

COMING OUT COMPARATIVE REPORT

Anna Giulia Ingellis &
Capitolina Diaz (Eds.)

Gender-stereotyped jobs
and gender-based identities
in the school-to-work
transition

FtC
Free to Choose



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gender-based identities
in the school-to-work transition*

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Anna Giulia Ingellis and Capitolina Diaz Martinez, *University of Valencia*

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Project partners: IRES-FVG, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Region Friuli Venezia Giulia, University of Valencia, MCBIT, NEFIKS, MIGS, Opcionate, Apload

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Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the contributions of all of the authors of the national research reports on which it draws. We would also like to thank all those who took part in the research in each of the five countries.



Co-funded by the
Rights, Equality &
Citizenship Programme
of the European Union

The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the Free to Choose project partnership and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.

Coming Out Comparative Report. (2019)

ISBN: 978-84-09-12193-9

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To cite this report:

Ingellis, A.G. and Diaz Martinez, C. (2019). Coming out Comparative Report. Gender-stereotyped jobs and gender-based identities in the school-to-work transition. Brussels: European Commission, Free to choose

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1 Introduction - *Anna Giulia Ingellis* (*University of Valencia*)

1.1 The project framework

Free to Choose (FtC) is an EU-funded project whose main aim was to design, test and implement a game addressing the reduction of the gender stereotypes which act against gender equality at work. The key feature of the project was to base the intervention on specific knowledge produced with the express purpose of basing the action on it. Work stream 1 of the FtC project was entirely dedicated to a complex research action, *Operational Map*. Its overall objective was twofold. On one hand, through the *Mind the Gap* research, it drew a picture of gender inequality in the labour market and educational systems of the countries involved in the project, comparing the gender gaps in those countries with the European average. On the other hand, through the *Coming Out* research, it undertook a deep analysis of stereotypes existing in the two main groups targeted by the project: young people and adults with key roles in education, orientation and training and employment services. This report presents the main results of the *Coming Out* research, the qualitative element of the complex mixed-method study, *Operational Map*. More specifically, *Mind the Gap* has explored and analysed the several forms of gender gap present in the Mediterranean European countries involved in the project (Cyprus, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain), while *Coming Out* has explored the existence and persistence of gender stereotypes and their influence in the transition from education to work, from a subjective perspective.

Both arms of the FtC project have three main objectives. The first is to generate new findings to augment the body of knowledge on existing gaps and the impact on them of gender stereotypes within the labour market and educational systems. The second is to disseminate the results among the international academic community interested in gender studies. Finally, the project aims to transmit the knowledge obtained to the diverse stakeholders, such as the other partners who will develop the game and carry out the training, young people and key actors in education, training and orientation systems in each country, in addition to local authorities potentially interested in policies to counter gender gaps. The present report focuses exclusively on the *Coming Out* results.

1.2 Between formal and substantial gender equality: the relevance of invisible factors

During the last 50 years, European countries have made much progress towards gender equality. A wide range of rights have been extended to women, their level of education has risen and overtaken that of males, and their participation in the labour market has increased greatly, although not under the same conditions. The legal framework, in almost in every field, has assumed gender equality to be the rule. Anti-discrimination laws and positive actions have been implemented in all European countries. A great number of official entities and institutions have been created to promote policies

designed to overcome gender inequality. However, despite EU and national legislation guaranteeing equal opportunities in education, training and employment for males and females, statistics on education, training and the labour market highlight the persistence of considerable differences in opportunities between them. A wide gap remains between formal and substantial equality. A growing number of studies are focusing on the informal level, aiming to explore the hidden mechanisms by which substantial discrimination continues to deny equal opportunities to women and men. As has been demonstrated by extensive literature on the topic produced during the last two decades, multiple factors at societal level—and not only in education or the labour market—reinforce gender inequality. The complexity of the phenomenon depends on a wide range of factors. Research in the 21st century has focused, among others, on 1) its invisibility, as discriminatory attitudes arise from automatic and largely unconscious thought processes acquired during primary socialization; 2) the unconscious contribution that women make to inequality by their lack of self-consciousness, self-esteem and so on; 3) organizational inertia in the workplace, which deters many firms from implementing the necessary changes to the working environment; 4) interconnections existing among the diverse aspects of social life, such as between productive and reproductive work. Other elements that need to be taken into account for the definition of strategies and policies that may prove effective in the (still long) path towards the achievement of gender equality include the cultural dimension, the socio-economic context of reference, relational networks and the role of the media. The Coming Out research has sought to make a modest contribution to the analysis of those phenomena, focusing its attention on the influence of gender stereotypes on young people's educative and career choices.

1.3 Objectives

As noted above, the main objective of the Coming Out research has been to explore the existence and the role of gender stereotypes in the school-to-work transition. The key actors in that process are young people and the adults involved in counselling and orientation tasks, helping youngsters in their decision-making. Thus, the research has focused on two groups: young adults (15-29 years old) and key actors in the educational system and in employment services.

The specific objectives of this research have been:

1. To check for the existence of gender stereotypes
2. To evaluate self-awareness about their existence
3. To identify their functioning
4. To assess their impact on educational choices and career paths
 - a. in education
 - b. in the labour market
5. To compare the results in the five countries
6. To check for the influence, if any, of Mediterranean culture

Consequently, the questions guiding the research have been: How do gender-based stereotypes affect the self-identity of youngsters and their relevant educational and career paths? Are young people aware of these influences? What are the main factors

influencing the reproduction of gender stereotypes? How do adults (counsellors in particular) develop and implement strategies to combat restrictive influences?

This report presents the results of the comparative analysis. The detailed results for each country have been widely disseminated by means of the individual country reports.¹ Their main findings are summarized in Chapter 4.

The report is organized in two parts. The first introduces the research (Chapter 1), sets out the theoretical framework and background to the research design (Chapter 2) and explains the methods used to carry out the fieldwork (Chapter 3). The second part is entirely dedicated to the research results, first with a synthesis of the five countries (Chapter 4), then with a comparative analysis (Chapter 5). The report concludes with some key findings and policy suggestions.

2 Theoretical framework - *Capitolina* *Diaz Martinez (University of Valencia)*

2.1 Literature review on stereotypes in general and gender stereotypes in particular

This section reviews the findings of many scholars on stereotyping and the mechanisms of human thought. Although we believe that we apply our rationality when we think or judge a situation, research shows that we all apply biases and stereotypes (increasingly subtle, unconscious, difficult to perceive and thus unrecognized) which confirm familiar roles.

The main objective of the literature review presented here is to deepen the understanding of the biased and stereotyping mechanisms, their ways of operating and their manifestations; in other words, to understand how societies and individuals assume, naturalize and reproduce **biases, customs, values and stereotypes**.

The most evident cause of gender stereotyping is attributing to females the role of providing care and support to the family. Derived from this are the most unconscious

¹ Jabbaz, Marcela (ed.) (2019), *Coming out. Spain report*, Brussels: European Commission, Free to Choose

Angeli, Maria, MIGS (2018), *Coming out. Cyprus report*, Brussels: European Commission, Free to Choose

Cristini Chiara and Riccardi Fulvia, IRES-FVG,(2018), *Coming out. Italy report*, Brussels: European Commission, Free to Choose

José Carlos Bronze and Luísa Almendra Roque, APLOAD, (2018), *Coming out. Portugal report*, Brussels: European Commission, Free to Choose

Vita Jankovič, MCBIT, and Meta Brečič, ZADOVNEFIKS, (2018), *Coming out. Slovenia report*, Brussels: European Commission, Free to Choose.

biases and customary practices, producing the double burden of paid and unpaid work, a lack of female professional role models and women's low self-esteem. In the area of interest to the Free to Choose research, one of the most influential stereotypes is the traditional division between women and men in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education, together with a generalized male employee archetype (manual or professional) and the consequent lack of flexible work and other job descriptions that alienate women.

We will refer to three key elements that operate in people's mental processes, considering that they have the greatest impact on the differential positions of women and men:

- the invisibility of recurrent processes,
- thought patterns and
- confirmation bias.

2.2 Mechanisms and mental processes that normalize patterns of conduct and define our culture

2.2.1 Invisibility of recurring processes

The human brain appears programmed to notice the extraordinary and ignore the ordinary. For a long time, this was a condition of survival, the mechanism that alerted early humans to threats or the opportunity to hunt their prey. Today, however, our species is dramatically affected by its contempt for the repetitive processes that hide the secret of life on which our social and economic culture is based (Frankish and Evans, 2009).

Traditional organizations (which are in the majority) continue to base their modus operandi on the fragmentation of spaces and closed criteria of specialization, with little opportunity for thematic connections, for the coordination of objectives between different actors (both intra- and inter-institutional) or for the cultivation of multidisciplinary approaches and teams that transcend the (systematic and anti-systematic) segregation of thought and action in closed compartments. We operate, in general, with a perception and management of the world in a dichotomous paradigm that supports all levels of mental, cultural, economic and social building, trapping us in an exclusive management of dualities: fragmentation of spaces, closed criteria of specialization, scarce interstices for thematic connections between actors or between times. Most of all, we are constrained by a duality between male and female, between feminine and masculine roles.

2.2.2 Patterns of thought: automatic, social and based on mental models

The World Bank's 2015 World Development Report entitled *Mind, Society and Behaviour* "explores the myriad psychological, social and cultural factors that influence the way

people think and decide in their everyday lives”. It does so by putting at the centre of efforts to eradicate poverty and promote socioeconomic change (early childhood development, productivity, family finances, health, care of health and climate change) the psychosocial factors that feed back the thought patterns and beliefs of people and collectives. Thus, it aims to “integrate recent discoveries on the psychological and social foundations of behaviour, so that both research and the professionals of the development community can use them more systematically”. The report is based on the discoveries of numerous disciplines, such as neuroscience, cognitive science, psychology, behavioural economics, sociology, political science and anthropology. In ongoing research, these discoveries help to explain the choices individuals make in relation to numerous aspects of development, such as savings, investments, energy consumption, health and parenting. They also allow us to better understand the way in which collective behaviours develop and take root in a society (Vedantam, 2010; Bertrand and Morse, 2011; Dawson, Gilovich, and Regan, 2002; Frankish and Evans, 2009; Slovic, 1987; Todd and Gigerenzer, 2000).

Three principles of the human decision-making process that guide the new approaches on how to understand behaviour and design and to implement gender equality policies are: automatic thinking, social thinking and thinking based on mental models.

First, individuals adopt most of their opinions and decisions automatically, not deliberately: we call this **automatic thinking**. It leads us to simplify problems and see them through narrow frames. We complete the missing information based on our assumptions about the world and evaluate the situations from associations that come to mind automatically and from belief systems that we take for granted. By doing so, we may form an erroneous picture of a situation. The fact that people resort to automatic thinking has important consequences in the way in which development challenges are understood and the most appropriate policies are designed to overcome them (Fryer, 2012).

Second, the way in which people act and think often depends on what people around them do and think; we call this **social thought** (Reyes, Thompson, and Bower, 1980). People are social animals, subject to the influence of social preferences, social networks, social identities and social norms: most of them care about what those around them do and how they fit into their group. Human sociability implies that behaviour is also influenced by social expectations, social recognition, cooperation patterns, care of group members and social norms and, undeniably, the differences between men and women (Ariely, 2008).

Third, individuals in a given society share a common perspective on the world around them and on themselves; we call this **thought based on mental models**, extracted from their own societies and collective histories. Individuals do not respond to objective experience, but to mental representations of experience. To construct these representations, they use the interpretive frameworks provided by the mental models. Individuals have access to numerous mental models, often contradictory. The use of a different model can change what the person perceives and the way he interprets it (Ariely, 2008; Kahneman, 2003).

2.2.3 Biases in thought

When people think, they do not generally use concepts invented by themselves, but concepts, categories, identities, prototypes, stereotypes, causal arguments and

worldviews drawn from their communities. A canonical example of a mental model is the stereotype, that is, the mental model of a social group. Stereotypes influence the opportunities to which people have access and configure processes of inclusion and social exclusion. As a result of stereotypes, members of disadvantaged groups often underestimate their abilities (Guyon and Huillery, 2014) and may even have worse performance in social situations when they are reminded of the group to which they belong. In this way and others, stereotypes can self-fulfil and reinforce differences between different groups. Likewise, the evidence shows that interventions and policy designs that alter this mental model and allow people to more easily recognize their own potential can improve important aspects of development such as educational achievement or participation in the labour market. All human beings are subject to psychological biases and this includes professionals in education and the selection of personnel in the world of work, as well as the persons in charge of formulating policy (Beaman, 2009; Bertrand and Morse, 2011).

2.2.3.1 Confirmation bias

Confirmation bias is the tendency to filter data in search of proofs and arguments that confirm our prejudices, while minimizing the importance and credibility of any reasoning and facts that contradict them.

Our way of approaching reality is contextual, based on frames of reference; we are normally left with the information that confirms what we already thought and we discard what does not fit (Reyes, Thompson, and Bower, 1980; Bertrand and Morse, 2011). Shihui and Man (2015) review what is known about the subject and explain that our ability to respond to rapid cultural changes is possible because the modern brain is able to reuse cerebral circuits arising from old motivations. Moya et al. (2018) summarize thus: “Our brain has evolved with social conditioning that has much to do with the tribe, with the close, with the familiar, and now we are in a situation in which the destiny of humanity is global. Our brain has evolved to recognize the near as our own and the distant as alien, and now we are facing a situation in which fate is the same for the near and the distant”.

In the 1990s, social psychologist Ziva Kunda consolidated the concept of motivated reasoning by noting “considerable evidence that people are more likely to reach the conclusions they want to reach”. In sum, we prefer news which confirms that we are right; otherwise we take care that the data fit our mental schemes. Prejudice and preconceptions help us to manage reality by creating a simulation with which to move forward. “When people develop a particular belief, even one that contradicts the facts, their brain continues to sustain that belief” (Newberg, 2001). When we receive information, our brain is far from responding objectively and neutrally. That is, it processes what is communicated to it according to confirmation bias (Owad, 2006; Marks and Fraley, 2006).

2.2.3.2 Selective collection of evidence

So clear is this bias that we spend significantly more time reading material that confirms what we think (LaMarre, 2009). Unconscious prejudice is a major obstacle to gender equality, but we can all do something about it. When companies address it, the results occur with surprising speed. One of the best examples is when Ernst & Young

took the decision to eliminate all academic and educational details from the apprentice application process and to introduce a blind CV policy to reduce unconscious bias (Rodionova, 2017).

2.2.3.3 *Biases, perception, assessment and recognition*

Within society there is no independent experience of society itself and its rules; the experiences are mediated by the configurations of the different spaces in which we live and interact. The part of the brain where the imagined is processed is the same as where memory is processed (the future is closely related to memory and therefore subject to bias). These findings are revolutionizing knowledge and recognition of inequalities, opening new perspectives for intervention; this is the field of neurodevelopment that can move towards neuro-equality. We may conclude that society should bet strongly on equity from the earliest stages of human life. If our future is partially conditioned by our past, we need a past as egalitarian—in gender terms—as possible.

2.3 Rules and cultural habits governing relations between men and women

The rules and habits that govern most of our acts, among them our interaction with the opposite sex, are increasingly naturalized. They are unnoticeable and subtle in their processes, but have a great impact on our conduct. Among them it is worth highlighting the normalization of roles, student evaluations, invisibility, feedback and androcentrism.

2.3.1 Normalization of roles

The sexual division of labour and the polarization of gender roles presupposes that women operate in the private, social and recurrent domains, men in the public, economic and extraordinary. This is at the origin of a persistent segregation in all spaces. According to a recent study (Lebowitz, 2015), companies in all industries reported that they found women more difficult to hire at all levels. The reported facility (or in this case, the difficulty) of recruiting women is directly proportional to the existing gender composition of an industry. A feminized environment attracts women and a male environment repels them (Hallberg and Schneider, 2017). Although it may sound tautological, we can say: What is a woman? The opposite of a man. And what is a man? The opposite of a woman. People are socialized to draw strong boundaries between the two concepts. Gender identities are built on this exclusive and hierarchical polarization, which also determines the way in which the generic human is defined, by equivalence to the masculine universe. We take this as normal, hardly ever noticing its implicit gender reduction. And if we take humanity as generically masculine, we must of course also speak of its other face, which is otherness in its broadest sense (de Beauvoir, 1949). Anyone who does not fit into this false concept of universality (occupied by the male, white, young, healthy, handsome and heterosexual) is considered to be “the other”, even though those others form the majority of the population. Some marks of the other, of the “good woman”, are sacrifice and surrender to others, to the couple, to the children, to work, to parents, to friends, to business; and marks of the generic human assumption are the assignment of greater capability and greater competence to men than to women.

The assignment of greater capability to men is clearly shown in the Howard Roizen vs Heidi Roizen case study, developed in 2000 at Harvard and used by several business schools (McGinn and Tempest, 2010). When students were asked to read a case study written by someone named Howard Roizen, they rated him as highly competent and effective, someone with whom they would be willing to work. When identical details were assigned to the real case of a successful female entrepreneur, Heidi Roizen, however, the same students found her competent and effective, but said they would not want to work with her.

2.3.2 Student evaluations

The same bias of rating males better than females with the same characteristics is shown by the John and Jennifer study of Moss-Racusin and colleagues (2010). They suggest that university professors, regardless of gender, evaluate a candidacy for laboratory director more favourably if it is signed with a male name. The professors received exactly the same CV, half under the name of John and half under the name of Jennifer. John was rated much more competent and worthy of hiring than Jennifer. The evaluators also decided that John deserved a higher salary than Jennifer.

Other similar analyses have observed how identical candidates for fixed university positions are more likely to succeed if the purported applicant is male. Their authors also note that these biases affect individuals who value equality and are considered objective. This biased perception of teachers and professionals affects—mostly in an unconscious manner—their everyday interaction with youngsters and consequently, male and female self-perception (Díaz Martínez, 1996).

In the increasingly important world of computer programming there is a belief which has gained strength over time: that men are better programmers than women. To determine whether this belief was well founded, a group of North American researchers took various software repositories and presented them to two panels of experts for evaluation (Tourjée, 2016). Members of the first panel knew the sex of the person who had developed each code, while those in the second did not. The results, in terms of gender equality, were disappointing: when the sex of the developer was known, men obtained better evaluations, but in the blind arm of the experiment, where the evaluators did not have this information, the figures were fairly even, with women being rated slightly more favourably. Most tellingly, there was a third round, superficially like the first except that the women’s code was labelled as written by men and vice versa. Surprise: the winners were the “men” who were really women. The myth fell by itself. Andrews (2016) gives an account of a similar experiment.

Martin R. Schneider and Nicole Hallberg are two bloggers living in Philadelphia. About three years ago, when working for a temporary employment agency, each of them signed their emails with the other’s name for a week. In a Twitter thread, Schneider reports that this informal experiment “helped me to verify the machismo suffered by women at work” (Hallberg and Schneider, 2017).

A recent study which followed boys and girls until they were adults found that when tested in mathematics and science at an early age without their sex being divulged, girls obtained somewhat better results, yet teachers in the classroom (even female teachers) gave more negative feedback on the abilities of the girls. Another study, conducted at

Stanford University, found that girls outperformed boys in maths if they were not in a competitive context (Niederle and Vesterlund, 2010). As a consequence of competitive testing, however, girls are significantly more likely to drop out of maths and science classes and less likely to enter STEM professions. In other words, the internalization of a bias occurs and negatively affects the trajectory of girls and women. There is a systematic association of women with a deficit which is assumed to be universal.

2.3.3 Presentism, invisibility and lack of role models

Invisibility is one of the worst forms of absence, because it naturalizes and feeds back the lack of power. In the case of women, this is a pathetic reality whose effects are fatal for self-esteem, for the exercise of leadership, for its legitimacy and self-legitimization. Women, in this sense, have low social visibility and young women lack role models. Women predominate—and are visible—in a limited number of sectors, specifically those that reinforce the female role (UN-Women, 2018; Lee, 2018). As recently as 1994, “Only 25% of the world media coverage offers women as protagonists in the press, radio and television. On the other hand, 46% of these coverages tend to reinforce gender stereotypes, while only 6% challenge them (Wood, 1994).

There is evidence of bias in street naming. Most streets, squares and avenues have male names. Girls and women very scarcely find themselves in places of importance.

Wikipedia and other Internet places

The Wikipedia entry for *Gender bias in Wikipedia*² states: “The vast majority of Wikipedia editors are young, college-educated males, a demographic which has been described as ‘a bunch of male geeks who are wealthy enough to afford a \$2,000 laptop and a broadband connection’.” Surveys have indicated that between 8.5 and 16 percent of Wikipedia editors are female. Consequently, Wikipedia has been criticized by some academics and journalists for having primarily male contributors and for having fewer and less extensive articles about women or topics important to women. The New York Times points out that Wikipedia’s female participation rate may be in line with other “public thought-leadership forums”. In 2009, a Wikimedia Foundation survey revealed that just 6% of editors who had made more than 500 edits were female, with the average male editor having twice as many edits.

In the English Wikipedia and five other language editions that were studied by researchers, the ratio of articles about women to articles about men was higher than in three other databases. However, analysis with computational linguistics concluded that the way women and men are described in articles demonstrates bias, with articles about women more likely to overuse words relating to gender and family. The researchers believe that this is a sign that Wikipedia editors consider male the “null gender”.

Women in film

The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in the Media³ reveals that only 7% of film directors and 11% of screenwriters in the United States are female. Similarly, females account

2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_bias_on_Wikipedia

3 <https://seejane.org/>

for just 12% of protagonists of the highest grossing films. And this is the United States! The interesting thing, in addition to this low female representation, is that 61% of male characters are identified by their professional role, against only 34% of women, who in 58% of cases are associated with the role of wife or mother.

Nobel Prize

The Nobel Prize, on its own web page,⁴ states that 48 women in total were awarded a Nobel Prize between 1901 and 2017. In 2018, several incidents of sexist misbehaviour, including sexual harassment within Nobel juries, were denounced and several resignations followed. Both things affect the absence of women and the hidden sexism in several areas of the Prize.

Female chefs

Only two of the 50 best restaurants in the world have female chefs and this cannot be because women do not know how to cook! As Meghan McCarron (2018) argues, “Men have a disproportionate share of power in the restaurant world for a whole host of reasons—male-dominated networks, male-centric kitchens, men’s preference for investing in other men—but underpinning and reinforcing all these is the core story that important cooking is done by men. Our culture’s desire for compelling male chefs, and discomfort with women cooking professionally, helped give rise to the ugly system we can no longer unsee.”

2.3.4 Women receive less feedback, more criticism and interruptions

Men receive twice as much positive feedback as women and four times more developmental feedback. Women are 66% more likely to receive a recommendation to change their communication styles. Men often criticize the speech patterns and tone of women. Linguistic studies show that men and women use different speech patterns and vocal tones in their interpersonal relationships or to show authority, but only women are criticized for it. Since entering the labour market, women have received numerous negative messages about their tone of voice—too high, too low—or the lack of authority and security in their speech, which in reality reflects their emphasis on collaboration rather than on imposition. Telling girls and women to speak more firmly or with a different tone is to falsely accuse them of defective or deficient speech (Liswood, 2015). Recent research has shown that women lower the pitch of their voices as they increase their power (Robson, 2018).

According to a curious study published on the Quartz website,⁵ women cannot avoid being constantly interrupted by men, even when they are members of the Supreme Court of the USA. The record is held by Justice Sonia Sotomayor, who was interrupted by male colleagues precisely 41 times when speaking in public. Ruth Bader was interrupted 11 times by the same male colleague and Elena Kagan (10 times) was not spared

4 https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/lists/women.html

5 <https://qz.com/952214/female-supreme-court-justices-get-interrupted-three-times-as-much-as-men-a-new-study-shows/> Downloaded 8/05/2018

either. In the same period of time (the sessions of the Court in 2015), those same Justices only interrupted one of their male colleagues on two occasions and the three female members of the Court did not interrupt more than four times. Paternalism and childish treatment is also frequent. “Mansplaining” is a new word that has been popularized to describe a situation in which a male explains something to a woman in a condescending or paternalistic way (Solnit, 2012).

2.3.5 Macro and micro definition of reality from an androcentric viewpoint

Authorized opinion is embodied by men. There are hardly any women in forums, panels or debate programmes on television, except when talking about what are considered “feminine” topics). Female “gurus” are almost non-existent: less than 10% of those who create opinion. In the domain of cookery, what counts is the supreme art of the chef and his capacity for innovation, not the mere fact of satisfying our primordial and daily need to feed ourselves in order to continue living (McCarron, 2018). In the case of care, according to objective data on remuneration, it appears to be more important to take care of things than of people. This valuation is divorced from reality; it is independent of the objective contribution of value. In this way we transfer the irrelevance of the activity to the irrelevance of the person who exercises it. There is an invisible norm that combines the apparent irrelevance of what you do and what you are.

3 Methods - *Anna Giulia Ingellis*

The Coming Out research adopted throughout a mix of two qualitative methods: in-depth interviews with young people aged 15 to 29 years and focus groups of adults involved in educational, training and orientation services.

In-depth interviews

With the youngsters, we needed to probe their self-representation deeply, exploring their thinking about jobs and making them imagine their future. The in-depth interview was the best technique for that purpose. A semi-structured format was used. As well explained in the theoretical framework, stereotypes are automatic thinking, acquired during the socialization process and converted in unconscious beliefs. For this reason, the methodological strategy of the research team was to create indirect access to those beliefs. The youngsters were not informed of the real object of the interviews: to explore gender stereotypes and their influence on their thinking. They were told instead that the research was about youngsters and their future in Europe. This was done to minimize the risk that the desirability effect would lead participants to give answers that were politically correct in terms of gender equality. Two ways of accessing youngsters’ real inner thinking were used. The first was to ask them to describe in detail their idea of a number of jobs and the tasks and requirements related to them. This line of questioning took a cognitive approach. Secondly, interviewees were asked to picture themselves at the age of 40, having definitively passed through

the education-to-work transition. A more projective approach was considered appropriate when speaking about themselves.

Thus, after a warm-up phase to establish contact with the interviewee, the interviewer presented a list of 50 jobs and asked the youngster to choose 10 of them. From these, they were then asked to choose three or four that they could imagine themselves doing as adults. The youngsters were asked to focus at a cognitive level, which made it possible to explore the social representations of the chosen occupations that they had absorbed. This part was not strictly related to their own lives and plans for the future. By contrast, in the second part of the interview they were asked to imagine their lives at 40 years old, when the decisions they would make during their youth were likely to have had time to take full effect. The idea was to let their self-identity emerge, but in a context far removed from the present, thus overcoming possible resistance to speaking about themselves, which is typical of adolescents.

Focus groups

As to the key operators in education, training and orientation services, the objective was to elicit their ideas about gender stereotypes and the young people with whom they were in daily contact, about the factors influencing young people and their own perceived roles in reducing the impact of gender stereotypes on youngsters.

To explore those dimensions, we sought to provoke discussion covering diverse experiences and points of view, for which the focus group technique was considered most appropriate. Two focus group sessions were held in each country: one with key actors in education having contact with and orienting youngsters who were making educational decisions and the other with people working in employment services, orienting young people with their career choices. In both cases the discussions were planned to cover eight thematic areas. The guidelines for the two focus groups were practically identical. Participants were first shown data about educational/horizontal gender segregation in order to prompt a discussion about this first issue. They were next asked to share their ideas about attitudes related to gender stereotypes that youngsters would have while making their decisions. The following discussion areas in both focus groups were gender stereotypes and inequality in career progression, work-life balance and empowering strategies. The only difference between the two sets of guidelines was that the educational group explored youngsters' role models, whereas the employment group members were invited to reflect on employers' attitudes.

Interview participants

46 in-depth interviews were carried out from October to January 2018, over the five countries, 9 per country, except for Italy where 10 interviews were held.

The variables taken into account to select the interviewees were: the educational institution they were attending at the time of the interview, age group, professional status or work experience, sex. The sample in each country was composed of youngsters with the characteristics listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Profiles of the youngsters interviewed

Female, 15-18 years old, below upper secondary	5
Male, 15-18 years old, below upper secondary	5
Female, 19-29 years old, in last year of VET, with work experience	5
Male, 19-29 years old, in last year of VET, with work experience	5
Female, 21-29 years old, university graduate, with work experience	5
Male, 21-29 years old, university graduate, with work experience	5
Female, 19-29, NEET, involved in Youth Guarantee Programme	5
Male, 19-29, NEET, involved in Youth Guarantee Programme	4 ⁶
Female or Male, 19-29, NEET, not involved in any programme	6
Male, in final year of bachelor's degree, with work experience	1 ⁷

Focus group participants

In each country, 30 counsellors in education and 23 advisors in employment services participated in the two focus group sessions,⁸ held during the autumn of 2017.

Those participating in the education focus groups came from secondary schools, VET services and public or NGO youth centres. Participants in the employment focus groups were labour market actors such as entrepreneurs, labour union officers and above all, advisors working in public and private employment services.

Gender balance was difficult to maintain because of the prevalence of women in orientation services.

4 FtC country profiles

This section offers a brief overview of the Coming Out research findings for each FtC country. Each profile focuses on the peculiarities and the main issues emerging from the fieldwork in the country concerned. The country profiles are based on the five Coming Out national reports.⁹ Extracts are quoted directly from these national reports.

6 In the case of Portugal, it was not possible to find two youngsters enrolled in the Youth Guarantee Programme (YGP), despite the efforts made. Therefore, the Portugal research team included two NEETs not involved in the YGP, instead of one as in the other countries.

7 A case included in the Italian sample.

8 Three focus groups were convened in Cyprus. As it was impossible to organize a single group comprising career counsellors in education and secondary school teachers, two separate education focus groups were formed.

9 Jabbaz, Marcela (ed.) (2019), *Coming out. Spain report*, Brussels: European Commission, Free to Choose

Angeli, Maria, MIGS (2018), *Coming out. Cyprus report*, Brussels: European Commission, Free to Choose

4.1 Cyprus - *Capitolina Diaz Martinez*

4.1.1 Country background

In the last two decades, Cyprus has promoted gender equality policies and legislation mainly within the framework of the country's harmonization with the *acquis communautaire* (EIGE 2018). Government policy and current legislation cover violence against women. The legislation in Cyprus also covers equal treatment in employment, the penalization of sexual harassment in the workplace, equal pay, maternity protection and limited parental leave, among others. A number of National Action Plans and strategies have been developed that specifically address gender inequality, including the National Action Plan on Equality between Women and Men (2014-2017).

The Ministry of Education and Culture has established a committee to monitor and coordinate activities promoting gender equality. One of its most important activities was the Strategic Action Plan on Gender Equality in Education (2014-2017), which includes the following measures:

- Structural reform of the education system (i.e. the introduction of programmes to increase girls' participation in technical fields of study, the use of new technologies and the development of a New Modern Apprenticeship for girls).
- Training and workshops in gender equality and gender sensitization for teachers and career guidance counsellors.
- Strengthening school resources on gender (i.e. developing up-to-date educational material to combat gender stereotypes from an early age, particularly: encouraging boys to actively participate in family life and girls to take part in politics/public life; encouraging relationships based on equality and mutual respect between the sexes; introducing vocational and social education).

The Cypriot Educational Reform (2010-2011) recognizes gender equality as one of the parameters of the reformed school curriculum. Specific learning objectives related to gender equality were introduced under the subjects of Health and Life Skills Education (Agogi Ygeias) in elementary schools and under Home Economics in secondary schools (gymnasium level, up to the age of 15).

In addition, the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute of the Ministry of Education and Culture has launched a webpage dedicated to gender equality, offering easy access to relevant material and information on good practice.

Although there have been important steps forward in recent decades, efforts towards gender equality have been sporadic. Many of the National Action Plans do not tend to

Cristini Chiara and Riccardi Fulvia, IRES-FVG,(2018), *Coming out. Italy report*, Brussels: European Commission, Free to Choose

José Carlos Bronze and Luísa Almendra Roque, APLOAD, (2018), *Coming out. Portugal report*, Brussels: European Commission, Free to Choose

Vita Jankovič, MCBIT, and Meta Brečič, ZADOVNEFIKS, (2018), *Coming out. Slovenia report*, Brussels: European Commission, Free to Choose

Each national report is available from www.freetochose.eu.

foresee a dedicated budget or long-term evaluation and have therefore proved ineffective in meeting their goals.

4.1.2 Youngsters' perspective

The young interviewees, at first glance, took a critical approach to dominant gender stereotypes that affect educational and professional choices. Some of them believed that everyone should choose what they love in order to reach their full potential, that people should be open-minded and consider which choices are good for them.

This progressive approach to gender equality and the right of people to choose what fits them best appears only superficially, however; a deeper examination of their discourse reveals evidence of gender bias. The same youngsters who at the beginning of the interview sounded so politically correct made quite discriminatory remarks. In fact, all nine interviewees expressed conflicting statements regarding gender stereotypes. In every interview there was at least one statement rejecting gender stereotypes and at least one statement normalizing gender stereotypes. On one hand, people were critical of the existence of gender stereotypes and pointed out how harmful they can be. On the other hand, they would unconsciously reproduce gender stereotypes. The existence of contradictions can be an indicator of how political correctness teaches people what to say but not what to believe.

The phrase “youngsters’ perspective” refers both to their self-image (as young adults and as workers or professionals) and to youngsters’ opinions on their generation and society in general in relation to gender issues. Their views were openly expressed but, like most people, they showed evidence of some contradictions and inconsistencies.

4.1.2.1 Gender stereotypes and occupations

Male and female interviewees made segregated choices regarding work. Young women more frequently chose occupations involving people and care, such as in the education and health sectors. Four out of five female interviewees chose doctor and three out of five chose pre-primary or primary school teacher, psychologist, flight attendant, nurse or veterinarian. Males chose occupations involving technology, engineering and technical skills. All four young men who were interviewed chose either mechanical or electrical engineering or both and three of the four chose pilot and fireman.

There are cases where the participants chose occupations not stereotypically associated with their gender, e.g. the young woman who chose sailor as one of her favourite professions and the young man who chose childcare worker. However, when asked about how they imagined themselves at forty years old, all interviewees made choices that are stereotypically associated with and dominated by their gender in the current workplace. The five females chose the following occupations: psychologist, occupational therapist, confectioner, teacher and secretary. All four men chose occupations involving a trade or manual labour: businessman/farmer, fireman, plumber, trainer and game developer. All of the jobs imagined by the young men are typically compensated more highly than those chosen by the young women.

Although there were some cases of interviewees saying that gender makes no difference to the way that people actually do their jobs, there was a tendency to allocate

different attributes to men and women based on the belief that some occupations are more appropriate for women and others for men.

During the in-depth interviews, most of the traits that were associated with occupations were gendered. We noted that interviewees mentioned more attributes related to women and that some women's attributes were cited more frequently. For example, the motherhood instinct was dominant, as six out of nine interviewees mentioned this at least once. Four interviewees repeated patience and sensitivity as being female attributes.

Tenderness and dynamism were the two traits associated with both men and women. There were also opposite traits such as patience for women and impatience for men, one task at a time for men and multitasking for women, decisiveness for men and indecisiveness for women.

4.1.2.2 Gender-based self-identity

Self-identity appears quite closely related to occupation and to be gendered. Women expressed an interest in jobs involving people, helping others and delivering social rewards.

Personal lifestyle is another element strongly related to self-identity. In this respect, it seems that Cyprus has a family-oriented society, as six of the nine interviewees envisioned themselves getting married, having children and living in Cyprus in the future. Some also praised themselves for not dreaming big, as all they wanted was a simple life with a full-time job and a family.

Only two women and one man said that they did not dream of having a family with children in the future, mainly because they would rather focus on their career. They all said they would not mind having a partner as long as she/he did not want to have children.

Analysis of the interview data suggests that young women are more concerned than young men with work-life balance. Some female interviewees thought that having a large business would affect the time they could spend with their families, so they expressed a preference to focus on family and have a smaller business that would demand less time.

4.1.2.3 Youngsters' role models

When asked to talk about their heroes/heroines or role models, interviewees referred to family members, professionals they knew, celebrities and comic book characters. More specifically, three interviewees mentioned parents and other family members as the people who they looked up to.

One young man named as his role model a professional he knew, while another mentioned a celebrity who was also a humanitarian. A third rejected the image of role model for himself, declaring that he would determine his own lifestyle. Three of the nine interviewees identified as anti-heroes/heroines people who are not responsible and do not do their jobs well, while another three said that people who do not spend enough time with their families were their anti-heroes/heroines.

4.1.3 Key actors' perspective

Key secondary school actors admitted that the gendered socialization of boys and girls, which reflects traditionally held gender stereotypes, greatly influences study and career choices. This view of gendered socialization is probably a description of reality, but it may also have been used to deflect criticism of their limited influence on youngsters' attitudes. They said this and at the same time, with similar contradictions to those of the youngsters themselves, they insisted that things were changing for the better and that boys and girls are not so concerned with gender stereotypes when they make career and academic choices.

The fact that young people, their teachers and their careers advisors are subject to similar contradictions in relation to the influence (or not) of gender stereotypes regarding fields of study or occupations indicates that we are at a point of transition between conventional gender-segregated occupations and a more inclusive culture.

Teachers and careers advisors also observed that boys and girls who came to career guidance sessions were reluctant to choose a field of study that is not stereotypically associated with their gender. In the same line of thinking, interviewees observed that women are not drawn to practical fields of study such as engineering, because young women tend to believe that these activities demand the kind of physical strength that is usually attributed to men. One teacher acknowledged that this was an obsolete point of view, since physical strength is no longer an issue, due to increased mechanization. However, the socially constructed barriers to women who want to enter male-dominated fields remain in place.

Teachers observed that gender segregation and gender stereotypes were dominant in every aspect of school life. One female teacher explained some traits of youngsters' attitudes that may indicate the path to follow to reduce gender stereotyping and gender discrimination. She gave the example of how a girl who moves towards a boy's style of action loses her girlish image and is accepted without being marked by her sex. Let us assume that the reverse phenomenon could also be true; that is, a boy moving towards a girl's style of action would be accepted without prejudice.

Boys and girls gain popularity in school for different reasons. Girls for being pretty and thin. Boys for being strong and portraying an image of the 'bad boy'. There was once this girl at our school who was Head Girl and very dynamic; she was popular in a male-dominated school, studying a male-dominated field. She was so dynamic that boys started seeing her as 'one of the guys', as if they were unable to see that she was a girl.

According to teachers and careers advisors, parents play the most influential role in their children's' study and career choices. Parents also tend to intervene in school career counselling sessions, projecting their own preferences on the choices made by their children, trying to move them away from crossing gender barriers. Sometimes, parents actively discourage children who want to follow in their footsteps.

Teachers and careers advisors understand that the economic crisis has forced young people to look for financially secure jobs and be less concerned with whether the job 'fits' the stereotypical notions around their gender. Interviewees thought that this was

normal, considering today's economy. They did not predict whether this trend would consolidate towards a less desegregated workplace, but according to their opinions cited above, it seems that their view is that the society which will emerge from the economic crisis could be less segregated by gender.

4.1.3.1 *Work-life balance*

Teachers and school counsellors believed that young people were not concerned with work-life balance. They saw girls as just reflecting what their parents thought about the issue and reported that concern about work-life balance was entirely absent from their sessions with boys.

But as noted above, young people are interested in this issue. Youngsters, especially girls, said that work-life balance was one of their criteria when choosing a future occupation. Professional careers advisors asserted that having a good work-life balance is a far greater concern to women than to men. In fact, the ease with which a career can coexist with the ability to have a family can be the crucial criterion for a woman choosing her future occupation. Some advisors noted that women's relatively strong concern about achieving work-life balance had to do with the gender pay gap and the stereotype of the man as breadwinner.

4.1.4 **Conclusions**

The results of this research have shown that young people reinforce gender stereotypes which create gender segregation in education and employment. When asked to choose their favourite occupations, some made choices not typically associated with their gender. However, when asked to imagine themselves in the future, all nine participants chose occupations dominated by their own gender. There were cases where interviewees gave politically correct answers that reflect the increasing prominence of gender equality issues in public dialogue. Our analysis of the data reveals that although most of the interviewees resisted gender stereotypes at some point, they were not consistent throughout the interviews. It is important to point out that interviewees tended to challenge gender stereotypes at the beginning of their interviews, then, as they became more familiar with the researcher, they were more likely to express stereotypical ideas. Therefore, we can assume that ideas which challenge gender stereotypes are linked to political correctness and social desirability. In other words, the youngsters told us what they thought we wanted to hear.

The interviews with young people have shown that young women are more concerned with work-life balance than their male peers when talking about their future careers. Some male interviewees assumed that nothing would change when they had a family, whereas females focused on the multiple roles they would have at forty years old.

Although gender stereotypes seemed to be dominant among the young people who were interviewed, teachers were inconsistent and sometimes contradictory in their observations about the role of gender stereotypes in students' academic and career choices. There was an across-the-board recognition of the persistence of gender stereotypes and a resulting gender segregation. There was also a paradoxical view minimizing the issue, treating it as something outside their remit of responsibility and of no particular importance. More specifically, career counsellors in schools overwhelmingly

rejected the gender-sensitive approach when counselling students because they disagreed in principle or did not have the time to apply it. Teachers complained about school advisors failing to provide young people with adequate information on study options, which they felt led to gender segregation in education and an under-representation of girls in technical schools.

The results of this research have shown that there is a need to train teachers systematically on gender equality. The existence of blatant and subtle stereotypes among young people also shows the need for a more systematic approach to efforts towards gender equality. Although there were sporadic actions to tackle gender stereotypes in schools, it seems that they were not successful in changing the mentalities and behaviours of young people. Change is possible only with political will and long-term budgeted action plans for interventions in the education system in order to change not only the discourse but also the behaviours of young people and educators alike.

4.2 Italy - *Anna Giulia Ingellis*

4.2.1 Country background

In Italy, the public system responsible for promoting equal opportunities between men and women has a multilevel structure and is expected to use multilevel governance to combat gender inequality. At national level, the governmental organizations involved are: the Department for Equal Opportunities at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, the National Equality Council¹⁰ and the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research, responsible for educative programmes and projects promoting equal opportunities.

At local level, there is a threefold organization comprising two unipersonal entities and a commission. At the level of regional, provincial and municipal administrations the Assessor of Equal Opportunities coordinates local policies on equal opportunities.

At regional and provincial level there are Councillors for Equality between women and men, to whom the current legislation assigns the task (but not the resources) to undertake any useful initiative to remove obstacles to achieving equality in the world of work and training. A collective organism completes the structure: the Equal Opportunities Commission (at regional, provincial and municipal level) tends to promote positive actions that affect the cultural dimension.

At non-governmental level, there is an active role for women's associations, some of which are included in international networks (e.g. Fidapa BP, Soroptimists) and whose objective is also to promote a greater gender balance in study and career paths.

In recent years, the main area of emphasis for the public entities is the need to intervene with policies and strategies that can attract more girls to STEM paths. However, the efficacy of this policy is negatively affected by a lack of available resources and the tendency to produce single interventions not able to have a long-lasting effect on the system.

¹⁰ Legislative decree 198/2006

This plurality of subjects and interventions, furthermore, does not always or everywhere operate in a coordinated or synergic manner, with the risk of weakening the effectiveness of the interventions, as well as the full implementation of equal opportunities policies and the principle of gender mainstreaming.

Several national statistics and the FtC project's *Mind the Gap* report (Ingellis, 2018) make evident the inefficacy of these policies, Italy being one of the FtC countries with the worst situation in terms of gender equality and indeed one of the worst in Europe.

4.2.2 Youngsters' perspective

4.2.2.1 Gender stereotypes and occupations

The Italian youngsters interviewed made very gender-segregated choices when asked to select jobs from the list and describe the main features of each. Only three of the 23 jobs chosen (teacher, hospital doctor and sports worker) were selected by both boys and girls, while each of the others was selected exclusively either by boys or by girls. Males chose manager, ICT programmer, sportsman, policeman, politician and technician, whereas only females chose waitress, fashion stylist, air hostess or administrative operator. Furthermore, the list of jobs chosen by boys was significantly shorter than the girls' list (9 vs 16). Girls seem to be open to a wider range of different jobs than boys.

During the description of the main characteristics of each job, only seven were considered available to both men and women: fashion stylist, doctor, sales operator, blogger, YouTuber, politician and basketball player or sports trainer/coach. All others jobs were described as either male or female. Only five were perceived as female: teacher, administrative operator, vet, air hostess and waitress, all of them related to care tasks. The "male" jobs were policeman, football player, chef, manager, financial operator, firefighter, soldier, butcher and driver, mainly related to strength or authoritative profile.

Authoritativeness and care are the two main features distinguishing respectively male from female professions. Paradigmatic, in this sense, is the following description of two jobs in the same area, which clearly reproduces stereotypes:

"A waiter? I imagine him more like a woman. I see him as dynamic, fast and he must make you feel at home. He has to be awake and not miss anything. Of course, there is no improvisation. A restaurant with a smart waitress has much more chance of success. I think the same applies to the chef. Both are difficult trades. For a local restaurant having a good waitress is more than half the battle, because if she is good at relating, you feel good, like at home, and you return to the same restaurant again and again. I see the chef as a man and the waitress as a woman ... No, not vice versa, because a woman will never be a great chef. For this work you need a dominant character, I see these chefs ... then a woman will have a family, and a chef lives in his restaurant. That's his family and so this counts too, this personal aspect...whereas for a woman..."
[The Enthusiast, 19, F, Ita]

It emerges clearly from the responses of the Italian interviewees that considering a job or a profession as male or female depends on the soft skills required for each occupation. The soft skills and personal features attributed to one gender or to the other are

highly dichotomized. Male and female attributes are completely different. The attributes mentioned when describing jobs considered as feminine are: kindness, empathy, maternal sense and care, patience, relational skills. Two other dimensions attributed to women are precision and patience (speaking of teachers, coaches and secretaries), as well as sensuality (for air hostesses). Conversely, courage (police, firefighters, soldiers and drivers), authority and decision-making (in the police and managers, but also in the chef) are perceived as predominantly male. To be focused on the objective (manager), to be strong (for law enforcement and sports figures) and the capacity for vision are also perceived as masculine characteristics. The ability to listen, dynamism, problem-solving skills and creativity are characteristics attributed to both males and females.

4.2.2.2 Gender based self-identity

Generally speaking, it seemed to be quite difficult for the interviewees to imagine themselves in the future. Nevertheless, one element emerged clearly: In planning their lives, girls mainly put their family plans first, while boys considered their work to be the main axis shaping their lives.

Imagining their own future at age 40, both the Enthusiast [19, F, Ita] and the Sports-woman [26, F, Ita] gave the family role priority over the working one.

“... but my dream is to get married and have two children, a boy and a girl ... I want to have it all. I don't want to give up on family life or work. But I would definitely put the family first, because it must be like that ... I think ...” [The Enthusiast, 19, F, Ita]

“Er ... an obvious answer is that I'm afraid of not achieving my goals. But I see myself married with children, with a job that I like and well off ...” [The Sports-woman, 26, F, Ita]

When the self-representation did not conform to this model, the choice was considered “selfish” or likely to be susceptible to change over the years. Normally, negative judgments and doubts were expressed in the presence of a nonconformist option in this sense.

4.2.2.3 Role models

As for the role models shaping their ideas about the future, the youngsters surprisingly spoke about the importance of their fathers and mothers as models. In general, they were mentioned as heroes and heroines, as positive models, particularly when the parents did not put pressure on them but left them free to make their own choices. Characters from social media such as YouTubers were also mentioned.

4.2.3 Key actors' perspective

- *In education*

4.2.3.1 Youngsters' attitudes

As for the presence and influence of stereotypes in education, especially when making educational decisions, the key actors in education had no doubts: youngsters came

to the orientation services with ideas very firmly based on gender stereotypes, making it very difficult to produce a change in their thinking. Even though the orientation services presented a wide range of options equally open to boys and girls, youngsters made very stereotyped choices; e.g. beautician is a career for girls and electrical or mechanical engineering is for boys.

Some members of the education focus group emphasized that technology and the consequent changes in the organization of work are now making gender-based attributes irrelevant: it is no longer necessary to have physical strength in industries where most heavy work is done by machines. Nevertheless, there is a persistent stereotype according to which working in industry requires strength.

“I’m thinking about the evolution of information and industry 4.0, where people are replaced by machines. This will create problems, but it must also be said that technology can nullify diversity. I think about mechanics or for example in the automotive industry ... less physical effort will be needed and it will be more important to know how to use technology and computer science, so this will tend to overcome the rigidity of gender roles.” [ORI, M, Careers advisor, PUB, Ita]

The career counsellors repeatedly stated that they were not able to reverse those decisions. On one hand, this is likely to mean that it is necessary to intervene earlier, in primary education and at home, with the parents, but on the other hand it looks like a key actors’ strategy to excuse their inefficacy in dismantling the gender-stereotyped views affecting boys and girls.

Another interesting finding is that girls appeared more open than boys to taking on roles or jobs traditionally associated with the other sex. Among girls there are signs of change that are impossible to detect among boys.

4.2.3.2 *Youngsters’ role models*

From the point of view of the key actors in education, peers and parents are the actors significantly influencing youngsters’ ideas and decisions about careers. The opinions of peers seemed to be particularly relevant when they implied a negative judgment about a choice contradicting gender stereotypes.

“I have an example of a boy who when he left middle school would have liked to study hairdressing but he gave up because it was women’s work and his friends would have made fun of him” [SCH1, F, Middle school teacher, PUB, Ita]

Parents being open-minded and not strictly conforming to gender-stereotyped careers considerably helped orientation services to guide youngsters correctly, taking into account vocations and not stereotypes.

Furthermore, the family is the place where primary socialization occurs, so that youngsters’ perceptions of male and female roles in society are shaped in the family context. A traditional family model encourages the reproduction of a gender-stereotyped notion of work-life balance for women and men and promotes corresponding educational and career decisions. As the family is crucial for the reproduction of

gender stereotypes about education, young people's social class has a strong influence. Schools and education in general are more "universal" than the family, less influenced by social class stratification. According to the key actors in education, primary socialization is more effective and has longer-lasting effects on the reproduction of gender stereotypes. The education system, particularly secondary school, were perceived as having little influence.

"It also depends on families. You have the ones that say you can choose what you want, others that put a lot of pressure on their kids. I mean, I don't know how much the school counts and how much it can affect the family context on the choice of a fourteen-year-old and even if I show them a woman driving a bus there are many other factors at play." [FP2, M, VET practitioner, It]

The relevance and importance of the impact of peers and family did not prevent key actors in education from being self-critical. Focus group participants pointed out the following weaknesses of their orientation practices: the use of non-neutral language (considering masculine terms as neutral), the lack of non-stereotyped experiences to show to youngsters and a training and education system, above all in VET, still organized with courses for girls and courses for boys. They also highlighted the need to use appropriate means of communication and language to capture young people's attention.

- At work

4.2.3.3 Youngsters' and employers' attitudes

According to the key actors in employment orientation services, there were gender differences in the attitudes of young people approaching the labour market. The immediate aim of boys was to obtain good contracts and benefits, while girls showed a more adaptive attitude. In general, girls approaching the labour market seemed more prepared and aware of gender stereotypes.

The presence of legislation forbidding gender-based discrimination in access to work did not prevent companies from seeking to employ males for production work and females for administrative positions.

"The proof of the existence of stereotypes is given by the fact that in the form that we ask companies to fill in, we never ask for age and gender, but then they put it in the skills. For example, in the construction sector, although it's in crisis, for the basic roles, but also foreman and surveyor, they ask for males. And then in the case of architects I see it's extremely difficult for women, because companies are looking for males." [LAV2, F, PES Practitioner, PUB, It]

Indeed, the actors most strongly influenced by gender stereotypes seem to be employers, whose justifications of discrimination were related to personal features such as strength for men or precision and order for women. Alternatively, they cited the organizational microclimate, claiming that too much effort would be required to introduce a male into an organizational context with a predominance of women and vice versa. In other words, entrepreneurs were afraid of upsetting the gender-segregated equilibrium.

The counsellors working to match labour supply with demand were aware of their key role in promoting the dismantling of gender stereotypes. Direct contact between female candidates and employers was considered a good strategy to overcome stereotypes, which, as noted above, are mental images. Meeting people directly could break stereotyped ideas about women and their commitment to the job and the company. A relationship between workers and entrepreneurs based on trust is another strategy mentioned by participants as likely to facilitate organizational change in favour of the recruitment of women.

4.2.3.4 *Work-life balance*

The need to build a family-friendly work-life balance was seen as a female concern and considered a cost by employers. The asymmetric distribution of care work within the family has a direct impact on women's ability to find good jobs. Not only do they have to take on more work at home, but they are also less likely to be hired because of the unequal distribution of reproductive work. The role of women in the traditional family thus seems to be at the origin of discrimination at work.

The organization of work is based on a traditional model of society; it is not yet oriented to more flexibility, to finding family-friendly solutions and to improving the overall work-life balance. Some operators recognized that more flexible work schedules would facilitate women's entry to the labour market and would boost productivity, but organizational inertia and the power of habit make this change difficult.

4.2.4 *Conclusions*

The research highlights the presence of stereotypes among both young people and adults involved in the school-to-work transition. Stereotypes are not only present and reproduced, but have a visible impact on gender-segregated careers and employment. The study has made it possible to identify the mechanism by which jobs—and consequently career and educative paths—are gender stereotyped and has underlined the relevance of the roles played by families, peers and media in transmitting or overturning those stereotypes. Occupations are gendered because of the soft skills they are assumed to require.

The cultural dimension exercises a strongly conservative influence on the reproduction of gender stereotypes, more than technology applied to industrial production, for example. There is no longer a structural barrier to women working in male-dominated jobs, but their central role in reproductive work, the strength of gendered culturally founded beliefs and some organizational forces at work exercise very strong resistance to change.

Careers advisors involved in education or employment services have a key role. They are able to see the roles played by all the actors involved in the school-to-work transition, but do not use this valuable information to create disruptive strategies.

It is not possible to limit interventions to institutions involved in education or the labour market. Gender stereotypes affect the whole of society, its values and structure.

4.3 Portugal - *Anna Giulia Ingellis*

4.3.1 Country background

In recent decades, gender equality has acquired ever-increasing importance in Portugal, both in terms of a policy commitment to combat inequality and in terms of the public awareness the problem.

As for organizations involved in that process, Portugal has a specific public structure to provide for and to enforce gender equality, called “CIG - Comissão para a Cidadania e a Igualdade de Género” (Commission for the Citizenship and Gender Equality).¹¹ CIG is concerned with changing the normative framework, protecting maternity and paternity, combatting gender-based violence, developing research to support political decision-making, promoting civic behaviour and raising awareness of gender equality. Furthermore, in Portugal there are NGOs dedicated to the theme, having similar aims, identifying best practices, working on cultural and social aspects and providing technical support for public institutions within gender equality acts, among many other activities.

One of the most important pieces of legislation is the Resolution of the Council of Ministers no. 103/2013 of 31st December, which defines the Fifth National Plan for Gender Equality, Citizenship and Non-Discrimination, covering the period between 2014 and 2017. This plan, like the four preceding it, details all actions and processes to be implemented by the Government and its structures in order to achieve substantive results in a multidimensional perspective. Its implementation is continuously assessed by monitoring and evaluation processes. The results are made public on the CIG website. According to the EU approaches, gender equality is a cross-cutting concern: every EU-funded project in Portugal has to include the gender perspective in its actions.

4.3.2 Youngsters' perspective

In the discourse of the young Portuguese interviewees, men and women were considered equal and should share equal opportunities regardless the contexts; nevertheless, they were aware that this ideal is not reflected in real life, where women are penalized and treated differently, having far fewer opportunities than men in many different domains. The youngsters identified the source of that discrimination as “society”. A certain political correctness could be detected in their responses. On one hand, they stated that gender equality is the only correct approach, but on the other, when speaking concretely about raising children, for instance, they assumed a predominant role for women, including in promoting a gender equality orientation in education.

4.3.2.1 *Gender stereotypes and occupations*

When choosing jobs from the list provided by the interviewer, Portuguese youngsters made very segregated choices. Among jobs chosen exclusively by males were director/manager of an SME, mechanic, civil construction worker and pilot, while

¹¹ www.cig.gov.pt

jobs selected by females were childcare worker, doctor, social worker, psychologist and housekeeper. It is also worth mentioning that young women chose a wider range of jobs than young men (10 vs 5). Girls seemed to be more open-minded than boys to options associated with the other sex, such as architect or designer. The girls' attitudes may be the result of decades of policies designed to empower women and to promote their inclusion in the labour market. Public policy is commonly more oriented towards promoting an active role for women than men in pursuing gender equality.

When describing jobs, youngsters in Portugal employed many clearly gender-stereotyped attributes, suggesting that men are more incisive, physically tougher, stronger, more objective, rational, colder, tending to feel superior and having voices that are more easily respected. Conversely, women were negatively described as lacking male attributes such as physical strength, as not being good bosses, as gossiping more and on the positive side, being more sensitive, better at affect and mothering, multitasking, patience and attention to detail. There was evidence of the reproduction at work of the stereotyped image of woman as mother.

4.3.2.2 Gender-based self-identity

In the Portuguese sample, all of the youngsters had in common the fact that they imagined themselves at 40 to be married with children (most commonly two, but up to six). There was no difference between girls and boys in their envisaged future marital and parental status. Nevertheless, analysing youngsters' responses about their life plans, it emerges clearly that childcare and the consequent issue of work-life balance were seen as female concerns. Women are responsible for childcare, directly or indirectly with the help of grandparents.

The interviewees expressed a fairly gender-balanced desire to spend time with their family (appearing in both cases); however, "caring for the family" was described three times as a spare-time activity, always by girls, never by boys. Educational achievement had a considerable influence on these choices, which were more gender balanced among those with a higher level of education. Finally, when youngsters were asked about the possibility of working abroad, there were gender-stereotyped differences in their responses: While wives were open to a free choice of the husband leaving the country for a better job, the reverse was not true.

4.3.2.3 Youngsters' role models

When asked to name their heroes and anti-heroes, youngsters identified the former in the private sphere, often parents, older siblings or grandparents; conversely, their anti-heroes were generally public figures involved in criminal cases or unethical behaviour, apparently regardless of gender differences. Nevertheless, while girls' choices also included successful male professionals, boys did not name any successful female professionals but gave only male examples: a successful CEO and Cristiano Ronaldo. In each gender group there was one reference to the opposite-sex partner: One girl chose her boyfriend as her hero and one boy said that his future wife would be his heroine.

4.3.3 Key actors' perspective

- *In education*

4.3.3.1 Youngsters' attitudes

According to the counsellors in education, youngsters in Portugal as individuals also seemed to be more open to an approach free from gender stereotypes than their social context.

“Kids get to the age of 15 and they want to make their own choices. That’s why the conflict emerges. They say ‘I want to do arts’. They say ‘I want’. They say ‘I’m going to be different, I’m not going to be an engineer just because I’m a man and men are supposed to become engineers’.” (WYOUTHWORKERNGOPT)

When making their educational decisions after secondary school they were put under great pressure by their families and the stereotyped images of professions. When speaking with the counsellors, youngsters expressed no gender-stereotyped choices, but in the end, pressure from family or peers (especially males) and the social context was very strong.

“The fact of being part of a group of, let’s say ten people, where there are men and women, where someone will take no for an answer from someone else, ‘No, you can’t drink or smoke’, or whatever is acceptable, whereas in groups of only men or only women this is more difficult. The idea that men behave in a certain way is very strong in a group where there are only men. This is more evident in groups of men only.” (MYOUTHWORKERNGOPT)

Most stereotyped attitudes found in youngsters today are related to sexuality, a domain where the key actors found significant differences between boys and girls and where stereotypes have a decisive effect on decisions. In other domains, such as education, leisure (children’s and youngsters’ games) and professional vocation, differences and stereotypes are slowly losing ground.

4.3.3.2 Youngsters' role models

Counsellors working in the education system pointed out that different models are presented to youngsters on a gender-stereotyped basis by the same education system and during primary socialization. The first gendered models are presented in these two contexts.

The two other main sources of stereotypes are the mass media and consumerism. Although the situation is gradually changing, there are still idols for men and idols for women, which represents a concern, youngsters being quite heavily exposed and vulnerable to the mass media, particularly through the Internet.

Boys seem to be more vulnerable to mainstream stereotype references, being more likely than girls to be labelled on the basis of their sexual orientation, which sets the stage for the reproduction of stereotypes. Girls, for their part, seem to be more vulnerable to the exploitation of the image and of the body than boys, which also tends to perpetuate stereotypes.

4.3.3.3 Work-life balance

Work-life balance was not a concern for youngsters in the final year of secondary school, whether male or female, as at this stage of their lives they were still living in the present. Thus it was not a factor influencing their educational choices.

“Yes, they want (to have a family) but they’re not thinking about it yet, so it’s not a decision-making criterion.” (WYOUTHWORKERNGOPT2)

This was the unanimous opinion of counsellors participating in the focus group of advisors involved in educational institutions.

- At work

4.3.3.4 Youngsters’ and employers’ attitudes

Youngsters making career decisions were still said to be influenced by gender stereotypes, although these were losing ground. The greatest obstacles to equal opportunities appeared to come from the youngsters themselves, despite the efforts of counsellors to overcome them. The principal problem was the absence of concrete knowledge about what particular jobs entail in terms of tasks to be performed and the skills actually required. This lack of information and knowledge facilitates the spread of gender-stereotyped images of many occupations, especially traditional ones.

Participating career counsellors (four women) were aware of their responsibility for combatting gender stereotypes:

“I believe that if society does its homework, because it’s the responsibility of each and every one of us to keep breaking those barriers down, maybe the change in mentalities will progress step by step. It’s our responsibility within our professional contexts.” (WCAREERCOUNSELLORPUPT1)

Youngsters with VET and/or higher education qualifications tended to seek work appropriate to those qualifications, whereas unskilled youngsters tended to seek the best-paid jobs, regardless of the tasks involved; no gender differences were apparent here.

As to employers’ attitudes, the focus group participants highlighted the joint responsibility of employers and employees for their gender-based decisions.

“A man willing to work in a kindergarten does not want to register for such a job because he thinks he will be condemning himself to unemployment [...] We often face this situation ...” (WCAREERCOUNSELLORPUPT1)

4.3.3.5 Work-life balance

From the focus group it emerged that men and women deal differently with work-life balance. Participants reported that when making career decisions, young women seem to verbalize such concerns more than men and tend to be more strongly affected by the absence of possibilities for family support in the future. Women would look for jobs where the demands of work and home life would be easier to reconcile. The implication was that care work is a woman’s issue. Discrimination against women at work

originates at home. It is more difficult for a women to share care and domestic work equally with her husband than to look for a job that is compatible with care work.

(Women) *“are concerned about finding a job that will fit with their children’s schedules [...] They say ‘When I was single I didn’t mind working at weekends. I was more available.’* (WCAREERCOUNSELLORPUPT2)

The alternative is being obliged to choose between family and work.

“It’s a matter of choice. Women have to choose between a family life or a professional life, because trying to reconcile the two has consequences!” (WCAREERCOUNSELLORPUPT1)

The consequences for women’s career decisions are evident.

“In the majority of cases, women who choose not to have children are women who value their career above the idea of having a family, just like so-called career men. In other words, those women realize how things really are: If they want to have a career they must give up the idea of having children.” (WCAREERCOUNSELLORNGOPT)

Nevertheless, as noted above, change seems to be happening, albeit slowly.

“Those concerns are starting to be found in men as well [...] Men also verbalize it. Women do it more often, it’s true, but men are starting to talk about those kind of things.” (WCAREERCOUNSELLORPUPT2)

4.3.4 Conclusions

To sum up the results of the fieldwork in Portugal, we could say that the pathway towards gender equality is still long, but gender-based stereotypes are losing ground. While young interviewees explicitly recognized equality between men and women when addressing the matter directly, their understanding of male and female roles in society emerging from the choices they made and the language they used was not free from gender stereotypes. This indicates the existence of a certain political correctness in the young people’s responses. Furthermore, Portuguese youngsters interviewed were aware of the gap between their beliefs and reality. They recognized the existence of deep discrimination and unequal opportunities for women and men in real life. As for occupations chosen during the interview, both girls and boys made choices according the main existing gender stereotypes, but as in other countries, girls were more open to choosing “men’s work” in addition to stereotyped decisions. Something appears to be changing in girls’ outlook, significantly more than in that of boys. The influence of gender stereotypes also emerged when interviewees spoke of “female” skills and characteristics at work, which they related to the stereotyped image of women as mothers. As for life plans, all youngsters regardless of gender saw themselves as married with children, but this does not mean that females and males assumed childcare responsibilities equitably; childcare was seen as predominantly a female issue which significantly influenced their career choices. Taking for granted that women are responsible for childcare, they must either choose between family and career or orient their career choices towards family-friendly jobs. Discrimination against women at work originates at home.

4.4 Slovenia - *Anna Giulia Ingellis*

4.4.1 Country background

During recent years, there has been a progressive degradation of the relevance of gender equality policies in Slovenia, to the point where there is only one body, the Expert Council, with the specific mandate to deal with gender equality, while other institutions involved in that issue have wider mandates. The reduction of funds dedicated to gender equality policies testifies to the scant interest of recent governments in this issue, which has been marginalized and is therefore rarely addressed publicly. Consequently, we are facing the threat of greater gender inequality in private and public spheres of life. There has been a considerable reversal in the evolution of gender equality policies in Slovenia, considering its starting point.

Some of the major legal achievements in the field of gender equality were made when Slovenia was part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Universal suffrage was granted in 1946, formal equality between married men and women was already recognized in the constitution of that time, divorce and abortion were made legal and children born within and outside marriage had the same rights. A major player in achieving these rights was the Slovenian feminist movement, the oldest civil society movement in Slovenia.

In 1992, newly-independent Slovenia established the Women's Policy Office, responsible for proposing legislation that would positively influence the position of women in the country. Starting in 2012, the body responsible for safeguarding gender equality was the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs. In 2015, the Expert Council on Gender Equality was established to advise the Ministry. The Council has the mandate to monitor and assess the status of gender equality and progress in its implementation in various fields of social life, to make proposals and recommendations for the adoption of legislation and so on. Importantly, it remains a purely consultative body.

In 2016, under the pressure of European legislation, Slovenia established the Advocate of the Principle of Equality, an independent and autonomous state organ aimed at preventing discrimination, but with no specific mandate on gender equality, covering instead equal opportunities in a wider sense. Recent developments mark a dangerous setback to official policy in Slovenia, leaving the weak points of gender equality uncovered. There is now a real risk of a return to deep gender inequality.

4.4.2 Youngsters' perspective

The Slovenian youngsters interviewed characterized themselves with a number of stereotypes. Both boys and girls projected a stereotypical self-image, but in the latter it had a negative meaning: the girls represented themselves using negative stereotypes such as "we women are evil and jealous" or "we complicate things too much".

The mental images associated with being male or female were related to differences in the functioning of male and female brains (multitasking for females and one task at a time for males) or to physical characteristics (beauty for women and strength for men). According to many interviewees, attitudes are gendered, too. Maternity is

clearly opposed to authority, the latter considered exclusively a male attitude. Similarly, interest and hobbies are described as gendered, different for men and women. Body strength, carelessness and rationality are male attributes, while tenderness, sensitivity, charm and empathy are female ones.

4.4.2.1 *Gender stereotypes and occupations*

These male-female differences have a considerable impact on career choices, according to the youngsters interviewed, who appeared well aware of gender stereotypes and their influence on their lives. They used a great deal of stereotypical language, both to refer to themselves and when speaking about jobs, but their attitudes to gender stereotypes were polarized between those who evoked them directly when describing jobs and those who attributed them to society and the pressure exercised by social structures.

The choices of jobs to be described were not totally gendered: there were significant unconventional, counter-stereotypical choices, such as pilot and soldier for women and primary teacher for men. Notably, as in other countries, females were considerably more prone than males to making such unconventional choices: Boys chose only one of eight traditionally female jobs, while girls chose four of eight male-dominated jobs.

4.4.2.2 *Gender-based self-identity*

Boys' and girls' representation of their self-identity during the interviews was polarized in terms of being gendered or not. There were two main postures: one set of interviewees did not connect their identity with their gender at all, while others clearly expressed their belonging to one gender in connection with particular stereotypes, as in the following quote.

We women are better at some details, at tenderness, approachability, aesthetics, emotions, whereas men are more rational, more technical, more practical and maybe because it's a vehicle, and a vehicle also breaks down, a woman sees those buttons differently than men." (ANIMALLOVER30FSL)

Interestingly, stereotypical self-images were more common among the female participants in the interviews. Furthermore, this self-imagery was sometimes very negative: "we women are evil, jealous", "we tend to complicate" etc., and at the same time women felt that their opinion was less valued: "We women are not taken that seriously".

When asked about their future self-representation, in the Slovenia sample it is possible to appreciate variations in terms of forming a partnership, having children or having a household with pets. The majority were conformist regarding being married and having children, but there were some nonconformist representations, where the standard model was abandoned in favour of following a vocation such as "changing society" or "adopting a black baby".

The option of moving abroad was most strongly favoured by interviewees from Ljubljana, especially those who were not currently working in Slovenia or who were seeking employment, because they saw it as a good job opportunity. Conversely, interviewees

in Črnomelj, a rural area of Slovenia, were less convinced of the value of moving to a different country, unless it was to follow their partner in pursuit of a better job. Most of them also mentioned that they would prefer a job that they enjoyed, rather than any job that would earn them a living.

4.4.2.3 *Youngsters' role models*

As for the role models mentioned by Slovenian youngsters interviewed, they spoke more about anti-heroes than heroes. It is notable that when they did mention heroes, these were often people belonging to their personal sphere such as parents or people concretely helping them in some way, rather than public figures. Others interviewees preferred to describe heroes only in an abstract way, often ascribing gender-stereotyped characteristics to them. As for antiheroes, again the interviewees did not mention concrete people, but described their antiheroes as people not fulfilling their ethical values, such as entrepreneurs contributing to pollution or engaged in corruption.

“My anti-heroes or let’s say what I don’t want to have in my life are corrupt people, people who don’t work according to the rules. And also those who don’t work within the rules and they want to take you onto the thin ice as well.”
(DANCELOVER30MSL)

4.4.3 *Key actors' perspectives*

In education

4.4.3.1 *Youngsters' attitudes*

The key actors participating in the focus group on education identified the existence of gender stereotypes, both in youngsters' perceptions as individuals and in the main material and immaterial social structures such as institutions, public and private organizations, social values and norms.

A career counsellor gave this clear example of youngsters reproducing gender stereotypes:

“Sometimes I say as a joke, ‘You boys could also go to a cosmetics school’. The usual answer is ‘Are you kidding?’ [Laughs]. ‘What’s wrong with that?’ I ask. ‘But that’s for women’. They would consider becoming a cook or something like that, but they also don’t want to become a florist, that’s also a women’s occupation and then you’re trying to convince them, but they have this fixed idea somehow.” (WCAREERCOUNSELORPUSL)

4.4.3.2 *Youngsters' role models*

The perceptions of educators were very different from those of youngsters when speaking about role models. According to them, the youngsters' models were from the public sphere, above all mediated by the mass media. Their heroes were sportspeople, celebrities, reality show stars and so on. The counsellors stated that more should be done, by presenting successful stories of men in female-dominated careers and vice versa.

Improving the visibility of non-stereotyped cases and situations would favour a less gender-stereotyped representation of jobs and careers.

4.4.3.3 *Work-life balance*

Work-life balance seemed not yet to be a major concern of their clients, who were too young to address this issue, although the counsellors thought that girls were more likely to focus on it than boys.

“I think we can still see that traditional spirit. I don’t remember any of the boys saying that free time is important to him, to share it with his family.”
(WCAREERCOUNSELORPUSL)

- **At work**

4.4.3.4 *Youngsters’ and employers’ attitudes*

According to the career counsellors involved in employment services, there was a widespread lack of information about jobs, related tasks, timetables and skills required, which might partially explain youngsters’ imaginations continuing to be dominated by stereotyped images. The false belief that some occupations require physical strength discourages girls from considering them as options.

“The problem for youngsters is that they don’t know what a typical day would look like in a particular line of work. They imagine something which can be the complete opposite of how it actually is. No one has told them that a diploma in pharmacy doesn’t necessarily mean working in a factory where they make pharmaceutical stuff. In addition, the problem is that girls sometimes think that some occupations are physically tough, but in fact they’re not. The lack of information in early youth is the problem.” (WSCHOOLCOUNSELORPUSL)

Certainly, gender-based prejudices still exist in society and are evident when young people are choosing career paths, representing a severe constraint on nonconformist decisions.

“Once I had a youngster who couldn’t get a job. She was trying in a male sector and because she was always the one leaving the office without a job, she just said, ‘I’ve had enough, I don’t want to do it anymore.’”
(WCAREERCOUNSELORPUSL)

Furthermore, gender differences are related not only to the final decision, but also to the ways in which boys and girls make career decisions. The boys are more oriented towards vocational high schools because they provide more direct access to work. Girls are more open to various options and for this reason they are more likely to choose general education programmes.

The career counsellors perceived employers as having the most gender-stereotyped attitudes. They strongly criticised this as the principal obstacle to their own efforts to create less gender-segregated employment services. The employers’ justifications of their preferences for men or women in certain jobs were totally stereotyped.

“Sadly, a lot of prejudices come from the employers’ side, especially when they are older people with lots of working experience that have this fixed mindset that only a man can be a metalworker.” (WCAREERCOUNSELORPUSL)

“If they have exactly the same people in front of them and one is male and one female, they would prefer the man. Why? Because of children. It’s still like that, that the woman is at home with a sick child or on maternity leave.” (WCAREERCOUNSELORPUSL)

4.4.3.5 Work-life balance

Career counsellors saw concern about work-life balance as influencing young women’s career choices much more than men’s. According to them, two parallel attitudes reinforced this reality and prevented society from changing it. First, employers believed that women would not agree to do overtime because this would interfere with family commitments. At the same time, women themselves tended to avoid jobs which might require them to work long hours or at times incompatible with childcare. Thus, from the time of the school-to-work transition, young girls would already be thinking about what kinds of work would leave them free to commit to reproductive work. The following two citations make this clear.

“Girls choose occupations where they know that they won’t have to work extra shifts or in the afternoons and where the work is not too demanding, because they want to have plenty of time free for the children and the family.” (WSCHOOLCOUNSELORPUSL)

“There was this woman who didn’t want to take a job just because the employer said that she would sometimes have to do extra work, for example an hour or two of overtime.” (WCAREERCOUNSELORPUSL)

4.4.4 Conclusions

The results of the fieldwork in Slovenia show the continuing relevance of gender stereotypes in youngsters’ school-to-work transition. According to our interviewees, young people’s educational and career choices are significantly influenced by gender stereotypes. There are two main processes through which this happens. The first is the internalization of gender-stereotyped mental images and thinking absorbed during primary socialization. In that case, young people expressed these stereotyped images as their own thinking during the interviews. The second process is the systemic pressure of social structures on individuals, forcing young people to make conformist choices even if they do not accept gender segregation. The gendering of jobs occurs by linking the skills required to do them with gendered personal features.

The young interviewees considered authoritativeness, body strength and rationality to be male characteristics, whereas beauty, sensitivity and maternity were typical of females. Gender stereotypes are assimilated and reproduced by young people.

In terms of self-identity in Slovenia, the analysis highlights the existence of two poles: one occupied by those youngsters distancing themselves from gender-stereotyped images and the other by those expressing their belonging to a particular gender through the use of significant gender stereotypes. Counsellors in education and in employment services agreed that youngsters reproduce gender stereotypes and that

their educational or career choices are deeply influenced by them. A concern for reconciling work and family is almost exclusively a female one and women's commitment to caring tasks influences both their own choices and employers' attitudes to gender equality when recruiting.

4.5 Spain - *Capitolina Diaz Martinez*

4.5.1 Country background

For the last 40 years, gender equality has been an issue in Spain and during those years, women's situation has improved enormously. There are grassroots movements that have pushed for changes in all aspects of women's lives and there have been important legal reforms. The situation of Spanish women in education and work will be detailed elsewhere in this report; here, we will refer only to the main legal innovations.

Gender equality has been on the Spanish political agenda since 1982, with a stronger or weaker commitment, depending on the political party in office. Spain's accession to the EU in 1986 obliged it to follow EU directives and recommendations, so Spain has had to implement a wide range of equality policies. Among these are the Equality Plans which operate at national, regional and local levels, and from 2000 onwards, many public institutions and private enterprises have developed their own equality plans. The variety of policies include not only equality policies but also positive action measures in many aspects of social and private life.

From 2004 to 2010 several equality acts were approved. In 2004 there was a real milestone in legislative matters with the 2004 Act on Comprehensive Protection Measures against Gender Violence. In addition to the specific provisions concerning women in situations of gender violence, the Act provides preventive measures, as in Article 6 on promotion of equality, which states: "In order to guarantee effective equality between men and women, educational administrations will ensure that all educational materials eliminate sexist or discriminatory stereotypes and that they promote the equal value of men and women".

A same-sex marriage act was passed in 2005, then in 2006 came the Dependency Act, which promotes positive action to support the personal autonomy of old people and those with physical or mental disabilities. These measures imply, for many women in the country, freedom from the care responsibilities they have assumed or financial compensation for their care work.

The second milestone was the Equality Act of 2007, along with reform of the Education Act and the Universities Act. These established the legal grounds for effective gender equality in the country. Among other aspect of relevance, the Act imposes a balanced presence of women and men in electoral lists and in appointments to public positions. The Abortion Act was also reformed in 2010.

These legal changes, side by side with the feminist movement and the high educational achievements of women, have paved the way for equality; indeed, equality is a reality in many aspects of social life. But despite all of these equality measures and the gender parity that has been attained, there remain noticeable gender gaps relative

to expectations, to fields of study and work, to positions of power, to violence and to intimate relationships, among others. Most of these gaps can be explained by what has been called “gender hysteresis” (Díaz, Dema and Finkel, 2015). This term refers to the phenomenon whereby, although the objective situations of women and men are quite similar, the old gender stereotypes and gender prejudices persist, leading people (especially but not exclusively men) to believe that men are better equipped for certain roles and women for others, the alleged female ones being of less social value than the male ones.

4.5.2 Youngsters’ perspective

Most of the Spanish youngsters interviewed (male and female) displayed a quite open and progressive view of themselves, a modern self-perception which in the majority of cases contrasted with the patterns established by their families. They see themselves and their generation as modern and open to new paths. They are open-minded in relation to gender and sexual diversity and consider themselves not to be sexist, although they recognize that society is. They are prepared to achieve their expectations in spite of societal limits and stereotypes. These modern traits appear on a first reading of their responses and some of them maintained this discourse throughout their interviews. There were others, albeit a minority, who tried to be politically correct but often became entangled in contradictions when their views were probed more deeply.

- My sex/gender does not affect my options or chances.

The most significant evidence from the study is that none of the young interviewees believed that they reproduced gender stereotypes, but rather that they were free of them. In general, they assumed that gender issues did not influence their own career choices. Instead, it was individual characteristics, training and interests that would decide whether they would be able to access certain courses or jobs. At the most, they felt that access was conditioned by social capital and family networks, or by societal stereotypes and discrimination, but they did not recognize the incidence of gender stereotypes in their own decisions or worldview.

- But ... society is sexist.

The interviewees stated that society still has gender prejudices and stereotypes, although as noted, this did not affect their minds. If we establish gradients, women are, in this sense, more aware than men of the presence of gender stereotypes and they report experiences of harassment and discrimination. At least one of the young men had suffered gender discrimination in the workplace and a transgender person also suffered discrimination for their trans identity. Some of the interviewees found that gender discrimination in the workplace could limit their aspirations, although they were determined to push for their own ambitions.

There are many patients who touch the bodies of female professionals too much, and have sexist behaviour towards nurses or female doctors.

- I don’t make distinctions between boys and girls, but in some respects we are different.

Most of the youngsters insisted that they do not discriminate. This seems to be how they like to see themselves, but they are not aware that some of their concepts are gender biased, nor how gender discrimination has permeated their opinions. Young men strive to be inclusive and they highlight the importance of incorporating women into their teams, although when they tried to explain the virtues of mixed gender teams, their arguments were quite superficial and in some cases contradictory.

Women and men cooks are complementary in the kitchen, although women are better at sweet dishes and men at savoury ones.

4.5.2.1 Gender stereotypes and professions

There was a constant denial of the gendered character of occupations, which can be summarized in the following quote:

I do not think there are jobs for boys and girls. It is true that some jobs require more physical strength, but I have seen girls who could beat some men [laughs]. There's a lot of diversity. We cannot separate occupations by gender. It does not depend on gender but on the person, because there are people who find some things easier than others.

Although our interviewees saw themselves as free of gender stereotypes, when they had to select the characteristics of a profession, most made segregated choices. Even when they said that there are no gender differences in the way that people do their jobs, they tended to attribute certain traits to one gender or the other than made some occupations more appropriate for women than for men and vice versa. As a general rule, women opted either for creative work or for occupations stereotyped as feminine, while men chose creative work or occupations requiring “male” attributes.

We (women) can be police officers, but it's important to have strength and muscle, therefore, policemen can despise and underestimate policewomen.

Sometimes, they justified job segregation on the grounds that women and men understand their own sex better:

Hairdresser is also a male profession because as a man, when you go to the salon, a male hairdresser will understand your requirements better.

Although prepared to work in a male environment and in “male” professions, female interviewees said that they would feel better in the company of other women and that they found groups of males to be potentially hostile.

The majority of our interviewees, both men and women, saw their future career as an extension of what they were studying or intended to study. A few found it difficult to get the money needed to fulfil their professional expectations, but there was no gap between their current preferences and how they saw themselves at forty.

In spite of the denial of the gender character of occupations, from the fifty among which they had to choose, there were some gender differences. Males chose cook (4 votes), artist (3), primary or secondary school teacher (2), vet (2), artisan (2), flight attendant (2), blogger / YouTuber (2), videogame creator (2), electrician (2), writer

(2), hairdresser (2) and pilot (2), while females chose artist (3), doctor (3), primary or secondary teacher (3), journalist (3), science researcher (3), social worker (3), actress (2), child-minder (2), psychologist (2) and biologist (2). It is worth mentioning that although some boys opted for masculinized occupations (videogame creator, electrician or pilot), others chose feminized ones (cook, flight attendant, hairdresser or primary school teacher). Women picked mainly mixed professions and highly feminized ones (social worker, child-minder, psychologist, primary school teacher).

4.5.2.2 *Gender-based self-identity*

Most of our interviewees did not link their self-identity with a profession or a job. To be a woman or a man, in their view, did not determine their career choices or lifestyle. It is worth noting that three out of four males foresaw themselves as family men sharing the household chores. In that respect it appears that self-identity was more closely related to the style of family life they expected to have (or alternatives to family living arrangements) than to their chosen occupations. Two women and one men said that they would work only part time. Both valued their free time as when they would live their real lives. The three of them concurred on not assessing the value of their activities by the money they could earn.

Two women incorporated the feminist point of view into their discourse. One of them declared herself a radical feminist. Both were seeking work that would allow them to disseminate feminist principles (through art or in the media).

Most of our interviewees, male and female, pictured themselves in clean surroundings. They preferred to work in uncontaminated conditions. One young man who liked mechanical engineering said that he would particularly like to work in robotics, among other things because it would be cleaner.

4.5.2.3 *Youngsters' role models*

Our interviewees described the people they would look up to as characterized by the values of perseverance, honesty, patience, care, support and authenticity. One young man strongly valued rebellion and therefore rejected any kind of role model. Since he espoused values opposite to those of his family and did so on his own initiative, he claimed to follow no one.

The variety of role models is as wide as our sample. There was one young woman whose role model was her father, a man who named his mother and his father, and another woman who identified almost all of her family: her brother, mother and grandmother. Two men and a woman found good role models in particular teachers or counsellors. Finally, there was the young man who rejected the idea of having a role model at all.

There were also anti-models. The same woman who chose a teacher as a role model also described some other teachers as her anti-models. Two young men, including the one without a role model, named their fathers as anti-models, while two other interviewees said that politicians were their anti-models.

Heroes and heroines were sex related. Males had heroes (fictional characters, sportsmen or singers), while women had heroines (sportswomen, fictional characters).

4.5.3 Key actors' perspective

Teachers and school counsellors ascribed the gendered socialization of girls and boys to their families, to primary school culture and more recently to social media influencers. Contrary to the young interviewees' opinion, our key adult informants believed that gendered socialization plays an important role in youngsters' career choices. They proposed important changes in primary school, from the pedagogy to the playground or to the textbooks, and closer surveillance of social media.

There was no criticism of their own interventions with youngsters. They understood that girls and boys were already conditioned by gender definitions of the job market and would choose occupations corresponding to their gendered view of the world.

Employment counsellors agreed with teachers and school counsellors that boys and girls tend to reproduce gender stereotypes and that this applies particularly to groups with lower cultural capital. They observed a current trend towards more egalitarian choices, due to the effect of the media. The popularity of the TV programme *Master Chef* explains why all four boys included "cook" among the 10 selected occupations, whereas no girl picked it, because they were all tired of women's invisibility in the kitchen.

The key adults acknowledged that the atmosphere in a male-dominated classroom (e.g. an electrical engineering course) is hostile for girls and that even girls with strong vocation will leave after a short time. The same happens to boys in female surroundings. The interviewees claimed to intervene with teachers, students and families, and suggested that there should be more such interventions, but were very sceptical about the results. As to their final thoughts, the adults admitted that young people find it difficult enough to take everyday decisions and that many, especially the most vulnerable such as low achievers and members of minority groups, consider it safer not to challenge gender stereotypes.

In addition to the hostility facing boys and girls who choose to study subjects not commonly taken by their own gender, teachers and school counsellors admitted that girls receive less attention, in general, and less specific attention. They attributed this to girls' lower profile in the classroom. Boys are more disruptive and teachers' reaction is to pay more attention to them. The extra time and care that boys receive not only reduces the time and attention generally available for girls, but can also specifically fail to serve those girls—or indeed all girls—who need particular care.

4.5.4 Conclusions

Initially, young people and their teachers and advisors maintained a gender equality discourse and criticized gender discrimination as potentially very harmful. Young people, both male and female, defended the right of each individual to choose whatever course of study or career they saw fit. At the same time, boys and girls assumed that their own choices were unconstrained by gender stereotypes. Their teachers and advisors asserted the contrary: that youngsters, particularly those from socially or culturally deprived backgrounds, are constrained by their gendered socialization and exposure to social media in making such choices. In a deeper analysis, gender bias permeated the discourse of young people and their educators. Only a few students or

educators who declared themselves to be feminists sustained an egalitarian discourse throughout the interview.

The lifestyle anticipated by the youngsters, which was directly related to their self-identity, followed one of two broad patterns: either framed by traditional prescriptions, even if they adopted a modern aesthetic, or reflecting a progressive, open and alternative lifestyle. Among examples of the former were those anticipating a quiet life in a village (one boy), caring for people (two girls), being married with children (two girls and two boys) and maintaining family bonds. The alternative pattern is exemplified by youngsters who opted for living with friends, having no children and moving abroad.

If one scratches the surface of the responses, prejudices and gender stereotypes appear, although with lower intensity than those attributed to society. There were also counter-discourses. Young people live at a time of great transformation, marked by contradictory discourses and practices. Their reactions to their lived experience result in differing effects on their imagination, the construction of their self-image, their options in the labour market, their attitudes to their peers and their families. This is a time of great creativity of new rules, with all the contradictions that the long processes of transition represent.

Teachers and counsellors, while not accepting responsibility for the gendered options of young people, made proposals to reduce the impact of gender stereotypes on students' lives, such as augmenting existing courses with special training on self-esteem and self-identity building in an open-minded framework. They also considered the current content of teaching and counselling obsolete and argued that curricula should be enlarged with youth-oriented content and more focused contact with families, especially in the case of more vulnerable groups. They recommended the inclusion of protocols for gender equality in all training courses, including in-service training, at the same time as promoting a spirit of entrepreneurship in young people.

5 Comparative evidence

In this section we present the main results from the five countries from a comparative perspective. Firstly, we discuss the main findings of the in-depth interviews with youngsters, then the results emerging from the two focus groups of counsellors in education and at work.

Two warnings are indispensable. First, the findings are not statistically representative. We used a qualitative method, as explained, which does not allow us to extrapolate the findings to the entire population of youngsters in the countries concerned. Such a qualitative exploration enables us only to identify some trends, some interpretative categories, to highlight the functioning of gender stereotypes influencing youngsters and key actors' perceptions and action in education and at work. This is what we present in this chapter. Secondly, although we have tried to produce a combined analysis of data from all five countries and have found many common cross-country features,

caution must be exercised in considering these countries as forming a homogeneous zone. This does not mean that the results are less valuable, only that they can best be used to generate ideas, promote debate or suggest a direction for further gender equality policies.

5.1 Young people's perspective - *Anna Giulia Ingellis*

In this section we present the results of the in-depth interviews with 46 youngsters in the five countries.

As mentioned above, the main objective of this arm of the research was to explore the existence of gender stereotypes and analyse their influence on the youngsters' decision-making in the school-to-work transition. To what extent and in what ways do stereotypes act and influence youngsters' education and career choices? What ideas do youngsters have of occupations and the skills required to perform them? Are these ideas stereotyped?

The interviews were organized stepwise with the objective of probing gradually deeper into the mental representations of the boys and girls interviewed.

The first step was dedicated to the selection of up to ten occupations from a list of 50.¹² The interviewees then had to choose at least four preferred jobs and describe each of them according to their own ideas about them. Next, they were asked to imagine themselves in the future, at forty years old, and describe the main features of their life. In this way we sought to elicit their self-representation and in some way their self-identity. Finally, they were invited to imagine what they would have to do from the present until the age of forty to achieve the status they had described. The idea was to analyse the subjective interpretation of their decision-making processes and find out whether and to what extent these paths were influenced by gender stereotypes.

5.1.1 Gender stereotypes and occupations

The youngsters were first asked to choose their 10 favourite jobs from the list of 50. Considering the preferences expressed by all the 46 youngsters in the five countries, every occupation was selected at least once, except "personal care worker" and "naval officer". It is interesting to note the **scattering of the preferences**, which suggests the existence of a certain curiosity among the young interviewees. The occupations most often selected were medical doctor, teacher, cook, firefighter, artist, researcher, sports worker, veterinarian and psychologist. It is worth mentioning considerable differences among countries in the total number of different jobs selected by the youngsters from the list, ranging from only 19 in Italy to 38 in Spain, with 25 in Slovenia, 31 in Portugal and 33 in Cyprus. The total number of choices expressed by the nine interviewees (ten in Italy) also varied considerably: 30 in Italy, 45 in Slovenia, 76 in Portugal, 79 in Cyprus and 89 in Spain.

¹² The list was extracted from the International Standard Classification of Occupations, updated during the Tripartite Meeting of Experts on Labour Statistics on Updating on 6 December 2007, by mandate of the International Labour Organization.

Deepening the analysis to take account of gender, in three of the five FtC countries **females chose a larger number of different jobs than males**: Italy (6 M/11 F), Portugal (5 M/10 F) and Cyprus (7M/12F). The young men were more focused on a reduced number of options. In Slovenia, young men and women chose the same number of jobs (eight each) and in Spain we have the opposite situation: men chose a wider range of jobs than women (17 M/8 F). The same applies to those jobs chosen exclusively by males or females. As Table 2 shows, except in the case of Spain, exclusively female choices were significantly more widely scattered than those of their male peers, while male choices were more concentrated. Young women selected a wider range of different occupations.

Table 2. Jobs chosen exclusively by males or females

	Exclusively chosen by young men	Exclusively chosen by young women
Cyprus	Engineer, soldier, fashion designer, firefighter, artist, social worker, farmer	Doctor, nurse, journalist, entrepreneur in small-medium-big company, primary school teacher, secretary, financial officer, taxi driver, actress, manager, researcher, writer
Italy	Technician, politician, policeman, veterinarian, ICT programmer, manager	Fashion stylist, blogger / YouTuber, financial operator, waitress, chef, hostess, firefighter, soldier, trainer, administrative operator, butcher, driver
Portugal	Entrepreneur, mechanic, writer, civil construction worker, pilot	Artist, architect, psychologist, childcare worker, journalist, biologist, designer, medical doctor, hairdresser, social worker, lawyer
Slovenia	Engineer (mechanical, electronic, maintenance) primary/secondary teacher/ firefighter, construction worker, electrician, journalist, marketing professional, videogame creator	Architect, pilot, motor vehicle mechanic, hairdresser, soldier, blogger and YouTuber, dress designer, industrial designer
Spain	Lawyer, blogger and YouTuber, waiter, videogame creator, electrician, hairdresser, pilot, architect, firefighter, butcher, taxi driver, sportsman, clothes designer, medium-size company entrepreneur, motor vehicle mechanic, worker, soldier	Researcher, psychologist, social worker, farmer, nurse, biologist, laboratory technician, administrative secretary

We can interpret these data as demonstrating young women's more open attitudes to career choices. This is consistent with what career counsellors and educators said during the focus groups: girls are more open to a wide range of possible jobs than boys, who in turn are more focused on gender-stereotyped and traditionally male jobs.¹³ It may reflect the current progress towards equality: Women are trying hard to enter the labour market and in order to do so, they are open to almost any employment, other than particularly masculinized occupations, which are few in number, considering jobs chosen exclusively by males. Men have good jobs and better opportunities, so have no need to open their minds. Furthermore, there is an issue of socialization to equality: Feminist campaigns or gender equality policies and interventions are generally directed to women, intended either to empower them or to eliminate the cultural and material barriers to women self-confidently choosing "male" careers, as happens in STEM. All positive actions to promote gender equality involve women much more than men. Consequently, women are significantly more sensitized to gender equality than men in all of the participating countries.

The diversity of situations among the five FtC countries is also demonstrated by how many jobs were **chosen by both genders**. While as already noted, the spectrum of occupations chosen varied significantly from one country to another, the same is not true of the proportion selected by both genders. In all five countries, fewer than half of the jobs were selected by both genders: in Spain, 14 of the 38 occupations selected overall were chosen by at least one person of each gender, in Portugal the figures were 19 out of 31 and in Cyprus 14 out of 33. Thus, interviewees of the two genders shared a relatively small section of the available employment spectrum. The choices made in the remaining two countries were even more segregated than this: 9 out of 25 in Slovenia; and in Italy, most strikingly, only three occupations (hospital doctor, sports worker and teacher) out of 19 were chosen by both genders. In Slovenia and Italy, then, the young interviewees appear largely to have instinctively differentiated among available career options on the basis gender associations.

A global view shows that of the 50 occupations presented, the greater part (35) were chosen exclusively either by males or by females in at least one of the FtC countries, while 13 jobs were exclusively chosen by girls or boys in the majority of the countries.¹⁴ Analysing Table 2, we see that in this initial selection of jobs from the list, most of those chosen exclusively by girls or boys are quite consistent with gender stereotypes. On one hand, engineer, entrepreneur, police officer, sports worker, firefighter, pilot, motor vehicle mechanic, electrician and videogame creator were more frequently chosen by men only; on the other hand, nurse, medical doctor, primary/secondary teacher, social worker, air hostess, actress, secretary, psychologist, biologist and researcher were chosen by women.

¹³ See Section 5.2.

¹⁴ Two were not chosen at all.

To a remarkable extent, the gendered¹⁵ jobs are consistent with the statistical data on horizontal and vertical gender segregation,¹⁶ according to which there are some economic sectors or socioeconomic groups in which jobs are almost exclusively occupied by men or, conversely, by women. The choices made by the young adults interviewed in our research tend to confirm this gender segregation and reveal that they are conformist vis-à-vis gender segregation in the labour market.

Although these data confirm the existence of gender stereotypes, the majority of choices being gender segregated, we must underline the fact that many nonconformist choices were also made. This highlights the emergence of a more equal view among youngsters.

5.1.2 Gender-stereotyped attributes and occupations: the job gendering process

The regulatory framework of the labour market and legislation governing recruitment forbid gender-based discrimination and make gender-equal selection processes compulsory. This is why the general requirements in job advertisement may not exclude applicants for reasons of age, race or sex, for example. Nevertheless, our research confirms a widely accepted truth that at an informal level, employers do discriminate on gender grounds. Identifying the mechanisms by which jobs are gendered was one aim of our in-depth analysis.

Having chosen ten occupations from the list, each interviewee was asked to describe the idea they had of four of these. The description required was focused on the main tasks involved, the people doing those jobs, those doing it successfully and their main characteristics; finally, they were asked if there would be any difference between a man and a woman doing that job. In addition, we asked them to reflect on the social image and acceptance of the occupation concerned.

The responses revealed the existence of considerably stereotyped ideas regarding the gender associations of the jobs. The extent to which the youngsters directly described them as male or female occupations varied from one country to another; this was done more explicitly in Italy than in Spain, for example. Despite some direct references to female or male jobs, the majority of interviewees gendered their responses more subtly and did not directly attribute a gender to a given occupation. Instead, the attribution of gender was made in terms of the characteristics, skills and abilities required to do the job. Apparently, the jobs per se were not gendered, but the requisite skills were.

Table 3 lists the personal attributes that the young interviewees associated with men or women when discussing the various occupations.

15 We considered “gender balanced” those jobs chosen by roughly the same number of girls and boys (the totals for the two genders differing by less than 3). Conversely we considered as gendered those occupations chosen predominantly by boys or girls, where the difference was more than 3.

16 See Ingellis, A.G. (ed.) (2018). *Mind the Gap*. Gender gaps in the education-to-work transition in Mediterranean European countries. Brussels, European Commission, Free to choose.

Table 3. Gendered attributes related to occupations

	M	F
Cyprus	Introversion, impatience, hard work, confidence, inability to multitask, spontaneity, imagination, inspiration, decisiveness, open-mindedness, teamwork/ collaboration, physical strength, supportiveness, strictness, adventurousness	Motherhood instinct, patience, sensitivity, physical weakness, multitasking, organization, beauty, indecisiveness, love, politeness, anxiousness, confidence, approachability, sociability, slyness, empathy, calmness, sense of justice, activeness, provocativeness/ sexiness, attention to detail
Italy	Courage, decision-making capacity, goal-centredness, physical performance, authoritarianism, authoritativeness, STEM skills	Kindness, empathy, maternal sense of care, patience, precision, relational capacity, sensuality
Portugal	Better physical condition, physical resistance, loss of control, physical strength, objectivity, incisiveness, ability to command respect, coldness, rationality, tendency to feel superior	Patience, tendency to gossip, easily clashing with other women, physical limitation, toughness, fighting spirit, knack for childcare, bodily elasticity, lack of physical strength, dynamism, ability to multitask, task management, inability to lead because of giving orders hysterically, maternal affect, sensitivity, attention to detail, emotionality
Slovenia	Daringness, authoritativeness, technicality, trustworthiness, body strength, carelessness, inability to multitask	Aesthetics/beauty, charm, communicativeness, complexity, detail-orientation, empathy, maternal instinct, precision, multitasking
Spain	Height, strength, musculature, being mentally closed, strictness, respect, sense of superiority, reservation	Patience, confidence, shamelessness, sensitivity, creativity, expressiveness, strategic approach, holistic vision, beauty and aesthetics, self-care

It is clear that personal attributes were perceived in a deeply gender-stereotyped way, so that the existence of gender stereotypes is much more starkly evident in these data than in the discussion of occupations, which most interviewees described as neither male nor female in nature. By contrast, gender stereotypes emerged overwhelmingly when the young people were asked about personal features related to concrete job tasks.

Males and females were thus assumed to have certain distinctive and gender-specific characteristics. These attributes refer to different areas. We can classify them as physical features, mental skills, attitudes, emotions and skills related to social interaction. Table 4 lists the main features attributed to each gender in the majority of the FtC countries.

Table 4. Main gendered attributes

	Male	Female
Physical features	Physical strength, toughness	Beauty, sensuality, sexiness, charm
Mental skills	One task at a time	Multitasking
Attitudes	Authority, decisiveness, strictness, hard work	Patience, maternal instinct, precision
Emotional skills	Rationality, goal orientation, coolness	Empathy, sensitivity, emotionality
Social interactions	Ability to command respect, reserve and introversion	Inability to lead, relational capacity, expressiveness

Source: Author's own formulation

Data elicited from our 46 interviewees in five countries indicate the existence of gender bias regarding some occupations because of a belief that they can only be carried out by people with gender-specific features and personal characteristics. The association of women with certain occupations and men with others is based on those specific characteristics and not on the occupations themselves being gender biased. Thus, what is stereotyped, in the young participants' discourse, is not the occupation but the personal characteristics required to perform it, gendered as described in Table 4. In other words, jobs are gendered because of the skills required to do them.

Table 5 gives some examples of occupations emerging as particularly gendered because of the skills they require.

Table 5. Gendered jobs

Personal features	Gender	Job
Kindness, empathy, maternal sense of care	F	Teacher, doctor, psychologist
Precision	F	Secretary
Decision-making capacity, physical strength	M	Manager, policeman, firefighter
Physical performance	M	Sportsman, soldier

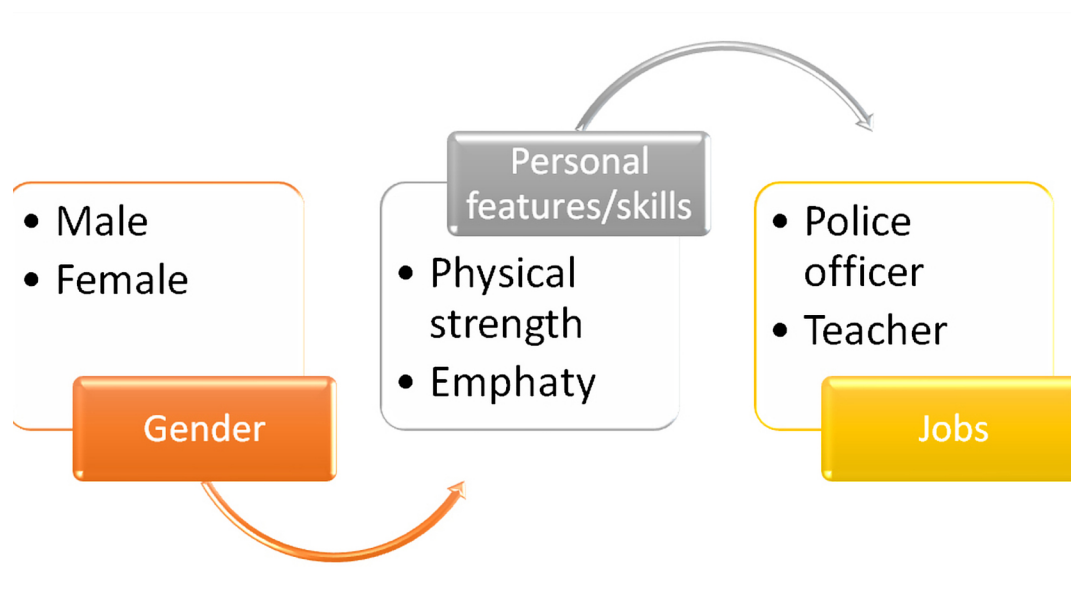
Source: Author's own formulation

As a number of career counsellors stated during the focus group sessions,¹⁷ technology has brought significant changes to the ways in which jobs are now carried out, to the benefit of gender equality. Many occupations which formerly required 'masculine' traits such as physical strength no longer do so. There is, however, a sort of inertia in the social representation of such work, as a result of which these gender-based requirements persist.

¹⁷ See chapter 5.2

To sum up, in the representations offered by our interviewees, the gender stereotypes applied to occupations seemed to work in an indirect way. Occupations were not directly specified as male or female. Political correctness prevented people from assigning a gender to a job. It appears that public discourse about the fairness of gender equality has reduced the presence of sexist discourses. The connection is instead created through intermediate variables: personal and psychological traits. Figure 1 illustrates this process.

Figure 1. Job genderization process



Source: Author's own formulation

This means that combatting gender stereotypes at work implies the need first to dissociate jobs from their stereotyped attributes and secondly to break the association between certain soft skills and only one gender. Two valuable instruments which could be used to disrupt this gendering process are the provision of information about the real tasks and skills required for each job, and a different gender socialization.

5.1.3 Awareness

The interviewees can be placed in two subgroups according to elements we identified in their responses: Some youngsters represented gender stereotypes directly in their discourse, while others attributed their existence to society. The latter described themselves as victims of social structures (the labour market, school, mass media, norms and values, etc.) and society in general, or as trying to resist these forces.

Another relevant finding which emerged from the interviews is that participants differed greatly in their levels of awareness of their own gender-stereotyped perceptions of the world. Analysis of the interview data allowed the research team to construct a theoretical gender stereotype awareness scale. The different levels of awareness seem to be influenced by cultural factors in the micro-social context of each respondent and by the national cultural context. This explains why differences in level of awareness were identified both among interviewees from the same country and across the five national samples.

Table 6 shows how the different levels of awareness corresponded to differences in participants' attitudes to gender stereotypes.

Table 6. Levels of awareness of gender stereotype and attitudes

Level	Awareness	Attitude
0	Gender stereotypes have been overcome and no longer exist.	Denial
1	Gender differences do exist, because of personal characteristics or preferences.	Reinterpreting, justifying and hiding.
2	I have no gender stereotypes but society does.	Externalizing
3	Gender stereotypes exist and we can do little to change them.	Acceptance
4	Gender stereotypes exist and we must actively combat them.	Opposition, hostility

Source: Author's own formulation

Furthermore, it was more than evident that young males were much less aware of gender stereotypes than their female peers. This gender difference in awareness levels may be relevant to the design and testing of the game.

5.1.4 Gender-based self-identity, the future and self-representation

The existence of a gender-based self-identity emerged both in explicit representation and in a more indirect way. In this sense, some subtle details reveal the existence of a gendered self-identity: The youngsters spoke of “we” and “us”, thus including themselves in gender groups. In the same way they referred to “the opposite gender”, designating people as belonging to the other group.

The areas in which gender-based differences were most evident were future plans and the roles of women and men within the family.

As seen in the theoretical framework and in the other main FtC report, *Mind the Gap*, gender stereotypes at work or in education are not limited to factors acting in the professional lives of men and women, but are strictly related to personal and private life. For this reason, we explored participants' perceptions about those spheres.

In the second part of the interview,¹⁸ we asked the youngsters to imagine themselves at forty, thus eliciting their self-representations and descriptions of their identity related to life plans.

The great majority of interviewees in all five countries pictured themselves having a partner and two children, more or less. The life plans of those interviewed in Italy, Cyprus and Portugal were overwhelming traditional, while in Slovenia we identified two polarized postures. Responses by the Slovenian sample regarding their future

¹⁸ See Section 3, Methods.

self-representation varied in terms of forming a partnership, having children or having a household with pets. The majority were conformist regarding being married and having children, but there were also some nonconformist representations where the standard model was eschewed in favour of following a vocation such as “changing society” or “adopting a black baby”.

For many interviewees in Spain, self-identity was more closely related to the lifestyle they expected to have or directly linked with alternative ways of living. Many Spanish interviewees highlighted the relevance of having time free from work and available for life. Furthermore, three of them agreed on not evaluating their activities in terms of earnings. Most of our interviewees, male and female, saw themselves in clean surroundings, preferring to work in an uncontaminated environment. A special social commitment arises from their responses on self-identity and future plans. We can interpret this orientation in the light of the emergence in family-oriented societies of non-traditional values. For some youngsters, there are more important things than the family.

Although both girls and boys imagined themselves with a family, they were not equally concerned about childcare and the related problem of reconciling the demands of work and family. In all five countries, this was assumed to be a female issue. Women are responsible for childcare, even though interviewees of both genders saw themselves having children. This is why females were more concerned with reconciling work and family; the issue was almost entirely absent from the discourse of their male peers. The impact of this asymmetry on career choices is more than evident in the youngsters’ responses. It is quite clear that gender-based discrimination at work originates at home, in the traditional family setting.

The only girls not assuming exclusive responsibility for childcare were those planning alternative lifestyles. Furthermore, the few emerging nonstandard options, such as where some girls focused on their careers at the expense of family life, were negatively labelled as selfish by girls themselves. This means that assuming the traditional family model automatically implies the asymmetric division of housework. In the girls’ discourse, the alternatives to assuming exclusive responsibility for childcare were to share it with grandparents, to choose a job favourable to exclusively female work-family balancing strategies, to give up plans for a family and prioritize one’s career, or to adopt an alternative lifestyle. Girls never suggested that housework and childcare could be shared equally. They assumed this option to be impossible or at least invisible.

Only in Spain was there a boy who spoke about sharing these tasks. This asymmetry in family life has a heavy impact on career choices. Girls aspire to a career which they can balance with family commitments and are focused on searching for a job which makes this possible. For girls but not for boys, highly qualified jobs and high status positions are perceived as alternatives to family plans.

Another trend we can highlight is that in general, the higher the education level, the more gender-balanced the choices, both of lifestyle and career.

Finally, to explore the influence on self-identity, we asked the interviewees to name their heroes and heroines, as a means to identify their role models. Surprisingly, the majority of youngsters interviewed in the five countries named real people in their lives, most commonly their parents, followed by siblings and sometimes by teachers,

in any case people belonging to their daily lives. This contrasts significantly with the responses of key actors in the focus groups.¹⁹ As explained in the following section, they spoke of role models proceeding from the mass media and being strongly gender segregated.

5.2 Careers advisors', counsellors' and youth workers' views on youngsters' career paths - *Capitolina Diaz Martinez*

The literature reviewed in Section 2 shows that gender stereotypes permeate all actors and beneficiaries involved in the training and work system. There is therefore a need to establish the ways in which they translate gender-biased views of society, careers and occupations in order to identify some intervention strategies that will allow us to move to a more open society in which the professional and personal future of youngsters is not determined by their sex. In order to include some traits of that potentially egalitarian intervention in a game, the five partner countries carried out field research to explore the views of careers advisors, counsellors and youth workers. It was important to elicit the views of these adults providing educational and occupational guidance to young people in order to assess whether, in that capacity, they might also transmit gender stereotypes and if so, how. We should recognize that their opinions will often weigh heavily in the decisions taken by young people when choosing careers or in the way they search for jobs.

The research teams conducted interviews using the sociological technique of focus groups, one composed of counsellors, careers advisors, etc. working with youngsters still in the education system and other of counsellors, careers advisors, youth workers, etc. working with youngsters who had left the formal education system and were seeking employment.

The twin aims of this part of the study were on one hand to elucidate the views of such practitioners regarding the young people they work with and on the other, their perceptions of how society understands gender roles and of how they themselves understand them. The focus group sessions met the research team's expectations and provided abundant data.

The following subsections report the focus group findings with attention to several facets of these key actors' views. First, we consider their own attitudes displayed in their everyday work with youngsters, then we examine how they interpret the mentality of their young clients and of their potential employers. The analysis addresses the following six aspects: i) youngsters' attitudes; ii) role models; iii) work-life balance; iv) empowerment and leadership; v) employers' attitudes. We first present the findings regarding youngsters in formal education, then concerning those in transition from education to employment.

¹⁹ see 5.2 section

5.2.1 Youngsters within the formal education system

5.2.1.1 *Careers advisors' and youth counsellors' attitudes*²⁰

All key experts recognized that gender stereotypes are widespread and influence students' attitudes and career choices. They saw gender bias as operating in students' families and society as a whole. Most of them showed a positive attitude in favour of moves to reduce the gendered view of careers, but some others understood their role as neutral in relation to gendered options.

Most key experts believed that they have a huge task in front of them, to fight against current societal trends, conventional families and a deep-rooted sexist environment in schools that are the main causes of gender inequalities and other injustices. They have tried to show students how accessible and suitable “male” professions are for girls. Some (Italian) participants recognized their lack of success in this and the persistent strength of gender stereotypes.

Some advisors showed a different attitude towards their job than the majority of experts interviewed in the five countries. They understood their role as neutral in relation to the gender profile of occupations and believed that they should accept students' choices without engaging in gender-sensitive counselling. If a student should make a choice that is influenced by gender stereotypes, they did not see this as their concern. Even if they were concerned, this is a secondary issue for which they do not have time. These contributors were extremely consistent, giving themselves and their own children as examples of how they would dissuade a young person from taking up an occupation where they would be outnumbered by the other sex.

The influence of parents' ideas on careers choices was a general concern for advisors, as well as the manipulation of information and the production of wrong messages by social media and their amplifying power.

Key experts volunteered some practical proposals, such as opening education to current youth culture. That is, schools should use youngsters' own tools to teach them the curriculum content. They also proposed the presentation of career paths according to students' talents, abilities, strengths etc., regardless of the gender profile of each occupation. They suggested changes to the selection of role models, not only away from media and sports, but towards people who excel in a job stereotyped as done by the other sex (e.g. a man working in midwifery).

5.2.1.2 *Youngsters' attitudes*

School advisors understood that the majority of students (both boys and girls) have gendered stereotyped attitudes reinforced by families and school. They also saw families as playing a central role in the creation of gender stereotypes among young people and as exerting a strong influence on youngsters' attitudes at a time when they would be making decisions about their future. There was general agreement that girls prefer studying academic subjects, whereas boys prefer technical or practical ones, although

²⁰ To simplify the text and make it easier to read, from now on we refer to the variety of career advisors, youth advisors, educators, etc. as “key experts”.

the economic crisis has widened the array of choices and students think more about earning money than other considerations.

According to the key experts, youngsters feel the need for a change in the way they are affected by stereotypes, but they are still highly conditioned by family and by society; in particular, they hold on to outdated conceptions of the characteristics of occupations and obsolete ideas about the requirements of many jobs.

The counsellors said that students did not resent them if they proposed a career or occupation suited to an individual's talent rather than the gender stereotype of the job. Nevertheless, most youngsters tended to choose study paths consistent with gender stereotypes; only the bravest or those enjoying strong family support were exceptions to this rule. Some counsellors reported that girls were more open to counselling than boys and that those from families with a history of violence had fewer resources for change.

The media were also blamed for encouraging rivalry between girls instead of promoting sorority and for fostering a posturing form of masculine camaraderie.

5.2.1.3 Role models

Today's youngsters are strongly influenced by social media. In particular, the experts noted the impact of YouTube influencers, sports stars (mainly male), celebrities, reality show participants, TV characters, pop musicians, rappers and their lyrics. Girls are also strongly influenced by the prototypes of beauty presented by the media. It is interesting to note that some key experts saw sportspeople, mainly football stars, as role models for both boys and girls, whereas specifically female role models were not accepted by boys. Some participants regarded certain role models, especially for boys and mainly from football, as inappropriate because they promote boastful and arrogant attitudes.

According to the key experts, parents play the most influential role in their children's study and career choices, not only because children tend to follow in their parents' footsteps (thus treating them as role models) but also because the parent push them towards very gender-stereotyped careers. To allow students to have their own say on their future, school advisors often have to work with parents whose children have made unconventional career choices in gender terms.

Some key experts saw mothers as more influential than fathers, since they spend more time with their children.

5.2.1.4 Work-life balance

A good number of counsellors assumed that young people are not concerned with work-life balance, although this is not what the youngsters said when asked. The key experts argued that young people were concerned only with their career profile, not with other aspects of their future.

According to counsellors, males do not suffer from the stress of care work, whereas females do, particularly those in high positions. Some counsellors explained that women in high positions feel challenged for not been good mothers and that some

prefer low-key positions in order to avoid such pressure. No counsellors reported having encountered girls who were prepared to pursue their careers regardless of family responsibilities.

Boys, they said, do not feel the need to have free time to spend with their families, while girls do.

5.2.1.5 Empowerment and leadership

Youngsters' empowerment was seen to be negatively affected by social pressure. Girls and boys are not equally empowered in terms of leadership. The school environment values a leadership attitude in boys but rejects it in girls. For their part, girls are more aware of the importance of making informed decisions in relation to their career paths. They show evidence of more advanced decision-making capabilities and seek counselling sessions, during which they tend to keep a more open mind.

Some girls can become leaders and gain respect as they seek equality, but it is more common that girl leaders imitate the male model, becoming self-important and very hierarchical.

In counsellors' opinion, girls and boys both believe that they can choose freely whatever career they like, although girls are generally more inclined to ask for advice from counsellors, psychologists, etc.

The key experts perceived a need to provide support, to help youngsters realize that they can undertake activities in which they have a leading role. Students, especially females, should be encouraged to value themselves and their bodies without comparison with popular stereotypes.

5.2.2 Youngsters in the school-to-work transition

5.2.2.1 Career counsellors' attitudes

Some counsellors believed that their work was fundamental in driving changes to the organizational culture of firms that would promote equality in employment. If they did not intervene as often as they might, it was for fear of upsetting the balance in these organizations and in many cases because of the effort required to have a man accepted in a female context or vice versa; consequently, most counsellors seemed to limit themselves to registering and defending the preferences expressed by the companies with which they worked.

There was no perception of attaching guilt to their counselling role in relation to gender segregation, although they accepted that most businesspeople would hire on the basis of gender prejudices and that youngsters would make choices under the influence of the same prejudices.

Some participants suggested a positive attitude towards greater involvement of career counsellors, business and the State in order to give clear guidance to youngsters about what occupations are really like, while at the same time avoiding gender bias in the description of occupations.

5.2.2.2 *Youngsters' attitudes*

Youngsters' attitudes were said in many cases to be misguided due to lack of information about the various occupations, or indeed misinformation about them; for example, girls might reject a career choice on the grounds that physical strength would be needed, when in fact it would not.

Gender-based prejudices were evident in students' decisions about their career paths and those who overcame these prejudices very often did not go far. For example, some girls who chose a masculinized occupation would find difficult to get a job, due to employers' gender-based prejudices, and after some negative results, they would seek employment in another line of work.

Participants reported a gender difference in the process of making educational choices from elementary school to high school. Many boys would quickly decide to go to a vocational school, whereas girls would give the question greater thought, ask for advice and find that they had a wider range of studies to choose from.

Prejudice was found to persist and affect how people see themselves and make choices and decisions, with males aiming to secure the best possible contractual conditions and financial rewards, while females showed a greater adaptability in respect of the conditions on offer.

A minority of counsellors perceived youngsters as making choices according to their talent, not their gender. All agreed that today, the main criterion for both boys and girls is to find steady employment and financial security, particularly in the case of youngsters from impoverished families.

5.2.2.3 *Work-life balance*

In the opinion of the key experts, only girls tended to think about how to balance paid and unpaid work, either when choosing an occupation or when discussing the details of a contract. Most counsellors referred to cases of young women not taking a job due to incompatibility with their care work. In other words, the self-exclusion of women for reasons connected with the management of their work-life balance is a widespread phenomenon.

Women were also seen to verbalize such concerns more than men and to be more strongly affected by the lack of family support policies in the future. In that respect, change seems to be underway, albeit slowly. In fact, young men have also begun to be concerned with their work-life balance, but they do not verbalize it.

Part time was equated with "female time". It appears that part-time work affects the individual's work identity and that males do not feel represented in part-time employment.

Many women, as counsellors see it, have the self-image of a worker whose income is an accessory to that of the male breadwinner.

The counsellors proposed that during job training the work schedule should be compatible with child rearing and felt that they should intervene in some ways with the

employers to modify organizational culture in order to capture the best talent irrespective of gender.

5.2.2.4 Empowerment and leadership

Counsellors generally saw youngsters as not very empowered and noted a clear gender difference in empowerment between young men and young women. Apparently, boys are more empowered and women are less inclined to take on leadership at work or to start their own businesses. Young men are more ready to occupy the public space. Recently, some girls have begun moving to that arena, but they need to push so strongly that they can look more empowered than they really are.

Counsellors considered it important to help students to build their own self-knowledge to improve their leadership qualities and management skills. Equality training is also important, both for young people and for guidance counsellors. Students should have continuous training in order to develop an entrepreneurial spirit and to learn how to generate their own work. They need to develop skills to start new ways of understanding gender relations.

Families were found to have a role in determining youngsters' level of empowerment. They mainly tend to push girls towards secondary high schools and boys towards technical schools.

5.2.2.5 Employers' attitudes

According to counsellors, the business world is more sexist than school and more so than the youngsters themselves. Students have the prospect of being hired only for jobs stereotyped as suiting their own sex. To overcome this, the key experts demanded the inclusion of social clauses in public employment contracts and the promotion of gender equality within the concept of corporate social responsibility.

The subordinate position of women in many businesses excludes them from consultation in the way those businesses are run. Counsellors argued that students should receive formal training in gender equality in secondary schools as well as in universities, in order to change attitudes in the work environment. Their proposals also revolved around the need to modernize business management, so that women, who are sometimes at the core of operations, can be taken into consideration when firms seek to improve the organization of their production. Counsellors considered it necessary to campaign to raise the awareness of people in charge of recruitment, because the number of women trained to work in every area is growing, but the market continues to discriminate. Moreover, today's technology allows giant trailers to be moved with a single hand; it is no longer a question of physical strength. Therefore, mentalities must adapt to the new reality.

Employers have many reasons for imposing gender segregation: first, they are simply part of a discriminatory society, but secondly, most youngsters come to the labour market with qualifications which reflect gender stereotypes. Finally, most employers are influenced by the notion that men do not ask for paternity leave, while women do ask for maternity leave.

Nevertheless, the key experts recognized that out of necessity, some employers accept the underrepresented sex for a job if no one of the expected sex applies and that they are generally happy with the results.

Few employers accept that they also have responsibility for changing gender stereotypes. The majority very openly hold discriminatory views. They find men more competent, more committed, better suited to some jobs. At the same time, employers prefer to choose male candidates for positions that are less compatible with care work and they are worried about women taking time off for breastfeeding. One was even quoted as saying that the best arrangement is women in the office, men on the shop floor. Some employers associate women with soft skills such as precision and order.

Negative attitudes were reported regarding the introduction of changes to help women to combine paid and unpaid work (which men do not ask for) and there were also negative reactions to female workers who asked for adaptations to suit their family life.

Key informants recognized a need for both employers and employees to strive for equality and change their own perceptions regarding prejudices and stereotypes.

6 Conclusions - *Anna Giulia Ingellis*

6.1 Key findings

There was a **high level of political correctness** in the interviewees' responses, across the five countries. Each interview began with statements and postures which were very strongly oriented towards gender equality. Youngsters seemed to know and distinguish what is right and what is not in terms of gender equality, and to have assimilated the public discourse favourable to gender equality.

Nevertheless, when we probed their beliefs below the surface of their discourse, a **very strongly gender-stereotyped idea of work and occupations emerged**. This deeper probing began in the first section of the interview, when we asked them to choose occupations from the list and to describe the main features of some of them. Furthermore, some very gender-stereotyped views emerged from their own representations of their long-term life plans elicited in the second part of the interview.

Although their discourse was initially very politically correct, many contradictions were evident, illustrating how political correctness teaches people what to say but not what to believe. Their adoption of a politically correct discourse can be interpreted in two ways. On one hand, using language favourable to gender equality allows people to disguise their real beliefs and makes it difficult to combat them, let alone change them, but on the other hand, it shows that they are aware that sexism is not right. It is thus the first step on the long road towards equality: to change perceptions of what is right and what is not. There is no doubt that it is not enough, but at least this step seems quite consolidated.

The second key finding of the *Coming Out* research is that **gendering the soft skills required to do jobs is the most visible mechanism for gendering the jobs themselves**. It is not the occupations themselves which are labelled as female or male, but rather the soft skills related to them, in the existing social representation.

In more detail, it emerged from youngsters' descriptions of jobs and related tasks that both boys and girls actually have unrealistic expectations about the world of work, concerning the occupations themselves, salaries, working hours, relations with employers, the tasks involved in doing those jobs, the norms to follow, etc. The lack of concrete information facilitates the assumption of stereotyped representations. Furthermore, young people are normally informed by older people and not by direct experience. These three elements—the absence of realistic information, the lack of direct contact with and experience of the world of work and the transmission of information by people socialized in a very gender-segregated world—are important causes of the perpetuation of gender stereotypes which it is high time to tackle.

Another key finding of our research is that **girls and boys differ greatly in their awareness of gender stereotypes** and in their sensitivity to constraints related to gendered roles. In particular, girls are significantly more open to engaging in male-dominated occupations than boys are in taking up female ones. Boys were found to be more locked into traditionally male roles in all five FtC countries. The stigma associated with males doing activities labelled as female is very much stronger and more obvious than that of the reverse situation. Indeed, girls contemplating a career in a male-dominated area is even seen socially as a symptom of a progressive attitude. The road to gender equality seems to be much longer for boys than for girls.

The same asymmetry arises regarding housework and childcare. As is well known, the traditional family model prevails in all five Mediterranean countries studied. This clearly emerges from our data, with some exceptions in Slovenia and Spain. Both boys and girls saw themselves in a couple with (usually two) children. Nevertheless, the concern about childcare work is not as gender balanced as the desire to have a family. It appears almost exclusively in the girls' responses. Care work in general is implicitly considered a female issue. This idea is automatically associated with the traditional family model. The girls who intended not to assume this role were those planning to focus on a career or who envisaged an alternative lifestyle, as did some youngsters in Spain.

The direct consequence of this implicit assumption is that **work-life balance is an exclusively female issue**, with women taking responsibility, either directly or indirectly with the help of grandparents. This unanimous belief significantly limits women's career choices. Their employment-seeking decisions are strongly influenced by the possibility of finding a job favouring work-family reconciliation. All very demanding or highly time-consuming work options are automatically excluded or considered alternative to the family project. The notion of dividing care work equally was practically absent from youngsters' discourse. It seems not to be an option. This is the main reason for boys to differ from girls in their availability for the labour market and the conditions of their access to it. The firm belief that "they are not equally available for work" is shared by all of the main actors and above all by employers, who therefore discriminate in favour of men because of their lesser burden of care work. **Inequality at work actually begins at home.**

A traditional family model encourages the perpetuation of a gender-stereotyped idea of the unequal division of domestic duties including care work; consequently, it perpetuates differences between men and women in work-life balance. This key element reinforces the impact of social class differences on gender-stereotyped career choices. Two structural factors negatively influence the presence of gender stereotypes: social class and parents' educational level. These two elements, which are normally positively correlated—the higher the social class, the higher the educational level—together make the reproduction of gender stereotypes inevitable.

While this is the reality emerging from the responses of a majority of the youngsters, some counter-discourse was nevertheless apparent, especially in Slovenia, Portugal and Spain. Some youngsters, when focusing as individuals on their own ideas and preferences, expressed some nonconformist self-representations and life plans. Women were particularly likely to consider at least some less gender-stereotyped career choices among the more conformist ones. Furthermore, new models of cohabitation emerged in contrast to traditional family models, although individuals who expressed a critical point of view towards gender-stereotyped choices were aware that they would come under heavy pressure from the social context to adopt more conformist choices.

As to key actors' opinions and attitudes, one of the findings most common across all five countries is that these adults tended to externalize responsibility for the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, blaming it on families, during the primary socialization process, on employers, on the organizational inertia of education and employment services and on the mass media. Key secondary school actors recognized that the gendered socialization of boys and girls, which reflects traditionally-held gender stereotypes, greatly influences study and career choices. Youngsters arrive at orienting services with gender-stereotyped prejudices that the adults stated they were unable to change. On one hand, this could be taken to indicate the necessity to intervene earlier, in primary education, but on the other it could be interpreted as a **key actors' strategy to excuse their own inefficacy in dismantling gender stereotypes** when orienting boys and girls in the school-to-work transition. Furthermore, they were critical of parents' intervention and influence in school career counselling sessions, projecting their own preferences on the choices made by their children, trying to move them away from crossing gender barriers. Parents appear to transmit their own stereotypes to youngsters more openly in principle. Actually, neither students, counsellors, families nor employers seem prepared to apply pressure for greater gender equality in the labour market. **Employers are the most likely to conform to gender stereotypes** and the least prone to promoting cultural and organizational changes to foster gender equality at work. Counsellors working in employment services asserted that employers, in addition to their culturally determined gender-stereotyped views, found it difficult to manage a mixed-gender micro-organizational climate, believing that if they were to introduce a male into a department or office where women predominated, this would cause problems of socialization. Furthermore, employers were said to hold a belief, unsupported by research, that organizing family-friendly timetables and adopting management strategies to improve work-life balance would damage productivity. The statistically overwhelming predominance of men among entrepreneurs heavily influences entrepreneurial culture away from gender equality.

It is indeed in the cultural dimension that conservatism serves to perpetuate gender stereotypes, exercising an inertial force greater than the transformative

power of evolving industrial technology, for example. Some key actors involved in employment services noted that a considerable number of jobs in the industrial production context have been changed profoundly by the technological revolution, digitalization and the introduction of robotics, so that there was now a much reduced requirement for physical strength among applicants. Nevertheless, work traditionally done by men is still seen as men's work, because of false stereotyped representations in a prevalently male work environment. In many cases, cultural barriers to gender equality are more resistant to change than structural or material ones. The present research supports the argument that now that the discourse has been corrected, it is high time to change beliefs and behaviours.

Notwithstanding the conservatism of the environment in which gender stereotypes are seen to persist, the fieldwork revealed some evidence of change. First is what we might call the "recession effect". The recent economic crisis presented a good opportunity to moderate the traditional gender segregation of the labour market. The need to work has pushed jobseekers to take less account of gender-based barriers. They need to be more open-minded in order to maximize their chances of finding work. Secondly, the digital revolution has introduced great changes in many occupations. The skills required to do an increasing number of jobs are less and less gendered. The advent of new jobs represents another opportunity; unburdened by tradition and history, they are in principle more open to both genders. Finally, from a wider sociological perspective, over the last three decades the individualization process has deeply transformed Western societies, facilitating less rigidly standardized and socially structured career paths. This phenomenon is creating a more favourable context for no gendered life choices. Our research has shown individuals to be more open to change than social structures are. Certainly, the social desirability effect has injected a more gender-equal perspective into the youngsters' interview responses. Reading between the lines, it is possible to see that the power of institutions and of social structures such as collective norms and values is gradually weakening, leaving space for more free choices. This, in principle, creates a context more favourable to changing traditional views. Individuals are more legitimated to make choices founded on their own preferences rather than following socially established paths. This seems equally true of the gender dimension. The transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist society through which we are passing may prove to be fertile ground for the change from more conventional gender-segregated labour markets to a more inclusive culture.

6.2 Policy suggestions and areas of intervention

The *Coming Out* research was not oriented to the study of policies and best practices across the five countries. Its main objective was to offer suggestions to the *Free to Choose* game designers. Nevertheless, some ideas have emerged about the main areas of intervention to reduce the impact of gender stereotypes on the school-to-work transition. This section provides the reader with some suggestions.

The first general conclusion to be drawn is that a great deal of work is necessary with boys, who are much less aware than girls of the influence of received stereotypes on them and much less oriented towards gender equality. The need to pay particular attention to males applies to all areas which would be covered by any kind of policy initiative. Previous European policy may be seen as having been focused on empowering

women and on eliminating barriers as much as possible, rather than on encouraging boys and men to adopt a perspective favourable to gender equality.

We identify here three main areas of intervention: the school-to-work transition system itself, primary socialization and the division of care work.

The majority of career counsellors in both educational and employment services reported that when youngsters entered the school-to-work transition, their decision-making was affected by gender stereotypes that were already embedded in their mental processes, or if this was not the case, family pressure tended to have the same effect. Counsellors' ability to modify these youngsters' decisions was thus severely restricted. This is an operator-focused perspective. A more systemic view would highlight the many possibilities for action by educational and training organizations to reduce the inertial reproduction of gender stereotypes among youngsters.

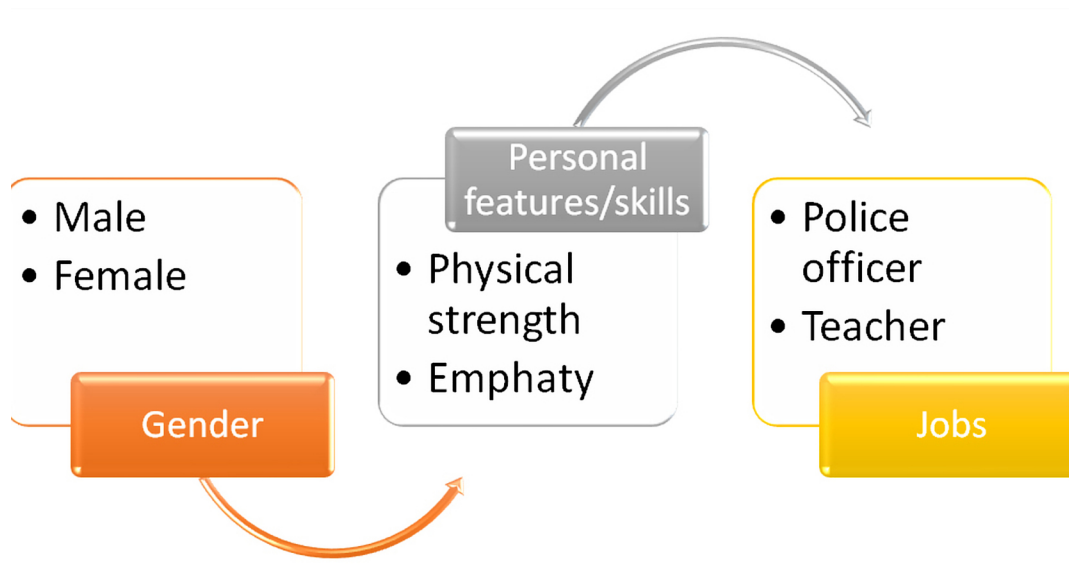
As far as the labour market is concerned, it appears indispensable to provide boys and girls with the same concrete, detailed information on a wide range of occupations. Direct contact with the working environment, and above all with the less gendered possibilities, would usefully complement the information services. Those in transition need to meet people in real life and learn about jobs directly, rather than receiving indirect and abstract information.

Research has found that gender stereotypes are transmitted throughout the secondary socialization process, including its first phase at primary school. Therefore, gender equality training should be provided for all of the actors involved, including primary school teachers. Deepening their understanding of how gender stereotypes operate would raise their level of awareness and diminish the opportunity for stereotypes to be perpetuated, from the first stage of secondary socialization. For this purpose, it would be useful to create another version of the FtC game, adapted to teachers, trainers and counsellors.

The best strategy would be to develop and implement action plans for employers, career counselling institutions and schools (elementary and secondary) to collaborate in challenging gender segregation in the world of work and in life in general. From the time they leave primary school, boys and girls tend to form separate groups around segregated interests and hobbies. Promoting mixed-gender groups and environments at school and in every training experience could help to emphasize similarities over differences.

To conclude with a global view, since the gendering of work occurs as illustrated in Figure 2, a strategy to overcome it should intervene at both stages of the process. It is first necessary to dismantle the association between each gender and related attributes at primary school and in the primary socialization process at home, before doing the same at the stage when personal features are associated with particular jobs. This could be achieved by providing youngsters in transition with concrete, detailed information and direct contact, above all in counter-stereotypical contexts, showing examples of women doing what was traditionally considered men's work and vice versa. Such atypically employed women or men could visit schools to talk about their work, or students could go directly to workplaces where such occupations are performed without gender segregation.

Figure 2. Dismantling occupational gender stereotypes



Source: Authors' own formulation

Furthermore, correct updated information about how much jobs have changed is necessary: technology is progressively reducing the physical demands on workers of a great number of jobs.

All participating career counsellors agreed that gender stereotypes largely originate in the family context, which is why it is extremely important for some dismantling of gender stereotypes to be done in the home. There are two main areas of intervention: primary socialization and the division of care work. The former is still highly segregated by gender. There are different toys and clothes for boys and girls, whose bedrooms are also decorated differently. The rules of behaviour differ between the two genders, as do expectations regarding attitudes and attainment at school. These are key areas where judicious intervention would prepare more favourable conditions for less gender segregation of career choices.

Finally, one of the most important factors perpetuating gender segregation at work is the highly unequal division of care work at home in the context of the traditional family model. On this matter our research has found that it is indispensable to make visible the implicit assumption that care work is a female concern and to counter it with the understanding that to be a father also implies caring responsibilities towards one's family. We found that most boys wanted to have children but did not infer the associated need to assume responsibility for care work, which is why they were not concerned with this issue when making career decisions.

To conclude, gender stereotypes still consistently influence youngsters' career choices in the FtC countries. Complex, multidimensional work needs to be done to reduce its impact. The policies adopted to this end must be characterized by continuity, commitment and cross-disciplinary working. A great number of actors from the main social structures of these Mediterranean European countries must work together to change the cultural environment in which new generations are growing up.

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