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Athens, Greece**

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**Abstract**

**Purpose:** This article presents the results of a survey conducted on employees of the municipality of Athens, Greece, in the context of an extensive survey on the implementation of the European Charter for Gender Equality in Local Communities and regarding stereotypes and discrimination between men and women in the specific survey population.

**Methodology:** In particular, a survey was developed aimed to investigate the existence of stereotypical perceptions about gender within the Municipality and the absence of awareness of the need to integrate gender equality in all municipal policies. The survey was conducted between June and September 2023, online. A total of 258 employees in various Services and Organizations of the municipality of Athens participated in the survey, 71% women and 27% men, with an average age of 49 years old. The results of the research show that the gender of employees had a negative impact in the working life for women, confirming its role in inequalities and reduced opportunities for career development.

**Findings:** The results also revealed that women in greater degree compared to men, have suffered a slowdown in their professional development due to their personal-family responsibilities, demonstrating that balancing work and family life is a difficult equation, especially for female employees. The study highlights persistent gender disparities, impacting work life balance and career progression for women.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** Its findings suggest a need for targeted policies that address gender-based barriers, promoting a more equitable work environment in municipal roles.

**Keywords:** *Gender, Discrimination, Gender Inequalities, Work-Life Balance Challenges, Gender Policies*

**JEL Codes:** *J16, J71, J22, J13, J18, Z13*

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## INTRODUCTION

Gender discrimination remains a significant barrier to human development, particularly in the workplace. Gender can significantly impact career progression and work inclusion for women and causes discriminations. According to Neville et al. (2024), discrimination can be defined as individuals or groups being treated unequally or prejudicially based on their features or quality, such as their race/ethnicity, gender, age, and it's in general considered illegal regardless of the context. Discrimination is particularly relevant in the municipal context as local governments often control essential public services—such as housing, policing, and education—where unequal treatment can directly impact residents' quality of life. In employment, municipal policies and practices can influence gender and minority representation in public sector jobs, affecting both job opportunities and local economic equity (Feeney & Camarena, 2021). Furthermore, municipalities shape inclusive policies and community initiatives, making their approach to discrimination pivotal in promoting fair treatment and fostering social cohesion at the community level.

Moreover, discrimination may happen because of different factors, for instance, age, gender, race, ethnicity, physical appearance, and social class (Elsayed, 2022). This phenomenon is rooted in various socio-cultural, organizational, and individual factors (Okimoto, & Heilman, 2012). Persistent stereotypes about gender roles often position women as primary caregivers, leading to assumptions that they are less available for demanding or leadership roles (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023). Women may face overt workplace discrimination, such as being passed over for promotions or receiving lower pay for the same work as their male counterparts (Cleveland, Stockdale, Murphy, & Gutek, 2000). Subtle, often unintentional, discriminatory remarks or actions can create a hostile work environment, impacting women's confidence and career progression (Kim & Meister, 2023).

In addition, several key points illustrate how gender can serve as a barrier and exacerbate work-life balance challenges. Women are more likely to bear the brunt of childcare and eldercare responsibilities (Mussida & Patimo, 2021). This can limit their availability for work-related opportunities that require long hours or travel. Inadequate maternity and parental leave policies can force women to take career breaks, which can be detrimental to their long-term career advancement (Torres et al., 2024). Also, women generally earn less money than men (gender pay gap) according to ILO<sup>1</sup>, which can affect their financial stability and bargaining power for promotions and raises<sup>2</sup>.

### Work-Life Balance Challenges

Gender can significantly impact career progression and work inclusion for women. This phenomenon is rooted in various socio-cultural, organizational, and individual factors.

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<sup>1</sup>The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that women on average continue to be paid about 20 per cent less than men across the world. There are large variations between countries, from a high of over 45 per cent to hardly any difference. The gender pay gap has been reduced in some countries while in others there has been little change. This brief is based on findings from the ILO report on Women in Business and Management: The business case for change (Geneva, 2019). Available in: [file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/wcms\\_735949.pdf](file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/wcms_735949.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>European Commission, Factsheet on the gender pay gap, 2022. Available in: [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/equal-pay/gender-pay-gap-situation-eu\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/equal-pay/gender-pay-gap-situation-eu_en)

The unequal share of care responsibilities between women and men further worsens the disadvantages of women in balancing public and private life, with an impact on their employment and health outcomes (Klein, Hill, Hammond, & Stice-Lusvardi, 2021).

Despite important advances, gender-based discrimination continues to hinder women's career progress. Much has changed in the past 50 years<sup>3</sup> regarding both the state of psychological research on gender bias and the state of women in the workplace. However, despite these important advances, gender-based discrimination in the workplace persists and continues to hinder women's work opportunities and career progress (Heilman, Caleo, & Manzi, 2024). Unconscious biases can affect hiring, promotion, and evaluation processes. Women may be perceived as less competent or less committed to their careers due to traditional gender roles. In addition, persistent stereotypes about gender roles often position women as primary caregivers, leading to assumptions that they are less available for demanding or leadership roles (Ellemer, 2018). Women may face overt discrimination, such as being passed over for promotions or receiving lower pay for the same work as their male counterparts (direct discrimination).

In recent years, Greece has introduced several policy changes and seen societal shifts that impact work-life balance, especially for women<sup>4</sup>. Family policies have evolved, with the Greek government increasing parental leave allowances and improving childcare support to alleviate the demands on working parents<sup>5</sup>. For example, new initiatives include subsidized childcare and extended maternity and paternity leave, aiming to support women in balancing their careers with family responsibilities. Workplace norms are also shifting, with a growing emphasis on remote and flexible work arrangements, accelerated by the pandemic, which has allowed more women to balance work with caregiving. These changes represent a significant shift towards greater gender equality in the workplace and more support for family-oriented responsibilities. However, the effectiveness of these policies in reducing work-life balance challenges depends on their consistent implementation and societal acceptance, as traditional gender roles remain strong in many parts of Greek society.

### **Aim and Objectives**

The study aimed to investigate gender stereotypes within the work environment and the employment conditions of employees at the municipality of Athens, Greece. The survey focused on recording employees' perceptions regarding the gender aspect of work, the current labor conditions in the municipality of Athens concerning gender, and any potential gender-based discriminatory attitudes and behaviors.

### **Hypothesis**

In this study, two main research hypotheses were investigated:

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<sup>3</sup> Facts and figures: women's leadership and political participation. UN Women. Available in: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>

<sup>4</sup> Empowering Women at Work Company Policies and Practices for Gender Equality. Available in: [https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_emp/@emp\\_ent/@multi/documents/publication/wcms\\_756721.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/@emp_ent/@multi/documents/publication/wcms_756721.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/return-to-the-labour-market-after-parental-leave.pdf>

- a) The gender (male-female) of the interviewees – employees in the municipality of Athens, has functioned as a factor in slowing down their career path and as a factor in job exclusions. It is expected that women, in relation to their male colleagues, have experienced, to a greater extent, work exclusions and obstacles based on their gender in their career path in the specific work environment.
- b) Compared to their male colleagues, female employees largely believe that their family obligations have slowed down or hindered their career progression and development.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A quantitative approach was applied, using a questionnaire survey as the main research tool. This approach was deemed appropriate because it provides rich data from a large number of individuals, can be conducted electronically without requiring physical presence, and allows for the generalization of results if the sample is representative of the population under study. Additionally, it enables the systematic investigation of phenomena (Kanaki, 2022). In contrast, the qualitative model was not considered suitable for this research, as it targets small samples whose characteristics are not capable of generalization and proceeds to an in-depth study for the emergence of new typologies and theoretical models, rather than for hypothesis verification or generalization to a large population (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bordage & Dawson, 2003).

Concerning the reassurance of participants for related matters such as anonymity and data security the researchers created and included to the form a Statement of why they were collecting the data and what they would do with it. The Privacy Statement included information such as the: purpose for which the information was being collected, how the information collected would be used and contact information of the person who could answer questions about privacy.

### **Study Design**

The survey was conducted between June and September 2023, exclusively online. The Microsoft Forms online survey builder, which is part of Office 365, was used to create the survey questionnaire. An electronic link was created, where upon activation, the participants were able to access all the questions of the questionnaire, having received information about the scope and objectives of the survey and having been informed and consented to the way their personal data would be processed and secured. The average estimated time to complete the questionnaire was 10 minutes. For this research, non-random sampling was used, specifically the purposive sampling technique, which involves selecting subgroups of the survey population that meet certain criteria (Pharmakis, 2015).

### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

The focus was on employees of the municipality of Athens services. Specifically, the identification and selection of the sample was carried out through the Department of Equality and Anti-Discrimination Policies of the municipality of Athens<sup>6</sup>, list of the number of employees in the departments, agencies, and organizations of the municipality were compiled, and electronic invitations to participate to the survey were sent out. The completion of the questionnaires was anonymous, through an electronic

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.kentro-kevpd.gr/en/>

form, which included the relevant information regarding the anonymity of the participants. The respondents' answers were stored in the questionnaire's answer pool, via a relevant link, and then processed.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

For the purposes of the research, a questionnaire was created consisting of open- and closed-ended questions with single answer, multiple choice and rating scale. Questions from methodological tools and questionnaires used in similar scientific research conducted in Greece and abroad, were included. The selection of the surveys and tools for this research was based on the theoretical framework, characteristics, purpose and research questions, as formulated after a thorough review of the literature.

For the formulation of the survey questionnaire, the following were used:

1) Scale on sexual harassment (modifications to the wording of the questions). The Scale on Sexual Harassment developed by Grigoriou (2010) is a tool used to measure the prevalence and experiences of sexual harassment in various settings, such as workplaces or educational institutions. The scale consists of a series of questions designed to assess different forms of sexual harassment, ranging from verbal comments and unwanted attention to more severe forms of inappropriate behavior. In Grigoriou's study, modifications to the wording of the questions were made to ensure the language was clear, culturally relevant, and specific to the context of the participants. These modifications involve clarification of terms (ensuring that the definitions of sexual harassment behaviors are clearly understood by respondents), contextual adjustments (tailoring questions to reflect the environment in which the survey is being administered) and neutral and inclusive language (adjusting wording to avoid bias and make the survey applicable to all genders and settings).

2) Degree of satisfaction of employees' section from Workplace Gender Discrimination scale (Elsayed, Ali Al Garni, Mohammed Al Rashed, & Abdullah Al Najem, 2022) was used. The scale includes 6 questions in a Likert scale (Strongly Agree - Strongly Disagree), measuring gender discrimination in workplaces through the dimensions of "recruitment, promotion, pay, taking positions, training, dismissal", and was translated in Greek and back translated in English for linguistic adaptation of the questionnaire,

3) Adapted work-life reconciliation scale (Khare & Owens, 2006). The scale consists of 7 statements describing the degree of agreement or disagreement, in terms of the difficulties encountered by employees in their efforts to cope with personal and professional obligations in the context of reconciling professional and personal life (Anastasaki, 2019).

For the rest of the questions of the final questionnaire, data from the study of bibliographical sources and recent research were used with the necessary adaptation of the questions and scales derived from them to the Greek data.

### **Study Population**

The final sample of the survey consisted of 258 persons, employees of the municipality, who were identified with the help of the competent staff, through the electronic human resources files of the respective service. The main criterion for the selection of the sample was to be an employee of the municipality, with an indefinite or fixed-term contract, during the period of the survey, without any other exclusion criterion. In addition, a systematic effort was made to ensure that the sample included people from

all the services of the municipality, its organizations and its directorates in order to ensure the representativeness of the population under study. Therefore, the sample is considered representative of the population under study and the results of the survey can be generalized.

### **Data Analysis**

The statistical package Stata, version 13.0 was used for the statistical analysis of the data. Mean and standard deviation (SD) or medians and interquartile range were also used to describe continuous variables and percentages for categorical variables. Differences between categorical variables were investigated univariately, using appropriate statistical tests, depending on the nature of the variables (e.g.  $\chi^2$ , t-test, etc.). The level of statistical significance for all analyses was set at  $p < 0.005$ .

### **Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Sample**

A total of 258 employees in various Services and Organizations of the municipality of Athens participated in the survey. Seventy one percent (71%) of the sample consisted of women and 27% of men. Regarding the age of the respondents, it is noted that the majority of them belong to the age group of 40-55 years, with an average age of 49 years.

The majority of the sample (58.9%) were married (including the Cohabitation Agreement) and 67% of the respondents had children, while 25% of them had minor children, who were living together during the study period. Apart from minor children, the respondents were also responsible for other dependent members of their family, such as elderly people (21%), disabled people (5.5%) and people facing chronic health problems (4%).

Regarding the level of education of the participants, 38.7% held postgraduate degree and 29.8% held a degree in Higher and Technological Educational Institutions. The respondents were employed during the research period in various Services and Organizations of the Municipality of Athens and with various specialties. Most of them worked in the Municipality for a long time, with an average of 18.4 working years.

The net monthly income of the household of the respondents, was €1,001-1,500 for the 23.6%, followed by €2,501-3,000 (16.9%) and €1,501-2,000 (16%).

The respondents came from different services and organizations of the municipality of Athens, such as, for example, Social Services, Technical Services, Cleaning and Green Services, etc. Regarding the position they hold in their Service, there was a dispersion, but not proportional, in various positions in the hierarchy, such as Heads of Services and Directors, but also secretaries and administrative employees of medium and low levels.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Gender Experience in Working Life**

Regarding the influence of gender in the work environment, respondents' answers partly confirmed the negative impact of gender in working life overall. Specifically, 15.14% of female respondents compared to 10.14% of male respondents agreed with the opinion that female employees in their department/workplace were less likely to influence the policy and management of their department/workplace. A high percentage of female respondents (28.65%) compared to male respondents (4.35%) argued that

very often women's ideas regarding work were not taken into consideration, while the same ideas received attention, if expressed by men (p-value<0.001). The opinion of women on whether there was a tendency in their Department/ Organization to promote women to managerial positions seems to be ambivalent, as 30.81% of them answered neutral (neither true nor not true) compared to 13.04% of men (p-value=0.004). At the same time, 39.46% of female respondents reported a negative experience of working with a woman in a position of responsibility, compared to 27.54% of male respondents, which can be interpreted on the basis of gender stereotypes and the resistance that still exists mainly among women to recognize and accept a more elevated role for them in the male structured environment of work leadership (p-value=0.029).

**Table 1: Gender and Perceptions of Gender in the Work Environment**

		Male N(%)	Female N(%)	Total N(%)	p-value
1.	<i>Women are less likely to influence the policy and administration of my department</i>				0.572
	Totally agree/ Agree	7 (10.14%)	28 (15.14%)	35 (13.78%)	
	Neither agree nor disagree	16 (23.19%)	38 (20.54%)	54 (21.26%)	
	Disagree/ Totally disagree	46 (66.67%)	119 (64.32%)	165 (64.96%)	
2.	<i>It's not uncommon for a woman to share an idea and not get a response, and then a man shares the same idea and be listened to</i>				<0.001
	Totally agree/ Agree	3 (4.35%)	53 (28.65%)	56 (22.05%)	
	Neither agree nor disagree	13 (18.84%)	37 (20.00%)	50 (19.69%)	
	Disagree/ Totally disagree	53 (76.81%)	95 (51.35%)	148 (58.27%)	
3.	<i>There is a trend not to promote women to managerial positions</i>				0.004
	Totally agree/ Agree	11 (15.94%)	37 (20.00%)	48 (18.90%)	
	Neither agree nor disagree	9 (13.04%)	57 (30.81%)	66 (25.98%)	
	Disagree/ Totally disagree	49 (71.01%)	91 (49.19%)	140 (55.12%)	
4.	<i>I have previous negative experience of working with a woman in a position of responsibility</i>				0.029
	Totally agree/ Agree	19 (27.54%)	73 (39.46%)	92 (36.22%)	
	Neither agree nor disagree	8 (11.59%)	34 (18.38%)	42 (16.54%)	
	Disagree/ Totally disagree	42 (60.87%)	78 (42.16%)	120 (47.24%)	

Interesting findings emerged from the respondents' answers to questions that seek to trace their perceptions of women in positions of responsibility and the possible obstacles they faced in taking up these positions. Respondents' perceptions on this issue can be seen as having a significant influence on their attitudes and behaviors towards women employees in their department, their acceptance or not of women in leadership or senior positions in their work, and their personal aspirations. It should be noted that their perceptions may also be influenced by their lived experiences. Among the respondents' answers, the one that stands out is the one declaring that women are reluctant to claim positions of responsibility because of their family responsibilities, a



view that is quite strong supported especially among men (75.36% of men versus 65.35% of women,  $p$ -value=0.041). In addition, a higher percentage of male respondents versus female respondents (34.78% vs. 25.95%,  $p$ -value=0.165), considered that the lack of support from their family members was a barrier for women in taking up positions of responsibility at work. This assumption shifts the responsibility at the individual-personal level rather than the work-social level, which was not initially evaluated negatively for the reduced opportunities, encouragement and facilitation of women in their work advancement. This could be interpreted as a reflection of the dominant culture that wants women to be dependent on third parties and family arrangements. At the same time, more females than males (40% vs. 31.88%,  $p$ -value=0.235), mentioned lack of opportunities for women in a structured work system characterized by male hegemonic dominance as a barrier.

**Table 2: Gender and Important Factors That are Considered to be as the Main Obstacles to a Woman Taking a Position of Responsibility (Multiple Answers)**

		Male N(%)	Female N(%)	Total N(%)	p-value
1. Low self-esteem					0.535
	Yes	16 (23.19%)	50 (27.03%)	66 (25.98%)	
	No	53 (76.81%)	135 (72.97%)	188 (74.02%)	
2. Fear of failure					0.445
	Yes	14 (20.29%)	30 (16.22%)	44 (17.32%)	
	No	55 (79.71%)	155 (83.78%)	210 (82.68 %)	
3. Lack of proper training					0.835
	Yes	9 (13.04%)	26 (14.05%)	35 (13.78%)	
	No	60 (86.96%)	159 (85.95%)	219 (86.22%)	
4. Family obligations					<b>0.041</b>
	Yes	52 (75.36%)	114 (61.62%)	166 (65.35%)	
	No	17 (24.64%)	71 (38.38%)	88 (34.65%)	
5. Lack of support from her closed ones					0.165
	Yes	24 (34.78%)	48 (25.95%)	72 (28.35%)	
	No	45 (65.22%)	137 (74.05%)	182 (71.65%)	
6. Lack of guidance					0.737
	Yes	10 (14.49%)	30 (16.22%)	40 (15.75%)	
	No	59 (85.51%)	155 (83.78%)	214 (84.25%)	
7. Lack of trust of the other employees in herself					0.737
	Yes	10 (14.49%)	30 (16.22%)	40 (15.75%)	
	No	59 (85.51%)	155 (83.78%)	214 (84.25%)	
8. No promotion/ encouragement by Management					0.470
	Yes	22 (31.88%)	68 (36.76%)	90 (35.43%)	
	No	47 (68.12%)	117 (63.24%)	164 (64.57%)	
9. Lack of opportunities in a male-dominated environment					0.235
	Yes	22 (31.88%)	74 (40.00%)	96 (37.80%)	
	No	47 (68.12%)	111 (60.00%)	158 (62.20%)	
10. Institutional barriers-discrimination					0.555
	Yes	14 (20.29%)	44 (23.78%)	58 (22.83%)	
	No	55 (79.71%)	141 (76.22%)	196 (77.17%)	

Of particular interest were the respondents' answers regarding their work experiences and how their gender may influence these experiences. In all sub-questions, women showed significant differences compared to men, confirming that gender can be a

substantial factor contributing to inequalities and reduced opportunities for career development. Specifically, female respondents indicated that their gender has been a factor in:

- Reduced career development opportunities (36.68% of female respondents, vs. To 4.35% of male respondents, p-value<0.001),
- Harassment in the working environment (34.05% of female respondents, vs. To 7.25% of male respondents, p-value<0.001),
- Refusal to accept a position of responsibility because of family responsibilities (31.89 of female respondents, vs. To 7.25% of male respondents, p-value<0.001),
- Inequality in earnings (21.8% of female respondents vs. To 2.9% of male respondents, p-value = 0.005),
- Not being able to participate in social events with colleagues, such as outings and fun outings (14.59% of female respondents, vs. To no relevant response from male respondents, p-value=0.009),
- Being prevented from participating in management (18.9% of female respondents, vs. To 1.45% of male respondents, p-value=0.001),
- Exclusion from participation in decision-making centers, trade union activities, etc. (17.3% of female respondents, vs. To 2.9% of male respondents, p-value=0.005).

**Table 3: Gender and Gender Experience in Working Life**

		Male N (%)	Female N (%)	Total N (%)	p-value
1.	<i>Reduced career advancement opportunities</i>				<b>&lt;0.001</b>
	Yes/ Sometimes	3 (4.35%)	66 (36.68%)	69 (27.17%)	
	No	66 (95.65%)	119 (64.32%)	185 (72.83%)	
2.	<i>Inequality in earnings</i>				<b>0.005</b>
	Yes/ Sometimes	2 (2.90%)	39 (21.08%)	41 (16.14%)	
	No	67 (97.10%)	145 (78.38%)	212 (83.46%)	
	Don't answer	0 (0.00%)	1 (0.54%)	1 (0.39%)	
3.	<i>Inability to participate in social events (outings, excursions, etc.) with colleagues</i>				<b>0.009</b>
	Yes/ Sometimes	0 (0.00%)	27 (14.59%)	27 (10.63%)	
	No	68 (98.55%)	154 (83.24%)	222 (87.40%)	
	Don't answer	1 (1.45%)	4 (2.16%)	5 (1.97%)	
4.	<i>Refusal to accept position – responsibility due to family obligations</i>				<b>&lt;0.001</b>
	Yes/ Sometimes	5 (7.25%)	59 (31.89%)	64 (25.20%)	
	No	62 (89.86%)	118 (63.78%)	180 (70.87%)	
	Don't answer	2 (2.90%)	8 (4.32%)	10 (3.94%)	
5.	<i>Harassment in the work environment</i>				<b>&lt;0.001</b>
	Yes/ Sometimes	5 (7.25%)	63 (34.05%)	68 (26.77%)	
	No	63 (91.30%)	114 (61.62%)	177 (69.69%)	
	Don't answer	1 (1.45%)	8 (4.32%)	9 (3.54%)	
6.	<i>Exclusion from participation in decision – making centers, trade unions, etc.</i>				<b>0.005</b>
	Yes/ Sometimes	2 (2.90%)	32 (17.30%)	34 (13.39%)	
	No	65 (94.20%)	142 (76.76%)	207 (81.50%)	
	Don't answer	2 (2.90%)	11 (5.95%)	13 (5.12%)	
7.	<i>Barrier to participation in Management</i>				<b>0.001</b>
	Yes/ Sometimes	1 (1.45%)	35 (18.92%)	36 (14.17%)	
	No	65 (94.20%)	138 (74.59%)	203 (79.92%)	
	Don't answer	3 (4.35%)	12 (6.49%)	15 (5.91%)	

## **Experiences of Reconciliation of Work and Family Life**

Balancing work and family life, is a difficult equation for employees, especially in today's competitive and demanding working environments. However, this balancing act becomes even more difficult for female employees, who still largely take on the majority of domestic responsibilities, child-rearing and the care of other dependent members of their family (elderly people, the sick, etc.). The present study confirms the increased burden of family responsibilities on women and the inhibiting role this burden plays in their working lives and development.

The respondents' answers show that women, more than men, have often and/or sometimes suffered a slowdown in their professional development due to their personal-family responsibilities (44.32% women vs. to 24.64% men,  $p$ -value = 0.011). Domestic care seemed to weight more heavily on the female than on their male colleagues, as 27.57% of women mentioned that there was no division of tasks and responsibilities in their home ( $p$ -value=0.013).

Also, women seemed to experience more than men the anxiety of responding to their multiple roles and they appeared stricter towards themselves when they failed to perform satisfactorily due to work commitments. Indicatively, 42.7% of the female respondents compared to 31.8% male respondents reported that work makes it difficult for them to be the partner and/or parent they would like to be, however, this difference was not statistically significant between the genders ( $p$ -value=0.242).

The role of the family environment and close people in supporting employees appeared to be supportive in general, with gender not being a strong factor. Specifically, the majority of respondents, with small gender differences (87% women and 81% men,  $p$ -value=0.429) considered that their close environment would be supportive in a potential decision to apply for a position of responsibility. It is worth noting that almost twice as many male respondents as female respondents (8.7% vs. 4.8%,  $p$ -value=0.429) mentioned that they did not know the attitude that persons in their close environment would take in case of such a decision, probably because they took men's support in the workplace for granted. It is also worth mentioning the fact that almost twice as many women respondents as men (15.6% vs. 8.7%,  $p$ -value=0.347) considered that the persons with whom they live (partner, children, parents) would not accept the increased hours of absence due to work commitments, which refers us to the importance attributed to women in the role of caregiver.

However, both genders seemed to consider themselves as satisfactorily meeting the obligations of their work and family life (93.5% of women and 91.3% of men,  $p$ -value = 0.830).

Family obligations impact women more than men in reconciling work and family life due to longstanding gender norms and expectations that assign primary caregiving responsibilities to women. This results in women often facing a "double burden" of paid work and unpaid domestic duties, making it harder for them to achieve a sustainable work-life balance. Additionally, women are more likely than men to adjust their work hours, reduce hours, or take career breaks to accommodate family needs, which can impact career progression and financial independence. These dynamics highlight the persistent gender inequality in how family and work responsibilities are distributed, influencing women's experiences with reconciling work and family life more profoundly than men's.

**Table 4: Gender and Experiences of Reconciliation of Work and Family Life**

		Male N (%)	Female N (%)	Total N (%)	p-value
1.	<i>I am often absent from professional/scientific activities (events, conferences, working groups, actions, etc.), due to personal obligations</i>				0.905
	Apply/ Apply sometimes	27 (39.13%)	75 (40.54%)	102 (40.16%)	
	Doesn't apply	39 (56.52%)	104 (56.22%)	143 (56.30%)	
	Don't know	3 (4.35%)	6 (3.24%)	9 (3.54%)	
2.	<i>My personal and family obligations have slowed down my career development</i>				<b>0.011</b>
	Apply/ Apply sometimes	17 (24.64%)	82 (44.32%)	99 (38.98%)	
	Doesn't apply	49 (71.01%)	100 (54.05%)	149 (58.66%)	
	Don't know	3 (4.35%)	3 (1.62%)	6 (2.36%)	
3.	<i>My work makes it difficult for me to be the partner and/or parent that I would like to be</i>				0.242
	Apply/ Apply sometimes	22 (31.88%)	79 (42.70%)	101 (39.76%)	
	Doesn't apply	46 (66.67%)	105 (56.76%)	151 (59.45%)	
	Don't know	1 (1.45%)	1 (0.54%)	2 (0.79%)	
4.	<i>I am often away from personal activities (e.g. parent meetings, school events, social gatherings, updating from teachers, etc.), due to professional obligations.</i>				0.832
	Apply/ Apply sometimes	20 (28.99%)	61 (32.97%)	81 (31.89%)	
	Doesn't apply	47 (68.12%)	119 (64.32%)	166 (65.35%)	
	Don't know	2 (2.90%)	5 (2.70%)	7 (2.76%)	
5.	<i>My family resents how often I deal with work issues even outside of working hours, inside the house.</i>				0.585
	Apply/ Apply sometimes	28 (40.58%)	76 (41.08%)	104 (40.94%)	
	Doesn't apply	39 (56.52%)	107 (57.84%)	146 (57.48%)	
	Don't know	2 (2.90%)	2 (1.08%)	4 (1.57%)	
6.	<i>There is a division of tasks and responsibilities in my home.</i>				<b>0.013</b>
	Apply/ Apply sometimes	60 (86.96%)	130 (70.27%)	190 (74.80%)	
	Doesn't apply	7 (10.14%)	51 (27.57%)	58 (22.83%)	
	Don't know	2 (2.90%)	4 (2.16%)	6 (2.36%)	
7.	<i>My close environment would work supportively in an eventual decision of mine to claim a position of responsibility.</i>				0.429
	Apply/ Apply sometimes	56 (81.16%)	161 (87.03%)	217 (85.43%)	
	Doesn't apply	7 (10.14%)	15 (8.11%)	22 (8.66%)	
	Don't know	6 (8.70%)	9 (4.86%)	15 (5.91%)	
8.	<i>The people I live with (partner, children, parents) would accept my increased hours of absence due to work commitments.</i>				0.347
	Apply/ Apply sometimes	58 (84.06%)	145 (78.38%)	203 (79.92%)	
	Doesn't apply	6 (8.70%)	29 (15.68%)	35 (13.78%)	
	Don't know	5 (7.25%)	11 (5.95%)	16 (6.30%)	
9.	<i>I consider that I respond equally well to my professional and personal obligations.</i>				0.830
	Apply/ Apply sometimes	63 (91.30%)	173 (93.51%)	236 (92.91%)	
	Doesn't apply	4 (5.80%)	8 (4.32%)	12 (4.72%)	
	Don't know	2 (2.90%)	4 (2.16%)	6 (2.36%)	

## Limitations and Future Research Implications

As with any research it is necessary to interpret these findings in the light of their limitations. This study, while offering valuable insights into gender stereotypes and their impact on employees in the municipality of Athens, has several limitations. The research focuses solely on employees of a single municipality. This geographical limitation restricts the generalizability of the findings to other regions or sectors. Future studies could expand the sample to include multiple municipalities or diverse sectors (public or private) to provide a broader understanding of gender dynamics in the workplace. Another issue, is that the vast majority of the sample were women (71%). In a future study, men's participation should be encouraged in order to have more representative answers for both genders.

Although the study identifies key issues such as work-life balance challenges and undertaken positions of responsibility barriers for women, it does not fully explore the intersectionality of other potential factors like race, social status, educational status, social class, which could further influence experiences of gender discrimination. Future research could use a more intersectional approach to understand how these factors interact with gender and affect gender stereotypes in the workplace.

Additionally, the study primarily relied on self-reported data, which may introduce bias as participants often answer in a way to portray themselves in a good light. Questions are not always clear and there is a possibility of misinterpretation of questions, which affects data validity. Incorporating qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, could provide a more nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of employees facing gender-related challenges.

Lastly, although the study focuses on the negative impacts of gender stereotypes, it leaves room for future exploration of potential solutions. Future research could examine the effectiveness of targeted interventions, such as mentorship programs, flexible work policies, or gender-sensitivity training, in mitigating these issues within local government contexts.

## Discussion

The main conclusions of this study are aligned with findings from other research conducted primarily in Western countries. It remains a paradox that, while societies have progressed and the position of women in relation to men has improved, obvious discrepancies and exclusions remain between genders in numerous areas of social and economic life. According to the most recent data, 2023 from EIGE<sup>7</sup>, the EU Gender Equality Indicators, although progress has been made, there is no room for reassurance as women still experience inequalities, mainly in terms of power, participation in decision making, but also in equal pay at work.

One of the greatest challenges in the struggle to achieve gender equality is the obviation of gender stereotypes and sexism that derives from them as a widespread practice that permeates all areas of private and public life. Traditional perceptions of gender roles seem to remain alive, proving their durability over time, while still creating inequalities in societies that maintain social institutions steeped in patriarchy (Gupta, Madabushi & Gupta, 2023). The workplace is one of these institutions, especially as it has not always

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<sup>7</sup> Gender Equality Index, 2023. Available in: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2023/country>

been accessible to women, unlike men where it has been and perhaps remains their privileged domain (Padavic, Ely & Reid, 2020).

The results of the present study confirm the existence of gender stereotypes as prevailing in the opinions of male and female employees about the position of women at work, their development and rise in the work hierarchy, as well as the abilities that seem to be more linked to gender, than with the individual's personality. It is a widespread perception that women should remain family oriented as a primary concern, while career and professional challenges follow and are often undermined by the dominant orientation (Padavic, Ely & Reid, 2020). Investigating the lived experience of women in relation to the effect that their gender has on their career path, the findings are impressive, confirming the negative impact that the gender can have at work (Lin, 2024). It is noted that in almost all subcategories of responses, women report more than men reduced career development opportunities, harassment in the working environment, refusal to accept a position of responsibility because of family responsibilities and inequality in earnings.

Considering the limitations of the present study, we state that it is important to have more field research, which will include employees of the public sector and various private sectors, as the work environment has diversity and heterogeneity. Also, future research should include other employees who do not identify with the "man-woman" dichotomy, as well as an interdisciplinary approach, including variables such as race, age, education, social status and class.

Finally, the research findings should not be overlooked or limited to discussions within the scientific community, instead, they should serve as a basis for designing and implementing policies aimed at promoting equal opportunities in the workplace and combating gender discrimination.

The Greek context both aligns with and diverges from broader studies on gender discrimination in keyways. Like in other countries, Greek women face substantial career barriers due to traditional gender roles that assign primary caregiving duties to women, a pattern observed globally. This results in lower employment rates, reduced hours, and limited access to senior roles for women, consistent with findings in other studies on gender discrimination. However, Greece diverges in that these disparities are further intensified by a slower pace of policy reform and a relatively high reliance on family networks for childcare, compared to Northern and Western European countries where institutional support systems are stronger. Additionally, Greece's economic challenges have historically limited resources for gender-focused initiatives, causing slower progress in workplace equality relative to other EU countries.

The policy suggestions provided could be strengthened by focusing on actionable, municipal-level initiatives that directly address gender equity and support work-life balance. For example, municipalities could implement subsidized childcare programs, accessible to all working parents, to alleviate caregiving burdens disproportionately affecting women. Additionally, establishing gender equity training for public sector employees and creating mentorship programs for women in municipal workplaces could enhance career opportunities. Policies that support flexible work arrangements, such as remote work options or adjusted hours for parents, would also contribute significantly to improving the work-life balance, helping to foster an inclusive and supportive community environment. Expanding these policy suggestions to be more

actionable could involve municipalities adopting specific measures, such as setting gender representation targets for public sector roles and leadership positions to ensure women have equal opportunities for advancement. Creating dedicated family resource centers within communities could provide a range of support services—from childcare to after-school programs—that directly assist working parents in managing family responsibilities. Additionally, municipalities could introduce incentives for local businesses that implement gender-equitable hiring practices and offer parental leave benefits that go beyond minimum requirements. Establishing community-based support networks, such as peer groups or workshops for parents, could further bolster work-life balance by fostering a culture of shared responsibilities and mutual support. Regularly assessing and publicizing the effectiveness of these policies would also create transparency, accountability, and an ongoing commitment to achieving gender equity at the municipal level.

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