

Women, Talents *In common*

*Women's
skills*

**GENDER:
EQUALITY & ROLES**

Inquiries and references

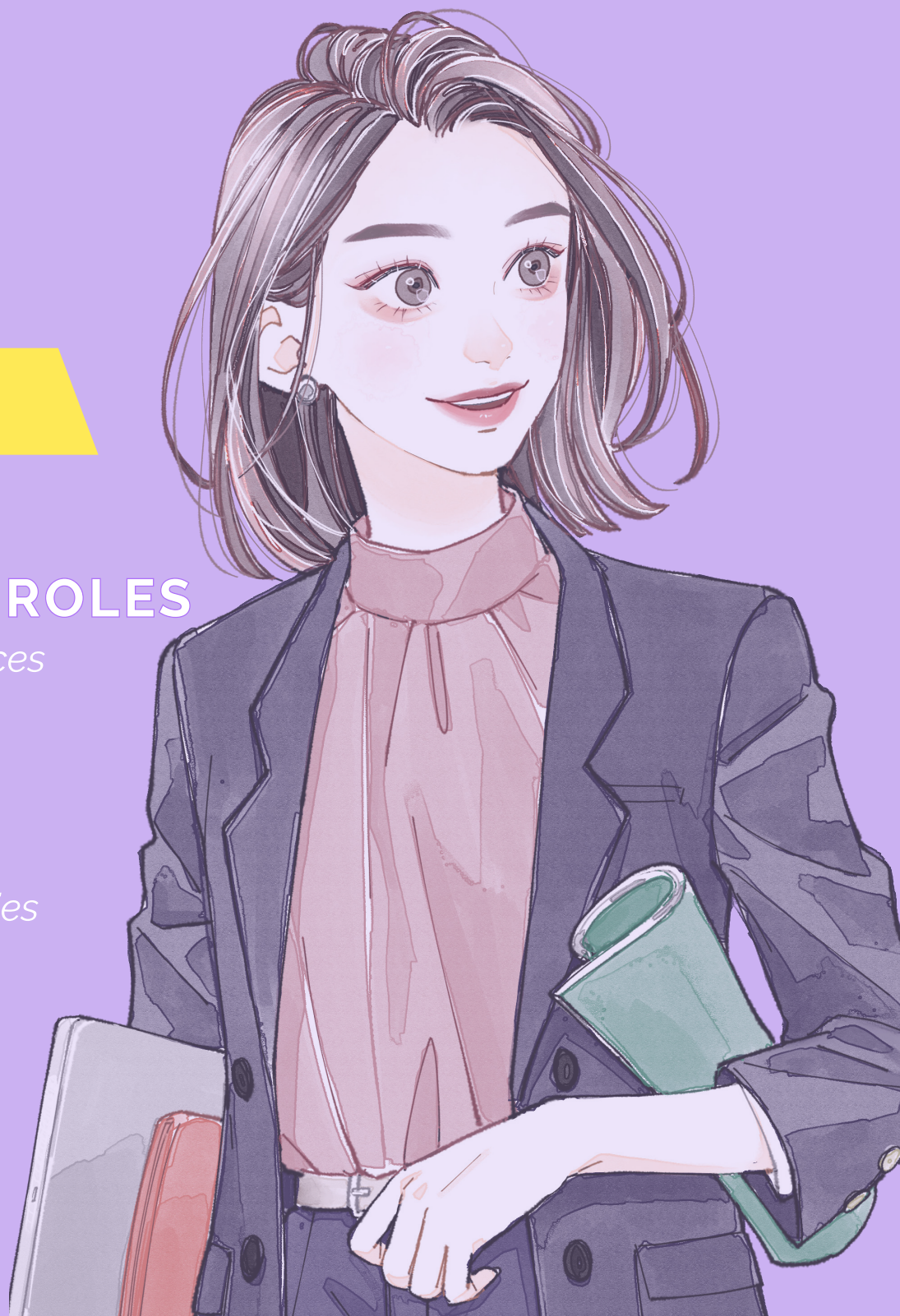
**SURVEY &
ANALYSIS**

Women tell their stories



COMUNE DI GENOVA

Direzione di Area
Attrattività, Competitività
e Transizione Ecologica



The work by the Study Centre of the Municipality of Genoa provides a rigorous analysis, based on data and thorough research, on the structural issue that is the condition of women in the Italian job market. "Women, Talents in Common" paints us a picture of a gap which remains significant: in Italy, after the birth of a child, one out of five women leaves her job; between the ages of 29 and 49, caregiving responsibilities fall disproportionately on mothers; five years after graduation the gender pay gap is over 20% to the disadvantage of women. These are numbers which we cannot consider physiological but, rather, that call into question specific political choices.

Structural policies at the central level are necessary, but we also believe that the city can and should do its part. We can address imbalances by starting from a local welfare system which ensures both equal access to rights and tangible support for work-life balance, education services, co-parenting and women's economic independence.

The choice to appoint the City Government with the highest female representation in the history of Genoa was not only a symbolic gesture, but also a clear political message. Representation is not only about numbers, but also about the quality of democracy. Institutions which reflect the plurality of society are more capable of understanding real needs, recognising inequalities and transforming them into actual priorities. When women take part in decision-making processes, the public agenda changes and so does the way we govern.

We do not need equal opportunities, but equal possibilities: the same access to the labour market a man has, the same prospects for professional growth, the same assessment based on competences and results.

This document is a valuable tool for knowledge in order to direct real and measurable policies, going beyond symbolic approaches and putting at the forefront the daily effort for a fairer city.

Silvia Salis
Mayor of Genoa

Index

Introduction	6
01 - Methodology	10
02 - The notion of gender and the establishment of roles	13
Reflections on stereotypes and social representation	14
03 - Gender equality - The current situation	17
Supporting research and explanatory references	17
04- The Study Centre's Survey of Municipality of Genoa	25
Work-life balance	30
05 - Gender segregation in education: its meaning and influence on the job market	32
Gender and stereotypes: differences and convergences	34
Female graduates in STEM subjects: better but disadvantaged	38
06 - Female employment	42
Not everything is negative	46
The Quiet Revolution	49
07- Gender pay gap in the job market	51
The role of institutions	54
08- Women's skills and advantages for companies	57
Female solidarity and "The Queen Bees Phenomenon"	66
09 - Case study and women's legacy	72
10 - Final reflections	83
Appendix 1 - Women, Talents In Common	87

Summary of the topics



Methodology

The study is based on a bibliographical analysis, anonymous questionnaires and interviews to women with important positions. The approach is multidimensional, with quantitative and qualitative data being gathered in the span of 6 months to better comprehend perception, obstacles and opportunities.

10



The notion of gender and the establishment of roles

Gender is a social construct, distinct from biological sex and influenced by stereotypes and processes of socialisation pushed by families and schools. These roles condition life choices and professional opportunities, creating persistent inequality.

13



Gender equality: the current situation

Regardless of normative and cultural progress, inequality remains significant in the work and family environment. Stereotypes tied to maternity affect women, while European policies and gender quotas favour access to decision-making roles.

17



The Study Centre's Survey of Municipality of Genoa

The answers of interviewees show difficulties in keeping the work-family balance. What also stands out are the cultural differences between Italian and foreign women and the need for support policies and an inclusive culture.

25



Gender-based segregation in education paths

Women have reached high levels of education, but stereotypes influencing study choices still exist, limiting female presence in STEM subjects. Choices are often conditioned more by cultural elements than real abilities.

32



Female employment

Work is essential for equality, but the employment and wage gap persist. Women's careers are often intermittent and often tied to part-time employment in order to reconcile work and family. Maternity remains a significant obstacle.

42



The gender pay gap in the workplace

The gender pay gap is due to both the varied distribution across sectors and cultural discrimination and stereotypes. Policies exist, but real equality is still far off and requires concrete intervention.

51



Women's skills and their advantages for companies

Female soft skills - empathy, listening, creativity, mediation capabilities - are strategic resources and favour innovation and performance. Still, women tend to underestimate them, preferring to focus on technical skills.

57



Female solidarity and "The Queen Bees Phenomenon"

Female collaboration is crucial for empowerment but not always present. The Queen Bees Phenomenon describes leaders who put distance between them and their colleagues, adapting to male-based models and hindering collective progress.

66



Case studies and women's legacy

Successful women's testimonies show diverse paths united by determination, networking and resilience. Messages to new generations invite us to believe in ourselves, to dare and to create support networks.

72



Final reflections

Change towards equality is possible through awareness, alliances and inclusive policies. Women must promote their distinctive qualities and build authentic leadership models based on collaboration and solidarity.

83



Appendix 1: Women, Talents In Common

The questionnaire given to the research sample aims at determining which are the characteristics and the soft skills which allow some types of women to stand out and transmit a message of inspiration and solidarity to other women, especially young ones who have just started.

87



Introduction

The Study Centre of the Municipality of Genoa is the public body's office which carries out empirical statistical-based research, analysing and presenting any phenomena concerning the Genoese territory, in order to best understand how the area prepares and answers to today's challenges.

In this light, the office creates publications and reports which, aside from more traditional topics, can offer easy to read excerpts on current topics.

The aim of this document, dedicated to women's converging talents, is to **offer some points for reflection** and to bring forward qualitative considerations on **women's roles and positions in an ever-changing world and job market.**

As a matter of fact, it seems that there is still a need to understand which are the characteristics and the soft skills which allow some types of women to stand out in their field. Most importantly, it is necessary to transmit a positive message to women of all ages, especially young ones, in order to encourage their brightness and to promote solidarity, favouring exchange and cohesion, essential values which need to be strengthened.

One cannot think of discussing the topic of women in the workplace, without emphasising how essential it is in the path to reach gender equality. **Work is not only a right**, but also a necessary way to **obtain economic independence, social recognition and personal satisfaction.**

While the path towards equal opportunities has been laid down, it is far from being completed. This is due to the imbalances and systemic discrimination which persist and manifest in social and work behaviours at a general and universal level. A substantial gender gap involving the female condition in various ways still exists.

In this document, this topic has been discussed in the first two chapters with reference to the origins and the current circumstances and literature on the topic.

The social origins of the gender gap are analysed, starting with the family unit, moving to gender segregation in education paths, up to gender inequality in the workplace, providing a short look on gender equality as it is today, both in Italy and Europe as well as globally.

Through a quantitative analysis of the soft skills generally associated with women, the document underlines how these competences can be an added value for organisations. However, the study is not limited to a celebratory outlook, rather it also discusses the often overlooked topic of lack of solidarity between women in work environments, exploring the possible causes and implications.

This publication's argumentative research is based on a vast bibliography, including academic and institutional sources, both Italian and international, complemented by contributions by other sources selected based on relevance and reference.

Supporting the theoretical analysis, an anonymous online survey was carried out by the Study Centre of the Municipality of Genoa, to which 98 Italian and foreign women willingly participated.

The questionnaire, articulated in 27 questions, has allowed us to garner their perception of gender gaps, of the strategies used to deal with it and, most importantly, the message we need to transmit to the new generations of women.

The results, presented in Chapter 3, are also cited throughout the document when relevant.

The Study Centre, when inquiring more in depth about the themes of this publication, has carried out some interviews with a smaller but representative sample.

The subjects, who have voluntarily accepted to answer, are women who have reached key positions in their respective professional fields.

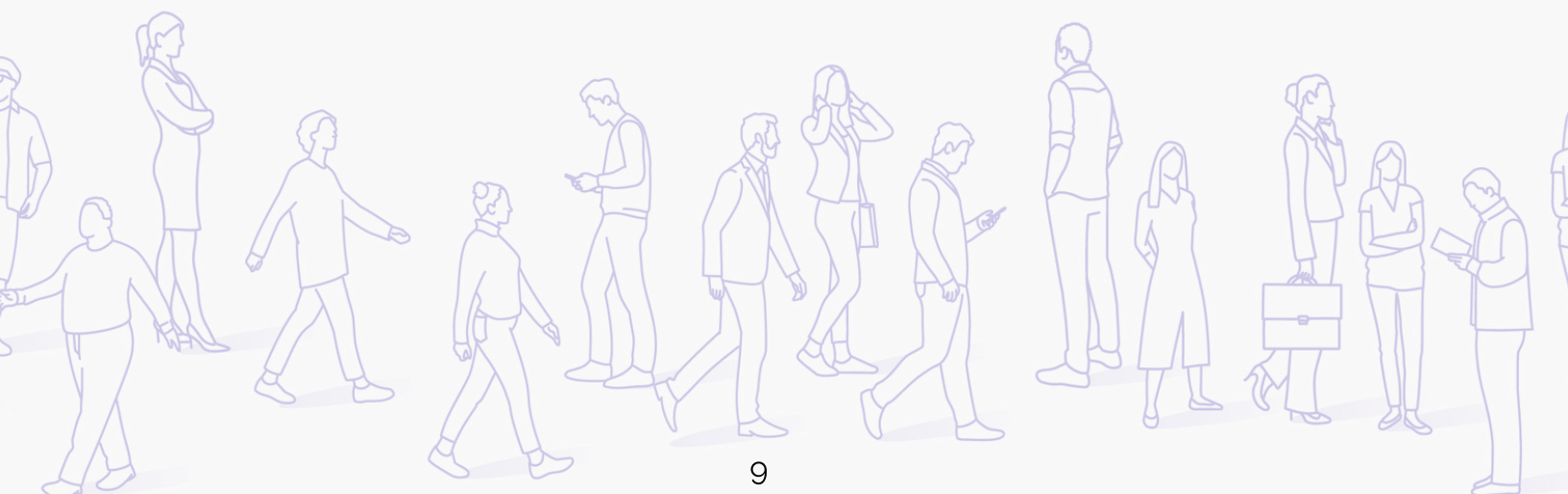
Through the stories of their personal experiences, their testimonies offer some points of reflection for all readers, especially ones who have just started in the job market or ones who are thinking about starting over, whether for need or want. These stories, summarised in their most essential parts, can be found in Chapter 9.



According to estimates by the United Nations (World Population Prospect 2024) the **female world population amounts to 4,07 billion people, equal to 49,7% of the global population.**

In Europe, according to Eurostat, by the 1st of January 2024 the number of women in Europe was 229 million, around **51% of the total population** in the continent. On the other hand, **in Italy**, Istat claims that there are around 30.3 million women, that is, **51,4% of the population.**

This data obviously proves that the issue of gender gap affects around 50% of people on the planet, accounting for the significance of the topic at the international stage.





1. Methodology

As anticipated, the goal of the document is to provide an easily readable instrument exploring a current issue with discretion by using data as well as quantitative and qualitative analysis. To realise this study, a classic methodology was chosen to approach the subject. This methodology was rigorous, multidimensional and took into account the specificities of gender, of the various geographical areas and of the socioeconomic dynamics tied to different cultural contexts. To gather the data and information used, the referenced materials have been analysed, subsequently a knowledge baseline was laid out, enriched by quantitative and qualitative analysis.

In summary, the organisational elements of the study were:

- Analysis and **presentation** of the phenomenology on the basis of references
- Anonymously structured **questionnaires** to evaluate perceptions, aspirations and obstacles
- **Interviews and focus** on women belonging to different sectors
- **Statistical analysis** to underline trends and correlations.

The qualitative and quantitative data were gathered throughout a period of 6 months of activity, research, elaboration and, finally, presentation. The analysis of the sample was done through an anonymous online questionnaire available for a span of 3 months, between November 2024 and January 2025.

In the same period some video interviews were carried out to explore the topic in more detail (the interviewees had agreed beforehand to being recorded).

The women involved were asked the same chief questions found in the questionnaire, but were given the opportunity to give more details and in depth answers as to their cultural background. The interview transcript was then summarised, given approval by the concerned party and its fundamental elements extrapolated, in order to make the various contributions more consistent with each other, both in content and length.

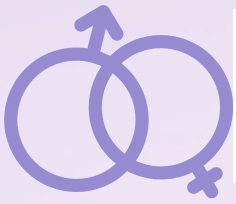
For the questionnaire the web platform EU Survey¹ was used, allowing for anonymous responses and statistical analysis of the gathered data. The questions have been arranged by the Study Centre and checked by the Municipality of Genoa's Data Protection Officer.

The participation in the inquiry was promoted both throughout the institution and through the network of international and national stakeholders with which the Study Centre of Municipality of Genoa is associated.

To guarantee transparency in publication, the content of the questionnaire can be seen in Appendix 1.

The analysis carried out based on the data was a simplified one with two variables, aimed at cross-referencing the data in order to recognise similar types of responses by women who, for instance, might be married with kids, might have not chosen their preferred field of study or might have encountered difficulties at work.

1. EU Survey - <https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/home/welcome?language=it>



2. The notion of gender and the reinforcement of gender roles

The notion of "gender" must not be confused with that of "sex", as happens so often. As a matter of fact, it concerns two different conceptions, as the latter refers to the biological characteristics of an individual and the former pertains to a number of psychological aspects, usually connected to anatomical characteristics.

Reflections on stereotypes and social representation

The notion of gender is affected by cultural aspects which describe the attitude, behaviour and psychological traits of men and women in a given society and point in time. This is a framework established through the interactions between individuals and the environment, a social construct which is subject to change and that differs from one society to another. Gender roles are thus really just directions as to the type of behaviour considered to be appropriate for men and women¹.

On the other hand, stereotypes are a set of simplified beliefs attributed to a specific group of people who share a number of characteristics or qualities. These somewhat represent the interpretation, rationalisation and justification of social practices².

According to traditional gender stereotypical views, in **men the sense of “agency” is prevailing**, implying **assertiveness, competence, independence, competitiveness and ambition**, qualities belonging to someone who knows what they want and how to obtain it. Instead, **women are associated with the concept of “communion”**, which implies **attentiveness, kindness, sociability**, characteristics which belong to a person prone to sacrifice and others' well-being³.

1. Nuove riflessioni sulla maternità: uno studio qualitativo per indagarne i suoi aspetti più complessi - <https://thesis.unipd.it/retrieve/35874365-3e1b-4fc8-a502-18a5a6d4fa56/TESI%201.pdf>
2. Eisenclas, S. A. (2013). Gender roles and expectations. SAGE Open, 3(4), 215824401350644.- <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244013506446isenclas>, 2013
3. *Priyashantha, K. G., De Alwis, A. C., & Welmilla, I. (2021). Three perspectives on changing gender stereotypes. FIIB Business Review, 12(2), 120- 131 - <https://doi.org/10.1177/23197145211049604>

Traditionally, masculinity and femininity have been considered as being dependent from biological factors, which are innate and immutable characteristics. Academics have questioned these beliefs by underlining the contribution that social and cultural frameworks have in creating and strengthening a gender system in which men enjoy higher status and more privilege compared to women. Far from being a biological element, gender is situated on a spectrum of power and inequality which is created, imposed and reinforced by society⁴.

On the other hand, socialisation is the process through which the people in a community transmit their rules, habits and roles. Among these, gender roles are relevant starting from early childhood, a period in which children are pushed into retaining social competences by their family and society, to guarantee appropriate behaviours.

The family of origin plays a fundamental role in this process of socialisation and the adoption of competences, values and roles that will aid the child to integrate into society. Those values, behaviors and roles will be further strengthened by school environments, which will continue the process of gender socialisation, through which "individuals, based on their sex, learn to behave, feel, think according to the forms that in the social aspect are appropriate for their sex that they see the world in the light of gender differences⁵".

4 Berdahl, J. L., Cooper, M., Glick, P., Livingston, R. W., & Williams, J. C. (2018). Work as a masculinity contest. *Journal of Social Issues*, 74(3), 422- 448 - <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12289>

5 Molla, E. (2016). The role of school in gender socialization. *The European Journal of Educational Sciences*, 03(01) - <https://doi.org/10.19044/ejes.v3no1a1> (Molla, 2016)

In the context of this process of socialisation the needs and particularities of the individual become secondary to the needs of the social system: the objective of children's education is thus the attainment of their conformity to social norms⁶.

It is the influence first of school and family and then of society which contributes to the creation of these roles which become increasingly rigid and hard to eradicate. This is not only because violations of the connected social norms can be repudiated, but also, most importantly, because the requirements of gender on society exercise a strong influence on the individual who has internalised them, making these social provisions "self-imposed"⁷.

6 Putney, N. M., & Bengtson, V. L. (2002). Socialization and the family revisited. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 7, 165-194 - [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1040-2608\(02\)80034-X1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1040-2608(02)80034-X1) (Putney & Bengtson, 2002)

7 Eisenchlas, S.A. (2013). Gender roles and expectations. *SAGE Open*, 3(4).2158244-
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244013506446>



3. Gender equality - The current situation

Supporting research and explanatory references

Italy is still strongly characterised by gender inequality in the work and family environments, in education and in the access to power according to the most recent IPSOS inquiry, from 2018. This research, carried out for the Department for Equal Opportunities of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, also highlights the worrying phenomenon of gender-based violence.

“Some differences pertaining to the development of gender inequality and the degree of adherence to stereotypes related to the considered areas (work, family, education, access to power) still persist”¹.

¹ Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Dipartimento per le Pari Opportunità - https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/Indagine_ipsos_sintesi.pdf

According to the data found through this inquiry, in our county the inequality of opportunities often originates from family situations. It seems that, in order to rise from the ranks, it is not only important to work hard but also to “know the right people” and come from a family which is well off or has a good cultural background. The picture this paints is that of a country still perceived as unequal, in which ascribed characteristics are just as important as competences and acquired skills.

Looking more closely at the differences in opportunities between men and women, the common idea is that some steps forward for women's status have been made, but that **gender discrimination and stereotypes are still a long way from being set aside**. This is especially true for the job market and couple and family life, especially when children are present. These two factors (family life and children) are closely related to the delay of the “women's rise” in the workforce².



² Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Dipartimento per le Pari Opportunità - https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/Indagine_Ipsos_sintesi.pdf

For instance, **gender-based prejudice already affects women in their family life and inevitably ripples through their work environment.**

In fact, women take on a significant workload at home, mostly family care, and thus already come to work more stressed and tired than men do.

As a matter of fact, according to an analysis by Openpolis, parental equality is still far from being achieved in Italy³.

Women also find themselves unemployed more often, a condition shared by 30,5% of European women, almost 10 percentage points more than men. Or more underemployed, as they are forced to work less time in order to carry out household chores⁴.

Historically, childcare has been almost exclusively left to women and **up to this day the workloads of family care between parents are wholly disproportionate.**

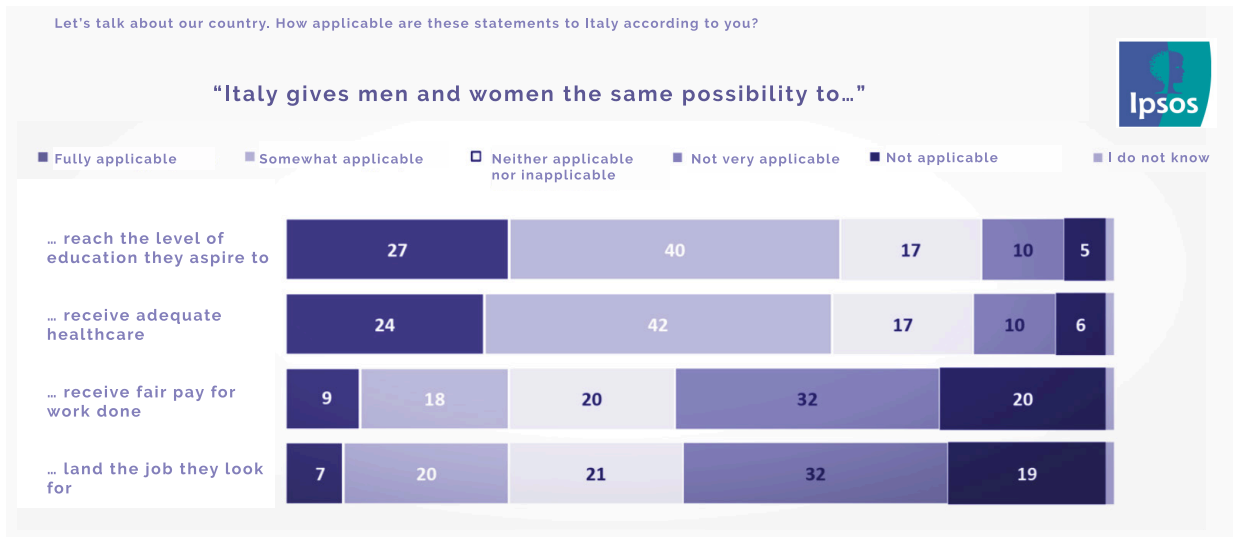
In Italy, women between the age of 25 and 49 years old who devote at least 50 hours a week to childcare are around a third of the total; between men it is less than 10%. A fifth of women (20,5%) even reach 70 hours a week, while only 6,3% of fathers do. This commitment has also an effect on the job market: after giving birth, one woman out of five tends to stop working, with various negative consequences⁵.

3 Openpolis - <https://www.openpolis.it/e-ancora-lontana-la-parita-nella-genitorialita/>

4 Openpolis - <https://www.openpolis.it/in-italia-ildivario-digenere-sullavoro-e-doppio-rispetto-al-resto-deuropa/>

5 Openpolis - <https://www.openpolis.it/e-ancora-lontana-la-parita-nella-genitorialita/>

Gender Equality: the opinions of Italians



Infographic 3.1 - The professional sphere: the opinions of Italians
https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/Indagine_ipsos_sintesi.pdf
 Graphic reworking for colour uniformity for the purposes of publication

The IPSOS inquiry, the results of which are shown in the graph, shows a country which can provide equal opportunities for education and care (67% and 66%) but which is incapable of guaranteeing gender equality with concern to job access (27%) and equal pay (27%). This reaffirms the existence of gender stereotypes, especially in the job market, which is strongly distorted by maternity, seen as a burden for women in the workforce as it stops them from establishing themselves in professional fields.

As a matter of fact, women are considered to have primary responsibility for family care as 53% of respondents for the above inquiry believe that women with small children should not work.

As shown by some of the answers given to the provided questionnaire, intentionally or not, women attribute to themselves the responsibility for care too, tending to take a step back at work. This data is confirmed by the inquiry commissioned to IPSOS by the Government⁶.

The professional sphere: women in the Italian imagination



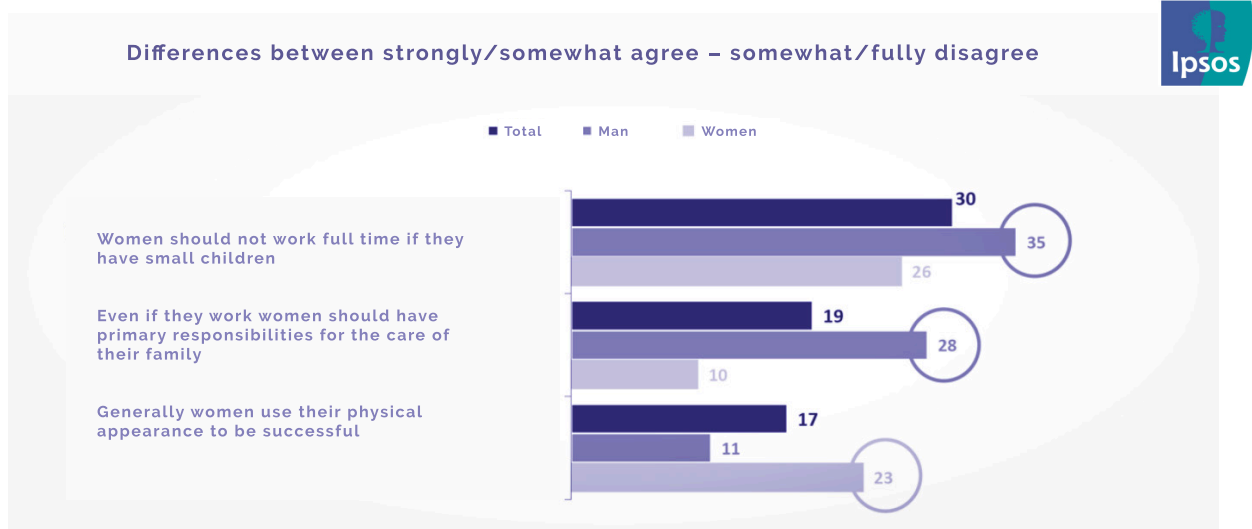
Cases: total interviewees (1.300), Percentage values
 Infographic 3.2 – The professional sphere: women in the Italian imagination
https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/Indagine_ipsos_sintesi.pdf
 Graphic reworking for colour uniformity for the purposes of publication

The interviews show that 23% of respondents believe that women with small children should not work full time, 27% believe that they have primary responsibility for childcare and 44% believe that women use their physical appearance to succeed.

6 Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Dipartimento per le Pari Opportunità - https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/Indagine_ipsos_sintesi.pdf

The professional sphere: women in the Italian imagination

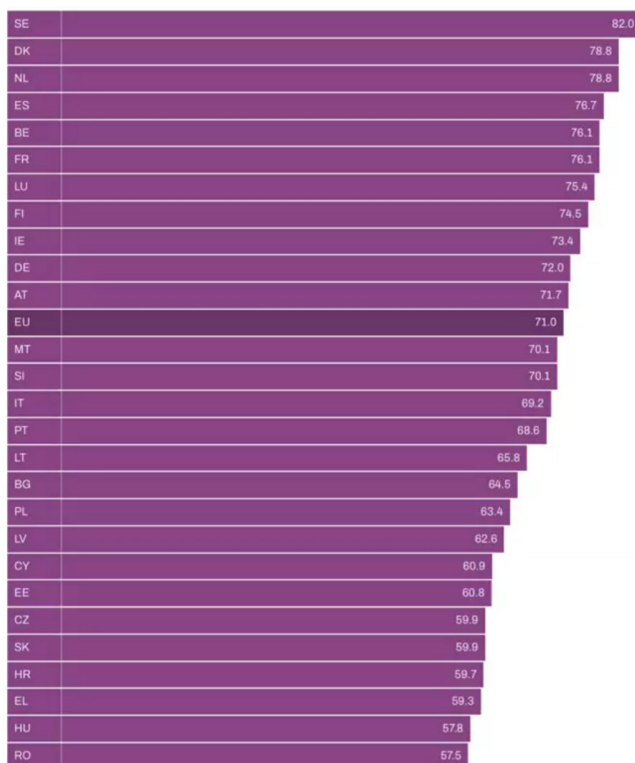
Analysis by sex



Cases: total interviewees (1,300), Percentage values
Infographic 3.3 – The professional sphere: women in the Italian imagination – analysis based on sex
https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/Indagine_ipsos_sintesi.pdf
Graphic reworking for colour uniformity for the purposes of publication

The most dramatic aspect revealed by this data is that the number of women who answer in this manner is rather high. Furthermore, concerning the question of whether women should be primarily responsible for childcare, 23% of women answered affirmatively, as opposed to 11% of men. Obviously, declaring oneself in favour of women in this specific context does not automatically mean adopting attitudes which can help in caring for the family.

Regarding education, gender stereotypes seem to be less common, even if, according to the IPSOS data, the segments closer to the world of education (those who have children, young people and students themselves) seem to still be tied to the idea of division of roles when choosing a field of study. In this division, men would be the primary responsables for income meaning that they tend to choose fields of study which guarantee higher income, while women would prefer fields of study tied to teaching and care activities⁷. Regardless, it should be remembered that ours is one of the European countries which is developing more quickly, as it reached a score of 69,2 and a 14th place on the European Union's Gender Equality Index (1,8 points less than the EU score). This was one of the most significant progresses from 2010, with an increase of 15,9 points⁸.



At the European level

things are better. However, the Gender Equality Index Report from 2024, published by the European Institute for Gender Equality or EIGE (which analyses 6 fundamental dimensions of daily life: work, money, knowledge, time, power and health) shows how long the path to equality still is⁹.

Infographic 3.4 – Ranking of European countries according to the Gender Equity Index. Asvis <https://asvis.it/goal10/home/305-22970/gender-equality-index-2024-progressi-lenti-dellue-litalia-guadagna-terreno>

7 Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Dipartimento per Le Pari Opportunità - https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/Indagine_ipsos_sintesi.pdf

8 Asvis - <https://asvis.it/notizie/2-22970/gender-equality-index-2024-progressi-lenti-dellue-litalia-guadagna-terreno>

9 Ibidem

The noticeable differences between the results between Member States stress the lack of a common approach. In some countries with rigorous legislative norms the results are self-evident, as much as the ones of countries such as Romania, which lacks a structured policy and relies solely on single initiatives incapable of establishing real change.

Concerning the access to power of women in Europe there has been a very positive increase of a total 19,5 points, tied to focused policies, such as gender quotas, which have increased the female presence in the decision making process.

In the workplace progress is slower and structural inequalities often persist, restricting working mothers in particular¹⁰.

Thus it seems clear that the matter of access to education and eventual stereotypes in the choice of a field of study, as well as the imbalance in family care, are fundamental elements in the development of women's workplace, which a study such as this cannot ignore.

¹⁰ Asvis - <https://asvis.it/notizie/2-22970/gender-equality-index-2024-progressi-lenti-dellue-litalia-guadagna-terreno>



4. The Study Centre Survey's of Municipality of Genoa

The Municipality of Genoa's Study Centre has made available on the EU Survey platform an anonymous questionnaire for 3 months (see Chapter 2 on Methodology). The respondents were a diverse sample belonging to both public and private sectors, in order to take into consideration as many professional fields as possible, reached through institutional stakeholders, partnerships and other networks.

FEEDBACK

The initiative received a generally positive response and a good voluntary participation. The results can be found in various short tables and exhaustive comments throughout the following paragraphs. Furthermore, throughout this document, there are qualitative and quantitative references to the results of this study, where pertinent and in relation to the topic discussed.

Once the responses' results were analysed, in order to create summaries with comparable data only the thoroughly answered questionnaires were selected. Those were completed by 98 Italian and foreign women and used as the baseline for the analysis.

The research sample

Foreign Women	Italian Women	Italian Women living abroad
9	87	2

The rest of the answers have still offered us opportunities to learn and improve any future inquiries on similar subjects. Some brief data on the main characteristics of the sample follow:

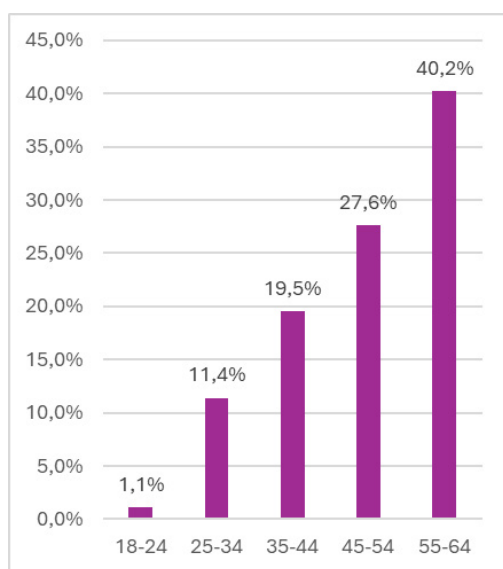
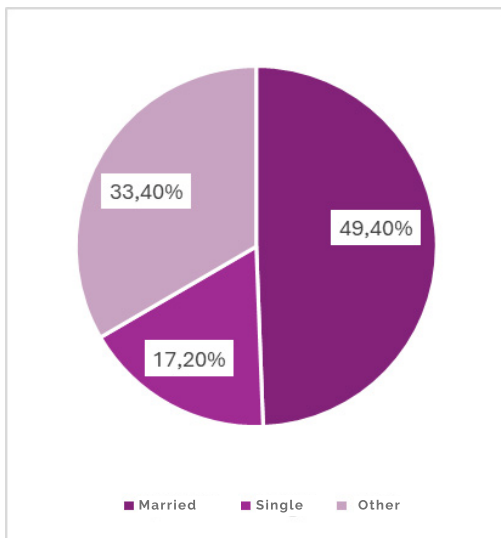


Table 4.1 – Italian interviewees by age
Data referring to the research sample
Processing by Study Centre

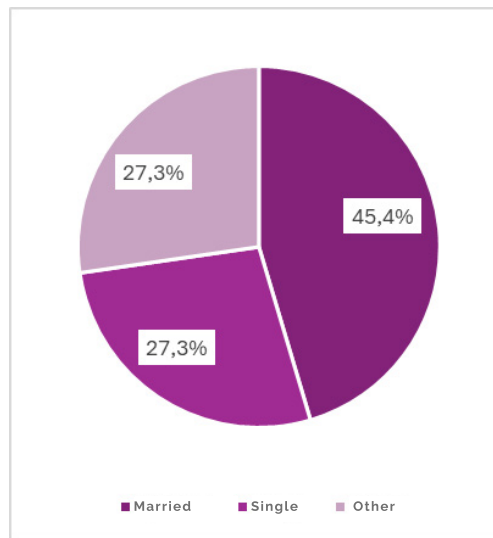


Table 4.2 – Foreign interviewees by age
Data referring to the research sample
Processing by Study Centre

As can be seen by Tables 4.1 and 4.2, there is a slight difference in the age groups answering the questionnaire, although the vast majority is uniform and concerns women with a more mature age from a work perspective.



*Table 4.3 – Personal situation of Italian interviewees
Data referring to the research sample
Processing by Study Centre*



*Table 4.4 – Personal situation of foreign interviewees
Data referring to the research sample
Processing by Study Centre*

A theme which is dealt with in this questionnaire (see Appendix 1) is that of maternity and how this condition has influenced the not always easy relationship between personal and professional life.

The analysis of the gathered data shows that 62% of Italian women declared having children versus 55% of foreign women. In the received answers it should be noted how 59,2% of Italian women have had children before reaching their career goals, while only 50% of foreign women did so. This might not necessarily mean that foreign women tend to have children later, rather that, in all probability, in foreign countries career advancements might happen at a younger age.

The comparative analysis between foreign and Italian women sheds some light of significant differences in how the impact of maternity on professional careers is perceived.

The following graph (Table 4.5) gives a summary of the answers.

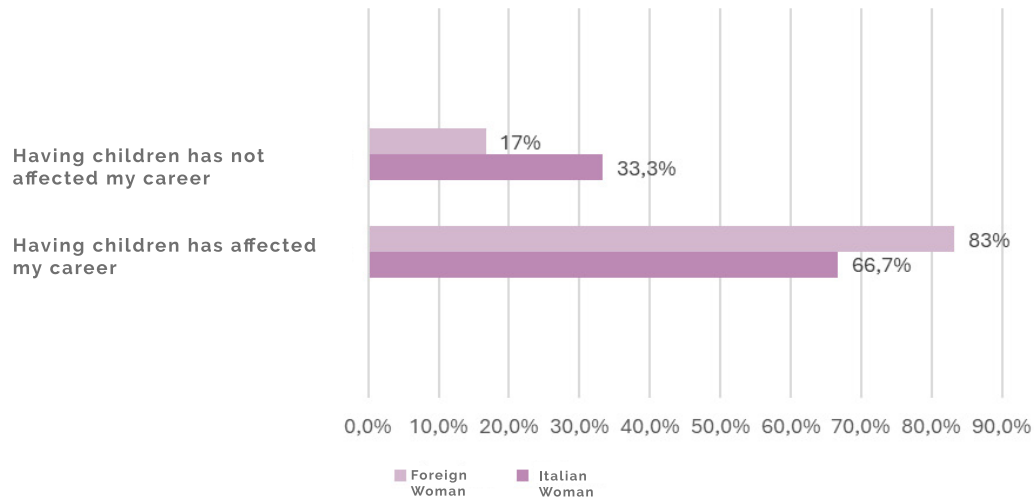


Table 4.5 - The effect of children on careers of Italian and foreign women
Data referring to the research sample
Processing by Study Centre

83,3% of foreign women state that having children influenced their career path, a surprising number considering how only 66,7% of Italian women say the same. This data suggests that, despite how maternity can be an overarching challenge while maintaining work-life balance, Italian women seem to be less negatively affected by it.

Considering how many foreign countries offer additional services to working mothers (such as company nurseries or schools with longer hours) compared to Italy, it almost seems that Italian women preemptively accept that having children will limit their career and thus feel less affected when it actually happens.

After all, a higher number of Italian women (33,3%) states that maternity did not significantly affect their career versus 17% of foreign women. This might result from a higher presence of family based support networks or a different, Italian, way to organise work as well as lower expectations on women's career possibilities.

The data on who decided not to have children due to their career is particularly relevant. 36% of Italian women stated having given up maternity for their careers, versus 20% of foreign women. This difference could indicate the presence of a stronger social or cultural pressure in the Italian context, where the perception of incompatibility between maternity and professional success is still widespread.

Overall, the data show a need for more effective policies in order to allow a more coherent and organised work-life balance capable of withstanding personal choices without affecting career opportunities.

Based on these results, the Study Centre of the Municipality of Genoa reports the need, as shown by the research sample, to promote an inclusive work culture recognising and enhancing female experiences and their added values.

Work-life balance

As stated in the previous paragraphs, this topic is still a relevant one, albeit in a slightly different manner, and an interesting starting point for further insights.

A brief summary of the answers is available in Table 4.6. The data shows that, although both Italian and foreign women have experienced similar inconvenience, Italian women report slightly less difficulty in handling their private life: 22.4% versus 72.7% of foreign women. Yet again, family support networks, which are particularly common in Italy, are fundamental to maintain this balance. Still, it is evident how the problem is still quite present at both the national and international level.

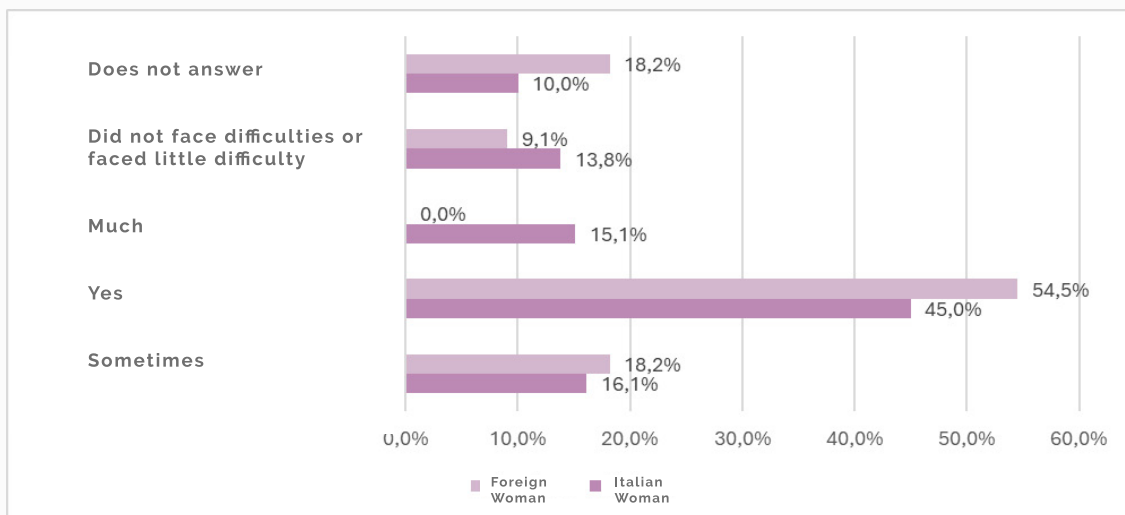


Table 4.6 - Difficulty in maintaining a work-life balance
Data referring to the research sample
Processing by Study Centre

Furthermore, a closer look at the data shows a more faceted and contextual aspect of these difficulties. In fact, as can be seen in Table 4.6 on the topic of work-life balance, an overall of 60,1% of Italian women answered "yes" and "very much", while foreign women did not answer "very much" at all and rather mostly opted for "sometimes".



5. Gender segregation in education: its meaning and influence on the job market

By skimming the data on schooling, talking about gender segregation might seem unwarranted. After all, it is true that, compared to the past, women's participation in academia has risen significantly.

Gender and stereotypes: differences and convergences

According to an analysis by the "Gender and Stereotypes" observatory, promoted by Henkel Italy in collaboration with Eumetra, women are still limited in their action and choices both in work and education. This is due to a culture still conditioned by gender stereotypes which keeps weighing on family and individual choices, even in younger generations³.

The choice of field of study sometimes still depends on gender.

The study cited above was carried out on a representative sample of the Italian population of **2.000 individuals between the ages of 18 and 55**, with an additional focus on a 1.000 people between the ages of 15 to 25 to better represent **GenZ**. The study focused on how gender stereotypes affect choices in matters of study, work, sport and free time and showed that 52% of women and 64% of men believe that at least one field of study in higher education has gender connotation, while 30% of women and 46% of men believe the same of Faculties⁴.



³ Henkel - <https://www.henkel.it/press-and-media/comunicati-stampa/2024-04-12-osservatorio-henkel-gli-stereotipi-di-genere-in-casa-e-nelle-scelte-di-studio-lavoro-e-tempo-libero-1951434>

⁴ Ibidem

This strong connotation with gender is determined by the **belief that men and women have different aptitudes** (53% of men, 52% of women, 45% of GenZ boys and 38% of GenZ girls), **different practical skills** (43% of men, 33% of women, 42% of GenZ boys and 32% of GenZ girls) and **different cognitive skills** (27% of men, 26% of women, 33% of GenZ boys and 25% of GenZ girls).

Thus **the idea that scientific subjects**, both technological and practical, are more suitable for men, and that the fields focused on care and the humanities are more suitable for women still persists⁵.

Women are generally connected to qualities tied to care, support and patience, which both consciously and subconsciously influence choices made in their education and work environments.

Regardless, based on data given by Consorzio Universitario AlmaLaurea (based on the profiles of graduates from 77 universities) the differences between male and female students are clear even by looking at their approach to secondary school (both middle and high school).

⁵ Henkel - <https://www.henkel.it/press-and-media/comunicati-stampa/2024-04-12-osservatorio-henkel-gli-stereotipi-di-genere-in-casa-e-nelle-scelte-di-studio-lavoro-e-tempo-libero-1951434>

The 2024 Report on the Profiles of Graduates shows that, among 2023 middle school graduates, 41,5% of girls receive a final grade of 9 out of 10 or higher (while 28,3% of boys do the same). Furthermore, when they reach high school, regardless of whether it is a grammar, technical or professional school, they obtain great results.

94,4% of female students do not repeat the year (the percentage for boys is 91,4%) and complete their schooling with an average final grade of 80,1 out of 100 (for boys the average is 76,5). 37,3% of girls allocate more than 15 hours a week to homework and study at home compared to 16,1% of boys. Moreover, 18,5% of female students have had international experiences, especially those promoted by schools (compared to 12,2% of boys).

After all, girls usually undertake linguistic specialisations in high school and, as a result, also obtain a higher number of language certifications (41,4% of female students compared to 30,6 of male students).

They are also often involved in activities tied to the social sphere: 13,7% of girls volunteer compared to 10,7% of boys. In their free time they participate in cultural activities, not because they are forced but because they want to: 52,7% of girls do them out of personal initiative, compared to 41,4% of boys.

Often they are also interested in continuing their studies, especially **at university level: about 81,0% of female graduates as opposed to 64,4% of male graduates**⁶.

6 AlmaLaurea - https://www.alma laurea.it/sites/default/files/comunicati/2025/cs_alma laurea_focus_gender_gap_2025.pdf

The 2024 Report on the Profiles of Graduates shows that, among 2023 middle school graduates, , where the number of women present is quite significant (60,0%), the number of women who graduate on schedule is around 64,0% (and 57,9% of men) with an average final grade of 104,8 out of 110 (102,9 for men). One still needs to remember that this is due, in part, to the differences between fields of study. Still, **women obtain higher final grades in basically all fields**, with the exception of the literary-humanitarian one.

Women sign up for university due to strong cultural motivations (30,6% of women compared to 27,6 of men) and carry out a good number of traineeships and internships tied to their degree (64,5% of women compared to 54,9% of men).

Female graduates also come, in greater measure, from less favourable family circumstances both from a cultural and a socio-economic context.

So, 28,8% of women have at least one parent with a university degree, as opposed to 35,2% of men. Moreover, women are less subject to educational inheritance, especially if it is a type of degree focused on freelance work. Indeed, among one-cycle Master's graduates with at least one graduate parent, only 33,2% of women inherit the same exact degree from their parents, compared to 45,6% of men.

The differential between the two genders lingers in the socio-economic status as well: 20,9% of women come from a high social background compared to 24,8% of men. It is thus not surprising that there is a higher percentage of scholarship students among women: 28,5% of women as opposed to 23,9% of men⁷.

7 AlmaLaurea - https://www.almaurea.it/sites/default/files/comunicati/2025/cs_almaurea_focus_gender_gap_2025.pdf

Female graduates in STEM subjects: better but disadvantaged

The AlmaLaurea inquiry on the Profiles of 2023 Graduates underlines the gender division between STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) graduates, whereas the male component is higher reaching 58,6%, compared to the 41,4% female one. This is particularly relevant for the Computer Science and ICT technology groups as well as Industrial and Information Engineering, where the male presence makes up two thirds of the total.

This result goes against the trend compared to what was found on the overall 2023 graduates where, on the contrary, where the female presence is predominant.

However, in the last few years, amongst STEM graduates, men's advantages are gradually reducing. In fact, in 2019, men made up 59,8% of the total, while women were only 40,2%, a difference of almost 20 points.

When women sign up for STEM educations, it is due to strong cultural motivations (30% as opposed to 25,0% of men, a difference of +5,3 percentage points). Furthermore, they pursue a good number of traineeships and internships recognised by their degree (61,3% of women as opposed to 49,2% of men, 12,1 percentage points more than men). Still, the differences between genders in STEM fields regarding these particular aspects are more significant than those registered on the whole of 2023 graduates.

Women, traditionally more high-performing in university studies in both grades and continuity in their studies, exhibit better results than men even in STEM fields.

In point of fact, they are characterised by a higher average final grade (104,5 out of 110, compared to 102,6 of men) and from better results in their consistency during their studies (among women 58,1% concluded their studies in the scheduled time compared to 52,7 of men). On university achievements, gender differences are up to par with the rest of graduates.

Women tend to look for stable jobs more than men (76,9%, +11,5 percentage points) and give **higher importance** than their colleagues to the **social utility of work** (45,4%, +11,6 percentage points more than men) and to autonomy and independence (63,8%, +9,5 percentage points). It is interesting to note that the relevance which is attributed by women in the STEM field to these three aspects has been consistently rising from 2015 to 2023⁸.

⁸ AlmaLaurea - https://www.almalaurea.it/sites/default/files/comunicati/2025/cs_almalaurea_focus_gender_gap_2025.pdf

Concerning the research sample of Italian women taken in consideration by the Study Centre of the Municipality of Genoa, it was found that only 18,8% of interviewees had chosen a STEM field of study. Out of them, 31,1% have found a predominantly male presence in their work environment, 25% a female presence, while 43% have not found a difference either way.

This difference was underlined also by the 2023 Bes Report by Istat, according to which out of every 1000 young women between 20 and 29 years of age, in our country, only 14,3% graduate in a STEM field, compared to 21% of men.



At European level, according to 2023 Eurostat data, in Europe women make up 33% of STEM graduates. Italy, with 39%, is behind Romania (42%), Poland (41,5%) and Greece (39%). It was also found that Belgium, Spain, Austria and Denmark have even lower estimates⁹.

⁹ EC Europa - https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/EDUC_UOE_GRAD04

The literature on the subject has found the cause of this phenomenon to be attributed to both biological and aptitude differences as well as sociocultural stereotypes, although it is hard to measure the former without taking the latter into account. The fundamental conclusion is that gender differences in STEM fields become more pronounced during secondary school and suffer from way more generalisations. For instance, from a controlled experience carried out in Italian middle schools, it was found that, when they were asked to assume the recommended study choice by the parent of their same sex, male students opted for mathematics and female students opted for Italian¹⁰.

Furthermore, although middle school grades in STEM fields are related to future education choices, they can only marginally justify decisions on preferred fields of study¹¹.

Therefore, the choice of starting a career in STEM is influenced by a variety of factors present throughout the entire path of education, rather than the single moment in which they decide. Women do not seem to be conditioned by their capacities or predisposition toward certain subjects, rather by a number of stereotypes entrenched in society, which we have debated, and by their own internalised gender stereotypes on education and professional paths.

¹⁰ "Parents and Peers: Gender Stereotypes in the Field of Study" di Lucia Corno e Michela Carlana

¹¹ "Women and Stem" di S. Khan e D. Ginther



6. Female employment

In modern times it has always been agreed that **one of the most important aspects to bridge the gender gap is the right to work**. In the Italian Constitution this right is recognised to all citizens thanks to Article 4. This is not only a formal recognition but a substantial one too, as the Italian Republic promotes the conditions which render this right effective¹.

¹ Costituzione della Repubblica italiana (1947).



Furthermore, this right is also recognised at a supranational level by the European Union thanks to Article 15 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights². Gender equality, as it is tied to social justice and work environments, is also one of the main objectives of the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations³ for sustainable developments. This is a particularly important instrument to coordinate efforts at the global level and to develop consistent policies to reach gender equality.

However, despite the progress accrued in the last few years, gender discrimination and the gender gap in the workplace still exist in many countries. According to recent estimates by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), women are still far from obtaining gender equality in workplaces. Additionally, in many parts of the world, they are trapped in low-skilled jobs and paid less than men⁴.

The 2024 Report on the employment status of graduates shows yet again significant and persistent gender inequalities. On this issue, AlmaLaurea has developed an ad hoc in-depth analysis underlining how, five years after graduating, there is a significant gender gap in employment between second level graduates. In point of fact, this difference is of 3,4 percentage points: the employment rate for women is 86,8% and 90,2% for men.

2 Corte Costituzionale, Servizio Studi

https://www.cortecostituzionale.it/documenti/download/pdf/Costituzione_della_Repubblica_italiana.pdf

3 Organizzazione delle Nazioni Unite -

<https://unric.org/it/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/11/Agenda-2030-Onu-italia.pdf>

4 Organizzazione Internazionale del Lavoro -

<https://www.ilo.org/it/parit%C3%A0-di-genere-nel-mondo-del-lavoro>



After these five years, women are less likely to obtain permanent employment contracts (49,9% compared to 56,1%), while fixed-term employment contracts are more frequent (17,0% as opposed to 9,9% of men). Obviously, these differences are also tied to different professional choices by men and women, as the latter frequently choose to work in the public sector and in teaching, fields which notoriously do not offer stable employment in the short run.

Gender differences are also confirmed when talking about salaries, that is, the gender gap. Five years after graduating, among second level graduates who have started working right after graduating and who have full-time employment, women claim that they earn around 1.711 euros per month, compared to 1.927 of men, a difference of at least 12,6%.

This data emphasizes the difference in the type of profession too: five years after graduation 63,1% of women have a high specialisation job (such as entrepreneurs and high management) as opposed to 65,9% of men⁵.



5 AlmaLaurea - https://www.almalaurea.it/sites/default/files/comunicati/2025/cs_almalaurea_focus_gender_gap_2025.pdf

Even if, in the statements given five years after graduating, there are no evident gender differences on the overall satisfaction of the work they carry out, in some aspects women are slightly less satisfied with their job. Particularly, they are less gratified with opportunities for foreign contact, by earning prospects and by the prestige gained through their activities.

The social utility and consistency with their chosen studies is the exception to this, as women are way more satisfied with it. Finally, the interpretation of the data confirms that women are more penalised at work if they have children: the significant gap in retribution and employment between men and women worsens when there are children involved⁶.



⁶ AlmaLaurea - https://www.almaurea.it/sites/default/files/comunicati/2025/cs_almaurea_focus_gender_gap_2025.pdf

Not everything is negative

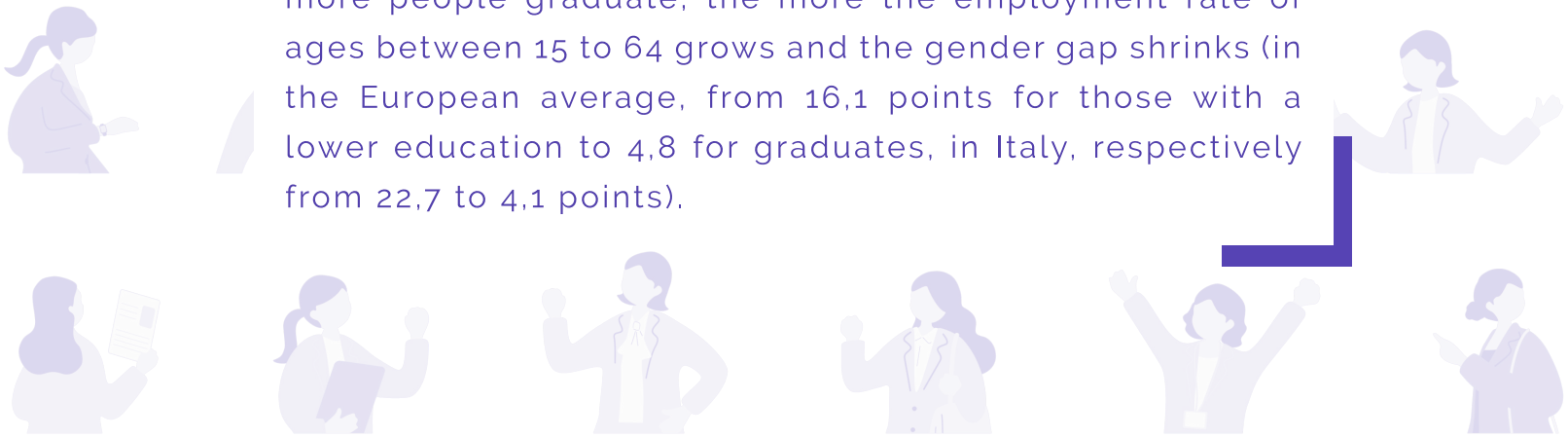
It is worth noting that, in the Study "Trends in female employment in Italy" (2024), the Fondazione Studi Consulenti del Lavoro recorded a positive trend based on Istat data, especially for women over 55 and between 25 and 34 years of age.

Although it is somewhat slowing, in the first half of 2024 this positive dynamic in the job market seems to be continuing, thanks to both a growth in employment and a decrease in unemployment and inactivity.

In particular, in the second trimester of 2024, the rate of female employment between the ages of 15 and 64 grew by 0,9 points in a year (in the 2023 trimesters the growth trend was always over one percentage point). On the other hand, the unemployment rate fell by 0,8 points (a dynamic similar to that of 2023) while the decrease in inactivity in ages 15 to 64 mildens (-0,5 points as opposed to values between -0,8 and 1,7 in 2023).

The education level has a key role in the participation in the job market and in the reduction of inequalities.

The more people graduate, the more the employment rate of ages between 15 to 64 grows and the gender gap shrinks (in the European average, from 16,1 points for those with a lower education to 4,8 for graduates, in Italy, respectively from 22,7 to 4,1 points).



Working women

A higher level of education also bridges territorial disparities both between women and between men. The rate of employment between the ages of 15 and 64 of graduates is about three times as high as those who have reached middle school and the difference between North and South, which is 25,9 points total, halves for women who have received higher education (14,5 points)⁷.

However, the number of part-time jobs is still high as most use it to balance family and work responsibilities and it is not by chance that it is mostly women who choose this type of work. Out of all employed, 31% of women, that is 3 million, work part-time as opposed to 8,1% of men, about a million, not to mention all those who abandon their job to take care of their children⁸.

The data collected by the Study Centre of the Municipality of Genoa confirm what mentioned by the AlmaLaurea Report: 86,67% of Italian interviewees work in the public sector (teaching and public institutions) compared to 44,83% of foreign interviewees. The motivations for this are mostly due to better time flexibility and job security.

Regardless of the fact that the data is overall encouraging and that "equal work for equal pay" is a foundational principle of the European Union law, it should be stressed that European women are on average paid 13% less than their male colleagues⁹.

7 Istat. Il lavoro delle donne tra ostacoli e opportunità - <https://www.istat.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/istat-cnel.pdf>

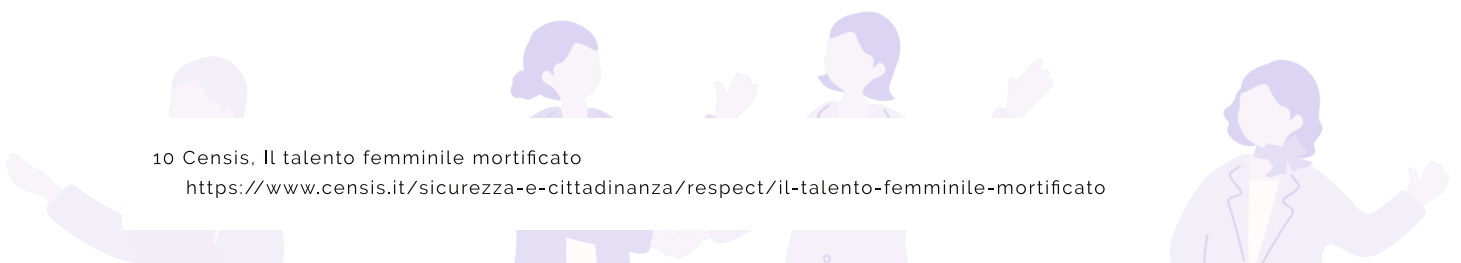
8 Ibidem

9 Commissione Europea - https://commission.europa.eu/news/pay-attention-gender-pay-gap-2024-11-15_it.

Therefore, to sum up, women are more than men, study more and more often and often reach better academic results than their peers, so much so that they constitute a significant part of the intellectual capital of the country. At the same time, they work less and, most importantly, are less valued in workplaces. Their talent is thus not fully expressed, negatively affecting both the life of the individual and on society as a whole, which finds itself without precious resources¹⁰.



Working women



¹⁰ Censis, Il talento femminile mortificato

<https://www.censis.it/sicurezza-e-cittadinanza/respect/il-talento-femminile-mortificato>

The Quiet Revolution

According to professor Goldin, renowned academic at Harvard University and winner of the 2023 Nobel in Economics for “having improved our understanding of the female job market's results”, young women's expectations are based on previous generations' experiences. For instance, on their mothers' decisions to not go back to work until their children had grown or to make “secondary” career decisions adapting to their partner's choices, the quintessential worker and the primary source of income¹¹.

From here the **need for a “Quiet Revolution”** is born, one which should **change old social models and leave space for a new female role**, unburdened by the traditional care tasks, in which the work dimension is part of the identifying legacy of both men and women.

The topic discussed by Goldin is not only key to understanding social transformation and fighting inequality but also to aid the economy. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), reducing the employment gender gap by 25% by 2025 would make the world GDP grow by 5.300 billion US dollars¹².

11 Career & Family: Women's Century-Long Journey toward Equity"- 2021
<https://www.lavorodirittieuropa.it/2-uncategorised/1513-il-nobel-per-lo-studio-del-gender-gap>

12 Organizzazione Internazionale del Lavoro -
<https://www.ilo.org/it/aree-tematiche/parita-di-genere-nel-mondo-del-lavoro>

Thus, this is not only a question of equality, although it is central, but also of prosperity, progress and efficiency. **Excluding women from the job market means giving up talents, competences and different points of view.**

To allow the bridging of this gap, to the benefit of the economy, society and the individual, the focus should be on education, on learning to share roles within the family and on creating more flexibility and good welfare practices in work environments.





7. Gender pay gap in the job market

According to the CPI Observatory (Osservatorio Conti Pubblici Italiani) in 2021 the average salary for a female graduate from a Master's degree five years after her degree was around 1.403 net euros per month as opposed to 1.969 euros per month for a male graduate. The net difference is 293 euros, that is, 21% of the female salary. This difference is in part due to the choices made in the different fields of employment.

CPI points out that men choose for the most part more lucrative careers, while women are more present in disciplines that are less fruitful in terms of salary.

Distribution of graduates from Master's degrees by field of study

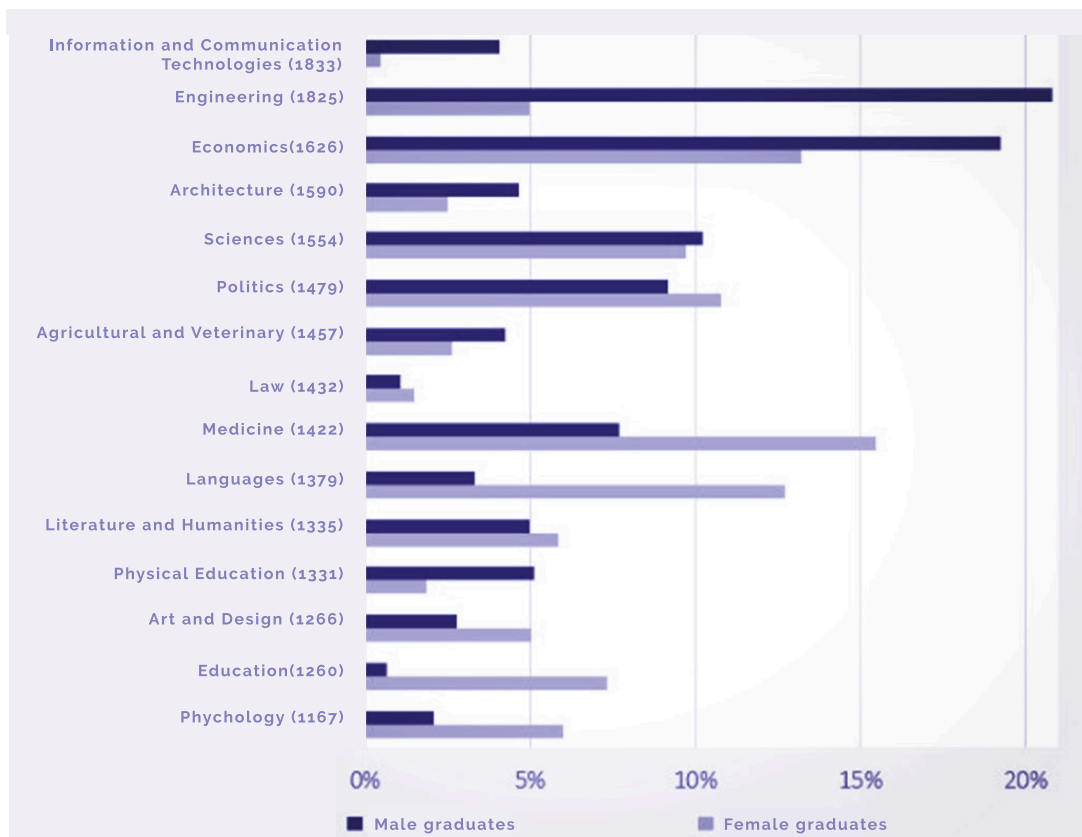


Image 7.1 - Distribution of graduates from Master's degrees by field of study
 In the parenthesis the average salary 5 years after the completion of the degree
 Source: OCPI analysis on AlmaLaurea data

However, according to the CPI Observatory's study, the different participation between men and women in different professional fields accounts only for 42% of the gender pay gap. The remaining 69% can be found in differences in the same sectors, to which implicit cultural values play a part¹.

¹ Osservatorio CPI, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore
https://osservatoriocpi.unicatt.it/ocpi-pubblicazioni-differenze-di-genero-negli-studi-e-all-entrata-nel-mondo-del-lavoro#_ftn10

There is, as previously mentioned, a widespread conviction that there are typically female and male fields. This stereotype, often subconscious, creates job categorisations with negative effects on women: if they tend to be discriminated against in one field, they will tend to opt for other types of careers thus reinforcing the existing prejudice².

Gender pay gaps gaps are also tied to the more discontinuous careers of women, attributable to the **absence of adequate structures for childcare** and the cultural bias that identifies them as primarily responsible for their families.

The stereotypes perceived by employers are often the same ones that influence choices on professional fields. For instance, the preconception that hiring women comes with more non-salary costs than those that come with hiring men still exists. Finally, discrimination can be owed to the existence of typically male work networks, which tend to shield themselves from access of female workers³.

² Theories of occupational segregation by sex: an overview", R. Anker, International Labour Review, 1997

³ Ibidem

The role of institutions

In a work environment, the main role of institutions is to safeguard workers. However, female workers have received ad hoc protection and safeguards only recently. For a long time this topic has been considered "invisible" in legal documents⁴.

From a judicial point of view, traditional theories on equal treatment only took men into account, considering them an a priori model of humanity. The original notion of equal treatment before the law, which is essential for democratic societies, thus did not take into account the objective position of power that men have in society or of how this position negatively impacted minorities⁵.

⁴ Vujadinovic, D. (2015). Gender mainstreaming in law and Legal Education. *Anali Pravnog Fakulteta u Beogradu*, 63(3), 56–74. <https://doi.org/10.5937/analipfb1503056v>

⁵ Bermúdez Figueroa, E., Dabetić, V., Yuste, R. P., & Saeidzadeh, Z. (2023). Gender and structural inequalities from a socio-legal perspective. *Gender-Competent Legal Education*, 95–142. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-14360-1_4

Gender-based prejudices are intrinsic to our society and, by extension, to our institutions. It has been only recently and only in some parts of the world that these prejudices have been recognised in the construction of democracies' jurisprudence. To this day it is clear that formal equality, the one established by legislators in legal texts, often does not go hand in hand with substantial equality, which creates a concrete effect on society. Therefore, legislators should be asked to recognise and consider the effects that gender discrimination can have throughout the legislative process⁶.

This process has been recently formalised with the name '**gender mainstreaming**' by various international and supranational organisations, such as the United Nations and the European Union. In particular, in the European Union this method was put among the chief objectives of the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 adopted by the European Commission.

Regardless of whether 'gender mainstreaming' should be considered as an essential instrument to reach gender equality, if it is not supported by ulterior measures it can become counterproductive. These measures can become 'in name' only if the Member States of the Union do not adopt anti-discrimination measures and a proactive approach throughout the legislative process⁷.

6 Bermúdez Figueroa, E., Dabetić, V., Yuste, R. P., & Saeidzadeh, Z. (2023). Gender and structural inequalities from a socio-legal perspective. *Gender-Competent Legal Education*, 95-142
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-14360-1_4

7 Stratigaki, M. (2005). "Gender mainstreaming vs positive action". *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 1(2), 165-186 - <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506805051236>



Regarding Italy, in the last few years national strategies on this topic can be found in the PNRR (Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza), in the National Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2026 and in the annual State Gender Budgeting. Particularly relevant is the National Strategy, inspired from the European one, which focuses on five priorities: work, income, competences, time and power.

These five elements are fundamental to better the Italian score for EIGE's (European Institution for Gender Equality) Gender Equality Index in order to feature in the ten best countries in Europe within the next ten years⁸.

A proactive example of Italian gender mainstreaming can be found in reclassification of expenses based on their impact on gender gaps in the annual budgeting⁹.

⁸ Camera dei Deputati Servizio studi. (2023). Le politiche pubbliche italiane: n.4 L'occupazione femminile - <https://documenti.camera.it/leg19/dossier/pdf/PP004LA.pdf>

⁹ ibidem



8. Women's skills and advantages for companies

There are still companies going against the grain which have fully grasped the added value of diversity and female skills: "Companies are increasingly aiming at **gender equality**, other than inclusion and diversity, as it **creates positive effects on the overall performance**".

This fact was also confirmed by the report published by the American consultancy firm **McKinsey**, "**Diversity Matters Even More**", which was carried out on a sample of more **1200 companies throughout 23 countries**. It was found that companies with more than **30% of female representation at top management** can achieve higher financial returns compared to those where this type of gender gap is still present. The more women are on top, the better the company runs. It is not feelings that say so, but figures too¹.

Agencies with greater gender diversity in their board of directors are 27% more likely to have a better performance compared to their competitors, while for ethnic diversity the percentage is 13%. Other data from the report states that 80% of the companies that do better on the market have at least one woman on their executive team, while **seven out of ten have more than 10%**².

Currently, the contribution that **women in high-responsibility positions** give is not only significant but also strategic. Thus, according to the Women4 blog, women in today's workplace bring various tangible benefits when assigned to roles of responsibility³.

1 Sostenibile Oggi - <https://sostenibileoggi.it/sostenibilita-impresa/la-parita-di-genere-fa-crescere-i-risultati-lanalisi-di-mckinsey/>

2 Ibidem

3 Gi Group SpA - <https://women4.gigroup.it/blog-articles/le-donne-trasformano-il-mondo-del-lavoro-grazie-a-soft-skill-che-portano-a-concreti-vantaggi-competitivi-in-azienda>

This tendency was also confirmed by the results of Italian companies which have integrated women in the workplaces in leadership positions and declared significant benefits as a result. A 2022 report from the Borsa Italiana (Italian stock exchange) has underlined that listed companies with at least one-third of female representation in their board of directors have shown better performance in terms of net profit and sustainability compared to companies with minimal or non-existent female representation.

This competitive advantage is also owed to the so-called soft skills that women tend to possess to a greater or different extent compared to their male colleagues⁴.

Soft skills are transversal competences which increase the possibility for professional advancement and which contribute to the improvement of the work environment, regardless of roles.

Empathy, active listening, ability to resolve conflict, attention to inclusivity, communication, openness to feedback, dynamic mentality and creativity are only a few of the characteristics which are highly appreciated in a collaborative and supportive work environment⁵.

4 Gi Group SpA - <https://women4.gigroup.it/blog-articles/le-donne-trasformano-il-mondo-del-lavoro-grazie-a-soft-skill-che-portano-a-concreti-vantaggi-competitivi-in-azienda>

5 Accanto alla donna - <https://www.accantoalladonna.it/soft-skills-al-femminile-come-valorizzarle-nel-mondo-del-lavoro/>

According to research conducted by Korn Ferry, an important consulting firm working at a global level, women get higher ratings than men in 11 out of 12 emotional intelligence skills. The only quality in which there is no difference between genders is emotional self-control, which is nearly equivalent.

According to Michèle Favorite, teacher at John Cabot University: "Many soft skills come from neurological characteristics tied to the functioning of the female brain, which facilitates interconnections between the two brain hemispheres as well as exclusively female life experiences". For this reason, women tend to stand out in those competences which aid in establishing a more harmonious and inclusive work environment. And the effects can be seen concretely too.

A study published by the Harvard Business Review has underlined that working groups with a significant female presence show a greater capacity for collective problem solving⁶.

If detaining soft skills is seen as a gain while exercising managerial skills and if emotional intelligence is now recognised as a fundamental requisite for successful managers, it seems that it is women themselves that do not give much weight to this potentiality of theirs. Rather, they are pushed by society to compete with men on technical competences, as the male component at work is so often rewarded, thus removing the divergence of thought which can be so valuable to their career and company.

⁶ Gi Group SpA - <https://women4.gigroup.it/blog-articles/le-donne-trasformano-il-mondo-del-lavoro-grazie-a-soft-skill-che-portano-a-concreti-vantaggi-competitivi-in-azienda>

Recent studies in empirical psychology demonstrate that, through the use of the M-F scale (masculinity v femininity), how women have increased their rating in masculinity throughout time⁷.

According to almost all coaching and consulting societies, for instance Albertario Consulenza⁸, **to take up the role of manager one must develop their leadership skills:**

coordination capabilities, individuation and evaluation of critical points, emotional intelligence, flexibility, inclusivity, listening capacity, empathy, creative thinking, organisation, qualities which women naturally possess, which are harder to measure than hard skills but which are no less important for it.

However, due to a lack of self-confidence and self-awareness, these abilities are not promoted by women owing to internalised bias, which often stops them from feeling on equal footing in job market competitions⁹.

- 7 Unibocconi "Donne in cerca di identità (e leadership)" di Simona Cuolo SDA professor di leadership, Organization and human resources (2017) - <https://www.unibocconi.it/it/news/donne-cerca-di-identita-e-leadership>
- 8 Studio Albertario - <https://www.albertarioconsulenza.it/manager-moderni>
- 9 Economy Group - <https://www.economymagazine.it/empowerment-femminile-in-5-mosse-tack-tmi-italy/>

All of this is fully reflected by the results given by the survey carried out by the Study Centre of the Municipality of Genoa, which shows that the aforementioned soft skills, fundamental for a company's success, are the same that the interviewees recognise as both their own and as their trump card. However, the same women also believe that they need to strengthen their confidence, assertiveness, and leadership capabilities. This calls back to that subconscious mechanism forcing them to affirm how they should still be implementing and put into practice those same qualities that they recognise as their own.



Image 8.1 - Women's talents, useful for companies too

The most cited skill is **Determination**

which is indispensable to overcome professional challenges, followed by **empathy** and the **capability to relate to people**, an added value for leadership and teamwork. **Problem solving, organisation, adaptability, creativity and tenacity** are also often cited as they are essential characteristics not only for leaders but also to treat inclusive and productive work environments.

There are no significant differences between the answers given by Italian women and foreign ones.

At the following question "which are the skills that, according to you, women should perfect?" both have curiously mentioned the same skills which they previously identified as their own and which they used to rise through the ranks, as if they are never satisfied with their level.

It is interesting to note that, especially among Italian women, there is the conviction of needing to work hard on and continuously update hard skills, as if they believed that these were ultimately more important than the soft skills women possess.

All of this is reflected in the persistence of a certain level of under-representation of female representation in senior positions, even though current signs seem positive. Particularly, according to the 2023 Report on Gender Equality published by the European Commission, around 32,2% of people on the boards of managers of the most important listed companies in Europe are women.



In this case, **Italy is a step ahead compared to other European countries**. As a matter of fact, alongside France, the Netherlands and Denmark, our country has over 40% of female members on the boards of managers of the most important listed companies, with a value of 42,2% recorded in 2022¹⁰.

This data gives cause for hope, not only because it is positive, but also because it is growing compared to the previous year, when the presence of women in managerial positions was 38,8%.

Even though the target of 45% set by the National Strategy for Gender Equality has not yet been achieved, **Italy has undoubtedly surpassed the 40% objective** set by the 2020-2025 Gender Equality Strategy of the European Commission.

10 European Commission. (2023). 2023 report on gender equality in the EU https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/a5bb9997-998a-4f95-961b-8f36edd1837c_en?filename=annual_report_GE_2023_web_EN.pdf

While on one hand this is the result of legislative initiatives such as the Golfo-Mosca Law (n.120) of 2011, which introduced the regulatory requirement on quotas for the under-represented gender in administrative bodies and boards of auditors of listed and subsidiary companies, on the other there are discrepancies in other types of positions. For instance, while **participation at the top levels of public administration does fall within in the European average of 35%**, there is still a lot of work to do from a socio-cultural perspective on women's representation in prominent positions in regional and public bodies¹¹.

The gender gap shows in different ways depending on the sector. There is a difference between the socio-legal field compared to disciplines such as STEM, in which this gap is more significant.

The lack of representation in this area is so prominent that it can be noticed even when looking at higher education. According to Istat data, while the number of graduate women in Europe is higher than the men's, only one out of three graduates in the STEM field is a woman. **In Italy only 38% of women has a STEM degree compared to 61% of men**¹².

¹¹ Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri Dipartimento per Le Pari Opportunità. (2021). Strategia Nazionale per la Parità di Genere - https://www.pariopportunita.gov.it/media/2051/strategia_parita-_genere.pdf

¹² E Habitat - <https://www.ehabitat.it/2024/07/25/stem-in-italia-gender-gap-in-europa/>

Female solidarity and "The Queen Bees Phenomenon"

In a **work environment**, women display **collaborative qualities more** compared to men, alongside a capacity for innovation, as shown by a study carried out by Bocconi University¹. This skill **allows for a more harmonious and thus productive work environment**; its value goes beyond sheer mutual support, but rather becomes a driving force for female empowerment².

Professional solidarity between women helps push back gender discrimination and break the so-called "**glass ceiling**". That is, the group of social, cultural and psychological obstacles which, albeit invisible, represent a real barrier in working women's careers. Last but not least, solidarity helps promote a work culture which enhances diversity, equality and respect³.

Building and cultivating the notion of female solidarity, based on mutual relationships and the sharing of information, knowledge and resources, is fundamental in order to raise women's self-esteem, to establish awareness of their skills and to reach their professional goals. The tool of 'mentoring' between women, the creation of female professional networks and the establishment of workshops and seminars might aid the development of female professional solidarity and the creation of environments promoting empowerment and collective success⁴.

1 Università Bocconi - <https://www.unibocconi.it/it/news/donne-cerca-di-identita-e-leadership>

2 Gi Group SpA - <https://women4.gigroup.it/blog-articles/come-accelerare-il-cambiamento-nel-mondo-del-lavoro-tramite-la-solidarieta-femminile>

3 Ibidem

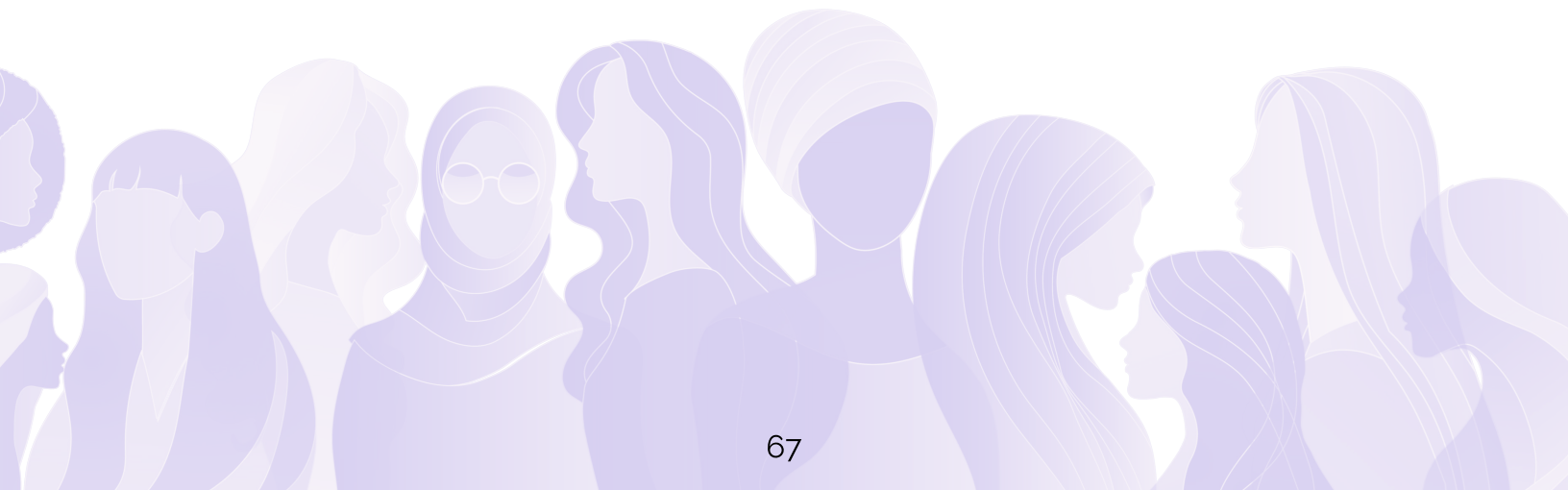
4 Ibidem

The ability to work collaboratively, leadership based on consensus and the importance of networking are elements corroborated by the eight in-depth interviews with Italian and foreign women who, while working in different sectors, all hold prominent positions in their respective fields.

Instruments such as women's support systems, be they informal or well-structured, can, **offer, through networking and seminars, the instruments and resources to face workplace challenges** and promote visibility and recognition of female competences.

The interviewees have also underlined the importance of mentoring between women: one woman's success can become an inspiration for other women's success and allows the mentor to ponder on her own path and strengthen her leadership.

However, despite the fact that female solidarity comes from a skill of collaboration which is shared between women, it is not necessarily a given.



Among our Italian interviewees, 42% stated that they never received solidarity from female colleagues and only 34.5% stated that they received support from other women in the workplace. On the other hand, among the foreign interviewees female solidarity is the most proven value, as 82% of answers were positive. This data is even more relevant when thinking about the fact that 49.9% of Italian women have faced discrimination at work as well as 54.5% of the foreign interviewees.

Indeed, according to Dana Britton's article "The Epistemology of the Gendered Organization", some women deliberately ignore discriminatory behaviour in the workplace: to focus on their career advancements they avoid what they consider fruitless "battles".

According to Anna Whitehead (Women's solidarity-and vision among women), this individualistic approach is caused by generational differences, based on a discrepancy in opinion on which values are truly important. These differences are what hinders the attainment of common goals. This often happens with subconscious gender bias, which is rarely openly addressed by women. Thus, it is evident that discrimination is not perpetrated only by men but women too.

5 Gi Group SpA - <https://women4.gigroup.it/blog-articles/come-accelerare-il-cambiamento-nel-mondo-del-lavoro-tramite-la-solidarieta-femminile>

The term is "**Queen Bees**", a notion established in 1973 by researchers Graham Staines, Carol Tarvis and Toby E. Jayden. According to a study by Belle Derlis, Colette Van Laar and Naomi Ellemers, once these women reach a position of power they tend to assimilate to the male oriented organisation by adjusting their attitude and leadership style instead of adding diversity. Instead of looking for career opportunities for their subordinates, these women distance themselves from them in order to avoid being associated with women who have been less successful⁶.

Various studies then suggest that Queen Bees tend to emphasise characteristics associated with success and careers and connected, according to stereotypes, with male figures. According to Ellemers, Van Den Heuvel, De Gilder, Maas and Bonvini (2004) in a study focused on senior female academics in Italy, these subjects recognise in themselves masculine traits, sometimes more masculine than their male counterparts: assertiveness, competitiveness, propensity for risk.

Similar studies carried out in other campuses in Europe have yielded similar results⁷. The "Academic Women: a study in the Queen Bee Phenomenon" written by Manoel Bastos Gomes Neto, Rebeca de Rocha Grangeiro and Catherine Esnard, focused on female workers from Brazil showing that women in leadership positions are very focused on work, have masculine behaviours, deny the existence of gender discrimination and focus on meritocracy⁸.

6 The Queen bee phenomenon: Why womwn leaders distance themselves from junior women – Belle Derks, Colette Van Laar, Naomi Ellemers -The leadership Quarterly 27 (2016)
<https://ppw.kuleuven.be/cscp/documents/artikels-colette/the-queen-bee-phenomenon.pdf>

7 British Journal of Social Psuchology(2004) The underrepresentation of women in science: Differential commitment or the Queen-bee syndrome? Naomi Ellemers, Henriette van den Heuvel, Dick de Gilder, Anne Maass4 and Alessandra Bonvini

8 Hal Operrn Science Academic Women: a study in the Queen Bee Phenomenon – Manoel Bastos Gomes Neto, Rebeca da Rocha Grangero, Catherine Esnard - <https://shs.hal.science/halshs-03479641/document>

This study, carried out in Brazilian universities and focusing mostly on STEM faculties, also shows that women in high positions in this field are few and exposed, at least occasionally, to sexist interactions with male colleagues.

The symbol of the ideal scientist as someone exclusively dedicated to research with no personal distractions (such as childcare), the meritocracy myth as the main driver of academic excellence (Van de Brink & Benschop, 2012) and the vertical organisational hierarchy are highly responsible for the creation and perpetuation of gender inequality in academia. Indeed, given the frequent inability to focus exclusively on their career (as they shoulder the responsibility of family care), women face difficulties with professional advancements and when looking for research grants.

The same phenomena have been found in countries such as the Netherlands and even Finland, generally recognised as a positive reference point for gender equality. However, the study does underline that the Queen Bee behaviour is not a female biological characteristic, rather a consequence of the negative experiences tied to gender discrimination that women have to tolerate in a work environment dominated by men⁹.

9 Hal Operr Science Academic Women: a study in the Queen Bee Phenomenon – Manoel Bastos Gomes Neto, Rebeca da Rocha Grangero, Catherine Esnard - <https://shs.hal.science/halshs-03479641/document>

On one hand, Queen Bees tend to identify with men and to embody traits which, according to society, characterise men. On the other, according to other studies (Derks, Ellemers et al. 2011), young female employees perceive women in senior positions as people who have distanced themselves from their gender identity and younger women. Once they have reached power, these women prove themselves to be more masculine, but, oddly enough, do not distance themselves from young male employees or women with equivalent positions and success¹⁰.

This contradiction explains the reason why, in many states, recruitment gender quotas based on the assumption that placing women in senior positions at prevalently male companies would automatically aid younger women's opportunities, did not have the expected results¹¹.

It is evident that a work structure built by and for men leaves few options for women: conforming to male behaviour to try and reach professional success, thus alienating oneself, or abandoning the competition altogether. Be that as it may, the road of collaboration and mentorship still exists, but it is up to women to take the first step.

10 Gender-bias primes elicit queen-bee responses among senior policewomen- Belle Derks 1, Colette Van Laar, Naomi Ellemers, Kim de Groot 2011

11 The Queen bee phenomenon: Why womwn leaders distance themselves from junior women – Belle Derks, Colette Van Laar, Naomi Ellemers -The leadership Quarterly 27 (2016)
<https://ppw.kuleuven.be/cscp/documents/artikels-colette/the-queen-bee-phenomenon.pdf>



9. Case Studies and women's legacy



To demonstrate what was written, the Study Centre has carried out **8 in-depth interviews in an intergenerational summary of experiences and visions** with Italian and foreign women who have **successfully fulfilled their potential**.

The interviews, carried out online through video calls, were conversations which followed the spirit of the same survey questionnaire mentioned in the premise and methodology.

Our interviewees were asked to expand on the story, the narration of the **individual experience as experienced in work environments** compared to the themes addressed by the publication: **discrimination, female solidarity, career choices**. Finally, they were asked to freely **send a message to other women**, envisioning talking to both those who are starting to take their first steps in the job market and those who might be finding themselves reconsidering or needing to change course.

From the women we met, the female *in common* talents stand out as a combination of attitudes, aspirations and potentiality expressed in a unique and often unconventional way, influenced by social and cultural conditions in which our interviewees live and operate.

Their testimonies can thus be seen as an easily read Legacy. We hope they can somehow make young girls, who will be tomorrow's women, readers who want to start over and readers interested in such a complex but well-treated issue, be more aware of their capabilities.

As an editorial choice the summary of the interview and experiences we presented only with the name of the interviewee¹. The abstracts underline the difficulties and opportunities that they have encountered, what do they think are women's common talents and weaknesses and which suggestions and message they want to share, as a sort of baton to hand over to other women in a race towards equality.



¹ Each interviewee gave their express and informed consent in accordance with the GDPR.

Amanda

English television journalist



Profile

Freelance of an important British broadcaster, she has had the luck of acting as a moderator in various types of debates on themes of all kinds. She stated that, in the early 90s, she met several "Queen Bees", who were tough, not very supportive and often stricter than men.

Story

However, she maintains that there are signs of a positive change and finds that, today, there is way more female solidarity, especially among younger generations.

The skills that Amanda attributes to women as common talents are the same which have been cited in the previous paragraphs: **inclusivity, empathy, multitasking, ability to collaborate**. Amanda, in describing female leaders, talks about being **solution oriented but having a mediating stance**, leading to an **empathetic form of leadership**.

Women's adversities have not been totally overcome: **to this day, family can still slow down a career** and going back to work after maternity leave can still be difficult, although it can be done.

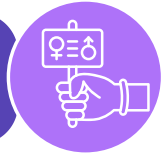
Message

The message of hope and trust that Amanda wanted to leave for younger generations is a precise and detailed one:

- never cry in the office: you need to keep calm and never be perceived as weak;
- follow your passions even at work: passion fuels self-confidence;
- **be assertive even when you are willing to negotiate**: you need to be able to fight for your worth and for your compensation too;
- do not be afraid: ask for more. The gender gap might still exist, but women have the same competences as men and deserve equal treatment.

Annelies

Policy Officer on gender equality, diversity and migration at Conseil des Communes et Régions d'Europe



Profile

She studied political science as well as international and diplomatic relations, she earned her degree in Canada and took an interest in the very themes which have been explored in this study. Following that, she worked in various non-governmental organisations and at the European Commission.

Story

Throughout her tale she told us that she knew about the “Queen Bee” phenomenon, but that she also interprets it as a defensive reaction to a competitive work environment dominated by men in which women need to fight on equal terms. For her, this behaviour, while emblematic, must be understood, denounced and overcome through the promotion of a culture of collective empowerment instead of one of competition. According to her, the gender pay gap in Belgium persists, although in a more contained manner compared to other countries.

Women’s competences are unique both in the soft and hard sphere so she invites women not to limit themselves to imitating male styles of leadership, but rather to **create a new feminine style, capable of integrating skills which are traditionally considered to be male with a personal touch**. Even in her personal mentorship experience, both sponsorship between women and role models are a fundamental factor to promote gender equality in workplaces.

She received female support, both at work and in her personal life, but she stressed how she also received solidarity from male colleagues, a sign of ongoing cultural change.

Message

Her message to female generations consists in **enhancing one’s competences, occupying the space that they desire, without fear, doing it their way by using all abilities at their disposal, even traditionally male ones, without adapting to an existing model but creating a new more equal, inclusive and authentically female one**.

Carolina

Head of Policy at
Medcities Organization



Profile

A lawyer, she soon discovered a great passion for nature and biodiversity. Her choice to study law was somewhat influenced by her family, despite being given total freedom of choice in deciding her field of study. As a matter of fact, various of her family members were lawyers, which is why she chose to follow that path and joined a law firm, just to immediately understand it was not to her liking.

Story

She thus decided to follow her passion and join an environmental organisation in the Netherlands, where she worked on legislation concerning marine coasts. She did this by collaborating with Eastern Europe and living in Russia first and then in the Mediterranean area later, in Barcelona, where, thanks to the support from her coordinator in Russia, she opened a unit of which she is now a Director.

In her experience, she states that she had excellent relationships with her male and female colleagues, although it was mostly women who supported and encouraged her. She also underlines that the no profit sector, in which she has always worked, is generally more collaborative and less competitive. Consequently, it is less likely to find gender gap dynamics, which create Queen bee phenomena in other workplaces. **According to her, women are generally more collaborative than men and more oriented towards consensus in leadership.** They often use creativity to solve problems and are capable of handling multiple things at the same time.

In her experience, women are more empathetic, a fundamental trait in managing a team, and more tenacious and persistent than men, as they must jump over more hurdles to establish themselves. Having been through key learning moments on maintaining work-life balance, due to a lack of support system, when she reached a position of power she promoted various types of work flexibility for parents and caregivers, to support wellbeing in the team.

Message

Carolina's message is clear: she appeals to **women's courage in facing opportunities which might sometimes look too risky and in not letting themselves be crushed by the prejudices of social and family pressures. Self-esteem and confidence in oneself and one's preparation and the key to success.**

Chiara

Italian aerospace engineer



Profile

Graduated at Padova, she completed her PhD in the United Kingdom where she had the opportunity to dedicate herself to space, the field she was interested in. This opportunity was pointed out to her by a network of hers. After a period at the Imperial College with a physics group, she moved to MDA Space, a Canadian company. Here, after a period as junior manager she became a project manager.

Story

She was also not subject to conditioning as to her choice of field, even though the field is generally seen as male, also thanks to a familiar family background which pushed her to follow her passions, as those would give her the strength to surpass all obstacles.

Her work environment is traditionally dominated by men: at the beginning she was one of few women in a team of 25 men. However, now female presence has grown and there are women in the company's key positions, a company which she describes as transparent and inclusive, where there have not been any "Queen Bee" phenomena, although she does recognise that the phenomenon exists. As mentioned in our study, she also underlines the existence of subconscious prejudice even between women.

According to her, her success and women's in general is grounded in her abilities to conduct good **professional networking, especially female, and an open-mindedness** mindedness which allowed her to throw herself in new challenges and to understand and live with different ways of thinking. For her, constant learning is essential and flexibility and strategic vision are a must to further one's career.

Message

So her message to new generations of women is transformed in key works: courage, open-mindedness, self-confidence and networking.

Francesca

Italian sailor



Profile

An internationally known athlete, she confirms straight away that sports, especially at the managerial and technical levels (trainers, federal executives), are still very male centred.

Story

She has not met Queen Bees, but, according to her, men are more supportive of each other, creating support systems, so-called "boy clubs", while women do not show this type of mutual help, often out of fear of losing what they have gained.

Still, Francesca has been working first hand, using her visibility to help other female sailors, offering support and pointing out opportunities. **From her words it shows that women have the same organisation and leadership abilities of men, but that they do not make use of them. In her world they feel a bit set aside and, in some way, they are not determined enough. It is often them, says Francesca, who hold us back.**

Today she lives in the United States with her family and is reconciling motherhood with sports life, although she does recognise that she waited a bit before choosing to have a child, in order not to stop her career. However, today she is seeing a positive change: many athletes can reconcile professional and family life also due a greater support by federations and sponsors.

Message

After her experience Francesca leaves this message. **With her kindness she advises women not to limit themselves, to be resilient and to not be discouraged by rejections. "Belive in yourself and do not get discouraged by stereotypes and societal pressures: even in sport, women should feel free to choose and to aspire to senior positions".**

Cecilia

Entrepreneur in the fashion field



Profile

Unmarried, with no children, she straightaway says that she had been conditioned by her family when choosing a field of study, as her father believed that women should not work. Instead of studying law, she was pushed towards a degree in Modern Foreign Languages and Literature.

Story

She underlines that, even after her degree, her family's conditioning has kept affecting her choices: after her PhD she found herself giving up an opportunity to go teach abroad. Unsatisfied by her career as a teacher in a lower secondary school, she took a shot in the dark and decided to become the owner in a franchise shop in the fashion field, going against everybody's advice and leaving her permanent job. The key to this change was **a moment of awareness of her own worth**, the recognition of a new her, brave and determined. The qualities which Cecilia draws upon are **determination and courage**.

The fashion world is female for the most part, but senior positions are usually held by men and it is still difficult for women to reach them. Furthermore, Cecilia has found less solidarity between women and more jealousy of those who have made it. Still, she is **convinced that solidarity between women could help them rise up**. After her experience, Cecilia leaves us a **precious message, that to remain feminine, to not take up masculine traits to emerge, to take advantage of one's talents: will, determination and multitasking**. Even when dressing, it is important to know how to balance rigorousness with femininity, but to never set aside such an important dimension.

In this case, she pointed out a criticality herself. Often, it is women in the first place who do not believe in themselves and take steps back, often crushed by the weight of a family or by a lack of support from those who surround her

Message

Her message is strong and significant: **believe in yourselves, try to follow your aspirations, fight stereotypes, keep your values and be ready for sacrifice, which is at the basis of any conquest both for men and women.**

Giada

Entrepreneur in the tourism field



Profile

She has a company of her own, a tour operator and an all-female team, the realisation of a dream she has worked hard for. She declares herself extremely convinced of the fact that it is not only important to try but also to do one's utmost, as often it is us who affect our success negatively, by having a defeatist attitude.

Story

Especially when you work in your own company, you need to be the one to raise standards, to set goals and aim high. She organised an Academy on luxury tourism where she teaches and learns at the same time. Giada believes in a leadership based on presence and listening, on a type of authority which is born from trust and not control.

Networking, according to her, is fundamental, as it creates opportunities to meet, grow and to carry out business. **Continuing to learn is also indispensable** for everyone, both new hires and those who have been in the business for a while. The world is moving quickly and we need to keep up.

Becoming a mother also helped her become the entrepreneur that she is today, maternity was not a limit, rather it **taught her to handle surprises, to organise every moment with lucidity**, but, most of all, to attentively choose where to put her energy. Giada tries to promote collaboration and avoids competition: when there is **respect and sharing, work becomes a powerful fluid**.

In her team of women all have the opportunity to express themselves and grow on the basis of merit, talent and determination. Thus inclusivity, sharing, organisation capabilities are the qualities of her all-female team.

Message

Her message for new generations is: **"Be determined, dare to network with each other and collaborate. Aim for the stars and you'll reach the top"**.



Profile

She studied industrial design, did a course on architectural restoration but then chose a career tied to computer science. She knew how to take advantage of the moment: during the pandemic, when the demand for online shops was more significant, she figured it could be a viable road. So she took her personal project (a website in which she showed the items of the shops whose website she managed) and made it into a startup and a career.

Story

Determined, aware of her identity, always ready to learn, according to Octavia these are the defining characteristics of her success. **Networking is important** for professional growth and can be **essential for women when aiming for top positions**. To this day the world of start ups is mostly male: all the founders are male, there are no women on boards and the venture capital is entirely male. All of this creates a significant disadvantage to women as they often see their projects go unfinanced as men, due to their own prejudices, tend to mostly trust other men.

The model of **Female leadership** exists and is different from the male one, not worse or better, **simply different** and there is no need for women to set aside their own femininity to be leaders. Women are "**antifragile**": resilience is that mechanical property which brings you back to your original state after experiencing a difficulty, while antifragility creates new roads after weathering a storm, helping you grow and find new configurations. Women evolve during difficulties thanks to **resilience** making it an important skill. Regardless of all the effort by women, the inequality of family burden still exists and often women succumb to the combined weight of family and work, sometimes giving up before even starting, too afraid of receiving no support. Family life should not be a weight on women's career, rather it should be organised in a way as to be supportive of all its components while companies and businesses should create policies in support of it.

Message

Her message to younger generations is that of **being somewhat selfish, to affirm themselves as individuals in the first place and then to be collaborative and supportive with others. One needs to make their own choices regardless of the judgements of who surrounds us and try.**



10. Final reflections

Meeting with this group of women, coming from vastly different professional fields, from journalism to pro sailing, from aerospace engineering to environmental management, gives us a detailed framework coherent with the challenges, resources and prospects which characterise the female path in today's workplaces.

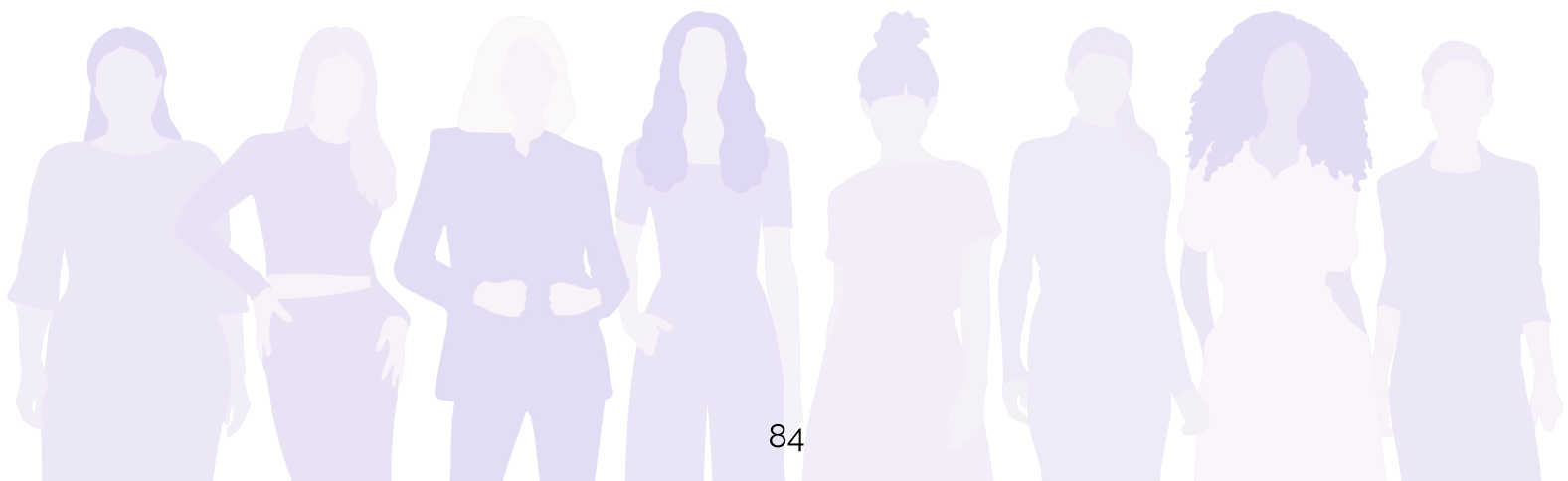


This study confirms that the results of many cited analyses and examples taken into consideration have a shared value as they are cross-sectional between all professional fields and different generations, even factoring out a slow but constant progress towards a more equal condition for women.

The analysed references, the interviews and the results of the survey show the persistent existence of a gender gap, both in terms of access to senior positions and in terms of the perception of competences.

Still, there is a, **a growing awareness and a shared will to fight stereotypes and cultural barriers**, even through personal examples and active efforts in promoting equality, mentoring processes and female solidarity networking.

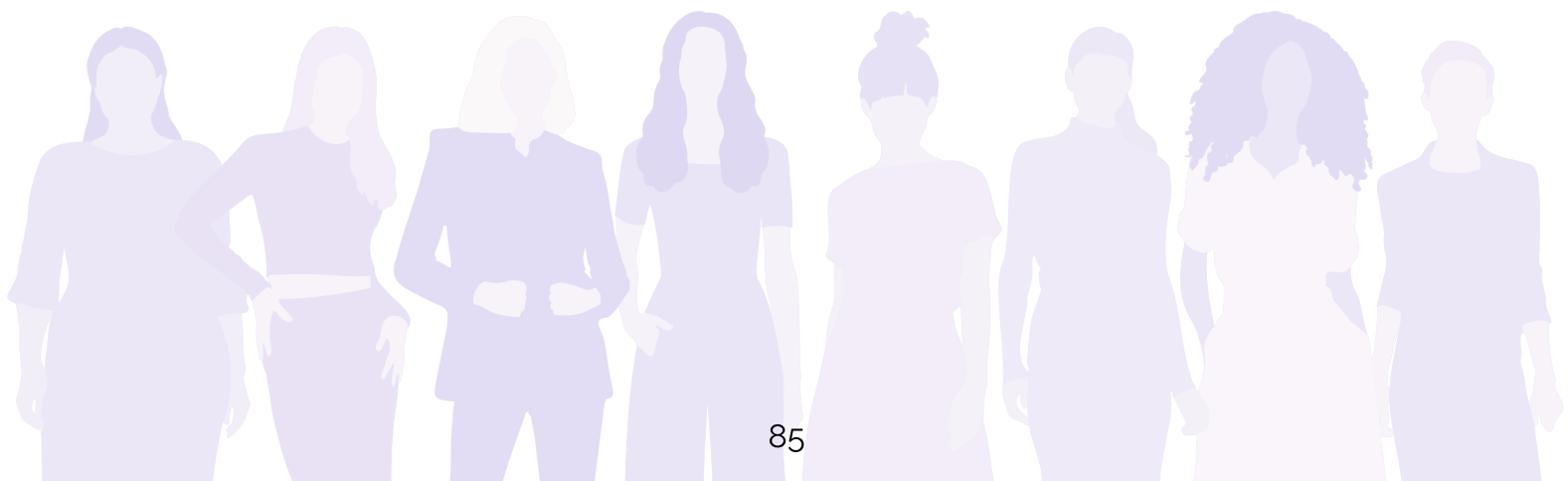
The phenomenon of Queen Bees is present in many fields, but is explained by women not as an innate female characteristic, but rather as a way to adapt to centuries of unequal treatment, up to the extent of abuse of power and outright oppression. These factors have thus created an inverse effect from which we should distance ourselves from in order to appreciate our own female dignity.



Maternity and managing life stand out as two key elements, often faced by women, although the phenomenon is gradually spreading to men (children, elderly, the sick), without appropriate support). However, the reported experiences show that flexibility, collaboration, trust and inclusive policies can make professional ambition and personal responsibility compatible, to the benefit of the entire work environment, both men and women.

Every single study, every account on the topic of women's skills converges on the **need to believe, to trust in the qualities that women specifically possess: empathy, inclusivity, creativity, problem solving, multitasking and determination.**

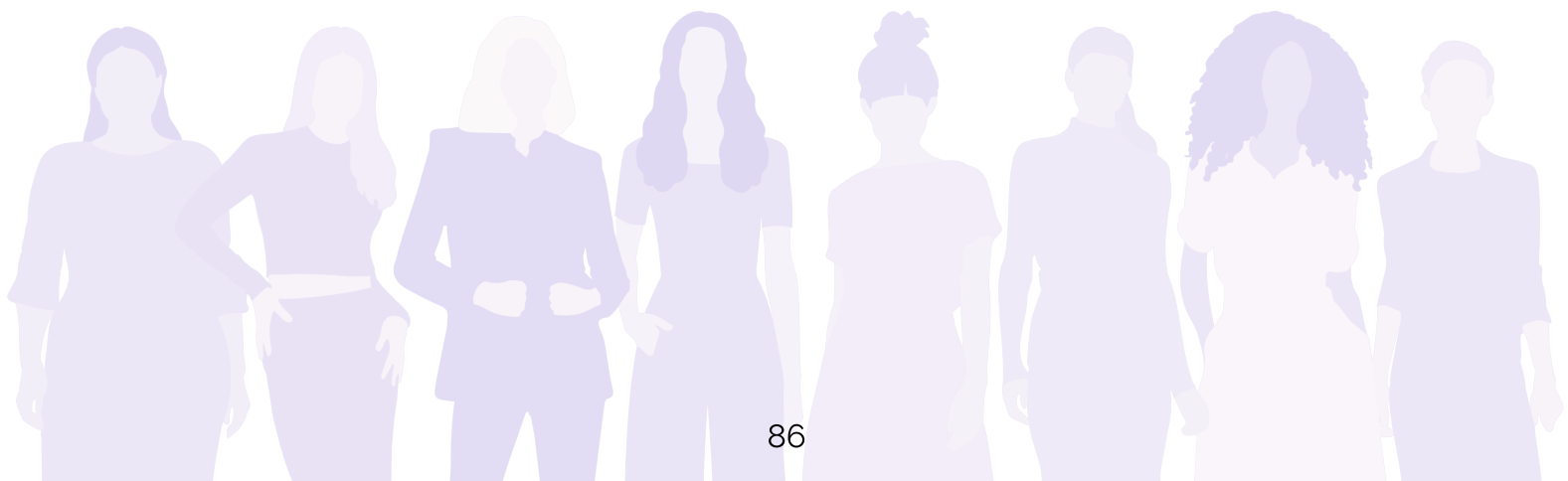
These qualities should be combined in an authentically female model of leadership, different from the traditionally male one.



Women need to cultivate their courage more, the courage to start new challenges without fear of failure, even with a touch of recklessness, and to do so with the help of other women, sharing information, opportunities and knowledge.

This legacy is not only symbolic, but it also represents an operational path on which to base policies, practices and future narrations. The collected experiences show that change is possible and, in some way, already ongoing, but that it requires awareness, alliances and visions.

New generations of women are called on not only to occupy new spaces, but to transform them in their image and likeness, contributing to the creation of more equal, human, livable and, as previously mentioned, profitable workplaces.





Appendix 1

Women, Talents *In Common*



COMUNE DI GENOVA

Women, Talents *In common*

The Study Centre of the Municipality of Genoa has decided to produce a publication entitled "Women, Talents In common", aiming to understand, through information collected from a selected sample, what are the characteristics, the soft skills that allow some types of women to emerge, and to transmit a message of inspiration and solidarity especially to young women, who are entering the working life.

Thank you for taking the time to complete our questionnaire and for your contribution to our survey.

1. Age

18- 24

45- 54

65 - 74

25 - 34

55 - 64

75- over 75

35 - 44

2. Nationality

3. Personal status

Single

Married

Other

4. Do you have any children?

Yes No

5. If the answer is yes, did you have children before or after you achieved your career goals?

Before After

6. Having children has influenced your career?

Yes No

7. If you do not have children, has your career influenced this decision?

Yes No

8. How?

250 character(s) maximum

9. Do you have experienced difficulties managing work and private life (family, leisure time, hobbies, etc.)?

250 character(s) maximum

10. Which field do you work in?

Public Private Other

11. If you have answered other, please describe your field of work

100 character(s) maximum

12. What is your occupation?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) | <input type="checkbox"/> Health Services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marketing e Communication | <input type="checkbox"/> Tourism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Manager of Social or Cultural Services | <input type="checkbox"/> Business services/Consultancy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public Services | <input type="checkbox"/> Human resources |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education and Training, Research and Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Logistic and Transport |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

13. In your field of work, do you notice a greater presence of men or a greater presence of women?

- Male Female No differences

14. In your opinion why? (including but not limited to)

- Heritage Working hours that clash with private life Other

15. Does gender discrimination exist in your working field

250 character(s) maximum

16. Does gender discrimination exist in your working field?

- Yes No I do not know

17. During your career, have other women shown you solidarity?

- Yes No I do not know

18. Have you ever been conditioned to choose a field of work that is traditionally considered feminine?

- Yes No

19. If the answer is yes, who or what has influenced you?

- Family Institution Society Other

20. In your opinion, which skills have enabled you to emerge in your career?

250 character(s) maximum

21. In your opinion, what are the qualities and the skills that differentiate the women? (including, but not limited to...)

- Determination Ability to mediate, Creativity
 Multitasking Other

22. If you answered Other, please list the main qualities and attitudes that differentiate women (for example and not limited to...)

100 character(s) maximum

23. What is the working field in which a woman can best stand out?

250 character(s) maximum

24. Why?

250 character(s) maximum

25. What do you think the career opportunities for women will be in the near future?

250 character(s) maximum

26. Which skills should women improve, in your opinion? (including but not limited to creativity, flexibility, communication, etc.) Max 3 skills

150 character(s) maximum

27. What message would you give to the young women that are starting or changing their career?

250 character(s) maximum

Contact: centrostudi@comune.genova.it



Bibliography

- Nuove riflessioni sulla maternità: uno studio qualitativo per indagarne i suoi aspetti più complessi - <https://thesis.unipd.it/retrieve/35874365-3e1b-4fc8-a502-18a5a6d4fa56/TESI%201.pdf>
- Eisenclas, S. A. (2013). Gender roles and expectations. *SAGE Open*, 3(4), 215824401350644 - <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244013506446> isenchlas, 2013
- Priyashantha, K. G., De Alwis, A. C., & Welmilla, I. (2021). Three perspectives on changing gender stereotypes. *FIIB Business Review*, 12(2), 120- 131 - <https://doi.org/10.1177/23197145211049604>
- Berdahl, J. L., Cooper, M., Glick, P., Livingston, R. W., & Williams, J. C. (2018). Work as a masculinity contest. *Journal of Social Issues*, 74(3), 422- 448 - <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12289>
- Molla, E. (2016). The role of school in gender socialization. *The European Journal of Educational Sciences*, 03(01) - <https://doi.org/10.19044/ejes.v3no1a1> (Molla, 2016)
- Putney, N. M., & Bengtson, V. L. (2002). Socialization and the family revisited. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 7, 165-194 - [https://doi.org/10.1016/s1040-2608\(02\)80034-xl](https://doi.org/10.1016/s1040-2608(02)80034-xl) (Putney & Bengtson, 2002)
- Eisenclas, S. A. (2013). Gender roles and expectations. *SAGE Open*, 3(4), 215824401350644 - <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244013506446>
- Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri Dipartimento per le Pari Opportunità. (2021). Strategia Nazionale per la Parità di Genere - https://www.pariopportunita.gov.it/media/2051/strategia_parita-_genere.pdf
https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/Indagine_lpsos_sintesi.pdf
- Openpolis - <https://www.openpolis.it/e-ancora-lontana-la-parita-nella-genitorialita/>
- Asvis - <https://asvis.it/notizie/2-22970/gender-equality-index-2024-progressi-lenti-dellue-litalia-guadagna-terreno>
- Istat - <https://www.istat.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/REPORT-livelli-istruzione.pdf>
Il lavoro delle donne tra ostacoli e opportunità - <https://www.istat.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/istat-cnel.pdf>
- Henkel - <https://www.henkel.it/press-and-media/comunicati-stampa/2024-04-12-osservatorio-henkel-gli-stereotipi-di-genere-in-casa-e-nelle-scelte-di-studio-lavoro-e-tempo-libero-1951434>
- AlmaLaurea - https://www.alma laurea.it/sites/default/files/comunicati/2025/cs_alma laurea_focus_gender_gap_2025.pdf
- Eurostat - https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/EDUC_UOE_GRAD04
<https://www.istat.it/it/files/2024/04/Bpdf>
- "Parents and Peers: Gender Stereotypes in the Field of Study" di Lucia Corno e Michela Carlana
- "Women and Stem" di S. Khan e D. Ginther
- Corte Costituzionale, Servizio studi - https://www.cortecostituzionale.it/documenti/download/pdf/Costituzione_della_Repubblica_italiana.pdf
- Organizzazione delle Nazioni Unite - <https://unric.org/it/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/11/Agenda-2030-Onu-italia.pdf>
- Organizzazione Internazionale del Lavoro - <https://www.ilo.org/it/parita%C3%A0-di-genere-nel-mondo-del-lavoro>
https://www.ilo.org/rome/approfondimenti/WCMS_631350/lang--it/index.htm
- European Commission - https://commission.europa.eu/news-and-media/news/pay-attention-gender-pay-gap-2024-11-15_it

- Censis - <https://www.censis.it/sicurezza-e-cittadinanza/respect/il-talento-femminile-mortificato>
- Career & Family: Women's Century-Long Journey toward Equity"- 2021 - <https://www.lavorodirittieuropa.it/2-uncategorised/1513-il-nobel-per-lo-studio-del-gender-gap>
- Osservatorio Conti Pubblici Italiani - https://osservatoriocpi.unicatt.it/ocpi-pubblicazioni-differenze-di-genere-negli-studi-e-all-entrata-nel-mondo-del-lavoro#_ftn10
- Theories of occupational segregation by sex: an overview", R. Anker, International Labour Review, 1997
- Vujadinovic, D. (2015). Gender mainstreaming in law and Legal Education. Anali Pravnog Fakulteta u Beogradu, 63(3), 56-74 - <https://doi.org/10.5937/analipfb1503056v>
- Bermúdez Figueroa, E., Dabetić, V., Yuste, R. P., & Saeidzadeh, Z. (2023). Gender and structural inequalities from a socio-legal perspective. Gender-Competent Legal Education, 95-142 - https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-14360-1_4
- Stratigaki, M. (2005). "Gender mainstreaming vs positive action". European Journal of Women's Studies, 12(2), 165-186 - <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506805051236>
- Camera dei Deputati, Servizio studi. (2023). Le politiche pubbliche italiane: n.4 L'occupazione femminile - <https://documenti.camera.it/leg19/dossier/pdf/PP004LA.pdf>
- Associazione Culturale Sostenibile Oggi - <https://sostenibileoggi.it/sostenibilita-impresa/la-parita-di-genere-fa-crescere-i-risultati-lanalisi-di-mckinsey/>
- Gi Group Spa - <https://women4.gigroup.it/blog-articles/le-donne-trasformano-il-mondo-del-lavoro-grazie-a-soft-skills-che-portano-a-concreti-vantaggi-competitivi-in-azienda>
<https://women4.gigroup.it/blog-articles/come-accelerare-il-cambiamento-nel-mondo-del-lavoro-tramite-la-solidarieta-femminile>
<https://women4.gigroup.it/blog-articles/le-donne-trasformano-il-mondo-del-lavoro-grazie-a-soft-skills-che-portano-a-concreti-vantaggi-competitivi-in-azienda>
- Accanto alla Donna - <https://www.accantoalladonna.it/soft-skills-al-femminile-come-valorizzarle-nel-mondo-del-lavoro/>
- Università Bocconi, "Donne in cerca di identità (e leadership)" di Simona Cuolo SDA professor di leadership, organization and human resources (2017) - <https://www.unibocconi.it/it/news/donne-cerca-di-identita-e-leadership>
- Albertario Consulenza - <https://www.albertarioconsulenza.it/manager-moderni>
- Economy Magazine - <https://www.economymagazine.it/empowerment-femminile-in-5-mosse-tack-tmi-italy/>
- European Commission, (2023). 2023 report on gender equality in the EU. - https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/a5bb9997-998a-4f95-961bf36edd1837c_en?file_name=annual_report_GE_2023_web_EN.pdf
- E Habitat - <https://www.ehabitat.it/2024/07/25/stem-in-italia-gender-gap-in-europa/>
- The Queen bee phenomenon: Why womwn leaders distance themselves from junior women - Belle Derks, Colette Van Laar, Naomi Ellemers - The leadership Quarterly 27 (2016) - <https://ppw.kuleuven.be/cscp/documents/artikels-colette/the-queen-bee-phenomenon.pdf>
- British Journal of Social Psuchology (2004) The underrepresentation of women in science: Differential commitment or the Queen-bee syndrome? Naomi Ellemers, Henriette van den Heuvel, Dick de Gilder, Anne Maass4 and Alessandra Bonvini
- Hal Operrn Science Academic Women: a study in the Queen Bee Phenomenon - Manoel Bastos Gomes Neto, Rebeca da Rocha Grangero, Catherine Esnard - <https://shs.hal.science/halshs-03479641/document>
- Gender-bias primes elicit queen-bee responses among senior policewomen- Belle Derks 1, Colette Van Laar, Naomi Ellemers, Kim de Groot 2011

Acknowledgements

This document was created thanks to the collaboration of the colleagues of the Civic and Public Administration, to the DPO (Data Protection Officer) for the support regarding matters within their scope of competence. Thanks to all those who participated in the survey and, in particular, to the interviewees per their precious contribution.

Credits

Municipality of Genoa

Directorate for Attractiveness, Competition and Green Transition

Coordination Office for Processes of Sustainability and the Green transition for Genova 2023 and Genova 2050 - Study Centre and Statistics

Working group

Geronima Pesce - Director of the Attractiveness, Competition and Green Transition Area

Stefania Manca - Resilience & Sustainability Manager, Head of Study Centre and Statistics

Paola Casubolo, Elena Martinasco, Claudia Pinna, Ilaria Ronconi (trainee at the Editorial Office)

Contacts

centrostudi@comune.genova.it

Photo Credits Adobe Stock

License CC-BY SA 4.0



thank you



COMUNE DI GENOVA

*Direzione di Area
Attrattività, Competitività
e Transizione Ecologica*

