: Towards a fatherhood premium or penalty?', in: Kruyen, P., André, S. and Van der Heijden, B. (eds), *Maintaining a Sustainable Work–Life Balance*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, 2024, pp. 146–155, https://doi.org/10.4337/9781803922348.00030.
([27]) Tremmel, M. and Wahl, I., 'Gender stereotypes in leadership: Analyzing the content and evaluation of stereotypes about typical, male, and female leaders', *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. 14, 2023, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1034258.
([28]) Li, Y., 'Systemic and sociocultural factors impeding women's political participation and leadership development: A sociological inquiry', *SHS Web of Conferences*, Vol. 187, 2024, 03016, https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202418703016.
([29]) Tremmel, M. and Wahl, I., 'Gender stereotypes in leadership: Analyzing the content and evaluation of stereotypes about typical, male, and female leaders', *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. 14, 2023, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1034258.

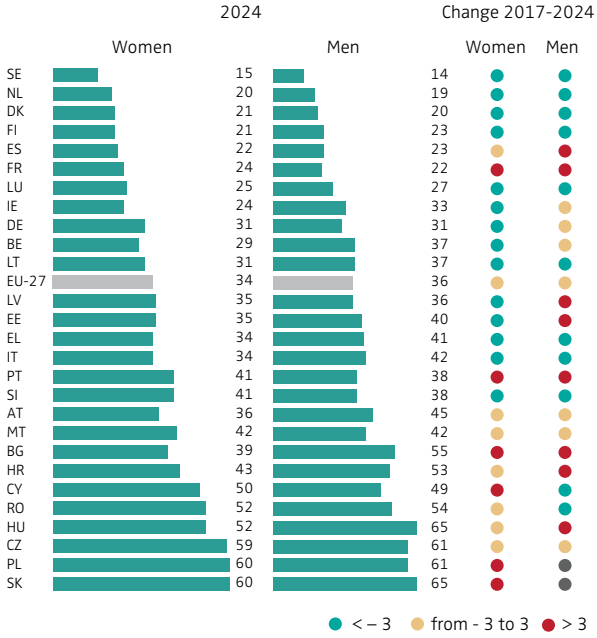
In nearly every Member State, more men than women think that women are less interested in positions of responsibility, though opinions vary widely across countries. While overall in the EU the support for this belief decreased marginally from 36 % in 2017 to 35% in 2024, sharp national divergences remain (see Figure 8). These views reflect a persistent belief in a 'role mismatch' between traditional women's roles and leadership expectations, even though ambition is shaped more by social and structural barriers than by personality ([30]).

Soft skills like empathy and communication – traits often linked to women – are seen as important for leadership. According to EB2024 data, 66 % of women and 61 % of men agree that these qualities matter in a good leader. Support for this view among women and men is especially strong in Finland (84 %), Sweden (83%) and Portugal (81 %). However, while these traits are valued, women are often caught in a double bind: expected to be both assertive and warm, ambitious yet approachable ([31]), making leadership more difficult to access and navigate.



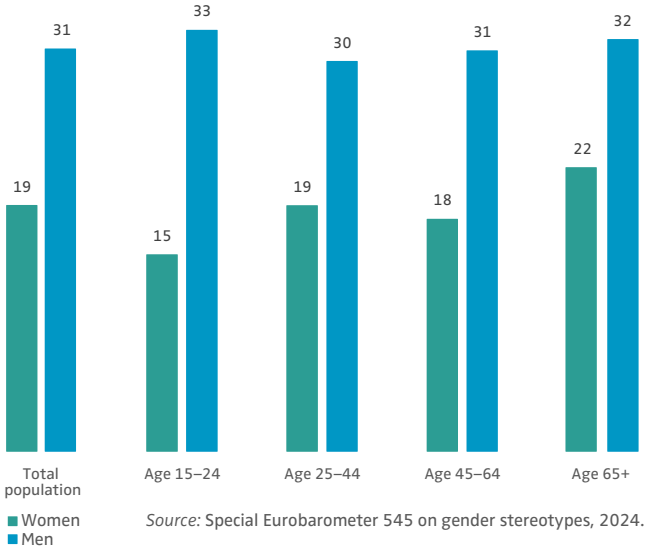
Moreover, young men are twice as likely as young women to believe that men make better leaders (33 % versus 15 %) (see Figure 9). A quarter of young men also think that women are too emotional to be good leaders, compared with just 12 % of young women. These views show that traditional gender roles are internalised early and that young women tend to hold more progressive views than their male peers ([32]).

Figure 8: Women and men agreeing that 'Women are less interested than men in positions of responsibility in politics' (%, 15+)



Source: Special Eurobarometers 545 on gender stereotypes, 2024, and 465 on gender equality, 2017.

Figure 9: Women and men agreeing that 'Men make better leaders than women' (%, EU-27)



Source: Special Eurobarometer 545 on gender stereotypes, 2024.

([30]) Barrymore, N., Dezső, C. L. and Lin, Y., 'Are there gender differences in ambition? Evidence from an online experiment', 2025, http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5041399.

([31]) Chikwe, C. F., Eneh, N. E. and Akpuokwe, C. U., 'Navigating the double bind: Strategies for women leaders in overcoming stereotypes and leadership biases', *GSC Advanced Research and Reviews*, Vol. 18, No 3, 2024, pp. 159–172. https://doi.org/10.30574/gscarr.2024.18.3.0103.

([32]) Nennstiel, R. and Hudde, A., 'A growing gender divide among young adults in ideological left–right self-placement? Evidence from 32 European countries', 2025, https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/zude5.

Gender stereotypes and health: perceptions, access, and unequal experiences

Gender plays a key role in shaping health experiences, influencing how people access care, how they are treated by health professionals and how their symptoms and needs are perceived ([33]).

Traditional masculinity can harm men's health and well-being in many ways. It often pushes men towards risky behaviours like drinking, smoking, violence or speeding, and makes them less likely to ask for help when struggling. As a result, men are diagnosed with and treated for depression less often than women([34]) even though they are nearly four times more likely to die by suicide ([35]).

Most women and men think they are treated equally in healthcare (67 % of women and 70 % of men) although opinions vary across countries. In Malta, Portugal, Greece and Spain, around 80 % of people hold this view. In Sweden, Croatia and Germany, only around 60 % of people think that healthcare treatment is equal. In addition, in Sweden and Austria women are 10 pp less likely than men to agree, probably reflecting real experiences of bias or unequal treatment in healthcare.

Young people – especially young women – are more likely to question whether healthcare treats everyone equally. This probably reflects young women's greater awareness of gender inequality, especially around reproductive and sexual health, an area where they may face judgement or discrimination ([36]). Overall, these trends point to a generational shift and the ongoing impact of gender stereotypes, which continue to shape how people experience and seek care ([37]).

Gender inequalities in health in the EU: key facts

Health status. in 2024, 66 % of women reported being in good health, compared with 71 % of men.

Life expectancy at birth. 84 years for women and 79 years for men.

Mental health. in 2019, 6 % of women reported depressive symptoms, compared with 8 % of men.

Deaths by suicide. men account for 77 % of all deaths by suicide.

Risky health behaviours. harmful drinking was more than twice as common among men (26 %) as among women (11 %) in 2019. Likewise, men (22 %) were more likely than women (15 %) to be daily smokers.

Seeking medical care. 49 % of women and 37 % of men have consulted a medical doctor in the past four weeks.

Seeking mental healthcare. 8 % of women and 5 % of men have consulted a psychologist, psychotherapist or psychiatrist in the past 12 months.

([33]) World Health Organization (WHO), 'Gender and health', WHO website, 24 May 2021, accessed 18 July 2025,
([34]) WHO, 'Depressive disorder (depression)', WHO website, 31 March 2023, accessed 15 July 2025, https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression.
([35]) Eurostat, 'Mental health and related issues statistics', European Commission website, accessed 15 July 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Mental_health_and_related_issues_statistics#Deaths_from_mental_and_behavioural_disorders_and_intentional_self-harm.
([36]) Stavropoulou, M., *Gender Norms, Health and Wellbeing*, Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms, 2019.
([37]) Schmitz, A. and Lazarevič, P., 'The gender health gap in Europe's ageing societies: Universal findings across countries and age groups?', *European Journal of Ageing*, Vol. 17, 2020, pp. 509–520, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10433-020-00559-6.

Gender-based violence and coercive control: persistent tolerance and worrying trends

Awareness of gender-based violence is rising, but tolerance of certain forms of violence is still high, especially among young men. According to Flash Eurobarometer 544 'Gender stereotypes – Violence against women' (FEB2024), 15 % of young men think it is acceptable for a man to slap his partner – more than double the proportion of young women (6 %) and five times as high as among older adults (3 %). Support for controlling behaviour is also high: 38 % of young men say it is acceptable to monitor a partner's digital and social activities or relationships (mobile phone use, activities on social media, etc.), compared with 19 % of young women. It shows that harmful norms linking masculinity to control and violence are still deeply rooted and normalised ([38]).

Tolerance of objectification and harassment is higher among men than among women and alarmingly high in some countries. FEB2024 data show that 48 % of men and 28 % of women find it acceptable to use sexually suggestive images of women in advertising. Approval is highest in Czechia (62 %) and Latvia (61%), with gender gaps of over 30 pp in Slovakia, Hungary and Malta.

Workplace norms show similar divides: 26 % of men and 14 % of women say it is acceptable for men to make suggestive comments about a female colleague's appearance. Support is highest in Czechia (39 %), Hungary (36 %) and Portugal (32 %), with striking gender gaps in Portugal, Estonia, Latvia, Czechia and Poland (around 19 pp). These attitudes reflect a broader culture in which objectification, sexualisation and harassment are normalised in the media, workplaces and daily life ([39]).

Gender based violence in the EU: key facts

Violence against women. One in three women (31 %) in the EU have experienced physical or sexual violence in adulthood. The prevalence is higher among young women (aged 18–29): 35 %. Every third victim (31 %) experienced violence from multiple perpetrators, including current or former partners and non-partners.

Sexual violence. 13 % of women have experienced sexual violence, including rape, by a non-partner.

Sexual harassment at work. 31 % of ever-working women have experienced sexual harassment at work.

Health consequences. 57 % of victims reported health-related consequences. The impact was greater when the perpetrator was an intimate partner (72 %) than a non-partner (37 %).

Disclosure. 31 % of women who experienced physical or sexual violence in the previous 12 months did not tell anyone.

([38]) Sundaram, V., 'A continuum of acceptability: Understanding young people's views on gender based violence', in: Anitha, S. and Ruth, L. (eds), *Gender Based Violence in University Communities – Policy, prevention and educational initiatives*, Policy Press, Bristol, 2018, pp. 23–39.

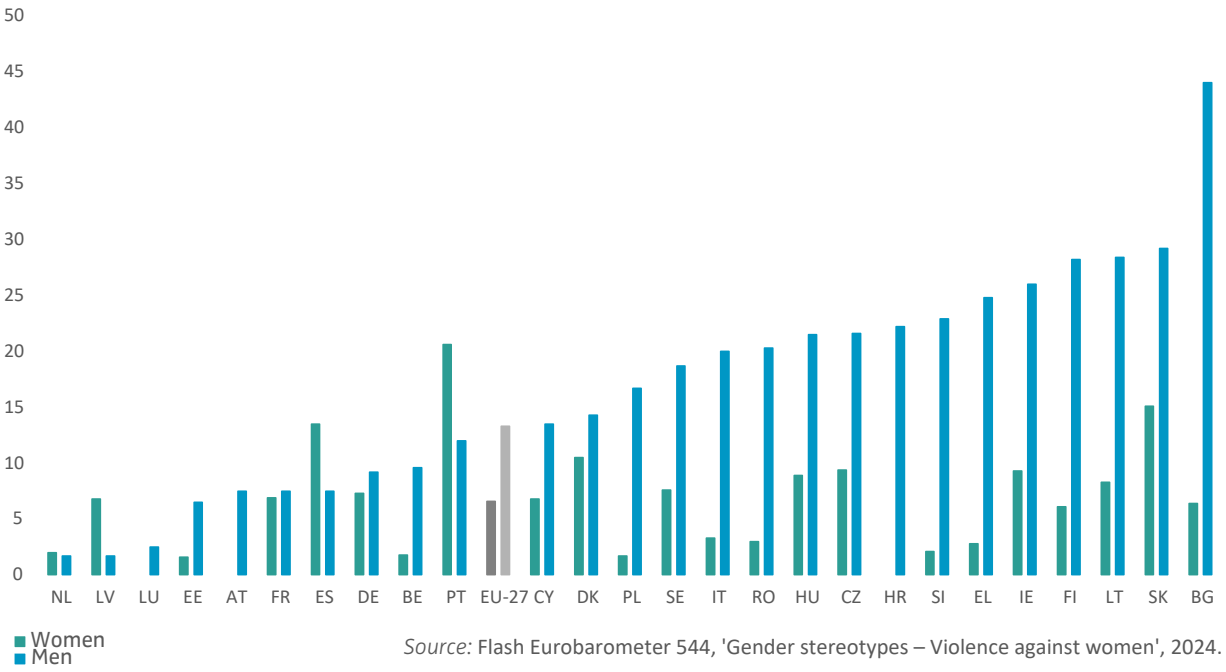
([39]) Pentus, K., Ruusu, M., Kuusik, A., Dorokhova, L. and Ploom, K., 'How sexualised images in advertisements influence the attention and preference of consumers with a modern view', *Organizations and Markets in Emerging Economies*, Vol. 14, No 2, 2023, pp. 366–385, https://doi.org/10.15388/omee.2023.14.97.

Victim blaming and harmful myths around consent remain widespread, especially among young men. According to FEB2024, 22 % of men and 12 % of women say women often make up or exaggerate claims of abuse or rape. Among young men this proportion rises to 26 %, more than double that of young women (11 %). Belief in these myths is highest in Bulgaria (34 %), Malta (32 %) and Lithuania (29 %), and lowest in Spain (10 %), France and Croatia (both 13 %). Consent misconceptions are also common:

- 43 % of people think women are partly responsible if private images they shared are leaked;
- 21 % of respondents think women should accept that they elicit sexist, demeaning and/or abusive replies when sharing their opinion on social media – rising to 28 % of young men;
- 16 % blame women for sexual violence if alcohol is involved;
- alarmingly, 13 % of young men believe that 'no means yes', compared with 7 % of young women (see Figure 10)

These views show how deeply embedded gender stereotypes continue to shape perceptions of abuse and consent. Acceptance of controlling behaviour in relationships is worryingly common. FEB2024 shows that 46 % of men and 26 % of women in the EU think it is acceptable for a man to control his partner's finances. Agreement is highest among young people (aged 18–24), at 44 %. This attitude reflects the normalisation of coercive control ([40]) , particularly among young men. It is often an early sign of abuse, rooted in beliefs about male authority over women and difficult to identify – especially when masked by financial or social pressures ([41]).

Figure 10: Women and men agreeing that 'Faced with a sexual proposal, if a woman says "no", she often means "yes" but she is playing "hard to get" (%, 18–24)



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 544, 'Gender stereotypes – Violence against women', 2024.

([40]) EIGE, *Combating coercive control and psychological violence against women in the EU Member States*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022.

([41]) Postmus, J. L., Hoge, G. L., Breckenridge, J., Sharp-Jeffs, N. and Chung, D,, 'Economic abuse as an invisible form of domestic violence: A multicountry review', *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, Vol. 21, Issue 2, 2018, pp. 261–283, https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838018764160.

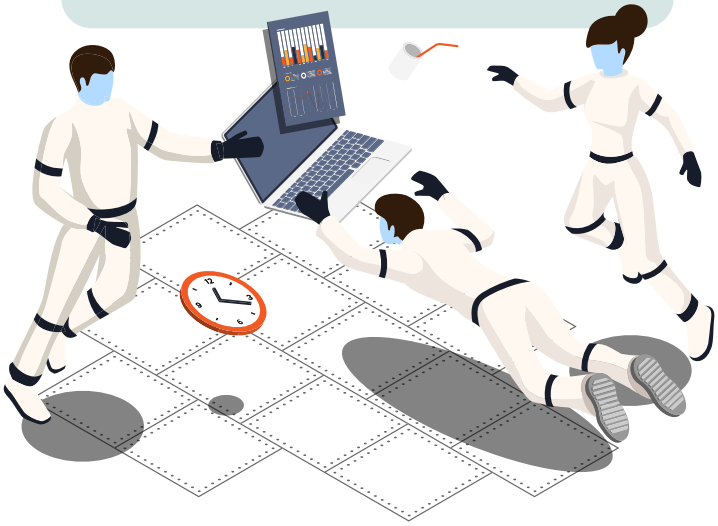
Policy pointers: challenging stereotypes across domains

Work and ambition: challenge the traditional norm

- Promote diverse leadership models that value collaboration and emotional intelligence – not just assertiveness.
- Support gender-responsive training for recruiters, managers and educators to counter implicit bias in assessing potential and performance.
- Embed gender norm awareness in career counselling and school-based vocational guidance to challenge early internalisation of gendered expectations.

Money and financial responsibility: reframe financial competence

- Strengthen messaging on the economic value of gender equality and promote gender equality in financial autonomy and intra-household decision-making.
- Ensure that financial literacy education in schools actively counters gender stereotypes, with inclusive examples and role models.
- Incentivise equal pay transparency and gender-neutral job evaluations.



Knowledge and education: break stereotypes early

- Review and revise educational materials to eliminate stereotyped representations of gender roles in textbooks and curricula, and train teachers to recognise and address stereotype-based interactions in classrooms.
- Promote visible role models of women in science, leadership and technology, especially targeting girls and young women.
- Promote positive and non-traditional male roles from early childhood by integrating gender-sensitive approaches into early education, play, and social and emotional learning.

Power and leadership: address the double bind

- Run public awareness campaigns that challenge assumptions about what a leader looks like.
- Encourage gender parity targets and quotas where necessary – not just to address numbers but to shift expectations.
- Address the ideological divide between young men and women through targeted youth engagement and dialogue initiatives.

Health and well-being: challenge bias and promote gender-sensitive practices

- Train health professionals to recognise and challenge gender bias in diagnosis and treatment; also include gender sensitivity modules in medical education.
- Run awareness campaigns highlighting the impact of stereotypes on health outcomes and patient trust.
- Break the stigma around men's emotional expression and mental health by promoting gender-sensitive mental health services and encouraging help seeking.

Time use and care: redefine responsibility

- Support and promote equal, non-transferable parental leave for both parents, and publicly challenge the stigma attached to male caregiving.
- Use campaigns to redefine unpaid work as a shared societal responsibility, not a natural female role.
- Incorporate awareness of time use into workplace equality policies and public discourse.

Violence and control: challenge harmful traditional norms early

- Integrate consent education and reasoning about the harmful impact of gender norms and stereotypes into school curricula from an early age.
- Develop social media and peer-led campaigns that address normalised sexism, objectification and victim blaming, also specifically targeting boys and young men.
- Provide funding for prevention programmes that explicitly challenge the idea that aggression and control are natural expressions of masculinity.

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