The manifestation of gender stereotypes in children's education and career choices

SZABAD➔

◄A-PÁLYA

Table of Contents

Gender stereotypes lead to systemic societal problems with a detrimental impact in many different areas. Their consequences are not confined to particular areas of life but permeate all aspects of it in an interrelated way. In order to eradicate gender inequality in the long term and bring about change, it is necessary, but not sufficient, to focus on its symptoms and consequences. We must also work to tackle these gender stereotypes and their negative consequences.

The primary objective of **Amnesty International Hungary**'s gender equality programme is to eliminate discrimination against women in the workforce. In order to achieve this as effectively as possible, we are developing a multidimensional action plan to promote gender equality on an individual, organisational and social level. We also intend to promote prevention as well as reaction. In order to achieve this, we conducted a complex research project with the Medián Institute for Public Opinion Polling and Market Research to explore the presence of gender stereotypes at different levels of education (nursery, middle and secondary school) as well as their impact on career choices. Another goal of our research was not only to look at the problem, but also to identify tools and methods that could be used to develop educational and awareness-raising programmes designed to help us all create opportunities instead of designated life paths as part of the "The Path is Open" ("Szabad a pálya") project, co-funded by the European Union[1] [2], the **Women in Science Association (Nők a Tudományban Egyesület)** and the **Power of Humanity Foundation (Emberség Erejével Alapítvány)**.

Introduction

Gender stereotypes and their consequences in Hungary

Gender stereotypes are present everywhere, but their extent varies from country to country depending on the intensity with which different actors (education, media, policy makers, institutions, public administration, etc.) in a given society are actively working on their elimination. According to a [2017 survey by Eurobarometer](#), nearly 79% of Hungarians think that women's primary role is taking care of their home and family, while men's is earning money. This figure is significantly higher than the EU average (nearly 44%), making Hungary the second highest ranking member of the European Union in terms of gender stereotypes. Even today, these stereotypes keep women relegated primarily to the private domain, depriving them of opportunities offered by public life, a broader vision of the future as well as existential independence and stability.

The results of EU research on gender equality clearly show that society and the dominant narrative in Hungary still associate women primarily with reproductive labour related to domestic and care work. For example, on the [Gender Equality Index](#) (with only 54.2 out of the available 100 points), Hungary has the third-lowest ranking in the EU.

One of the main reasons for this gap, as highlighted by the Eurobarometer survey mentioned above, is that women in Hungary spend more than twice as much time doing home-related labour as men, according to the data of the [Hungarian Statistical Office (KSH)](#). As the number of children increases, so does the time spent on these tasks, which take 206 minutes a day for a woman with three children. The European Parliament cites the unequal distribution of invisible labour as one of the main causes for the gender pay gap, as significant extra work in the private domain limits women's paid opportunities in the public sphere, be it the workforce, political decision-making or other areas of public life.

In the labour market, both horizontal and vertical occupational segregation can be observed, with a higher percentage of women in areas that are socially essential but financially undervalued, such as healthcare, education, social and civil sectors – in 2017, for example, only 8.9% of all [ICT professionals](#) were women, in contrast to over 80% of all [healthcare workers](#) and [teachers](#) – and a lower percentage of women were working in [decision-making positions](#), be it in the economic or [political field](#). In 2022, only 10.5% of the board members of the largest listed companies in Hungary and only 14% of policy makers were women, which is the [lowest proportion](#) in the EU.

[Inequalities in the private domain also have an impact on the public sphere](#). For example, the employment rate for women drops from 71.5% to 58.3% after the birth of their third child (compared to 85.6% for men - [Eurostat 2021](#)). These factors all contribute to a significant ([approx. 17.3%](#)) and [persistent](#) (almost unchanged over the last 10+ years) [gender pay gap](#), which leads to an increased risk of poverty and financial vulnerability, as well as a reduced likelihood of self-advocacy, self-worth and ultimately of taking effective action, thus perpetuating power imbalances. As these issues are interrelated, changes in one component of the structure have a direct or indirect impact on other components of the system. In order to facilitate these changes, is not enough to address the problem symptomatically: it is necessary to tackle the underlying biases and stereotypes.

Gender stereotypes and socialization

Stereotypes enable us to simplify our environment, create expectations and efficiently process more information. They delimit groups based on certain characteristics, set behavioural expectations and establish norms for desirable and undesirable traits and behaviours, thereby also taking on a prohibitive character (Gill, 2004; Sullivan et al., 2018). They encourage us to comply with norms in order to avoid being penalised. The acceptance of these stereotypes, in turn, can easily turn into prejudice (Devine, 1989).

Stereotypes are also defined in terms of gender (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Studies measuring gender identity show that children as young as two years of age are able to identify themselves and others by gender (Zosuls et al, 2009), and around the age of three they also acquire a sense of gender constancy (or its representation) (Ruble et al., 2007). As they self-identify with a gender, they not only categorize themselves, but based on social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981) they also define the external group. In addition to their efforts to evaluate themselves positively, they also perceive differences between the groups more strongly, which leads to a distancing from the other group, thereby forming a rigid system of categories that provides the basis for gender differentiation (Halim, 2016). Some studies have shown that children as young as three years of age acquire socially and culturally embedded knowledge that increasingly differentiates men and women based on physical attributes, objects and activities, which forms the basis of stereotypes (Bian et al., 2017). According to scientific research, by the age of two to three years, children's colour preferences already show an internalisation of stereotypes (Lobue & Deloache, 2011), and by the age of three they are able to associate everyday objects with men and women (Jackson, 2007). By the time they get to nursery school, they can distinguish between genders based on activities, characteristics and occupations (Liben et al, 2002). These are reinforced by the media, the toy industry, fairytales and the behaviors modeled by adults.

Once gender identity has been established, they learn cultural expectations and try to conform to them. While some theories suggest that gender stereotypes develop in early childhood and peak around the age of 5-6 years (Chrisler & McCreary, 2010), other studies suggest that they are reinforced steadily from the age of 3 to 11 years (Blakemore, 2003), with a gradual progression of this type of stereotyping during primary school (6-11 years) (Siyanova-Chanturia et al., 2015). In the case of the positive social identity mentioned above, at the beginning of this period, girls can already be observed associating some of the more positive traits with boys and the abilities, skills and intellectual capacity attributed to them (Bian et al, 2017). In addition to this, recent studies have also shown that girls are more often interested in toys and activities that are "atypical" in terms of gender stereotypes (or that colour preference overrides the gender-stereotypical classification of a particular object) (Weisgram et al, 2014). Boys are more likely to follow stereotypes, and this is further reinforced by peer pressure and sanctions (e.g., social ostracism, parental expectations and patterns) (Banerjee & Lintern, 2000; Ferguson & Eyre, 2000, Skočajić et al., 2020). This leads to a kind of asymmetry in stereotypes (Wilbourn & Kee, 2010). This phenomenon might also be influenced by the fact that girls are expected by society to be more accepting and tolerant, also based on gender stereotypes. This can have both positive and negative consequences.

During this period, and even afterwards, the rigidity of stereotypes may be reduced in an egalitarian environment and maintained or reinforced in a highly gender-differentiating environment (Blakemore, 2003; Halim, 2016). It is therefore important that young people grow up in an education system that provides them with a broad spectrum of opportunities rather than the categories and constraints mentioned above.

The role of education

The internalization of gender stereotypes thus begins at an early age, which is why education on the subject is essential to prevent its harmful consequences. The promotion of traditional gender roles in the Hungarian education system is getting stronger and more embedded with each passing year. In turn, these patterns have a strong impact on young people's outlook on the future and their opportunities in the workforce.

Nursery school

In 2010, a section on ways to avoid gender stereotypes was removed from the National Core Programme for Early Childhood Education (Annex 2 of Government Decree No 255/2009 (20.11.2009). p. 12-13.). As several studies point out, nursery school teachers play a central role in reinforcing or eliminating stereotypes and it is therefore essential to develop a curriculum that supports them in providing opportunities and perspectives for young people regardless of gender, as well as countering and overriding stereotypes in society at large.

Middle school

In 2020, a new National Curriculum was introduced, which includes the Family Life Education programme (Family Life Education 7.10.1). The new programme offers a more conservative view of family and gender roles than the previous one (2013). The curriculum "aims to help students from a young age to strengthen their gender identity in accordance with their genetic sex, to learn about the basic differences between the sexes (gender, brain function, communication, etc.)..." This means that a more inclusive and diverse understanding of the family and gender roles is not facilitated by resources embedded in the school curriculum. Therefore, it is necessary to provide alternative educational resources for primary and secondary school teachers that offer both opportunities and a broader perspective.

Secondary school

Individual performance in a particular subject has a strong influence on young people's perception of their future career prospects (Dicke et al, 2019). Young girls score lower than boys in mathematics on PISA tests, which correlates to the subjects and expectations that adults around them associate with them based on their gender (Csüllög, Molnár & Lannert, 2014). In general, there is a tendency for young girls to lack support and encouragement in subjects related to the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) sector (Wang & Degol, 2013; Thébaud & Charles, 2018). Together, this manifestation of gender discrimination and career guidance that is insensitive to and ignores these disadvantages and structural differences, affects higher education and leads to occupational segregation.

Consequences

This leads to the phenomenon that the number of women in STEM courses is still low, despite a higher proportion of women in higher education (51.5%). According to data from the Central Statistical Office in 2019, 66-76% of students pursuing a degree in education and health were women, compared to only 16-26% of students in computer science and engineering. In dominantly male-populated fields, the average gross salary is twice as high as in disciplines where the majority of employees are women. This trend is also evident in vocational education and training: 94% of students studying social work are female, whereas in construction, architecture and engineering this figure is only 2%. As the European Commission's 2019 report on equality between women and men points out, around 30% of the overall gender pay gap is due to this horizontal occupational segregation. This clearly demonstrates that raising awareness regarding gender stereotypes and their elimination is essential in the education of young people, as it increases and broadens the potential opportunities available to them, thus contributing to the realization of gender equality (Camussi et al., 2018).

Researching gender stereotypes at three education levels

In order to explore the different representations of gender roles and norms in different age groups, as well as the impact of socialization on developing gender stereotypes and how these are reflected in individual interests or career choices, we have developed a complex mixed methods study that not only raises awareness for the problem, but also contributes to developing educational resources that consciously reduce the harmful consequences of gender stereotypes at various levels of education.

In the case of nursery and middle school age groups, focus group interviews were used to explore the experiences of parents, nursery school teachers and teachers.
For the secondary school age group, focus group interviews were conducted with teachers, but instead of the parents, we asked the students about their experiences by means of an online questionnaire.

The surveys were developed by Amnesty International Hungary with the professional support of the Women in Science Association. The collection and processing of the data, the organization of the interviews and the recruitment of the participants were performed by the staff of the Medián Institute for Public Opinion Polling and Market Research.

Focus group interviews

The focus group interviews were conducted online between May 8 and 10, 2023. The interviewees were selected to represent a diverse mix of genders, ages and places of residence. As the objective of the surveys was to develop a training course that could be used in educational institutions, the participants' attitude towards the subject was also assessed beforehand with the help of a questionnaire compiled by Amnesty International Hungary. The intention was to select people who do not deny the existence of gender stereotypes and their harmful effects.

The results of these studies are presented below, broken down by age group.
The focus group interviews on gender stereotypes covered four main themes: (1) consequences of gender stereotypes, perceived differences, (2) the emergence of differentiation based on gender, (3) career orientation, (4) further opportunities.

Nursery school age group

Description of the sample

Teacher groups consisted of people with university degrees, while parent groups were mixed in terms of their educational level. The aim of the polling institute was to achieve a balanced mix between genders, but this was not always feasible. The data collected data for the nursery school age group consisted exclusively of female nursery school teachers and parents. The nursery school teachers' group comprised of 8 women from the following age groups: 2 between 20-30 years, 4 between 40-50 years and 2 between 50-60 years. In terms of place of employment and its administrative status, all of them were employed in public institutions, two in cities, four in cities with county status and two in Budapest.

As for the parents, 7 were present during the entire interview, all women, most of them between 30 and 40 years of age, four lived in villages, one in a city with county status and one in a smaller town, and one in Budapest. In terms of education, four of them held university degrees and three had completed secondary or vocational school.

Gender stereotypes, observed gender differences

Parents found that during spontaneous play at home before nursery school age, there was no significant difference between boys' and girls' behaviour, activities and interests.

There was also a consensus among kindergarten teachers that up to the age of three, the choice of play equipment is essentially the same for nursery school children, and according to them, they do not differentiate between them after that age either. However, there is a gradual process of differentiation throughout the nursery years. Boys tend to gravitate towards toys typically associated with boys (e.g. Lego, construction toys, cars, soldiers, swords, football), while girls tend to gravitate towards toys typically associated with girls (e.g. dolls, toy kitchens, colouring, role-playing, songs). In the boys' case, aggression and the role of competition were also mentioned. All of these were also attributed by the nursery teachers to the differences in the cartoons that children watch (e.g. boys prefer more aggressive cartoons).Parents stated that *"by this time, their child's personality is established, they can decide what they like and don't like, they can choose what they want to play with"*.

In conclusion, neither parents nor nursery school teachers looked for or mentioned their own role in the gradual differentiation, suggesting it was a spontaneous, natural process, or related to cartoons or perhaps to the child's individual personality.

Gender stereotypes and differentiation based on gender

Both teachers and parents of nursery-age children perceived the nursery as a place where children are free to choose which toys they want to play with, so that their options are open regardless of gender. However, it is important to emphasize that for both groups, categorization was present, "atypical" play was noted: "*sometimes boys play with the dollhouse, girls with the construction toys*" (50 year old head of nursery school). These behaviours were then channelled into stereotypes about the LGBTI community.

Even in this questionnaire-focused sample, in which a certain awareness and consciousness is supposed to be captured, stereotypes and a lack of perception of the individual's role are still evident. "*Our little girls are modest, typical girls, with hair pins, not vocal, not tough. There is one exception, short-haired, a leader. And the boys have accepted that this tough girl is in charge. I find that strange. We're not even talking about real boys anymore, they shouldn't be following a girl. We talk about whether this girl is going to be someone who is not attracted to boys*" (44 year old nursery school teacher in a big city).

Stereotypes were also used to highlight distinctiveness: "*we even have a beautifully declaim little boy*", "*boys have better spatial awareness*" (44 year old nursery school teacher), men are better "*drivers*" and "*have superior mental maps*". This implies expectations which are not necessarily explicitly stated: they do not see themselves as differentiating in terms of expectations. The same expectations apply regarding helping in the classroom, reciting poetry, and maths in nursery school, a point also confirmed by the parents.

Although gender discrimination is not perceived by parents and nursery school teachers, the nursery school curriculum also points out the processes during which children show increasingly differentiated behaviour based on their associated gender roles throughout the three years of nursery school. An example would be the importance of cultivating traditions, folk dances, traditional games, folk customs, which impose gender roles that are adhered to.

Heteronormativity is also present: "We are not afraid to say: 'boys over here, girls over there', in case of a game where a partner needs to be chosen: 'boy chooses girl, girl chooses boy' (44 year old nursery school teacher). On rare occasions, girls and boys are expected to do different crafts or recite different poems: "*For March 15, the boys made helmets and the girls made a párta (a traditional headdress for women)"* (44 year old kindergarten teacher).

The difference in teachers' attitudes towards violence and emotional difficulties is most evident: "*they are more accepting, they coddle little girls when they cry or throw tantrums*" (31 year old parent). "*We scold a girl faster if she hits someone. If two boys hit each other, we have less of a reaction".* "*If a little girl is crying, 'oh my god, what's wrong', if a boy is crying, they typically tell them to walk it off"* (28 year old nursery school teacher). On the positive side, in the latter two cases, the teacher is aware of these differences and presents them in a negative light. In the children's case, the sanctions by their own peers are less frequently highlighted, but it was mentioned that they do occur in social interactions such as friendships on the playground and during football. In one case it was mentioned that it is the children rather than the teachers who indicate to each other who should be playing with what.

Career orientation

During nursery school activities, occupations are mainly shown as pictures on laminated cards, with a few participants mentioning characters that are going against stereotypes (e.g. female firefighter). In addition, parents tell stories about their jobs and female police officers talk about their profession as part of the Ovizsaru ("Kindergarten Cop*")* programme. One interviewee pointed out that in the case of laminated cards, children could be consciously reminded to question if there is a similar person among their parents (e.g. female police officer, butcher, etc.). Additionally, most interviewees mentioned the importance and lack of male nursery school teachers. One young teacher said that it would be important to talk about the fact that "*little girls can also choose masculine jobs"* and that this should be woven into stories. They also stressed the importance of recreational activities: letting girls play football and helping them be included by boys. She believes that it is the responsibility of the nursery school teacher to acknowledge the child's strengths and facilitate their development, stating that if teachers acknowledge them, children will too.

Further possibilities

However, when discussing other possible options, nursery school teachers said that breaking down gender stereotypes is not up to them. They felt that the phenomenon goes much deeper, is more complex and rooted primarily in families and society. In nursery schools, the principle of equal treatment works completely: "love, acceptance, empathy, fairness". "*We have to provide freedom at this age*" (26 year old nursery school teacher), "*Nursery school compensates every day for what happens in the outside world*" (53 year old head nursery school teacher). On the other hand, it was also mentioned that the preservation of culture is an important duty of nursery school. And the examples show that in this context, practices that reinforce stereotypical gender roles continue to emerge.

Nursery school teachers stressed the role of parents, highlighting parent forums and parents' meetings as places to promote the breaking down of stereotypes. Parents also saw their own role as particularly important "*us parents are the role models, we are the ones whose habits they pick up"* (28 year old parent). They also highlighted the influence of role-playing, peers and the media, adding that societal pressure does not give them much flexibility: "*Even if I don't want the little girl to be in all pink and the boy to be in all blue, society and the available products, such as clothes, don't help. Or the shelves labeled Fairytales for boys - Fairytales for*

girls..." (41 year old parent). They also added that . "*Parents are more likely to do research on the internet or listen to their fellow parents than to professionals.*" and according to the interviewees, the families who need them the most are the exact ones that do not participate in things like parental forums, to which psychologists and paediatricians are invited.

At the same time, we found that the interviewees did not feel that they needed them either. While nursery school teachers would welcome a programme or a toolkit that could help them to more consciously tackle gender stereotypes, parents were firmly opposed to the idea. "*This is not a topic for nursery school, let's just them play, it's not an age-appropriate topic"* (31 year old parent). "*Sensitization starts at school, e.g. about wheelchairs, the child needs to reach an awareness level for that*" (33 year old parent). In addition, an important finding emerging from the focus group interviews with parents of nursery-aged children they do not believe career orientation and the acquisition of gender stereotypes at a young age are connected, regardless of their educational level or the type of settlement they live in, even though they indicated on the questionnaire that they disagree with stereotypes: "*we confuse two things with each other: it is one thing to play certain games as a child and another to have a certain job as an adult. This only connects in the brain by the end of secondary school*" (41 year old parent with university degree).

According to the kindergarten curriculum, all children are equally involved in all activities (duties, helping, crafts, open play, etc.) but some of these are coded with traditional roles (see folk games, traditions, classic stories and folk tales, etc.). However, the preservation of culture is an important aspect of nursery school. "*Maybe it is not part of the education system, but it is embedded in it - e.g. stereotypes are incorporated into games*" (31 year old mother of nursery school children). This arose as a contradiction to be reconciled during the focus group interview with nursery school teachers.

Middle school age group

Description of the Sample

Gender stereotypes in middle school education and potential ways to tackle them were investigated in grades 7-8 with the help of focus group interviews with parents and teachers in a similar manner to the nursery school age group.

In the case of the parents' group, equal numbers of men and women (4-4) participated in the study, two of whom were in the 30-40 age group and six were in the 40-50 age group. In terms of place of residence, four lived in a village, two in a city with county rights and two in Budapest. One parent held a university degree, the others had a secondary school degree. In the case of teachers, four women and four men participated in the interview, one person belonged to the 30-40 age group, five to the 40-50 age group and two to the 50-60 age group. In terms of place of employment and its form of funding, all but two of them worked in state-run institutions, one in a village, two in cities, two in cities with county status and three in Budapest.

Gender stereotypes, observed gender differences

According to middle school teachers, the most significant difference between boys and girls aged 13-14 is the difference in their appearance and related interests. Whereas for girls, the introduction of jewellery, make-up, hair dye, nails and dressing up is linked to a "degree of precociousness" (which, according to one experienced teacher, used to occur approximately two years later than nowadays), for boys, a less mature attitude was reported, as well as (at this

age) less interest and time and energy invested into dressing up. However, the teacher from the smaller village school reported a preference among girls for wearing baggy clothes and covering up their bodies. Parents did not mention this difference at all.

Regarding children's interests, middle school teachers reported a variety of experiences that clearly fall under negative evaluation. Many teachers experience a complete lack of interest and motivation: "*none of them are studying, there is no difference*". They also do not observe any motivation among young people with higher familial expectations, and the dissatisfaction that follows poorer school results comes not from the young people themselves, but rather from their parents. In these cases, and in higher-status middle schools, young people's interests and parents' expectations reflect gender stereotypes. "*Children with good family backgrounds deliver what the system expects of them: boys go to a secondary school with a specialization in science or technology, girls go to a secondary school with a specialization in humanities or to high school"* (teacher at an elite bilingual comprehensive school in Debrecen).

In addition to physical appearance, differentiated reactions to maturation based on gender are also reflected in school performance, which is cited as a justification for boys' lower grades. "*boys mature later, it's harder for them to adjust to the school's expectations*" – that is why they tend to go to vocational schools (52 year old teacher). It was suggested that girls are sometimes more hardworking, but the reasons behind this were not addressed (e.g. socialization, expectations, social roles, etc.). In the case of less outstanding schools in terms of education, it was stated that children think that "*we will pass anyway, it is not in the teacher's interest to fail us*". Teachers say that books paint a distinctly unpleasant image of young people in their age group, so they read almost no books at all. Teachers at metropolitan schools cited a gender gap in this regard, reporting that girls read more. The lack of motivation is also evident when it comes to sports, where it is difficult to organize communities.

In contrast, parents see the situation as much less hopeless. The role of independence is also stressed here, as well as a sort of tendency towards introspection, which is also reflected in individual hobbies (e.g. drawing, researching a particular subject). The importance of higher education is emphasised, which is why language assessment exams are sometimes taken early. However, similar to the teachers, parents also mention the crucial role of TikTok and Youtube.

Gender stereotypes and differentiation based on gender

The interviews showed some implicit and some explicit gender stereotypes on the part of the education system, particularly in relation to the arts and humanities, natural sciences, physical education, behaviour at school and general diligence and tenacity. "*Children in class were invited to choir and dance practice, but only the girls were spoken to, the eye contact was with them. The boys in my class told me that they liked singing and dancing too, but they felt that only the girls were invited*" (teacher at an elite school in Budapest). "*The school has a maths specialization, but girls are not motivated by the maths teachers or even given a chance, so only boys compete in the maths competitions in the upper grades. At the same time, I personally had to persuade the boys to come to the Poetry Festival*" (history and literature teacher at a secondary school in a city).

"*Boys are not expected to have neat notes and pretty handwriting, but they are expected to be strong and persistent*" (mother of two boys in Budapest) "*Boys are more likely to be forgiven for misbehaving, girls get written up faster"* (father of a boy living near a big city) "*My son was pushed in the bathroom. The teacher's only comment was that boys do this kind of thing.*" (49 year old mother). They are also treated differently when it comes to invisible labour:

decorating and looking after lower classmen is an expectation that is mainly placed on girls: "*There is more of a reliance on girls for classroom decorations, and for cakes for parties*" (43 year old parent from Budapest). "*It's difficult, but possible to mobilize boys for gardening, but only girls come help with the organization of sports competitions for the lower classmen, for example*" (history teacher in a village). The perception was that rewards are especially important for boys (prizes, grades, etc.).

Career orientation

On the topic of career choice, the focus group discussions revealed that "*girls win some extra time by going to high school, boys either want to continue their education or want a stable financial background*" (54 year old teacher at a vocational secondary school in a large city). "*Girls with an interest in science go to high school and from there (even engineering) university, boys with a good head on their shoulders go to polytechnic school, and only those who want to become doctors or lawyers go to high school*" (54 year old literature teacher at a polytechnic school in a big city). Earning a good wage as an important factor when choosing a career came up in several interviews with teachers, either as a priority of the child or as a requirement by the parents.

For the surveyed parents, the option to switch later on was important, and they preferred they child continue their education at high school. Even the teacher who works at the polytechnic school points out that the vocational education system "entrenches" young people, making it difficult to change direction.

Similarly to previous discussions, parental or other role models were also strongly mentioned alongside the possibility of change. "*It's about what is modeled for them, what their peers' parents or acquaintances do. They very quickly deduce which are the masculine and feminine professions. They file it away.*" "*I always say that whatever you choose to do, sooner or later you'll find your way. I'll support you in making changes too*" (49 year old mother living in a smaller town) "*I wanted to become a furniture maker, but my grades were too good and nobody could associate this profession with a girl. So I got a degree in economics. I had no interest in it. Even now, they look at children's grades, not their interests.*" (45 year old mother from Budapest)

At some schools, there is an organised form of career guidance at the end of middle school. Parents and teachers mentioned that this is when the local vocational schools and their students introduce themselves: "*Career orientation entails an exhibition of vocational schools in the area, where they bring students to give a presentation and talk to the children. They only push vocational training. There is a total absence of higher skilled professions.*" The participant also pointed out in a negative light that "*the military has already come to the school six times under the guise of career orientation*" (teacher at an elite comprehensive school in a big city).

Similar experiences were reported by parents: "They often have career orientation days, but only for eighth graders, where the nearby vocational schools introduce themselves" (a parent from Budapest). These opportunities were rated as insufficient by parents, but there were also schools where young people received even less guidance. "There was one lesson by the class teacher on the topic" (parent from a village). As for school textbooks, it was stated that more, and more diverse, role models were needed: "*The ethics textbook contains a section on the subject. For example, it shows a female pilot and a male nursery school teacher. Then the children can discuss it and say it's OK if I want to be a nursery school teacher, since it's in the textbook. There should be exercises in the textbook that address this.*" (physical education and ethics teacher from a big city).

Both parents and teachers are dissatisfied with the current career guidance programmes: „*We don't have to have classes on career choices, but we for example do have a Mosaic Day, where*

there are no classes, only projects, and parents come in to talk about their jobs" (teacher at an elite comprehensive school ran by a foundation).

<u>Further possibilities</u>

So by the end of middle school, children and their parents are already making important decisions regarding their future careers. It is important to provide them with as wide a spectrum of potential options as possible. However, the interviews clearly show that, although parents would welcome this, teachers have lost a lot of their motivation and feel ill-equipped and overworked.

Although some teachers are careful to avoid gender stereotypes in the materials they use, e.g. "*we are careful to make language exam questions unisex, not about football or fashion*" (English teacher at a bilingual comprehensive school). "*When the task is writing a short story, I offer 3 different points of view: boy, girl, neutral. They get to pick. Never has a boy chosen to write "Seven Pence" from the mother's perspective. If I wanted to do something like that, it would require double the preparatory work, which I'm not sure I would want to put in*" (Hungarian teacher at an elite school in Budapest).

When it came to tackling gender stereotypes - similar to the findings in the nursery school age group, where sexual orientation was mentioned - gender identity, particularly non-binary identity as well as negative discrimination on the basis of gender identity was brought up. "*There is no need to push for boy or girl roles, because this age group is largely unable to decide on their identity.*" (teacher at a school ran by a foundation in Budapest) "*There are 2-3 children in every class who are struggling with this. They are not doing it because it's trendy, they get enough abuse for it from their peers*" (teacher in a rural town). LGBTQ parents are also mentioned: "nowadays*, you have to get used to the fact that some children at school have two mothers*" (teacher at a school ran by a foundation). Like nursery school teachers, they also emphasised the lack of male teachers, and stressed that they themselves are primarily in touch with the mother as a parent. Which also sends a clear message to young people that when it comes to childcare or education, it is mainly women who are concerned. However, in terms of role models, they mention influencers, who they see as both risks and potential assets.

Secondary school age group

<u>Description of the Sample</u>

Gender stereotypes in secondary school education and potential ways to overcome them were explored in focus group interviews with secondary school teachers. For this age group, however, the other surveyed group no longer consisted of parents, but of the students themselves, who were surveyed via an online questionnaire.

Below, we first present the data collected from the focus group.
The surveyed teachers included ones teaching at an elite alternative high school in Budapest, as well as ones teaching at a polytechnical school offering a high school diploma or at vocational schools.
Out of the secondary school teachers participating in the interviews, five were women and three were men. In terms of age distribution, one was in the 20-30 age group, three were in the 40-50 age group and four belonged to the 50-60 age group. Regarding the type of settlement where they worked, three teach in Budapest, one in a city with county status, two in smaller towns and two in villages. As for the type of these institutions, six of them are state funded schools and two are not state-funded schools.

Gender stereotypes, observed gender differences

When asked about the interests of secondary school students, teachers reported that "boys find it harder to abstract", so it is difficult to analyse literature with them, and out of the human sciences, they are mostly interested in history, especially recent history (literature teacher at a polytechnic school in a city). Interest in sexuality is unrelated to gender (literature, history and drama teacher at a polytechnic school in a city). It was also reported that students interest levels in IT are also similar, regardless of gender, and that a career and future abroad are also amongst their plans.

It should be noted that, as with the indirect survey of the middle school age group, the question of maturity also came up here. It was reported that boys "make up the difference" by around grade 11. However, as was the case with middle school teachers, no justification was given as to why this might be the case. The perceived "maturity" of girls, its representations, are therefore not pinned down, not linked to socialization processes or differing expectations. Though not stated, a kind of "biologisation" is noticeable in this phenomenon and its interpretation as a "natural" process.

Gender stereotypes and differentiation based on gender

According to secondary school teachers, the choice of secondary school itself reflects the gender stereotypes that young people already pick up during their primary school education.
In the case of boys, they emphasise awareness, i.e. choosing based on their interests, while for girls this choice is more random and they are often attracted not by a profession but by their social contacts, preferring to go to an institution attended by their friends. "*Girls arrive in groups, almost in a contingent, in a clique of 4 or 5 from one school, following one of their leading personalities*" (reported independently by teachers from two different urban polytechnical schools and one vocational school). This shows that while boys may often receive stronger encouragement to pursue their own plans during earlier socialization processes, girls seek safe spaces in which their existing social networks play a role. Teachers report that in their individual experiences, 'atypical' occupational choices that go against stereotypes are becoming "more common": "*Girls are now also studying agricultural engineering, and the gender ratio among salespeople is now half and half, it is becoming a mixed bag*" (teacher at a vocational school in the city). At the same time, the gender differentiation and different expectations described in the earlier stages of education can be observed even as stereotypes regarding occupations are gradually being overturned. "*We are also training soldiers, a third of them are girls. They are more disciplined than the boys, even at marksmanship.*" (teacher at a polythechnic school in a city) "*Boys used to become cooks and girls used to become confectioners, but that is no longer true*" (teacher at a vocational school in a city). Here, even middle school teachers highlighted the impact of male cooks as role models, who, like male hairdressers or beauty professionals (and presumably also confectioners), profit from the a "glass elevator" effect, where men are given higher prestige and status in predominantly female domains.

The interviews revealed that secondary schools reinforce expectations in a covert way, as embedded in society: "*Perhaps because of the teachers' age, they seem to stick to stereotypical roles, male teachers push the macho stuff, women become subordinate, so it is hard to communicate the opposite to the children*" (teacher at a foundation-ran art school). Along these lines, it became apparent that, while nursery school and comprehensive school teachers emphasised the absence of male role models in their own profession, secondary school teachers tended to point out the harmful consequences of gender stereotypes within the teaching staff.

Career orientation

Most of the surveyed secondary school teachers' schools do not have career guidance activities, at most they dedicate one day to it. In schools that have them, it mainly consists of a guidance counsellor who helps the students with filling out documents. "*There is also a talent management programme*", but this was mentioned only by one teacher from an elite alternative high school in Budapest. In some institutions, there is a career orientation day, but only where the class teacher considers it important and puts extra effort into organising it. "*We invite friends from the industry or parents to talk about their interesting jobs. I, for one, have been wanting to have a Girls' Day for a long time.*" (IT-focused polytechnical school in Budapest). In vocational schools, as stated earlier during the middle school interviews, the career orientation day is inverted, with vocational schools going to middle schoolers to showcase the professions taught at their schools. However, parents of middle school children have expressed that they expect a lot from secondary school, thinking that it places emphasis on skills rather than on attitude, community and other factors.

Overall, we can see that career orientation is less of a focus in secondary education, with young people's family background and the models and knowledge acquired in school determining their future choices instead, putting considerable pressure on them to decide on the direction they want to take in life.

Further possibilities

However, secondary school teachers mentioned the possibility that young people tend to start challenging the norms at home at this time in their lives, which is mainly determined by spontaneous and less controlled platforms such as the media, YouTube and influencers. A significant role is also played by peers, including teachers, whose personalities are crucial. It is left to the teachers to incorporate creative resources, but they often lack the capacity to use them. Also, the choice of tools tailored to these "areas of interest" is often based on stereotypes, such as choosing materials related to sport for boys and to physical appearance for girls. Thus, the guidance of these processes is left to the media, youtubers, influencers, artists, peers and teachers' personalities.

It is apparent from the interviews that, according to the interviewed teachers, the choice of career, which is significantly influenced by gender stereotypes, is often already made by choosing a certain type of secondary school, especially in the case of vocational schools and polytechnic schools. A positive example could therefore be the presentation of the career paths of people who have changed their occupations and are even working in a career that does not conform to and align with gender stereotypes.

Conclusion

In summary, gender stereotypes strongly permeated all five focus group discussions. Despite the fact that everyone believes that they do not differentiate by gender and that stereotypes are beyond them, these conversations also included ideas that justify and perpetuate stereotypes, and whose transmission to young people further exacerbates the problem. For example, the explanation of gender differences with biological reasons, emphasizing its naturalness, was expressed: "*It has been like this since ancient times, boys are coded to be hunters, girls are coded to be gatherers. Hence the stereotypes reinforced by society. Women's fight for equality is part of modern culture*" (33 year old mother). A similar sentence justifying gender stereotypes: "*I would split the issue into two parts: from a legal point of view, all people are equal, and that's the way it should be. In terms of roles, there will never be equality, for evolutionary and customary reasons, and that's the way it should be.*" (43 year old father)

Additionally, it was often stated that it is not the competency of the group in question to break down gender stereotypes. Parents blame the media, society, the garment and book industry and the grandparents, while teachers blame societal pressure, parents and family patterns: "*Without supportive parenting, it doesn't matter how hard we try.*" (teacher at a school in Budapest). There is also a tendency to devalue the importance of the issue, and the type of approach that believes that gender inequalities have already been resolved: "*It is not true that women earn less, there is a salary table in the public sector, it applies to everyone.*" (teacher at a school in a small town). "*I know women who earn good money*", "*there are female police officers and soldiers*", "*I know a female tinsmith*", "*there is one male nursery school teacher, hairdresser, pastry cook*", etc.

A dissonance, however, is that even when there is a justification of the existing system, its consequences are also perceived: "*Men go to work in Budapest or in other countries, and often they don't even get any thanks when they return home. The man is just a distant mysterious figure who sends money home.*" (middle school teacher in Budapest, formerly from Szabolcs) "*If a woman is left alone with a child, it is tantamount to existential insecurity*" (40 year old teacher in Budapest) "*For me, a woman with 4 children, it is much harder to find a job than for my husband.*" (37 year old woman living in a village). "*By giving birth, a woman loses 10 years of her career, she is still starting out at the end of that period, while a man has already had 10 years of professional experience*".

Therefore, the findings show that parents and teachers are aware of the fact that the social system is based on gender stereotypes and of the inequalities between genders, but they also see the harmful consequences of these stereotypes and stress that they create opportunities and do not differentiate. This sometimes overt, sometimes covert expression of gender stereotypes, the ambivalent attitude towards them and the demand for justification from adults clearly has an impact on young people. In addition, this type of covert expression can create a conflicting image in them. They may think that what they are surrounded by does not necessarily count as stereotyping, prejudice or sexism, as it is always followed by the message that people want to offer them the most and the best. This makes it difficult to detect stereotypes and gender inequalities, which further limits the possibility of effective action against them. The following findings from the study illustrate the impact of these socialization processes on young people.

Questionnaire

Structure of the questionnaire

Similarly to the the focus group questionnaire, the questionnaire for secondary school students is also divided into four main parts: (1) attitudes towards gender stereotypes, (2) occuptional outlook, (3) experiences at school and (4) demands.

Following the demographic questions, these four main topics are structured as follows:

1: Attitude toward gender stereotypes, awareness, childcare and work (7-point Likert scale)

1.1: Attitude toward gender stereotypes: exploring attitude toward stereotypes based on the degree of agreement with the following statements: (1) a man's most important task is to earn money, (2) a woman's most important task is to take care of her home and family - These questions are part of the Gender Stereotyping Index and were taken from the 2017 Eurobarometer survey. - (3) Engineering and IT-related professions are more suited for men, (4) Professions like teaching and nursing are more suitable for women.

1.2: Awareness: we wanted to know how aware young people are of inequalities in the labour market, particularly of the discrimination against women. The following statements were also assessed on a 7-point Likert scale according to the degree of agreement: (1) on average, women earn less than men, (2) it is harder for women to achieve a management position, (3) they are generally disadvantaged in the labour market, (4) higher paying professions are predominantly populated by men.

1.3: Perceptions of balancing childcare and work: as the statistics show that childcare has a significant impact on women's position in the workforce, two brief questions were included on the topic, but these were not used in the subsequent analysis. We have explored this issue in the same way as mentioned above: (1) it must be very difficult for women to reconcile childcare with work, (2) it must be very difficult for men to reconcile childcare with work.

2: Occupational outlook (7-point Likert scale and open question)

2.1: Individual experiences, concerns: this was also assessed on a 7-point Likert scale according to the degree of agreement. The respondent's perceptions of their professional future based on their own gender were examined along the following statements: (1) my gender has an impact on what profession I will choose / have chosen, (2) my gender would have less impact on my professional future abroad, (3) I worry about my future livelihood.

2.2: Occupational interest: for this variable, an open-ended question was posed asking "What occupations would you be interested in when choosing a career, what would you like to do in the future?". Responses to the open question were coded bottom-up by three independent coders, based on patterns derived from the responses.

3: Experiences at school (multiple choice and open questions)

3.1. Negative experiences:

> 3.1.1: Stereotypes displayed in certain subjects (teachers' indications that boys are better in some subjects and girls are better in others)

> 3.1.2: Preferred subjects (favourite subjects)

> 3.1.3: Gender-based negative discrimination (1) by teachers: lower grades in certain subjects, (2) by teachers: unfair treatment other than grading, (3) by classmates: unfair treatment.

> 3.1.4: Reporting experiences (to whom - e.g. teacher, parents, school psychologist, friends, etc.)

3.2. Information provided:

> 3.2.1: Information provided at school (on gender discrimination in relation to career choices and in general)

> 3.2.2: General awareness, obtaining information: the question was "Have you heard about the importance of creating gender equality?", if "yes" where did you hear about it? (e.g. TikTok, Instagram, Youtube, friends, parents, teachers, etc.)

4: Demands

To identify existing demands, we asked whether participants would like to see a programme at school about the consequences of gender discrimination and its elimination, (2) then, if they answered 'yes', we asked what topics they would be interested in, (3) and what they felt could be done to reduce gender bias at school.

Some of the key findings from the survey are highlighted below.

Sample description

As the questionnaire was administered online on a voluntary basis, it was mainly completed by young people who were interested in the topic. Responders were recruited through targeted Facebook ads during May 2022. A total of 1,073 secondary school students completed the questionnaire, of which 11% were male, 85% female, 2% identified as "other" and another 2% did not answer the question regarding their gender. The fact that such a significantly higher proportion of women completed the questionnaire indicates that they are more open to sharing their experiences on the subject. In terms of age range, the biggest part of the sample was aged 17-18 (28-23%). Regarding place of residence, respondents from smaller towns (32%) were more likely to complete the questionnaire, with a similar percentage of people living in the capital, county seats and municipalities (21-24%) (Figure 1).
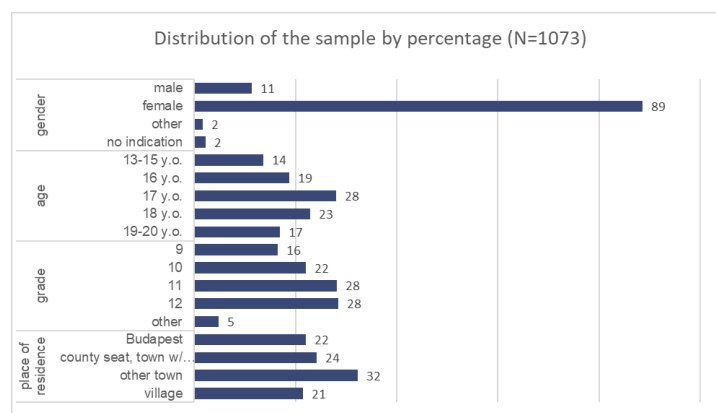
Figure 1 – Sample distribution

Descriptive results

<u>Attitudes towards gender stereotypes, awareness, parenting and work</u>

In terms of overall attitude, the vast majority of participants believe that job opportunities should be independent of gender identity (92%) (Figure 2).

Questions concerning awareness and the reconciliation of childcare and work show that most respondents agreed that women have more difficulty in reaching senior positions (74%) and earn less money on average than men (71%). Conversely, albeit at a lower rate, young people were also aware that a higher proportion of men work in higher paid jobs (61%). Compared to the 75% of women who agreed, only 55% of men thought that they have greater difficulty reconciling work and childcare. Overall, 69% of respondents think that women in Hungary are at a disadvantage when it comes to the workforce (Figure 2).

Regarding gender stereotypes, we can see that a relatively lower proportion of participants agreed that women's primary job should be taking care of their home (34%), while men's primary job should be earning money (33%). This is significantly lower than the 78-79% reported in the 2017 Eurobarometer survey, but definitely closer to the EU average of 43-44%. The degree of agreement with gender stereotypes about professions is also lower, with 25-27% of respondents believing that engineering and IT-related professions are more suited for men, while those related to teaching and nursing are more suited for women.

However, even with these figures, about a quarter of the young secondary school students surveyed agreed with the stereotypes associated with the professions and about a third of them perceived the roles of men and women in society and the workforce according to general gender stereotypes (Figure 2).
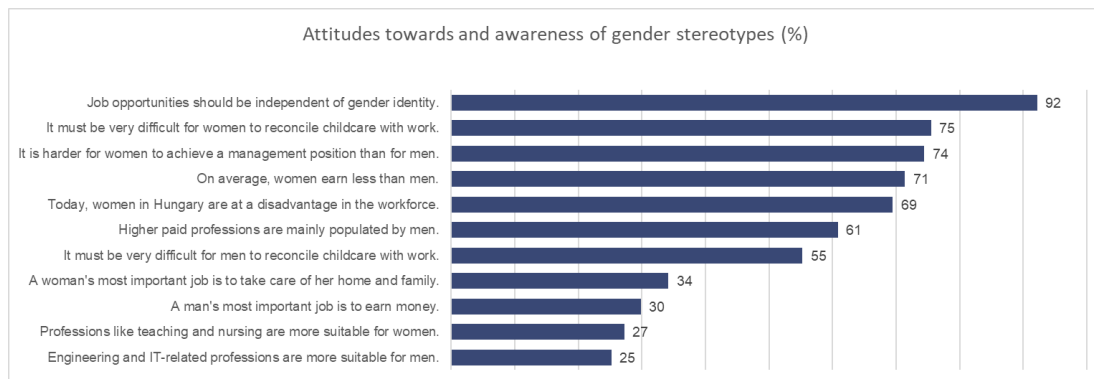

Figure 2 – Summary chart of attitudes towards and awareness of gender stereotypes

In terms of gender, we see that non-binary young people and girls (88-72%) were more likely than boys (49%) to perceive women's situation in the workforce as disadvantageous. There are also differences when it comes to discrimination in leadership positions and awareness of the pay gap. While around 77-84% and 73-80% of girls and non-binary participants respectively have observed these differences, only 57-58% of boys did. When it comes to women's difficulty of balancing childcare and work, there is a smaller discrepancy in the assessment of the difficulties, with 69% of boys, 76% of girls and 85% of non-binary participants thinking that it must be very difficult for women. Boys were almost equally likely to think it was also difficult for men, with a difference of only 6% (63%), while only 54-59% of girls and non-binary participants thought so (Figure 3).

In the case of gender stereotypes, boys were also found to differ from the other two groups. A higher proportion of them agree that a woman's primary job is to take care of her home and family (43%) while men's is to earn money (40%). Non-binary participants are least inclined to agree with these stereotypes (19-22%), followed by girls (33-29%). Similar results can be seen for occupations based on gender stereotypes. It is important to note that, in addition to the fact that boys in secondary school tend to agree with stereotypes more than girls and non-binary young people, the results also show that stereotypes against women are slightly more strongly held among secondary school students than stereotypes against men (Figure 3). No significant differences were found between age groups, nor were there any significant differences in terms of place of residence.
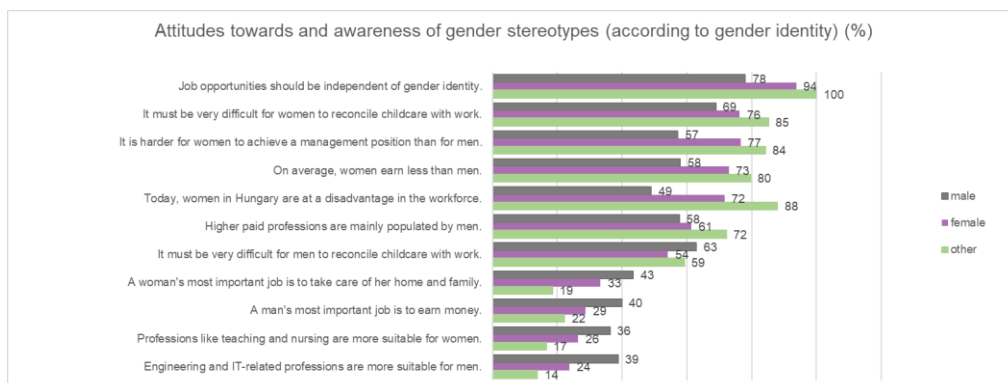

Figure 3 – Attitude towards and awareness of gender stereotypes according to gender identity

<u>Occupational outlook</u>

Lastly, regarding individual experiences and concerns, 31% of participants felt that their gender identity had an impact on their career choice, and half of young people felt that their gender would have less impact on their professional future abroad. Some 66% of respondents expressed concern about their future livelihood (Figure 4).
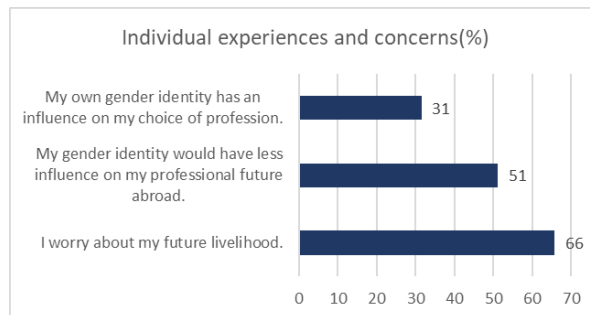

Figure 4 – Summary chart of individual experiences and concerns

Regarding individual experiences and concerns, although non-binary young people are the least likely to feel that their gender has an impact on their career choice (25%), they are also the most likely to feel that their gender would have less impact on their career prospects abroad (71%). They are followed by girls, 31% of whom believe that their gender determines their choice of career, and boys, for whom this figure is 36%. This is not surprising, given that they were most likely to agree with gender stereotypes, so it is understandable that it would affect their choice of career as well. More than half of all girls (52%) believed that their gender would have less of an effect on their professional future abroad, compared to only 35% of the boys. Non-binary respondents were clearly the most concerned about their future livelihood (85%), followed by secondary school girls (67%) and lastly boys (55%). In terms of age group and place of residence, gender identity's impact on the choice of career is most likely to affect the youngest (13-15 year olds) (39%), and they are also the most likely to think that this would be different abroad - 13-15 year olds and 16 year olds (52-53%) - while concern is most likely to be felt by a slightly older age group (18-20 year olds) (70-69%). No significant difference is apparent regarding the place of residence (Figure 5).
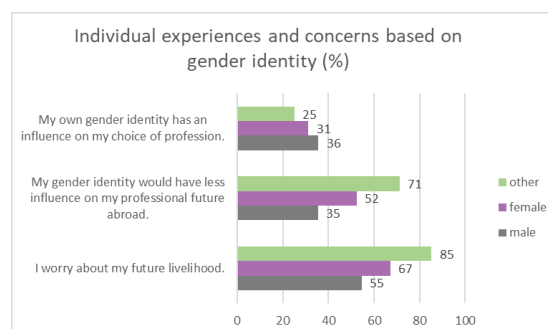

Figure 5 – Individual experiences and concerns according to gender identity

Out of the occupations listed, the highest number of people named the field of liberal arts as their future occupation. When evaluating these results, the fact that 85% of the sample is composed of girls may have an influence on the impact of gender stereotypes on the professional future. After that, the most frequently mentioned professions included arts (21%), as well as professions related to tourism and the business sector (19%) and fields related to medicine and natural sciences (16%). Information technology and engineering were only marginally represented (5-6%) (Figure 6).
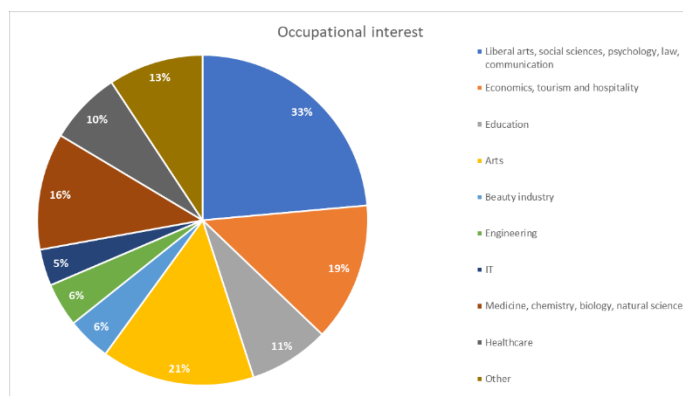
20

Figure 6 – Summary chart of occupational interests

While 28% of non-binary young people listed a career related to arts as their primary interest, this figure is 15% for girls and only 9% for boys. In the field of liberal arts, the picture is similar: 26-22% of girls and non-binary participants listed a profession in this field, compared to only 15% of boys. There is an even more significant difference when it comes to an interest in engineering, which was mentioned in first place by 11% of boys and only 3% of girls, with no mention of this profession by non-binary young people. In contrast, in IT, the interest rate among girls is also 3%, while non-binary young people are just as interested as boys (11-10%). There is less of a difference when it comes to medicine, science and economics, with 13-14% of girls, 10% of boys and 6% of non-binary young people expressing an interest. Professions that have been undervalued both socially and financially for many years, which should be of primary importance for the functioning of society and in which women are heavily over-represented, are of almost no interest to young people. Only 3-6% would like to be a healthcare professional, 5-6% a teacher (these results were similar for the second category, and for the third category, almost nobody mentioned these fields.) (Figure 7).
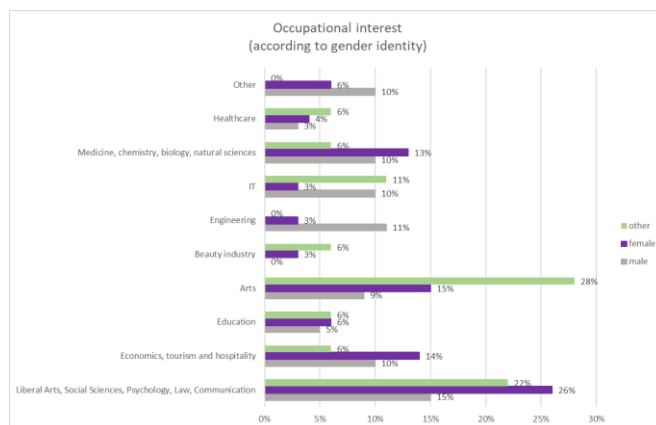

Figure 7 – Occupational interest according to gender identity

Experiences at school

The main findings that emerged regarding experiences at school show that 69% of young people reported that there were mentions at school of male and female professions, just as the same proportion reported a differring treatment of genders when it came to school subjects. 37% of young people experienced unfair treatment by their classmates and 39% by their teachers because of their gender (Figure 8).
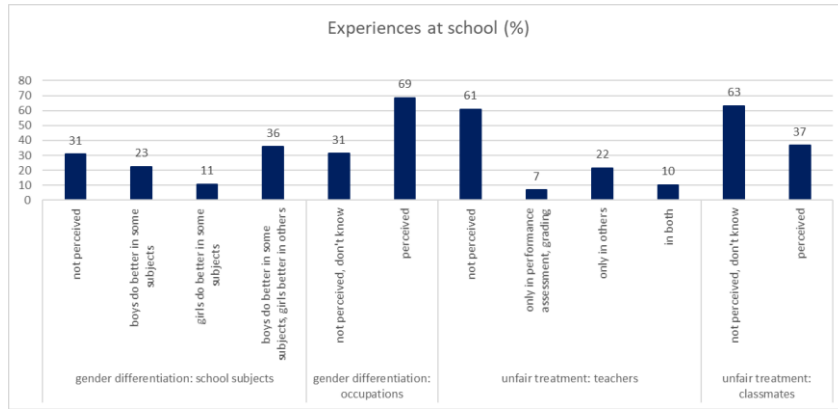
Figure 8 – Summary chart of experiences at school

When looking at children's experiences in the classroom, it can be observed that girls and non-binary participants tend to experience higher rates of injustice than boys. A third of non-binary respondents have experienced unfair treatment by their teachers, with an additional 17% seeing this reflected in their grades. Girls indicated that they had experienced gender-based negative discrimination by teachers in 7% of cases exclusively when it came to grading, in 22% of cases regarding general treatment, and in 11% of cases they indicated both. 9% of boys had experienced getting a lower grade because of their gender, 19% had been treated unfairly by their teachers in other ways, and 8% had experienced gender discrimination in both ways. A similar picture is painted concerning classmates, with 17% of boys, 38% of girls and 61% of non-binary young people having experienced unfair treatment by their classmates because of their gender (Figure 9).

In terms of professions, the results show that 72-70% of non-binary young people and 72% of girls have been told at school that there are 'masculine' and 'feminine' professions. More than half (53%) of the boys have also noticed this (Figure 9).

When it comes to school subjects, the results show that while 46% of boys had not observed a teacher suggesting that boys were better at certain subjects while girls were better at others, this figure was only 29-28% for girls and non-binary participants. While 24-33% of girls and non-binary participants reported that they had been told/refered by a teacher that boys were better at certain subjects, only 11% of boys reported the same. Instead, they felt (16%) that this type of stereotypes was more likely to be displayed towards girls. This was observed by only 10% of the girls, and non-binary respondents did not indicate that they had encountered this. The highest proportion of participants found that both boys and girls are associated with certain subjects at school, with 26% of boys, 37% of girls and 39% of non-binary young people perceiving this to be the case (Figure 9).
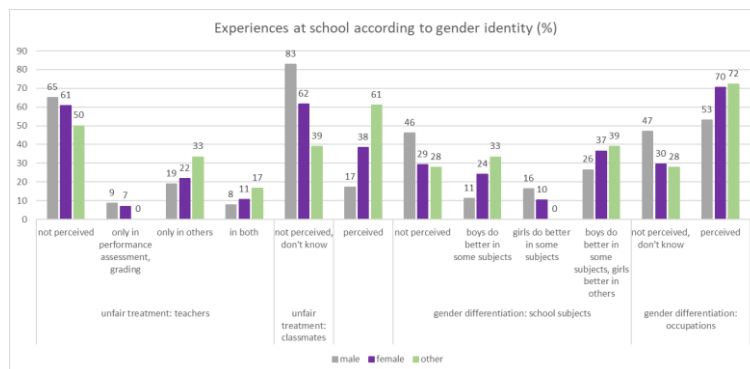

Figure 9 – Experiences at school according to gender identity

We also asked participants which of the subjects they were referring to. 66% of the participants named specific subject(s) that their teachers associate with boys, and 42% identified subjects that their teachers associate with girls. The results show that even today, in young people's experience, teachers still associate boys with natural sciences (82%), as well as physical education (55%) and IT (35%). Girls are mainly associated with artistic subjects (42%) and human sciences (36%). There is minimal discrepancy in the case of biology, which teachers associate slightly more with girls, and history, which teachers associate more with boys (Figure 10).
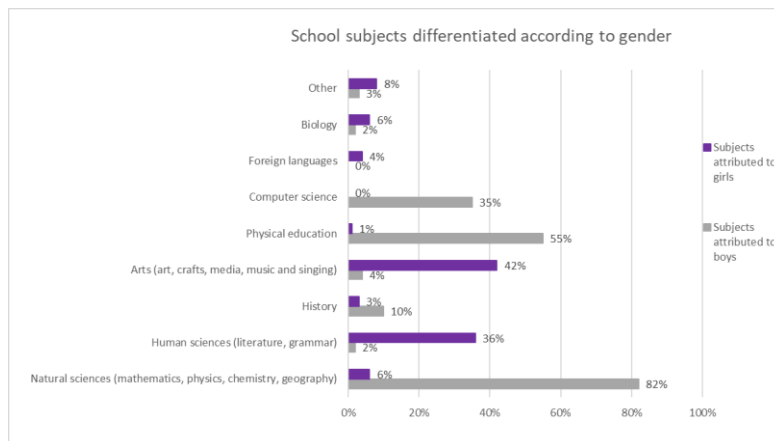

Figure 10 – Subjects associated with boys and girls according to young people's experiences

These values are also reflected in the variable measuring subject preference. Boys mostly named history (38%), mathematics (30%), computer science (16%) and physics (15%) as their favourite subjects. Literature (38%) was the subject most favoured by girls, along with history (29%) and biology (24%), similar to boys. However, 21% of girls also indicated mathematics and 17% indicated art. Only 7% selected computer science and 4% physics. Chemistry was more popular with boys (12%) than with girls (7%). Physical education, music and geography were all low performers, with only marginal differences between the genders.

Those young people who experienced unfair treatment by their teachers (whether in terms of grading or other aspects) reported this to someone in 66.5% of cases. When they experienced this from their classmates, only 58% talked about it. Students who reported these experiences were most likely to have mentioned them to their friends (82%) and parents (76%). Only 34% of them have reported it to their class teacher, 18% to other teachers and only 8% to the school psychologist (which might be due to the fact that there are very few of them). This shows that young people are more likely to report these experiences to people who are not school employees (Figure 11).
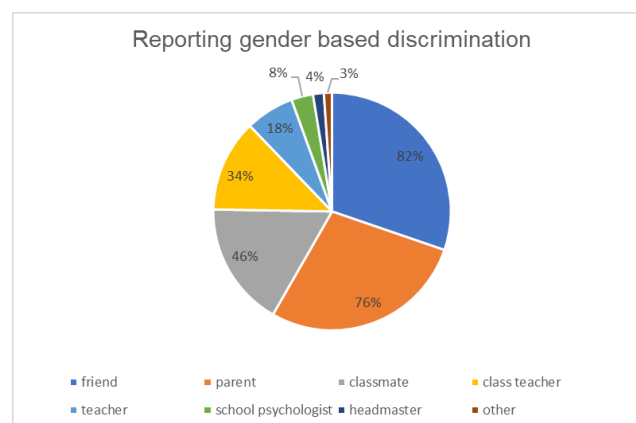

Figure 11 – Reporting negative discrimination based on gender

Awareness and demand

Concerning the acquisition of information in the classroom, we wanted to know whether gender discrimination has ever been discussed in class, and if it has been addressed specifically in the context of choosing a career. 57% of all participants had heard about at least one of these topics in class. A smaller proportion (9%) of these discussions pertained to career choice and work than to other topics (22%). A higher proportion of girls reported having heard about gender discrimination in lessons, and a higher proportion of 13-16 year olds remembered this topic being discussed during lessons than those aged 17 or over (Figure 12).
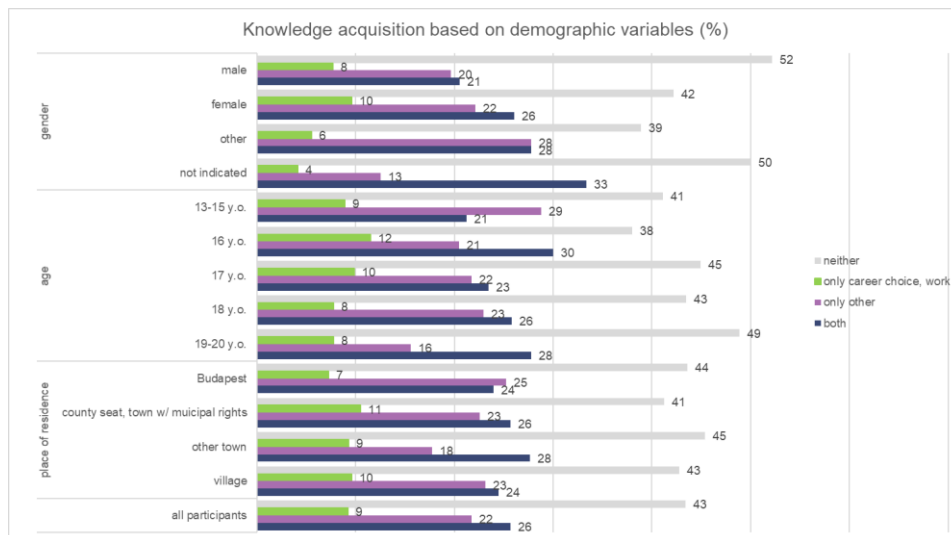

Figure 12 – Knowledge acquisition in the classroom based on demographic variables

We also asked about general awareness, namely whether the students have heard about the importance of creating equal opportunities for all genders. Nine out of ten respondents have heard about it. The proportion of those aware is dominant in all groups, but slightly more girls than boys are informed, and more of them belong to the 18 and over age group than to younger age groups. In terms of place of residence, those living in cities are more aware than those living in smaller municipalities (Figure 13).

Figure 13 – General awareness of the importance of gender equality based on demographic variables

We also inquired about the source of the information, revealing that more than one in two participants heard about gender equality from friends and discussed the topic with them.

However, the most common source overall is social media: 69% of respondents mentioned either TikTok or Instagram or both, 78% mentioned social media if we include YouTube, 82% if we include Facebook. On average, participants named 4.4 sources out of the 12 options, with TikTok, their friends and Instagram being the most frequently mentioned ones. School and textbooks were the least likely sources, along with teachers at only 36% (Figure 14).
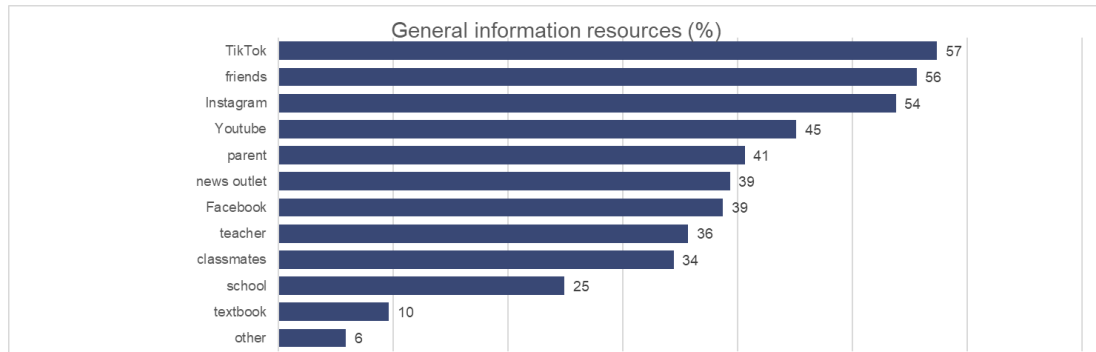

Figure 14 – General information resources of gender equality

Moreover, the differences between genders show that while girls were more likely to get their information from friends (57%), TikTok (60%) and Instagram (55%), boys were more likely to get their information from Youtube (58%), news portals, Facebook (50%) and teachers (44-44%). The youngest participants generally cited fewer sources (4.1) than older ones (4.5). With the exception of them, the importance of TikTok decreases with age, while the significance of Facebook increases. Personal channels (friends, parents, teachers, classmates) are generally more frequently mentioned as a source in larger municipalities than in smaller ones, while the trend is inversely correlated for social media, with 63% of those living in villages naming them as a source compared to 51% of participants living in Budapest.

Awareness is related to how informed the respondent is about gender equality and how much they agree with gender stereotypes. Those who have not discussed gender discrimination in class (whether in relation to career choices or other areas of life) or have not heard about it in other settings either, are more likely to think that women's primary role is to take care of their home and family while men's is to earn money, and are more likely to agree that engineering is a male profession, while teaching and healthcare are female professions. Conversely, those who have heard about these topics in the classroom are less likely to agree with stereotypes and more informed about gender inequality in the workforce, and thus more likely to perceive men as over-represented in higher paying professions, women as earning less than men on average and having more difficulty in reaching senior positions and generally being disadvantaged in the workplace. This type of awareness, which focuses specifically on inequalities in the workforce, is not related to whether the respondent has heard about the importance of gender equality (e.g. from TikTok, friends, etc.), nor to whether gender discrimination has been discussed in class in relation to other issues. However, the more areas the participant acquires knowledge in (general gender discrimination, job market, importance of gender equality), the more informed they are and the less likely they are to agree with gender stereotypes. This result clearly demonstrates that if we want to inform young people about negative discrimination in the workforce and how to overcome it, specific training in schools is necessary and the broadest possible range of knowledge on the subject should be provided to decrease stereotypes (Figure 15).

		Stereotypical attitude	inequality-conscious
providing information in class about gender discrimination in relation to career choices or work	has not discussed	0,0409	-0,0808
	has discussed	-0,0771	0,1523
gender based discrimination in the classroom	has not discussed	0,0760	-0,0311
	has discussed	-0,0858	0,0351
importance of creating gender equality	has not heard	0,5236	0,0305
	has heard	-0,0635	-0,0037
awareness of the different topics	neither	0,6812	-0,0131
	one	0,0028	-0,0789
	two out of three	-0,0454	-0,0039
	all three	-0,1378	0,1412

Figure 15 - Acquiring information, stereotypes and awareness

And this is something young people want, too. Three quarters of all participants would be interested to hear about the consequences of gender discrimination and ways of eliminating it as part of a programme offered in schools. Girls and non-binary young people are significantly more likely (78-89%) than boys (45%) to request this. 13-15 year olds are slightly less likely to express interest than older students, and those living in municipalities are more likely (78%) than those living in Budapest (70%) (Figure 16).
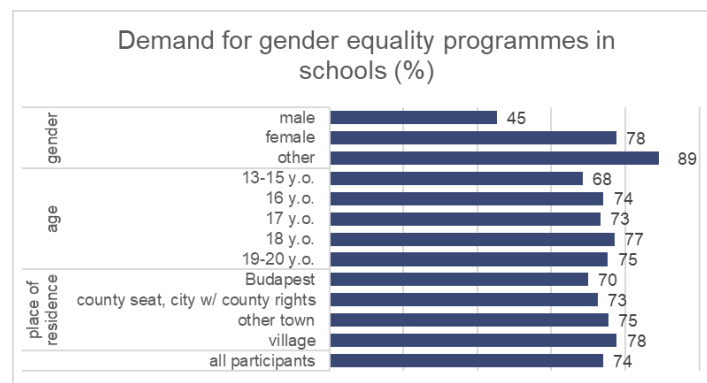
16. ábra – Demand for gender equality programmes in schools

Previous awareness is also correlated with demand. The results show that those who have talked about gender discrimination in relation to either choosing a career (78%) or another issue (76%), or who have heard about the importance of gender equality (75%) or have heard about all three (81%) are more likely to demand more information on the subject (Figure 17).
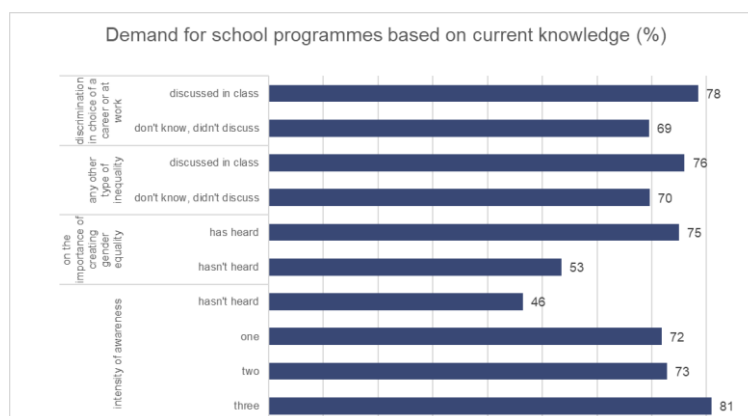

Figure 17 – Demand and existing knowledge

26

As part of the assessment of demand, we also asked young people what specific topics they would be interested in. Those who answered this open question (68%) most often prioritised learning about the issues that were relevant to them (56%) (they wanted to know more about gender stereotypes, gender roles and the social dynamics that lead to inequalities). 46% of respondents indicated that they would like to learn more about inequalities in the labour market and 35% were primarily interested in solutions, such as how to create a gender-equal society and wanted to know more about their own rights. However, this age group is also interested in appearances (25%) and, to a lesser extent, in relationships and violence against women (Figure 18).
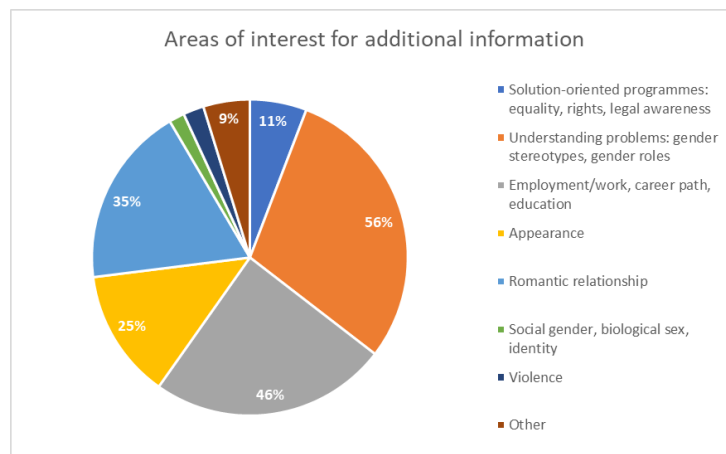

Figure 18 – Areas of interest

Lastly, we asked secondary school students what they felt would be needed in their schools to reduce gender bias. The responses show that young people would like to see more conversations and an inclusive peer community (32%), they see teachers as the main key to change (29%) and they would like to hear more about the issue in school (29%). At the same time, they also consider it important to increase acceptance and empathy (16%). The role of parents and education as well as role models was also mentioned (8-8%), as well as the desire for legislation that promotes equality (6%). Despite the young age group, there were also mentions of a systemic approach and a desire for change at a societal level (11%) ("*the issue should be discussed in the public domain*", "*everyone should be treated equally regardless of gender*") (Figure 19).
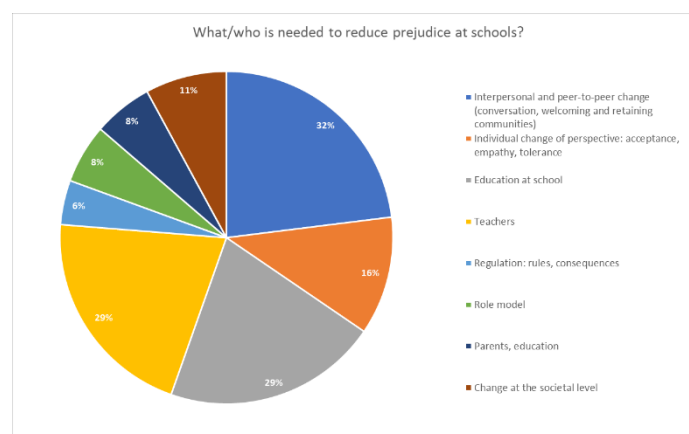

Figure 19 – Drivers of change

Conclusion

The questionnaire survey conducted among secondary school students shows that girls are more interested in gender roles and stereotypes - as shown by the gender distribution of the survey participants in itself.

The vast majority (92%) of young people surveyed believe that gender identity should not determine career opportunities, but even so, roughly one in three associate women primarily with domestic tasks and one in four associate men with earning money. As for stereotypes, as the literature suggests, it is clear that a higher proportion of boys agree with them and that non-binary young people are the least likely to have this type of attitude. When it comes to awareness, we see that the majority of participants are aware of discrimination against women in the labour market, so it comes as no surprise that many of them are concerned about their future existence.

With regard to occupations and preferred school subjects, we can see which subjects are associated with each gender at school and how this affects children's professional outlook. Human sciences are associated with girls, therefore their favourite subjects and their plans for their future profession are also associated with them. This can also be observed in the case of boys, for example in the fields of IT and engineering. Additionally, a warning sign regarding occupations emerged: the fact that only a tiny percentage of those asked about their professional interests named occupations such as teaching and healthcare, which are fundamental for society but financially and socially undervalued.

In terms of experiences at school, an important finding is that around 70% of respondents have experienced gender discrimination when it comes to both school subjects and professions, and nearly 40% have experienced other types of unfair treatment because of their gender, both by teachers and classmates. These experiences were mainly reported to friends and parents, with teachers and other school employees receiving little or no information.

On the positive side, however, 9 out of 10 respondents have already heard about the importance of gender equality, mainly via social media (82%), with a much smaller proportion (36%) citing teachers as a source of information. On the other hand, it is clear that they would be hugely needed by students to help bring about change, with nearly 30% of participants saying that teachers are (also) necessary to reduce prejudice in schools. The results also show that three quarters of respondents would like to see workshops on the subject at school. Many would like to learn more about gender inequalities in the workforce and how to tackle them, and would also like to be informed about gender stereotypes, their consequences, solutions as well as their own rights. However, this would first and foremost require that stereotypes are not implicitly or explicitly validated.

The results show that these types of school activities are clearly associated with lower levels of stereotyping, and discussions about differences between genders in the labour market and about inequalities in career selection lead to greater awareness. In addition to this, the need for change at the societal level, in which schools play a pivotal role, has also emerged among the young people in secondary school who participated in the study.

Young people want to know more about gender equality, how we can work together to achieve it and how we can bring about systemic change because, as they say, *"society needs to change its worldview about women and men. Why should anyone be lumped in anywhere because of gender bias?"*.

Bibliography

Banerjee, R., & Lintern, V. (2000). Boys will be boys: The effect of social evaluation concerns on gender-typing. Social Development, 9, 397– 408. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9507.00133

Bian, L., Leslie, S. J., and Cimpian, A. (2017). Gender stereotypes about intellectual ability emerge early and influence children's interests. Science (New York, N.Y.) 355, 389–391. doi: 10.1126/science.aah6524

Bian, L., Leslie, S. J., and Cimpian, A. (2017). Gender stereotypes about intellectual ability emerge early and influence children's interests. Science (New York, N.Y.) 355, 389–391. doi: 10.1126/science.aah6524

Blakemore, J. E. O. (2003). Children's beliefs about violating gender norms: Boys shouldn't look like girls, and girls shouldn't act like boys. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research, 48*(9-10), 411–419. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1023574427720

Camussi, E., Annovazzi, C., Montali, L., & Ginevra, M. C. (2018). Gender-sensitive career counseling: An innovative approach. In L. Nota & S. Soresi (Eds.), *Counseling and coaching in times of crisis and transition: From research to practice* (pp. 139–150). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315266596-12

Chrisler, J. C., & McCreary, D. R. (2010). Handbook of gender research in psychology (Vol. 1). New York: Springer

Csüllog, K., D. Molnár, É., & Lannert, J. (2014) *A tanulók matematikai teljesítményét befolyásoló motívumok és stratégiák vizsgálata a 2003-as és 2012-es PISA-mérésekben.* In: Hatások és különbségek. Másodelemzések a hazai és nemzetközi tanulói képességmérések eredményei alapján. Oktatási hivatal, Budapest, 165-211. ISBN 978-615-80018-0-9

Devine, P. G. (1989). Stereotypes and prejudice: Their automatic and controlled components. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 56(1), 5–18. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.56.1.5

Dicke, A. L., Safavian, N., & Eccles J. S. Traditional Gender Role Beliefs and Career Attainment in STEM: A Gendered Story? Front Psychol. 2019 May 8;10: 1053. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01053. PMID: 31139116; PMCID: PMC6519300.

Ferguson, T. J., & Eyre, H. L. (2000). Engendering gender differences in shame and guilt: Stereotypes, socialization, and situational pressures. In A. Fischer (Ed.), Gender and emotion: Social psychological perspectives, 254–277. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Gill, M. J. (2004). When information does not deter stereotyping: Prescriptive stereotyping can foster bias under conditions that deter descriptive stereotyping. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 40, 619–632. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2003.12. 001.

Halim, M. L. D. (2016). Princesses and superheroes: social-cognitive influences on early gender rigidity. Child Dev. Perspect. 10, 155–160. doi: 10.1111/cdep.12176

Jackson, S. (2007). "She might not have the right tools and he does": children's sense-making of gender, work and abilities in early school readers. Gender Educ. 19, 61–77. doi: 10.1080/09540250601087769

Liben, L. S., Bigler, R. S., Ruble, D. N., Martin, C. L., & Powlishta, K. K. (2002). The developmental course of gender differentiation: Conceptualizing, measuring, and evaluating

Lobue, V., & Deloache, J. S. (2011). Pretty in pink: The early development of gender-stereotyped colour preferences. *The British journal of developmental psychology*, *29*(Pt 3), 656–667. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-835X.2011.02027.x

Prentice, A. D., & Carranza, E. (2002). What women and men should be, shouldn't be, are allowed to be, and don't have to be: The contents of prescriptive gender stereotypes. Psychology of Women Quarterly, 26, 269–281. https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-6402.t01-1-00066.

Ruble, D. N., Taylor, L. J., Cyphers, L., Greulich, F. K., Lurye, L. E., and Shrout, P. E. (2007). The role of gender constancy in early gender development. Child Dev. 78, 1121–1136. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2007.01056.x

Siyanova-Chanturia, A., Warren, P., Pesciarelli, F., and Cacciari, C. (2015). Gender stereotypes across the ages: on-line processing in school-age children, young and older adults. Front. Psychol. 6:1388. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01388

Skočajić, M. M., Radosavljević, J. G., Okičić, M. G., Janković, I. O., & Žeželj, I. L. (2020). Boys just don't! Gender stereotyping and sanctioning of counter-stereotypical behavior in preschoolers. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research, 82*(3-4), 163–172. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-019-01051-x

Sullivan, J., Moss-Racusin, C., Lopez, M., & Williams, K. (2018). Backlash against gender stereotype-violating preschool children. Plos ONE, 13, 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0195503

Tajfel, H. (1981). Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press

Thébaud, S., & Charles, M. (2018). Segregation, stereotypes, and STEM. Social Sciences. 7. 111. 10.3390/socsci7070111.

Wang, M. T., & Degol, J. (2013). Motivational Pathways to STEM Career Choices: Using Expectancy-Value Perspective to Understand Individual and Gender Differences in STEM Fields. *Developmental review : DR, 33*(4), 10.1016/j.dr.2013.08.001. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2013.08.001

Weisgram, E. S., Fulcher, M., & Dinella, L. M. (2014). Pink gives girls permission: Exploring the roles of explicit gender labels and gender[1]typed colors on preschool children's toy preferences. Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 35, 401–409. https://doi.org/ 10.1016/j.appdev.2014.06.004.

Wilbourn, M. P., and Kee, D. W. (2010). Henry the nurse is a doctor too: implicitly examining children's gender stereotypes for male and female occupational roles. Sex Roles 62, 670–683. doi: 10.1007/s11199-010-9773-7

Zosuls, K. M., Ruble, D. N., Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., Shrout, P. E., Bornstein, M. H., & Greulich, F. K. (2009). The acquisition of gender labels in infancy: Implications for gender-typed play. Developmental Psychology, 45, 688–701. https://doi.org/10.1037/ a0014053.